

Romanza and Requiem: James Joyce's Polyphonic Narrativity and Its (De-)Musicalization

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Abstract

Music has long been a contentious subject in Joyce studies, especially when it comes to the fugue structure in "Sirens." While critics have interpreted this episode with great success, we still require a clearer awareness of the essential disparity between music and word as two narrative discourses, and more attention needs to be directed towards Joyce's earlier works for a better understanding of the development of his musical form. From the close alignment between poetry and music in the song "Bid Adieu to Girlish Days," to the textual imitation and subsequent deconstruction of the two-part structure in "The Dead," and finally to the dissection of word and music into sound in "Sirens," the formalization of Joyce's polyphonic narrativity undergoes substantial change and gradually betrays a certain suspicion of music's discursive power. The discordance of "Sirens" seems just the resultant manifestation of Joyce's distrust of either word or music alone as the agent of his narrative polyphonicity. Rather, it is in the reduction *and* combination of the two discourses into sound that Joyce finds a medium through which to implant multiple musical and cultural meanings into written language so as to overcome the temporal, spatial, and rhetorical limitations of textual narrative alone. Meanwhile, the thematization of dual or triple narrative dynamics is also multilevel, constructing a covert progression of conflict and betrayal beneath the superficial plot of courtship and love and, layer by layer, portraying the spiritual paralysis of twentieth-century humanity.

Keywords

James Joyce, polyphonic narrativity, *Chamber Music*, "The Dead," "Sirens"

Arguably the most influential novelist of the twentieth century, James Joyce represents the physical condition and mental status of the Irish people in a panoramic yet meticulous style and explores the workings of the individual psyche by way of modernist techniques such as the stream of consciousness. Joyce is not only a master of modernist literature but was also a noteworthy musician, with elements of sound, music, and opera occupying a pivotal position in his fictional works and real life alike. It has been generally acknowledged that, in *Dubliners* (1914) and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), Joyce borrows from various musical forms to shape his narrative discourse, and in his later works *Ulysses* (1922) and *Finnegans Wake* (1939), Joyce problematizes traditional linear narrative through his audacious experimentation with extra-literary modes. Nevertheless, apart from attempting to shed some new light on music in *Dubliners* and *Ulysses*, I will widen the critical scope to include Joyce's earlier but nonetheless important collection of lyrics *Chamber Music* (1907), a work that embodies his first impressions of musical possibilities in literature and contains rudimentary pieces such as "Bid Adieu to Girlish Days," which the author himself had set to music.

I would argue that Joyce's works have a polyphonic narrativity at their core, an artistic urge to simultaneously deal with and oftentimes alternate between multiple perspectives, voices, and storylines. The formalization of such a narrativity naturally fits musical modalities, and, with the evolution of Joyce's own conception of and attitude towards music, the mode also changes across different works, from the close alignment between poetry and music in the song "Bid Adieu to Girlish Days," to the textual imitation and subsequent deconstruction or de-musicalization of the two-part structure in "The Dead," and finally to the dissection of word and music into sound and noise in the "Sirens" episode of *Ulysses*. In each of the three cases, the thematization of dual or triple narrative dynamics is also multilevel, constructing a covert progression of conflict and betrayal beneath the superficial plot of courtship and love and, layer by layer, portraying the spiritual paralysis of twentieth-century humanity.

In addition to offering a new structural, if not exactly fugal, reading of an ostensibly disorderly passage in "The Dead," I also reconsider Joyce's claim of the fugue structure in "Sirens" from the perspective of the dichotomy of order versus freedom and argue against the presence of fugue in this episode, taking into account the critical history of *Ulysses* and the aforementioned development of Joyce's form. In all, unlike in *Chamber Music*, in *Dubliners* Joyce is very conscious of music's tendency to glamorize flawed characters and obscure hard truths. He already seems

suspicious of the artform's discursive power when revealing not the authenticity but the artificiality of musical structure in "The Dead." The discordance of "Sirens" seems just the resultant manifestation of Joyce's distrust of either word or music alone as the agent of his narrative polyphonicity. Rather, it is in the reduction *and* combination of the two discourses into sound that Joyce finds a medium through which to implant multiple musical and cultural meanings into written language so as to overcome the temporal, spatial, and rhetorical limitations of textual narrative alone.

The study of music in Joyce's works began with the 1959 publication of *Song in the Works of James Joyce* by Matthew J. C. Hodgart and Mabel P. Worthington. Zack Bowen and Ruth Bauerle, among others, extended our understanding of this particular area, and their scholarship, though generally more informative than interpretative, laid the foundation for future studies. While much criticism has been penned on music in *Dubliners* and other episodes in *Ulysses*,¹ most attention has been directed towards "Sirens."² Many critics have pored over the alleged fugue structure in this episode with great success, but some of their interpretations may also seem incongruous or vague at certain points. To a large extent, a more adequate definition of musical terms, a more comprehensive understanding of musical forms and structures, and, not least, a clearer awareness of the essential disparity between music and word as two narrative discourses that are originally independent from each other and function differently are all necessary for the discussion of issues such as the validity of the fugue structure in "Sirens" as well as for the discovery of other probable structures. Furthermore, by largely focusing on the role of music in *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, Joycean scholars have so far overlooked Joyce's music-narrative experiments in *Chamber Music* and thus have left the later departure of his musical method from the compact form of song unaccounted for.

