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# Joyce's Musical Doublespeak

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The College of Wooster

JOYCE'S MUSICAL DOUBLESPEAK

by  
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Of the Requirements of Independent Study  
English 451-452

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*For Molly Bennett.*

## **Introduction:**

When I was a few months old my parents, Brenda Joyce-May and Edward May, took me to New York City to visit my mom's relatives. At some point she took a picture of my grandfather, Pat Joyce, jokingly holding *The James Joyce Reader* over my head while I was laying in bed. He adored Joyce; according to my aunts he often raved about Joyce's epiphanies and signed up for a class at Columbia University dedicated to Joyce's works. He also tried to find a link between his family and the legendary Irish author, hoping that James was a distant relative of our family in Galway. Though those attempts turned out in vain, my grandfather was nevertheless ecstatic about having a James "Joyce" in the family (even though my surname is May).

I don't remember this fanaticism, considering I was barely large enough a baby to lift my head up independently. I did, however, grow up surrounded by Irish family and friends, going to festivals and celebrating St. Patrick's Day unaware that not everyone had the same devotion to Ireland and its culture. It was only a matter of time before I picked up *Dubliners* and *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. I didn't care much for them on first reading, but was struck by the beautiful prose and how Joyce captured tendencies of the Irish I had seen played out by my family for 22 years.

My interest in Ireland amplified when, in 2013, I was awarded a Fulbright Undergraduate Grant to participate in a summer institute at Queen's University Belfast in Belfast, Northern Ireland. The program was an interdisciplinary discussion of Irish history from the context of the Troubles in Northern Ireland, which occurred from the late 1960s through the early 1990s. We examined the government, politics, history,

literature, music, geology, and anthropology of Ireland and Northern Ireland, while traveling through the country to observe these things for ourselves.

It was a seminal experience for many reasons, not the least of which was a renewed personal investment in Irish culture. I read more Irish literature, listened to and played traditional music, and even joined my school's Irish Dance Team. This eventually led me to taking a class dedicated to James Joyce's works; we read *Dubliners*, *Portrait of the Artist*, and, most significantly, *Ulysses*. This time I had a much deeper appreciation for the narratives, and a new fascination for the dense intricacies of *Ulysses*. When it came time to pick a topic for my thesis *Ulysses* was among the top choices.

Now, I don't want to make it seem like I grew up in constant awareness of my heritage (though in retrospect it seems so). I did go to Catholic school, but I also read a lot, played video games, and participated in various sports more consciously than I experienced "being Irish." If there was any one interest I intentionally prioritized, it was music. I begrudgingly started piano lessons in grade school, but by high school willingly played guitar, drums, and sang, spending most of my little money on CDs, concert tickets, and band merchandise.

When it came time to begin college, I was so invested in music that I decided to study it. I entered The College of Wooster as a prospective music composition major; I would only add the English degree later, after somewhat randomly enrolling in a course on gothic literature. For the music major, I took fairly demanding classes on theory, history, orchestration, form and analysis, and other subjects – a standard undergraduate music major transcript.

This heavily influenced my choice of English thesis topic. I felt that it would be disingenuous to not incorporate music into my thesis, not to mention less fun. After considering various ideas, I returned to *Ulysses*. What began as a general curiosity about Joyce's musical references morphed into a more specific question of how Joyce used music to shape his writing and how I could use my trained background in music to guide my understanding of his practice. Much critical literature concerned with Joyce and music focuses on the eleventh episode, "Sirens," which Joyce himself claimed was imbued with musical references, structured in musical form, and employed musical terms as descriptive devices.

This episode was the perfect intersection of my interests, so I re-read it and perused the critiques. However, as I read through analyses I noticed some discouraging trends. The first was that many critics tried to read the episode as if it were literally a piece of music, but everyone disagreed on how the text would "translate" to musical notation. A second, related, trend was that critics made claims about music and the text that obviously weren't informed by musical comprehension. I found myself repeatedly adding marginalia that read, "What?" or simply, "No." or the occasional, "How can you possibly justify that?" It wasn't that writers misused terminology (though that did happen), it was that they assigned musical functionality to the text with little justification.

I felt as though the criticisms not only failed to provide a satisfying explanation for the music of "Sirens," but discarded a lot of the textual and musical significance in the process. Articles arguing about the compositional form of the episode never satisfactorily provided real commentary on the implied meanings. And, unfortunately,



criticisms that avoided this trap were not much more satisfying because they disregarded the musical elements of “Sirens” for the sake of providing a purely literary critique.

As a musician, I found reading this episode enthralling for Joyce’s integration of music into his writing. There are hundreds of references and manipulations that, to me, suggested specific musical gestures I had previously encountered in my studies and experience. But, as I found in my reading, nobody was willing or able to “read” these musical tropes for their aesthetic duality, and therefore nobody produced a cohesive analysis that adequately brought to bear Joyce’s musical referents. Once I could articulate this, I had a focus for my project: I would attempt to integrate a literary and musical analysis in order to fully explore the intricate workings of the episode.