Combining Poetry and Music in "Bid Adieu to Girlish Days"

Chamber Music is a collection of lyrical poems that Joyce repeatedly invited his friends and attempted himself to put to music; the poems are nevertheless considered by critics to be simple in content and uninspired in form. "Bid Adieu to Girlish Days" is the eleventh poem (XI) in Stanislaus Joyce's arrangement, but in the original 1905 manuscript it was placed differently (Anderson 130), right before

¹ See, for example, Maddox; Haas; and Bowen.

² See, for example, H. Levin; L. Levin; Hardy; Cole; Lees; Herman; Bucknell; Zimmerman; Brown; and Witen.

“My Dove, My Beautiful One” (XIV), which Joyce regards as the center of the suite, the turning point of its general mood (*Letters* 1: 67). “Bid Adieu to Girlish Days” is then assumed to be the speaker’s seduction and encouragement of his beloved before the ecstasy of their consummation (Fargnoli 174). It is also the only piece for which Joyce created an air while asking Edmund Pendleton to supplement the accompaniment. The composition is deemed by Bauerle to be improvisatory and somewhat like “liturgical chants” (111). Adrian Paterson briefly points out the rhythmic awkwardness in the first and second lines of the second verse’s recapitulation of the tune due to the asymmetry between stanzas (127). Both critics seem to imply that Joyce’s lyrics and notes are hardly unified in this piece on the level of musical composition, but neither of them digs deeper into what this disunity could make manifest on the level of literary significance. The young Joyce very much believed in music, both real music and musical effect in poetry, as a pure form for aesthetic and thematic purposes and, owing to the immaturity of his poetic technique, relies on its discursive power to complement words in his actualization of a sophisticated vision in the form of a multilayered narrative.³

From the handful of recorded performances of this song available online, including that of Joyce’s son Giorgio, one can hear a sentiment of melancholy or even sorrow, which is not compatible with the flirtatious and rejoicing nature of the poem.

The image shows a musical score for the song "Bid Adieu to Girlish Days" by James Joyce. It consists of two systems of music. The first system is for the voice and piano. The voice part is in a single line with lyrics: "Bid a - dieu, a dieu, a dieu, a dieu". The piano part is in two staves (treble and bass clef) and is marked "C Phrygian" and "p". The tempo is "Moderato" with a quarter note equal to 90. The second system continues the piano accompaniment, with a boxed "Motif" in the treble clef staff. The tempo changes to "a tempo" for the final phrase. The piano part ends with "simile".

Fig. 1. Joyce, James. “Bid Adieu to Girlish Days.” measures 1-8.⁴

³ See also Conner 10-11 for the insufficiency of Joyce’s poetic forms for his needs and how this is related to the development of a maturer style in *Dubliners*.

⁴ Excerpted from Bauerle 112. Boxes and annotations are mine.

A closer look at the score reveals that Joyce actually uses the Phrygian mode, a church mode that can sound very dark in its musical color. The C# - E - D - B sequence (measure 1) at the beginning of the piano part and the C# - B - C# - E - D - C# - B sequence (measure 7) of the voice part, which gets repeated in the 15th measure and then twice more in the second verse, are derived from the C# Phrygian scale (C#, D, E, F#, G#, A, B, C#). Joyce's familiarity with the church mode most likely comes from his Catholic background, and his interest can be evidenced by his discussion of this and other medieval musical concepts as well as the natural overtone relationships with the composer Otto Luening (Martin and Bauerle 42). Besides, the given names of the barmaids Mina Kennedy and Lydia Douce in "Sirens" are derivations of the "minor" tonality and the "Lydian" mode, and in "Circe" Joyce also refers to two other church modes, "Mixolydian" and "Hypophrygian," as metaphors to describe Stephen's perturbed mentality (*Ulysses* 503-04).⁵ Joyce's deployment of the church mode is not only in keeping with the modernist vein of excavating literary material from bygone traditions, but it also shows his consideration in terms of compositional technique. At the beginning of the twentieth century, when tonal music had long replaced modal music and was increasingly subject to the impact of atonal music, the return of modality satisfied a need for traditional melody in a musical world dominated by functional harmony, which happens to have coincided with Joyce's own affection for tuneful music, such as that of Vincenzo Bellini.

With this identification of the Phrygian mode, I would continue to argue that Joyce's composition for "Bid Adieu to Girlish Days" is profoundly influenced by the aria "Tutto è sciolto" from Bellini's opera *La Sonnambula*. Also in the Phrygian mode, this aria is sung by the anguished Elvino after finding his fiancée Amina in bed with another man while being unaware of her somnambulism.

⁵ See also Gifford 487n15.2090 and Martin and Bauerle 41n7 for more discussion on the church mode and Joyce's intention here.

Fig. 2. Bellini, Vincenzo. “Tutto è sciolto.” measures 1-8.⁶

The E - G - F - E - D - C - B sequence (measures 2-3) of the voice part is derived from the E Phrygian scale (E - F - G - A - B - C - D - E) and the stepwise descending sequence of E - D - C - B constitutes a Phrygian progression. Apart from the same mode, the motif appearing twice as the E - D - E - G - F sequence in “Tutto è sciolto” (measures 6-7) is borrowed by Joyce and transposed into the C# Phrygian mode as the C# - B - C# - E - D sequence in “Bid Adieu to Girlish Days” (measure 7), which is repeated four times. Not only are the intervals of the two sequences completely the same (major 2nd - major 2nd - minor 3rd - major 2nd), but their rhythmic schemes are also highly alike. As the aria is later heard by the cuckolded Bloom in “Sirens” (*Ulysses* 272-73), “Bid Adieu to Girlish Days” is very likely the speaker’s lament over betrayal in a sentimental style typical of the *Romanza* rather than simply a song of lewd eroticism:

When thou hast heard his name upon
 The bugles of the cherubim
 Begin thou softly to unzone
 Thy girlish bosom unto him (*Poems* 14)

In this light, “him” is not the speaker referring to himself from an omniscient perspective, but the paramour of his beloved. More importantly, this context helps

⁶ Excerpted from Bauerle 120. Boxes and annotations are mine.

to solve interpretative problems arising from Joyce's addition of three poems before publication. Joyce's manuscript initially consisted of only twenty-seven poems and, with six more added later, these thirty-three poems together form a trajectory of sorts, with Poem XIV as the turning point, the former half depicting courtship and seduction, and the latter half portraying estrangement and separation. Finally, three more framing poems (XXI as prelude and XXXV and XXXVI as coda) were written and completed the thirty-six-piece collection, which was then handed to Stanislaus for rearrangement before being published in the current definitive form. J. C. C. Mays points out that the three add-on pieces, especially Poem XXI, which so early on intimates a fear of disloyalty, drastically changes the structure and meaning of the collection, bringing out overtones of deception in love and friendship alike in poems such as XVII, XVIII, and XIX and rendering the climax of the exuberant Poem XIV obtrusive and the whole narrative unreasonable (268-69). As I have demonstrated above, the preceding "Bid Adieu to Girlish Days" already suggests betrayal and, in fact, the speaker's suspicions of betrayal function as a covert narrative progression throughout the collection, in juxtaposition with the overt plot of sensual love. Rather, the question of betrayal should be explored in the rest of the collection, including Poem XIV and others that do not seem to harbor this theme.

Critics have noticed traces of betrayal in other poems of the collection, but they mainly interpret them in an autobiographical light, connecting them to Joyce's own distrust of Nora and his disappointment with the Parnell government.⁷ This autobiographical reading does not register the import of the cycle's love-betrayal narrative on a higher level, as a musically and intertextually informed reading of "Bid Adieu" would reveal. The musical motifs Joyce borrows from "Tutto è sciolto" are originally keyed to *per sempre* (forever) and *morto* (dead) and are subsequently transferred onto "(a)dieu" (God) and his "name" in "Bid Adieu to Girlish Days." The foregrounding of these words through the quasi-Wagnerian technique of pinpointing dramatic details with certain musical phrases creates within the poem a third narrative apart from seduction and betrayal—death—and transforms the song into the likes of a Requiem solo: "Bid adieu, adieu, adieu, / Bid adieu to girlish days" (*Poems* 14). Besides a euphemism for virginity, "girlish days" refers more directly to the youthful days of life. The unending and incrementally *pianissimo* "adieu's," literally meaning "to God" (*à Dieu*), constitute a final farewell to earthly life, with "bugles of cherubim" heard by the soul on its way to Heaven. Instead of a mortal, the "wooer" of the "girl" is none other than Christ himself, indicated and represented here by his "name." Joyce, with his Jesuit education, must have been no

⁷ See, for example, Mays xviii and Campbell 53.

stranger to the Song of Songs, in which Christ forms a bond with the church and the individual soul through wooing and marriage. In the ensuing apex of the presumed celebration of sexual love in “My Dove, My Beautiful One,” which is also deeply influenced by the Song of Songs according to Stanislaus (251-52), “my dove” is an invocation of the Holy Spirit and “arise” a call for salvation (*Poems* 17). In the following Poem XIX, “Be Not Sad Because All Men,” the speaker, who seemingly consoles the abandoned girl, really criticizes fallen “Man” in general with all their lies before God and whose “lives ascend as a continual sigh” (*Poems* 22). In the subsequent and very libidinous Poem XV, “From Dewy Dreams, My Soul, Arise,” the three stanzas rehearse a Dantesque pilgrimage from a dark forest (“the trees are full of sighs / Whose leaves the morn admonisheth”), down into Inferno (“From love’s deep slumber and from death”), then to Purgatorio (“Where softly burning fires appear”), and finally up towards Paradiso (“the wise choirs of faery”) (*Poems* 18). Instead of constructing a simple narrative of love gained and lost, the entire collection—with its dense religious allusions, vocal associations (for example, “calling,” “sigh,” and “choir”), and musical elements—epitomizes the tough modern journey of seeking spiritual transcendence in a solitary life of crumbling faith, established especially through the combination and interaction of poetry and music in the case of “Bid Adieu to Girlish Days.”⁸

The intervention of music impacts and alters the narrative and enriches the thematic expression of Joyce’s poetry, particularly that of “Bid Adieu to Girlish Days,” which used to be limited by superficial readings of the text and the music separately, in terms of how they were composed, but also demands attention to the interaction and interweaving of multiple textual, musical, and operatic threads. The speaker, who in a sense stands for Joyce himself as well as Gabriel and Bloom, is forced by his own impotence as a husband to endure the betrayal of an untrue lover on the surface, but, deep down, it is the spiritual helplessness of what T. S. Eliot calls “hollow men” that continually defers resurrection.