I was immediately overwhelmed by the prospect of doing this adequately – I’m still unsure about whether I accomplished it. How could I navigate the line between a glorified close-reading and a musical interpretation without succumbing to the same problems I found in other criticism? What would justify anything I said over what had been suggested before me? Perhaps most importantly, I realized that I had more concretely focus on music analysis before I could apply that analysis to text.

I started this process by reading examples of music criticism, and criticisms of those criticisms. I took a musicology course in the spring of 2015 and thus relied heavily on some of the texts from that class, using them as guiding examples for how to “read” a piece of music. I also found literature that dealt solely with the subject of interpretation, discussing how listeners make claims about what music “means” from both a highly theoretical and very practical perspective. I even used some of these specific theories to conduct a sample analysis, which resulted in the third chapter of this thesis.

I then turned to “Sirens” and its aggregate analyses. I re-read the critical literature and decided what claims I thought were justified, based on my musical background, and what claims were unfounded. I read articles that discussed Joyce’s musical writing on a much larger scale and ones that discussed how his musical insertions interfered with standard linguistic syntax. I found that having an expansive knowledge of previous approaches informed how I thought about “Sirens,” even though I didn’t think that these various works did the episode interpretive justice.

This eventually led to my own reading of the episode. Every time I went through the text I found new examples of Joyce’s use of music or came to an understanding of other examples that I previously could not explain. One unexpected result of this process was the realization that much of Joyce’s experimentation did not necessarily carry a deeper meaning – it existed as a surface-level connection, insignificant besides creating a more cohesively-wrought narrative. I was nevertheless able to focus on a few elements of the episode that I felt, without an adequate consideration of musical and literary critique, were lost on critics.

At many times in this process I found myself asking why this mattered – who cares that another person is doing an analysis of “Sirens”? Uncovering these new elements of significance ultimately justified the project. James Joyce was a brilliant mind, a man whose command over wide-ranging types of knowledge manifested in his literary output. Critics today cannot often claim an even comparable command over Joyce’s varied subjects and, as a result, must resort to simply literary criticism. This is not an invalid approach, nor is the observation meant as an insult – the fact of the matter is that ignorant critics unwittingly erase a great deal of meaning in Joyce’s works.

I thus found myself in a surprisingly useful position to incorporate a musical background with my literary critique. Frustrated by what I saw as mostly failed attempts by other critics to talk about music, I used my experience to add a useful and accurate interpretation of “Sirens” to the already large body of literature. The results were very satisfying – I found new dimensions of understanding in the text that more closely explained the complex meanings of the episode.

This integrated approach, in my opinion, should be the new enterprise for Joyce scholars in general, particularly critics of *Ulysses*. The book has been read time and time again for its literary import, which I do not intend to diminish. But, as historical documents have pointed out for us, imbued within the linguistic realm of *Ulysses* are layers of expertise outside of literature; music, anatomy, and religion, to name only a few. These other fields have significant idioms and tropes within their own discipline, recurring elements that suggest importance. Joyce scholars should strive to understand and incorporate these other fields into the scope of their analyses, so as to more fully expand and explore the nature of meaning in *Ulysses*.

My Independent Study, therefore, is both an analysis of “Sirens” and a summary/analysis of the literature read to prepare for the project. Chapter 1 introduces James Joyce, *Ulysses*, and music to the reader. *Ulysses* is, I think, still a book on the fringes for many people and so warrants explanation of its complex writing schema and experiments. I then establish a working musical vocabulary for the non-musician reading my project. It is in no way an exhaustive explanation of musical construction or musical history, but hopefully suffices for the discussion at hand.

Chapter 2 critiques the theoretical and critical literature I read for this project. I explore the varieties of “Sirens” scholarship and provide my judgment on whether authors generated a successful interpretation of the episode – as well as my justification for thinking so. I follow this with an exploration of musical criticism; specifically, how does music generate meaning, and what do music theorists say about a listener’s ability to create a legitimate interpretation of a musical work? This is all in an attempt to explain the theoretical contexts on which I will base my analytic arguments.

Chapter 3, as previously stated, is a case-study employing the strategies of critique that I discuss in chapter 2. I analyze Samuel Barber’s “Solitary Hotel,” which sets text from a late episode of *Ulysses*, by incorporating both a musical and literary analysis, both informed by my personal understanding of the text and the music in their contexts. I found this analysis a helpful linking mechanism between the highly theoretical discussion of chapter 2 and the involved analytic process of chapter 4.