Repeating, Varying, and Breaking Narrative in “The Dead”

Dubliners marks a transformative stage in the maturation of Joyce’s musical method when he makes extensive use of performative scenes, musical structures,

⁸ It is important to note that Joyce is not a devout Catholic *per se*; he treats the Bible not as an authority for knowledge but uses it as an aestheticized discourse to serve his subject matter. While he makes good use of religious discourse to critique human sins, he also tends to weaponize blasphemy in order to ridicule and undermine formal religion in reverse.

folk songs, and operatic stories, all of which are coordinated and assimilated into narration in a style of “scrupulous meanness” (*Letters* 2: 134), instilling epic emotional resonance into quotidian details and blending naturalism with symbolism in a critique of the ethically numb and spiritually inert citizens of the Irish capital. The conclusion of *Dubliners*, “The Dead,” widely known for its lyrical and emotive ending, contains many songs that merit discussion, such as the aria “Arrayed for the Bridal” from Bellini’s opera *I Puritani* (167) and the Irish folk song “The Lass of Aughrim” (183). Critics have approached these musical allusions as well as their narrative contexts from the perspective of plot (i.e., content rather than discourse), but Joyce’s innovation resides more in his effort to imitate musical structures and construct multiple narratives. Moreover, it is important to note that despite his masterful and affectionate use of music, there is a conspicuous sense of subversion in Joyce as he both devises and deconstructs the quasi-fugal structure in a passage of “The Dead,” and such a sense even intensifies as the songs and arias, though usually morally unobjectionable and uplifting in themselves, are negatively interpolated into most stories throughout the collection, especially in “Two Gallants” (Moore’s “Silent, O Moyle”), “Clay” (Balfe’s “I Dreamt I Dwelt”), and “The Dead.” These pieces not only undercut the characters who sing or hear them under most circumstances, but also arouse doubts about opera itself, with its occasional fanciful grand narratives. Despite its transcendental power over the mundane world and its unifying force as an aesthetic instrument, music to Joyce can also be saccharine, illusory, and therefore literarily dubious and artistically unsatisfactory.

After illustrating several scenes of musical performance and exposing the hypocrisy of Gabriel’s aunts and their guests, Joyce turns to the protagonist who, on the way to the inn, secretly observes his wife, his thoughts rioting with desire (*Dubliners* 185-86). Compared with the foregoing intense narration and dense characterization, this sparse section of description and reminiscence seems rather stagnant and nugatory as Gabriel is caught up in an endless reverie about his wife and their life together. Nevertheless, the long passage is not without strict order and subtle design when viewed from a musical angle.

A	B	A'	C	D'	E'
She was walking on before him . . .	The blood went bounding along his veins; and the thoughts went rioting through his brain, proud, joyful, tender, valorous.	She was walking on before him so lightly and so erect he longed . . . to be alone with her.	Moments of their secret life together burst like stars upon his memory.	heliotrope envelope
<p>X = theme</p> <p>X' = variation</p> <p style="text-align: center;">→ Narrative progression</p> <p style="text-align: center;">- - - → Musical progression</p>		B'	D	E	C
		A wave of yet more tender joy escaped from his heart and went coursing in warm flood along his arteries.	Like the tender fire of stars moments of their life together, that no one knew of or would ever know of, broke upon and illuminated his memory.	one letter that he had written to her	He longed to be alone with her.

The introduction presents theme A and theme B as if in the prelude of a fugue,

designating two parts with their respective tones or subjects: Gretta and Gabriel. Then, in Gretta's part, theme A is varied as her walking is described in more sensuous terms, just as Gabriel's part begins to imitate and vary theme B when his desire intensifies. The two parts proceed side by side: for Gabriel's part, theme B is strengthened by theme D (their life together) and theme E (his letter to her) before the part returns to theme C (which is really what Gabriel has been thinking of); for Gretta's part, theme C is conditioned by variation A (her walking posture makes him long for her even more) and then consolidated and amplified by variation D (their life together) and variation E (her letter reciprocates his love). The structure is one of strict logic and perfect symmetry. The general tonality of each part is sustained, with variation B and theme E led by Gabriel and variation A and variation E by Gretta. Gretta's part does not simply repeat but rather chases Gabriel's, with theme E and variation E forming an epistolary "counterpoint." In a sense, the musical reordering of the narrative here strongly resembles the compositional technique of a fugue, transforming the stream of consciousness, which at first glance seems quite blurry, like "distant music," into a hymn of love between husband and wife, accompanying and echoing each other (*Dubliners* 186).

However, a closer look at the text reveals some highly discordant notes within the ostensibly harmonious structure. Both parts end with a disconcerting coda, leaving the duet voices in an uncommunicative, unresponsive state, as if to suggest a monophonic nature beneath the polyphonic surface. As for the first coda, Gabriel remembers when Gretta asks a man at a furnace about the fire and he becomes relieved since Gretta does not get rudely treated (186). However, instead of strengthening Gabriel's self-image of a thoughtful husband trying to protect his wife from coarse speech, his recollection of the fiery locale seems rather a reflection of his own burning desire at the present moment. The inattentive attitude of the man at the furnace towards the couple in some way undermines Gabriel's carefully crafted scene of tender love and, more importantly, the scene itself also hints at a sense of estrangement between Gabriel and Gretta as it is adapted from an episode in Gabriele D'Annunzio's *Il Fuoco* where the couple watch a man at a furnace make a glass bottle that, symbolically, gets broken by accident later (Boyle and Staley 362). Thus, Joyce creates a double narrative, helping Gabriel shape the image of a caring husband in his own imagination while ridiculing him for being unaware of his alienation from Gretta in reality. Similarly, with the second coda, Gretta's non-reaction to Gabriel's soft calling also seems to bring the music to a halt. Gabriel imagines that his wife would be too busy undressing to pay attention and only "something in his voice" could turn her head (186). In fact, what really turned her

head and still haunts her mind is the song “The Lass of Aughrim,” just heard at the Christmas gathering and sung in the past by her dead lover, Michael Furey. It is through the construction of the musical structure and then its deconstruction by double narratives that Joyce successfully shows the whole process of an egotistic Gabriel “idealising his own clownish lusts” (191).

Apart from musical structuring, the association of arias and songs with double narratives also prevails in “The Dead.” Most prominent is Aunt Julia’s *bel canto* showpiece “Arrayed for the Bridal,” an aria for coloratura soprano from Bellini’s *I Puritani*. However, unlike Elvira, the merry maiden who eagerly anticipates marriage in Bellini’s opera, Aunt Julia, her face “grey” and “flaccid” with “darker shadows” and her eyes “mirthless” (155), is “no longer smiling” and, like the fading applause, “gradually ceased” to be (167). Critics have noted the incongruity and even impossibility of such a performance given the aria’s technical demands (Benstock 555; Ackerley 197), and Gabriel’s comment, “To follow the voice, without looking at the singer’s face, was to feel and share the excitement of swift and secure flight” (168), is very likely exaggerated by his own pretension to refined taste and erudition, one that is typical of an unreliable focal character who would continue to romanticize his desire through music as well. This alone would suffice to indicate Gabriel’s sanctimonious personality, but the curious scenario of a dying woman becoming a bride-to-be also very faithfully recapitulates the general theme of spiritual death from “Bid Adieu to Girlish Days” and, as does the guests’ comedic chorus “For They Are Jolly Gay Fellows,” extends Joyce’s irony towards one man to the entirety of humankind.

The tripartite interrelation of love, betrayal, and death is completed after Gretta confesses her story with Michael Furey: Gabriel’s concupiscence gradually gives way to a mixed feeling of jealousy, anger, and disillusionment, which at the same time leads him to reflect upon his own ludicrously hypocritical attitude towards other people when “acting as a pennyboy for his aunts” and “orating to vulgarians,” and this impels him to accept the fact of being a “pitiable fatuous fellow” (191). Indeed, the destiny of a fiasco for everyone because of the same self-righteous complacency has already been secretly woven into the musical structure by the author. My previous discussion of the first coda demonstrates its double function in characterizing Gabriel, but Gretta’s involvement in the scene also seems to emphasize the collectivity of people who, like them, only pretend to care about the life of the underprivileged while in truth worrying about being offended by them. Robert Boyle and Thomas F. Staley notice the arrogance and artificiality in Gretta’s language but fail to pursue the idea any further (361). Like

her, the romantically disposed and self-deceiving Gabriel, who cannot do better than compare his burning desire with the scorching struggle of others' uneasy lives, is unable to truly empathize with people like the man at the furnace and his aunts' housemaid Lily. Besides, the focus of the second coda—"The Lass of Aughrim," which mirrors the tragic story of Michael Furey—also contains a point of concern regarding the class divide between Lord Gregory and the peasant girl in the song, but Joyce's intention here may be inferred from his revision. Originally, Mr. D'Arcy would sing an adaptation of Moore's "O, Ye Dead!", and Richard Ellmann believes that Gabriel's "feelings about his wife's dead lover found a dramatic counterpart in the jealousy of the dead for the living in Moore's song" (244). Such an understanding, however, does not penetrate to the depths of either the song or the story:

But still thus ev'n in death,
So sweet the living breath . . .
We would taste it awhile,
and think we live once more! (Bauerle 168)

The dead are rather proud, even contemptuous towards the living, and as if still alive, they manifest a strong attachment to this world as well as an unwavering quest for life. Indeed, the dead Michael Furey is forever living in Gretta's heart because of his bravery in love while Gabriel, being accustomed to affectation and fantasizing and numbed by his own priggish personality, is as good as dead.

In short, what Gabriel sees in his faint consciousness is not only the fire of love in D'Annunzio's novel, but also the infernal flame in Dante's *Commedia*. Mr. D'Arcy's hoarse singing, much like the unusually redundant exchanges of "good-night" of the guests and the elegiac "Bid Adieu to Girlish Days," announces the death of the conscience of modern humanity. More significantly, much as Joyce would like to musicalize his bifurcating narrative for a structured whole, his effort inevitably contracts in *Dubliners* when the beauty of music often entails a risk of deception and harmony seems no more than a construct. Meanwhile, there emerges in the text a tendency to resist, discredit, and eventually dissolve the musicalization of narrative threads as well as the intertextual dramatization of narrative scenes.

Atomizing Word and Music and Connecting by Sound in “Sirens”

Ulysses is one of the most daring experiments in modernist fictional discourse, as Joyce makes a break with the reliance of traditional narrative on a stable written language, populating his text with figures of speech such as onomatopoeia and metonymy, free indirect speech, and fragmented language to construct internal monologues and recreate the freely wandering mind. Especially in “Sirens,” Joyce almost entirely entrusts the task of narration to music-related discourses, employing and adapting every kind of sonic expression and musical allusion to build up what he himself calls a “*fugue*” (Gilbert 31). However, Joyce’s equivocal statement, particularly his conflation of two different concepts (fugue as mentioned in his letters and *fuga per canonem* as specified in the chapter’s schema), has led many critics to interpret the literary exposition of this compositional technique according to vastly different standards. See, for example, the five versions listed below.