Chapter 4 contains my interdisciplinary analysis of “Sirens.” After reiterating how my analysis brings to light new elements of interpretation, I examine two examples that demonstrate how Joyce’s musical manipulations create significance on both a surface level and deeper analysis. I then explore the significance of climaxes in the episode, specifically discussing how the intersection of musical and narrative consideration reinforces the function of tension and release. The importance of climax has been discussed by previous writers, and was therefore an excellent topic to further dissect through my analysis.

I hope that, by so structuring this study, I can bring an appreciation for the music of *Ulysses* to a larger audience who may not otherwise have such an experience. I also

hope that this writing exemplifies an analytic framework for other Joyce scholars who wish to more fully explore the extra-literary devices that Joyce used in *Ulysses*. There exists almost an entire new discipline of such scholarship dedicated to the intersections of literature and other media, and to proceed with such a dedicated examination of *Ulysses* could be the first step in that discipline.

## Chapter 1: James Joyce and Music

### *Ulysses*

In 1906, while planning the final selections for his short story collection entitled *Dubliners*, James Joyce conceived of a story called “Ulysses” that would “portray... the putatively Jewish Dubliner, Alfred H. Hunter” (Ellman 230). Though this story never came to fruition, he retained the conceit of the plot. Eight years later, while living in Trieste, he returned to this idea and began writing his third novel, *Ulysses*. According to his biographer Richard Ellman, this was “a sudden outflinging of all he had learned as a writer” (Ellman 357), transforming Alfred Hunter into the unremarkable Leopold Bloom. The book would take him an additional eight years to complete, during which time he would develop significant eye difficulties (Ellman 454), have *The Little Review*’s serialized publication of *Ulysses* banned for obscenity, and scramble to secure a publisher. On Joyce’s birthday, February 2, 1922, *Ulysses* was published by Sylvia Beach, owner of Shakespeare and Company in Paris.

*Ulysses* recounts the events of one day – June 16, 1904 – in Dublin, Ireland, as experienced by Bloom and Stephan Dedalus, Joyce’s literary surrogate. Chief among these experiences is Bloom’s preoccupation with the knowledge that, later that day, his wife Molly Bloom will have an affair with a man named Blazes Boylan. Molly, her history, and Bloom’s family provide a substantive amount of thematic material for Bloom’s mental wanderings – though by no means do those topics account for all of his thoughts. Loosely following the structure of the *Odyssey*, *Ulysses* tells of the heroism of the commonplace man experiencing a relatively pedestrian day.

However, in creating such a story Joyce bent the parameters of writing to extremes, introducing idiosyncratic devices throughout the text including dramatic form, encyclopedic question-response, and interior monologue. He wanted to explore language in a way that, according to Patrick McCarthy, would “extend the range of possible signification to an ultimate degree of openness” (McCarthy 7). Further, he saturated these complexities with factual and historical references to Dublin, religion, Irish history and culture, and literature, in addition to countless other subjects.

This experimentation went so far that he had to provide his friend, Carlo Linati, with “an intricate scheme for *Ulysses* which showed its Odyssean parallels and its special techniques.” In fact, so much is discussed within *Ulysses* that the book moves beyond traditional expectations of narrative function – as a result, “the influence of *Ulysses* on the modern novel has depended less on what the book means than on how it generates its meaning” (McCarthy 9). This question of meaning has plagued the book’s critics for the past 80 years, spawning countless essays and lectures discussing the text’s significance.

Of particular interest to me is the eleventh episode of the novel, named “Sirens” by the Linati Schema for its Homeric counterpart. The episode begins just before 4:00 p.m. in the Ormond Hotel bar, the supposed time of Molly Bloom’s affair. Inside the Ormond restaurant, separated from the bar, Bloom and Richie Goulding share lunch while a rotating cast of characters play on the piano and sing, including Simon Dedalus (Stephen’s father), Father Bob Cowley, and Ben Dollard. Two barmaids, miss Kennedy and miss Douce,<sup>1</sup> attend the crowd, serving drinks and suggestively teasing the bar’s

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<sup>1</sup> The “miss” of their names is not capitalized here because it is not capitalized throughout the episode as Joyce wrote it.

inhabitants, including Blazes Boylan, Lenehan, and Lidwell. Finally, among other characters are Bald Pat the waiter, and the blind piano tuner.

The men enter the bar one by one, often gravitating to the piano in the adjoining concert room. Just after four o'clock, Boylan leaves – assumedly for his rendezvous with Molly – and Bloom remains, eavesdropping on the music in the other room and pondering, as is his wont, Molly and music. After listening to a few numbers, Bloom leaves, the crowd converges at the bar in a joyous climax, and the blind piano tuner returns to retrieve his forgotten tuning fork.

“Sirens” famously takes music as its writing aesthetic and is suffused with references to songs, music techniques and devices, and an unconventional writing style that approximates a musical composition in what Joyce described as the “eight regular parts of a *fuga per canonem*” (Ellman 462). Though previous episodes were by no means simply wrought,<sup>2</sup> “Sirens” truly marks Joyce’s departure from his standard narrational mode of writing, pushing permanently into the linguistic manipulation for which he would come to be known (Grodan, *Ulysses In Progress* 39).

This is an extremely reductive explanation of an extremely complex episode. First of all, to say as I did above that “Sirens” has an “unconventional writing style that approximates a musical composition” does not quite capture what is at work. Maybe a better description is Michael Groden’s, who says that, “musical metaphor dominates Bloom’s interior monologue; occasionally Joyce even alters the appearance of Bloom’s thoughts on the page to fit the pattern” (*Ulysses in Progress* 39), and that by the time he

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<sup>2</sup> For example, the third episode, “Proteus,” follows Stephen’s stream-of-conscious contemplations on ontology and perceivable reality, while the seventh episode, “Aeolus,” follows a scene in a newspaper printing press while interjecting headlines that comment on and parody the action of the episode.



was done writing “Sirens,” “Joyce had distorted his initial [writing] style about as much as possible while still retaining it” (*Ulysses in Progress* 42).

This manipulation is apparent even at the episode’s onset. In a conventional novel, chapter beginnings suggest the idea of emergence from previous events (such as the chapter immediately preceding). Since, according to Peter Brooks, narrative is dependent on events having already “happened,” we can even extend that to the first chapter of a novel; though we as readers may not have encountered the contents already, a story can only emerge from supposedly “past” action (Brooks). “Sirens” immediately disrupts that narrative comfort because the opening lines do not tell a story. Instead, the episode opens with the listing of seemingly senseless phrases that become the core thematic material for the episode:

Bronze by gold heard the hoofirons, steelyringing.

Imperthnthn thnthnthn.

Chips, picking chips off rocky thumbnail, chips.

Horrid! And gold flushed more.

A husky fifenote blew.

Blew. Blue bloom is on the.

Goldpinnacled hair.

A jumping rose on satiny breast of satin, rose of Castile.

Trilling, trilling: Idolores.

Peep! Who’s in the... peepofgold?

This continues for 63 lines, culminating in:

True men. Lid Ker Cow De and Doll. Ay, ay. Like you men. Will life your  
tschink with tschunk.

Fff! Oo!

Where bronze from anear? Where gold from afar? Where hoofs?

Rrrpr. Kraa. Kraandl.

Then not till then. My eppripfftaph. Be pfrwritt.

Done.

Begin! (*Ulysses* 11.1-63)

Only after outlining this general contour of material does the episode commence.

Throughout “Sirens” these phrases return in various forms, mixed amongst manipulations of other textual ideas. Lenehan’s remark hailing the arrival of Blazes Boylan, “See the conquering hero comes,” one line later becomes, “Between the car and window, warily walking, went Bloom, unconquered hero” (*U* 11.340-342). In addition, Joyce directly references music by using terminology for description: “No glance of Kennedy rewarding him he yet made *overtures*” (*U* 11.243); “Over their voices Dollard *bassooned* attack” (*U* 11.528); “Bored Bloom *tambourined* gently with I am just reflecting fingers on flat pad Pat brought” (*U* 11.863-864, all emphases mine). Finally, and in some ways most problematically, Joyce approximates musical composition and performance techniques with textual manipulations, one example being “her

wavyavyeavyheavyeavyevyevyhair un comb:’d” (U 11.808-809) perhaps suggesting a trill before a resolution.

I say that these devices are problematic because of their wide-ranging interpretation by critics. As I mentioned, Joyce referred to this episode as having the component parts of a *fuga per canonem*<sup>3</sup> – a musical form characterized by motivic repetition between multiple voices, on which I later elaborate. Almost a century of criticism has thus offered a range of arguments for what parts of the text, exactly, constitute this musical structure, taking for their defense Joyce’s syntactic experiments. Some writers come close to appreciating the musical gestures Joyce meant to capture; others, not at all. In either case, the result is that much literature on the subject has been subsumed into a surface-level, structural debate about “which text corresponds to which musical idea” in order to understand the *fuga per canonem*.

It is my hope to put those debates to the side in the place of a new, holistic appreciation for the episode. I do not want to attempt what many have attempted, which is to “solve the puzzle” of the *fuga per canonem*. This is in part because I do not necessarily hold that this structure exists due to the difference between music and literature as aesthetic media. However, more importantly, the musical nature of “Sirens” can still serve to inform our understanding of the episode in profound ways, especially when considered from a musically literate understanding.