Fugue Interpreter	Prelude	Subject	Countersubject	Answer
Stuart Gilbert	/	Siren’s song	Boylan	Bloom’s entry and monologue
Ann Hardy	/	Man-woman relationships	Music	/
David Cole	/	Feminine desire	Thirst quenched	Masculine desire
		[Counterpoint] Repulsion between the sexes		
Lawrence Levin	Wagnerian <i>Vorspiel</i>	Eight-part fugue through shared thematic material		
Heath Lees	Tripartite pattern	Fugue not entirely according to the canonic directions in the prelude		

As can be seen from the figure above, critics have structured this episode according to starkly different definitions concerning the constituents of the fugue and its mechanism of progression, each of which has its pros and cons. Lawrence Levin notices the leitmotif quality of the phrases in the overture-like opening section (14), but this twentieth-century technique typical of Late Romanticism is a far cry from the Classical origin of the fugue. Heath Lees very appropriately points out that “the

emphasis now shifts from the reader's eye to the reader's ear" (41), but his explication of the influence of Bach's *Art of the Fugue* seems slightly too specific to account for Joyce's whole pattern. Stuart Gilbert, Ann Hardy, and David Cole register significant designs and themes in this episode, be it the contrast between Bloom, representing the will to suffer, and Boylan, representing the power to conquer (Gilbert 252-56), or the sexually charged but mutually disappointing relationship between the sexes (Hardy 60; Cole 224). Still, the terms of subject, countersubject, and answer have been defined in more or less uneven terms (narrative, thematic, and tropical alike), which inevitably sacrifices the nuances in the literary language for the sake of formalist completions. In contrast, the less-complex themes and variations in "The Dead" are more clearly delineated and more tightly structured on the level of discourse as well as content, which hardly seems what Joyce aims for in "Sirens." In fact, more and more critics have lately voiced their dissent against the search for a fugue in "Sirens." Timothy Martin worries about musical terms, such as leitmotif and subject, being defined so loosely that they have begun to lose their links to music (120). Susan Sutliff Brown convincingly identifies the highly probable source of "fugue" and other terms to be passages, which may well have been misunderstood by Joyce, from Ralph Vaughan Williams's 1906 edition of *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (189). Harry Levin attributes the kerfuffle over the fugue structure to the authorial ambiguity as to whether it is the language or the situation that is being treated fugally and holds "polyphonic prose" to be "rarely more than a loose metaphor" (98-99). Brad Bucknell likewise argues that "no definitive analogy with either fugue or canon can be maintained in 'Sirens'" and instead directs attention to "the strange word to word method of the chapter" (125). Even Lawrence Levin has to concede that Joyce cannot "attain the impossible of coinstantaneous-sounding melodic lines" and that his musical effects at best lie in the interpolation and alternation of paragraphs and "within the word itself" (13).

I would approach this debate firstly from the novel's critical history. Critics from the 1970s, who tend to prioritize the mythological framework of *Ulysses* as well as the poetic structure of each chapter, were very much influenced by the structuralist trend of thought. With the rise of post-structuralism, critics during the 80s, such as Lees, could no longer avoid the problems caused by holistic readings of "Sirens" and conceded on the issue of its structure. Later, as the critical environment became more liberalized, studies of this novel gradually broke away from the generic constraints of poetic or novelistic conventions, allowing critics to view *Ulysses* purely as a text. Current criticism of "Sirens" is clearly influenced by

the abovementioned legacies, with some scholars, such as Nadya Zimmerman and Michelle Witen, probing into the text's convoluted structures with even more complicated internal logics (Zimmerman 113-14; Witen 113-63), and others, such as Bucknell and Jennifer Levine, tending to dissect the text and treat it as a compilation of wordplay (Levine 138). Rewarding as they are, both approaches are partial, partly because Joycean scholars who are immersed in the novelist's musico-textual world sometimes take the phenomenon of "literary music" for granted and thus overlook the discursive differences between word and music.

It seems to me crucial to acknowledge that, though Joyce's narrative draws on the structural order of musical models, it also exploits much of the formal and rhetorical autonomy that is found in music alone. Music is freer than word in at least two aspects. On the horizontal axis of time, the novel's narrative plot usually unfolds within a succession of different images, while music is allowed to repeat and vary thematic materials in order for the listener to capture meaningful patterns, for notes cannot linger in the air as words can on the page. On the vertical axis of space, the superimposition of multiple images or scenes at the same point in time can hardly be realized in fictional narratives, but the symphonic integration of multiple sounds can be achieved under the auspices of the parallelism of musical timelines. Such kinds of freedom are clearly exemplified by the varying and "folding-up" of narrative in "The Dead." *Finnegans Wake* essentializes the emancipatory property Joyce finds in music, so much so that word is deprived of its function as narrative discourse. Somewhere in between, "Sirens" should at least be viewed as a negotiation, sometimes even a struggle, between the verbal and the musical.

Secondly, the debate should include consideration of the anti-musical direction of the development of Joyce's form. As demonstrated in previous sections, Joyce's artistic attitude towards music does not seem neutral at all. As he went from preferring the form of song to that of poem in *Chamber Music*, to deconstructing an anticipated fugue in "The Dead" and satirizing songsters in *Dubliners*, one cannot but presume that the critique of music as a surrogate for the literary word would carry on into *Ulysses*, a work as noisy as it is musical. But Joyce did not completely reject the whole of music and, given the polyvocal quality and fluid texture of episodes like "Sirens" and "Anna Livia Plurabelle" in *Finnegans Wake*, it is most likely that Joyce viewed and treated music in an *Aufhebung* manner. After all, Joyce's intertextual use of musical phrases as literary motifs in "Bid Adieu to Girlish Days," along with his contrivance of narrative fragments as musical themes and designation of different characters to represent vocal parts in "The Dead," has

significant limitations, all of which more or less reduce musical entities to semantic units and leave their acoustic properties aside. More than any other episode in *Ulysses*, “Sirens” marks Joyce’s return to sound, but it is a turn fraught with anxieties when neither word nor music seems adequate for his needs. Therefore, much in the same way as David Herman calls for a grammatological dimension of discourse, a third mode into which both narrative and musical form are to be projected (487), I would propose sound as the key vehicle in “Sirens,” into which word and music are both coalesced and reduced.

In this light, critics may wish to revisit Joyce’s updated twentieth-century idea, not the sixteenth-century technique, of the fugue: “*fuga per canonem*” literally means “flight according to rule” in Latin, and it does not represent either the artistic freedom of absolute music or the structural order that can be achieved through compositional techniques. Rather, the fugue embodies their paradoxical coexistence. Ultimately, it is the literary possibility of an intermediate texture with quasi-musical fluidity that resonates with Joyce most and best suits his project of concurrent narration in “Sirens,” where the sound-sense connection is loosened for words to be associated in an acoustic-visual continuum, thereby overcoming the temporal, spatial, and rhetorical limitations of textual narrative alone. Far from a noisy game, though often bordering on noise, this is a newly challenging enterprise for the writer-musician to refresh and expand a theme that he has erstwhile articulated in less complicated undertakings.

Take the sound of Bloom’s name for example, which first appears in the “overture” section: “A husky fifenote blew. / Blew. Blue bloom is on the / Goldpinnacled hair” (*Ulysses* 256). It is important to note that “bloom” is originally “Bloom,” according to the Gabler Edition (1: 548). Joyce’s revision reverses the proprietarization of the common noun, preserving its semantic potential to evoke the flower image and highlighting its acoustic quality among the de-signified auditory cluster of “Blew” and “Blue.” Later, the sound reappears as “Bloom” proper in a seemingly irrelevant context, Miss Douce and Miss Kennedy’s chat about a boy:

—Imperthnthn thnthnthn, bootssnout sniffed rudely, as he [the busboy] retreated as she [Miss Douce] threatened as he had come.

Bloom.

On her flower frowning miss Douce said:

—Most aggravating that young brat is. (258)

With Miss Douce’s flower mentioned immediately afterward, the reader naturally takes the word “Bloom” to be a cataphoric reference to the plant as well as a delayed realization of the semantic potential of “bloom” from the “overture.” Meanwhile, as the standalone paragraphing capitalizes the “b” in “bloom,” the graphic change actually engenders a phonetic significance, covertly turning the common noun into a proper noun that happens to be Bloom’s name, as if the omniscient narrator is interrupting the conversation to report Bloom’s appearance on the street, which also responds to the previous question “Bloowho went by by Moulang’s pipes” (258:9) and constitutes an anaphoric reference to “A man” (258:8). This then juxtaposes two different scenes inside and outside the bar by compressing into the sound from the “overture” two different meanings. The interconnection and multiplication of other key sounds also help to parody the parallel narrative threads.

<p>“overture” (256)</p>	<p>A husky fifenote blew. Blew. Blue bloom is on the Goldpinnaced hair. <i>husky; blew, blue, bloom</i></p>
<p>Bloom wanders on the street and passes the pipe store (258)</p>	<p>Bloowho went by by Moulang’s pipes bearing in his breast the sweets of sin, by Wine’s antiques, in memory bearing sweet sinful words, by Carroll’s dusky battered plate, for Raoul. <i>dusky; bloowho, Moulang; by, pipe; Carroll, Raoul</i></p>
<p>Simon Dedalus blows his pipe in the bar (261)</p>	<p>Forth from the skirt of his coat Mr Dedalus brought pouch and pipe. Alacrity she served. He blew through the flue two husky fifenotes. —By Jove, he mused. I often wanted to see the Mourne mountains. . . . Yes. Yes. Yes. He fingered shreds of hair, her maidenhair, her mermaid’s, into the bowl. <i>husky; blew, flue, two; pipe; brought, pouch, Mourne, mountains</i></p>