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<sup>3</sup> There are, it should be noted, points of contention about what exactly Joyce meant by *fuga per canonem*. Many critics have interpreted it as the traditional fugue, as I later describe. However, others have pointed out the possibility that he meant a strict-imitation canon; others, that he referred to a specific medieval practice of writing one melody line with instructions for how to vary it in repetitions (Mann). These forms will be discussed in more detail below.

## *Music*

In order to ensure that such an analysis is accessible, we must establish a base-level understanding of music, without which nobody can hope to adequately appreciate “Sirens.” The following material is complex, particularly for a non-musician, and is only a brief summary of many concepts. However, I have tried to explain what I feel is necessary to understand the remainder of this project, and much later material will assume this knowledge as part of the discussion.

Among the first questions we need to ask is: what is music? Already we run into problems, particularly since a definition of music varies between cultures, encompassing matters of practical use, cultural tradition, and blithe entertainment. However, accepting for the moment that we are dealing with primarily the Western art music tradition, the following definition should suffice: *music is the collection of sonic phenomena, variously organized based on frequency, volume, duration, and timbre*. This is a purposefully broad statement that could include any genre from Gregorian Chant, to Beethoven’s symphonies, to Vladimir Ussachevsky’s electronic experiments.

Though the definition allows for many possibilities, for now we need to concern ourselves with *tonal* music, music whose organization emphasizes one particular class of pitch frequencies. Much classical (and popular) music dwells within this realm of categorization – though, again, there are numerous outliers. In tonal music, sound tones are called *pitches* and are categorized based on their harmonic frequency. The faster the frequency, the higher the pitch, and vice versa. When a frequency is doubled or halved, the pitches are said to be separated by an *octave*. Since, at the octave, pitches sound extremely similar, those frequencies are designated the same *pitch class*, which we label

with letter names A through G. These pitch class letters are often referred to as *notes*.

When we refer to a pitch we refer to the frequency of a sound, and when we refer to the designation of that pitch in musical notation or in relation to other sounds, we call that a note.<sup>4</sup>

The result of this process is the creation of 12 distinct pitch classes (Fig. 1), which can be grouped in certain ways to create *scales*. A scale is a collection of 8 pitches, the first and last of which are separated by an octave: for example, the “C major” scale contains the notes C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C (Fig. 2).



Fig. 1: 12 distinct pitch classes



Fig. 2: C Major Scale

The quality of scales – quality referring to whether, for example, the scale is major or minor, whether it “sounds happy” or “sounds sad” – is determined by the distance between pitches in the scale. When two notes are next to each other they are separated by a *half-step*; when there is one note intervening, they are separated by a *whole step*. The combination of whole-steps and half-steps determines the quality of

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<sup>4</sup> This is largely a technicality, as it is common to see these terms exchanged for one another.

scales (Fig. 3).<sup>5</sup>



Fig. 3: C Major Scale, whole and half steps

These scales form our sense of *tonality*, the idea that in a piece of music one specific pitch class is more important than the others or that a piece of music has a tendency to return back to one pitch class. When a piece of music is based on one scale, it is in the *key* of that scale – a piece that mostly uses the C major scale for its source of notes is said to be in the *key of C major*. When discussing the notes as they relate to one another in a scale, we use the term *scale degree* – for instance, C is the first *scale degree* in the key of C major, D the second, E the third, and so on. Each of these scale degrees has a separate name, most of which are not significant to this space. However, it is important to know that the first scale degree is referred to as the *tonic*, and that the fifth scale degree is referred to as the *dominant* (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4: Scale degrees

This concept of tonality in Western music is the central theoretical idea from which almost all other musical structures and practices stem. Unfortunately, there is not

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<sup>5</sup> In the C Major scale, C and D are separated by a whole-step; D and E by a whole-step; E and F by a half-step; F and G by a whole-step; G and A by a whole-step; A and B by a whole step; B and C by a half-step. Thus the “pattern” for any major scale, starting from any note, is: W-W-H-W-W-W-H (Fig. 3).

adequate space in this study to explain all of these ramifications. For the sake of this paper I want to highlight a few: the ideas of *melody* and *harmony* – often respectively thought of as the horizontal and vertical aspects of music – and possible forms of a piece of music, particularly the form known as the *fugue*.

First, melody and harmony. *Melody* usually refers to the line created by one voice (or instrument) moving between different notes during a piece of music. Graphically, melody can be thought of as the “horizontal” aspect of music – how does one note lead to another and how does that process shape a contour. In the development of Western Art music, there emerged aspects of a melodic line that desirably created a sense of independence, where one voice or instrument stands out amidst others.

*Harmony*, on the other hand, refers to the phenomenon of two or more distinct notes sounding simultaneously – the “vertical” element of music. In tonal music, a composer can build harmonies using the notes found in the key in which they write. Over the course of centuries there emerged “correct” ways to progress from one harmony to another when writing tonal music. Among these, perhaps the most significant progression is the movement from a harmony based on the tonic (scale degree 1) to a harmony based on the dominant (scale degree 5), which then returns to the tonic (scale degree 1). Music theorists usually use Roman numerals to represent chords built on specific scale degrees; this progression would thus be represented by the diagram  $I \rightarrow V \rightarrow I$ .

The establishment of melody and harmony can be thought of as part of the micro-structure of a piece of music. The macro-structure – how melody and harmony change over time – is understood as the *form* of a piece. There are, throughout the development of Western music, a number of commonly used forms for the composition of classical

pieces. Famous among these were dance suites, Sonata form, binary, and the rondo, to name a few. These forms are identified by their large structural markers, usually identified by the melody played or the tonal center of each section. For example, rondo form consists of one important melody, or *theme*, repeated throughout the piece. Additional material, often in a different key or having a contrasting character, intervenes between repetitions of the main theme.

Among these historical forms perhaps the most compositionally intricate was the *fugue*. The fugue was a practice in counterpoint, a method of composition in which multiple melodic voices exist as independent lines while simultaneously sounding in appropriate and desirable harmony. The balance between these two interests set fugal writing apart as among the highest level of creative complexity, with Johann Sebastian Bach commonly venerated as a master of contrapuntal writing.

A fugue begins with one voice stating the main melodic theme, or the *subject*, of the piece. After this, another voice immediately restates the subject, starting on the dominant note (scale degree 5) instead of the tonic (scale degree 1). While the second voice is stating the subject, the first plays accompaniment called the *countersubject*. After the second voice completes its statement, a third voice joins and states the subject at the tonic level (scale degree one) – again, all while the first and second voices accompany with decorative counterpoint. A fugue typically has two to four independent voices, each of which must state the subject independently while still sounding in harmony with the other voices.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that, while these rules are usually found in fugal compositions, composers experimented with this form in ways that push against conventions of compositional practice.



The fugue itself is divided into expositions and episodes. An exposition occurs whenever one voice states the subject in full. Episodes separate expositions, often operating as modulatory or transitional material. Composers utilized techniques of variation to manipulate the subject, varying the texture of the composition while still retaining the core thematic materials. Near the end of the piece, the voices would sound overlapping statements of the subject, a practice known as *stretto*.

It might also be worth mentioning other forms of imitative composition, because many have been used as frames with which to analyze “Sirens.” Kent Kennan, in his *Counterpoint*, explains the technical process of composing the following: *canon, enigma canon, two- and three-part inventions*, and other derivations of those forms. A canon he defines as “when a melodic idea in one voice is duplicated in a second before the first has finished,” which he further notes is usually applied to just a section of a composition (90). An enigma canon “usually consists of a single melodic line, along with clefs or other clues to indicate the harmonic interval and time interval to be used in working out the actual realization of the canon” (111). Two- and three-part inventions, made famous by J.S. Bach, are “short contrapuntal work[s] centering around the development of material from one or two motives” (125).

These forms are all very similar, though they have unique musical differences that distinguish them from one another. I bring them up because, as mentioned, Joyce scholars have called on all variety of imitative forms to frame their interpretation of “Sirens,” stemming a lack of agreement as to what exactly Joyce meant by his claim of the *fuga per canonem*. In fact, this phrase itself is not commonly used today and the histories of the terms “fugue” and “canon” move between numerous uses, all related to imitative

composition. Having concrete definitions is thus helpful when judging the validity of certain claims.

*The Fugue of “Sirens” and a Problem of Media*

When we consider text from a comparable structural standpoint, we find some marked differences between music and literature. First, narrative text is usually a collection of symbols (letters) which, in combination, represent sonic phonemes. When we read text, we recognize letter combinations that create words, which similarly (or by themselves) signify objects or ideas outside of the word.<sup>7</sup> Words can be collected alongside one another, and the various types of words (noun, verb, etc.) combine into coherent sentences which delineate narrative, explanation, or description, among other things. The study of this process is known as semiotics or semiology, which I will discuss in depth in chapter 2.

There are two immediate contrasts between text and music. The first is that, unlike text, music does *not* have the ability to signify outside of itself, besides through direct association (which, ironically, is a connection usually established with words). This quality is called *ineffability*, the inability for music to represent anything besides itself. The second contrast is that music has the unique aesthetic property of simultaneous occurrence. In literature you cannot write two words at the same time – to do so literally would result in a confused ink smudge. Even to suggest that events are happening simultaneously through narrative device (“meanwhile,” “while this was happening,”) does not achieve true aesthetic simultaneity, as one event by default must be described

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<sup>7</sup> For example, the letters r, e, and t can be combined to write “tree.” This combination of letters is not itself a tree, but calls to mind (or stands in for, or signifies) the idea of a tree.

before the other. In music, the simultaneous voicing of different pitches is not only possible, it is an integral part of the construction of the medium.