According to Brian Richardson, it is typical of the *nouveau roman* to first display certain images and then narrate in a manner that is centered around them; therefore, he terms the “fictional pictures” of the “overture” in “Sirens” as “verbal generators” and categorizes such a practice as “aesthetic ordering” with no practical end (171-72). However, as can be observed from the figure above, the narrative is driven, organized, and expanded more by sounds than by pictures. The pictures, though all very suggestive, may indeed seem arbitrarily disorganized, but it is the acoustic reordering that tightens them into two groups and juxtaposes two apparently irrelevant scenes, which can effectively remind the reader of the same inclination to objectify the female shared by Bloom, Dedalus, and other male characters. The sexually charged atmosphere is carried through such sounds as “Bloom” and “Yes” and extends far and wide: “Mr Bloom reached Essex bridge. Yes, Mr Bloom crossed bridge of Yes-sex. To Martha I must write. Buy paper. Daly’s. Girl there civil. Bloom. Old Bloom. Blue Bloom is on the rye” (261-62). In the second sentence, the narrator creates a physical-psychological middle space by reducing the name of the material image “Essex” into the non-morphological phoneme “essex” and compounding it with the echo of an inner voice “Yes,” thus portraying a vulgar mentality full of risqué humor while switching the perspective from omniscient to limited. At the end of this passage, because the metaphorical image of the “rye” can be seen as the vehicle to the tenor of Miss Douce’s “goldpinnacled hair,” it transports the narrative from the street back into the bar. But being situated in the vicinity of “Bloom,” it also morphs into a cultural sound indicative of the song “My Pretty Jane,” whose refrain “But meet me, meet me in the ev’ning, / While the bloom is on the rye” expresses a man’s wish for a late-spring dalliance with his sweetheart (Bauerle 352). The sentiment is obviously shared by Bloom. Moreover, as Bowen mentions, the original song contains a proposal of marriage: “But name the day, the wedding day, / And I will buy the ring” (31). Thus, the song not only resonates with Bloom’s bawdy thoughts but makes Bloom’s imagined rendezvous with his lover all the more dishonorable and hopeless.

The collage of these sounds, with their acoustic intensity and semantic richness, prevents the reader from sympathizing with a “blue,” cuckolded Bloom who keeps thinking of his own lover but accuses his wife of infidelity at the same time, recalling the opera *La Sonnambula* from Richie Goulding’s whistling of “Tutto è sciolto” and translating Elvino’s anguish into his own:⁹

⁹ Chris Ackerley argues that “Bloom listens to Simon Dedalus singing Flotow’s ‘M’appari’ under the mistaken impression that he is listening to Bellini’s ‘Tutto è Sciolto’” and emphasizes

All lost now. Mournful he whistled. Fall, surrender, lost.

Bloom bent leopard ear, turning a fringe of doyley down under the vase. Order. Yes, I remember. Lovely air. In sleep she went to him. Innocence in the moon. Brave. Don't know their danger. Still hold her back. Call name. Touch water. Jingle jaunty. Too late. She longed to go. That's why. Woman. As easy stop the sea. Yes: all is lost. (272-73)

It seems that Bloom goes much further than simply share Elvino's despondency over the loss of his love as he accuses women in general of being born fickle. The seemingly casual statement "She longed to go" substantially transforms the instance of Molly's betrayal out of desire into a tendency of constantly desiring to betray. Bloom's complaint is hardly justifiable because, as the "Yes's" keep reminding the reader, it applies to himself too as both a victim and a victimizer in marriage. Nonetheless, it does explain why both of them have such double identities. In modernity, humans are programmed by this eternal *Sehnsucht* to not commit to anything, to doubt for its own sake, and to live without an end.

Neither from his marriage nor from his affair does Bloom have a proper heir, which symbolically announces the impossibility of redemption and rebirth. Although Bloom does have a daughter from his marriage, Milly in many ways seems just a reproduction of her mother Molly. In a sense, in the world of *Ulysses*, desire only breeds more desire when the death of their infant son Rudy has already extinguished all hope for the Blooms. In the previous episode "The Wandering Rocks," the display of three consecutive scenes—Bloom reading books on sexual exploitation, infanticide, and abortion; Dignam mourning for his father Paddy; and Molly putting back the card "Unfurnished Apartment" after drawing the curtains—also implies the unproductive and unrepairable nature of the marriage of Bloom and Molly who, like the men and women in the bar, are doomed to spend their time in reverie and rendezvous and, as they gradually lose the will to act, metamorphose into "wandering rocks" (233-34).

Conclusion

In this essay, I have reviewed the trajectory that Joyce followed in musicalizing and de-musicalizing his polyphonic narrativity. Early on, in *Chamber Music*, unsatisfied with both his own poetic word and the divine Word, Joyce sets

the shared theme of loss (202-03). But as I have argued, Bellini's aria has much deeper thematic significance for Joyce.

the titillating poem “Bid Adieu to Girlish Days” to a dark Phrygian mode and, with a more or less naive belief in the unblended medium of music, establishes in this Romanza-Requiem piece the double figure of the “impotent man” as both a desperate husband tolerating the betrayal of his beloved and a hopeless human seeking spiritual transcendence in a solitary life of crumbling faith. Later, in *Dubliners*, he attempts again to marry musical framework to narrative texture in “The Dead,” but the quasi-fugal “folding-up” of the stream of consciousness cannot break through consciousness itself, just as the melodramatic ideals of operas and songs will not transcend the self-delusional or self-imitative mind. It is then no wonder that Joyce chooses to first construct the two-part musical structure, a double narrative in itself, in order to reinforce the tripartite theme of love, disloyalty, and death, and then deconstruct it through more double narratives—in a sense, music betrayed by music itself—in order to demonstrate its frangible status. Finally, in “Sirens,” despite traces of an endeavor to incarnate musical forms such as prelude and phrase, which are rendered all the more evident by the author’s baffling statements and critics’ firm belief in them, a greater change has been wrought within the word itself, both extracting from it and instilling into it the acoustic-semiotic sound. It is within such paradoxical processes of selecting and rejecting music and word, of diminishing and unifying these two originally separate discourses that Joyce finds a medium to fulfill his task of narrative polyphonicity, which implants multiple musical and cultural meanings into written language so as to overcome the temporal, spatial, and rhetorical limitations of textual narrative alone. It is also through these formal dissections and amalgamations that the thematic content further embroils itself until reaching a point when to desire is to betray, and to love is to die.

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