These differences, among others, make it extremely difficult to “compose” text like it were music. To be fair, James Joyce’s writing does not necessarily abide by typical rules of text construction – as I mentioned, the opening of “Sirens” is an excellent example of Joyce thwarting our expectations for narrative. Further, his syntax is a heavily altered version of typical literature, where the words written do not necessarily function with their expected signifying power. That all being said, even his text is still trapped in the linearity of writing and, despite his best efforts, cannot *completely* stand for the construction of music.

This aesthetic separation of medium, in addition to the specificity of music and the fugue in particular, puts some roadblocks in the way of interpreting “Sirens” as a literal piece of music. The first difficulty arises in the “translation” of text to musical material. Authors can approximate some of the characteristics of music in their work, including motivic manipulation, but there is a certain distance between written words and sounded phenomena. Beyond the consequent difficulty of “writing music” without using notes or musical instruction is saying what a typical piece of music “means.” As stated above, music is an ineffable medium, meaning that it does not signify something else in the real world<sup>8</sup> and therefore poses problems of interpretation. This exacerbates the difficulty with interpreting the music of “Sirens” – if critiquing music itself is challenging, how can we critique text as music?

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<sup>8</sup> Over the course of centuries, many listeners have assigned meaning to certain kinds of musical gestures, or to certain instruments, a mechanism called *troping* which I discuss in chapter 2. But, as I have said, these direct associations couple sonic occurrences with something inherently unrelated.

We are thus left with some interpretive difficulties. Did Joyce actually mean to inscribe in this episode a fully functional fugue, as he claims? And if he did, how could he have? Or, did he intend to, but ultimately fall short because of the difference between music and literature? Even if he did successfully inscribe a fugue, are critics who interpret textual manipulations in the chapter correct or even justified in their assertions about parallels between the text and music? Can one interpret “Sirens” through some lens besides the fugue without losing a sense of the obvious musicality in the episode?

These are the questions I explore in this paper. Ultimately, I do not think that Joyce inscribed a fugue within the structure of “Sirens.” Perhaps more importantly, I think that to focus only on the syntactic structure of the episode for the sake of uncovering its musical form loses a depth of meaningful analysis and interpretation. Instead, analysis should utilize knowledge and understanding of both music and James Joyce to critique “Sirens,” combining literary and musical disciplines into a holistic examination.

## Chapter 2: Review of “Sirens” and Music Literature

### *“Sirens”*

Joyce, at one point, remarked to Jacques Benoît-Méchin, “I’ve put in so many enigmas and puzzles that it will keep the professors busy for centuries arguing over what I meant, and that’s the only way of insuring one’s immortality” (Ellman 519, 521).

Whether aware or not, critics have undoubtedly substantiated his statement. My initial sampling of writing on “Sirens” alone yielded upwards of 30 articles written between 1965 and 2010, each adopting its own unique approach to the episode – and this is by no means an exhaustive survey of the criticism. Still, despite the confines of a small sample of text, the various criticisms I read generally follow one of three approaches.

The first takes Joyce’s Linati Schema and correspondences as a lead. As mentioned, many critics spend articles attempting to “solve” the form of the episode. Before even broaching specific examples, this analytic approach suffers the problem of intention. The difference in musical and literary composition makes it difficult to claim with certainty that a literary device does or does not stand for a musical technique, as I alluded to in chapter 1. Though Joyce said that he included such musical experiments, he did not specify how he meant for certain textual devices to function musically. The result of this is that critics have freely interpreted Joyce’s syntactic experiments to represent specific musical phenomenon, like modulations, prolongations, chords without certain notes included, etc. Whether critics are justified in making such claims remains to be discussed.

This interpretation also brings up questions of semiotics, a discipline of study first proposed by Ferdinand de Saussure. In his *Course in General Linguistics*, he defines semiology as “a science that studies the life of signs within society” (16), which he proposes particularly in relation to linguistics and language phenomena. A linguistic sign “unites... a concept and a sound-image” (66), a relationship where invocation of one recalls the other. This simply refers to the phenomena where, for example, the word “tree” (sound-image) calls to mind the image or idea of a large, leafed plant (concept). For the sake of unity, Saussure re-labels “sound-image” and “concept” as *signifier* and *signified*, respectively (67). Semiology, which was overtly concerned with intentional communication (like language), was similarly discussed by Charles Peirce who broadened signifying ability to *anything* and who termed his study *semiotics* (Atkin). This is an overly simplistic explanation, but hopefully provides a usable understanding of semiotics – an important topic for these analyses which ostensibly deal with what specific passages in “Sirens” mean.

Attempting to “solve” the episode’s structure unveils further complications. The first is the little agreement between critics as to what *fuga per canonem* refers (or what Joyce meant), suggestions running the gamut of musical forms as I discuss in chapter 1. To take some examples, Lawrence Levin brushes aside questions of whether Joyce meant “fuga per canonem” or “fugue” by highlighting Joyce’s attention to detail. He claims, “Joyce’s thorough musical background, his near mania for correctness of detail... and the fact that he states that he based the chapter on the *fuga per canonem*... indicate that the Sirens episode is structure along the lines of the canon, not the fugue” (13).

Heath Lees points out that, “the musical term *canon* when it was first used in the fifteenth century referred not to the music but to the verbal directions placed before or sometimes within the music” (40), and goes on to propose that the list of phrases that opens “Sirens” serves as instruction for how to read the episode. Nadya Zimmerman, on the other hand, asserts that Joyce’s reference to *fuga per canonem* inherently implies a 20<sup>th</sup> century understanding of the phrase, one which she suggests “incorporates both fugal and canonical rules” (110).

This does not bode well for the idea of *one* true answer to the question of form in “Sirens.” The multiplicity of analyses at the least suggests that no single interpretation of *fuga per canonem* is more valid than another (though some are more convincingly argued), especially since no one analysis has ever been considered by scholars as the “correct” approach. This process also inevitably devolves into the aforementioned difficulty of intention and interpretation. Unfortunately, statements of correlation between text and music often detract from arguments because they link the media in ways that either do not make sense or stem from a misunderstanding of musical composition.

Levin’s claims about compositional devices erroneously mislabel the episode at best. For example, he remarks that “the free counterpoint of the bootboy harmonizes Miss Douce’s ‘impertinent insolence’ with ‘Impertthnthn thnthnthn’” (16) which, beyond being an unsubstantiated claim (how can text harmonize without pitch content, especially when not occurring simultaneously?), seems much more an example of compositional imitation than harmonization. Many of his examples feel like a stretch – even though he affirms that “it is in accord with the canonical rules that we must attempt to analyze and to evaluate this chapter,” he himself later claims that

A strict imitation in canonic form would not allow the variety which Joyce introduces, but, through repetition of words, phrases, and themes in an ordered sequence carried from one voice to another, the episode does not violate, past reconciliation, the bounds of the canon. (13)

By definition, anything besides strict imitation *does* violate the bounds of the canon, another of many exceptions and loose definitions in Levin's argument.

Lees suffers a similar problem. He focuses on the importance of rhythm in fugal composition, identifies two rhythmic motives from the episode's opening lines and uses them as markers for a double fugue within the episode. This process, like Levin's labelling, is forced. The rhythm of text (and speech) is inherently dependent on the speaker, their dialect, and their understandings of phrase, which runs contrary to the idea that Joyce's text can be confined to any specific metrical pattern. Beyond that, Lees does a poor job of transcribing the rhythms of natural speech to music; "bronze by gold" is not a phrase of three equal units, though he argues as much (46).

Of the three critics mentioned Zimmerman has the strongest justifications for her argument, if only because she takes more caution in her labelling of the text. Rather than pinpoint specific phrases as standing for musical gestures, Zimmerman develops a method of reading the text that indicates simultaneous events between characters and from there constructs a fugue based on character actions. She then uses this simultaneity to determine which voices are in harmony. Her argument still suffers some weaknesses; most significantly, she proposes that "Joyce helps the reader negotiate this predilection



[of narrative linearity] by evoking temporal simultaneity... By keeping a strong sense of time in mind, the reader can sense the simultaneity of events that are separated on the page” (112) as a critical component of the fugal texture in “Sirens.”

This seems plausible for the sake of her argument, but less so for the sake of the text — why would Joyce demand that we read “Sirens” with overlapping timelines when that was the dominant textual feature of “Wandering Rocks,” the previous episode?<sup>9</sup> Her choice of eight characters to fit Joyce’s eight parts of the fugue is also questionable; why not include Father Crowley, a particularly active character in the episode? Still, her proposed “solution” to the episode’s fugal structure withstands scrutiny, more so than other writers’ solutions.

Despite historical documents to the contrary, I reject this notion that “Sirens” is a fugue, a description Zack Bowen claims “has done scholarship some disservice... the chapter nowhere supports such an interpretation” (16), and which Arthur Nestrovski claims “must be so more for its names and for the history of its form than for an unlikely but much-believed but never shown parallelism,” (Blindness 22). There are manifold reasons to reject such an interpretation – many have been articulated by critics like Bowen – but let me mention the most significant.

The biggest problem with the comparison is the specificity of practice demanded by the musical fugue. It is one of the strictest compositional forms whose brief melodic themes are repeated exactly or manipulated in certain ways throughout the piece, as I described above. The repetitions and manipulations of the theme are not mere

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<sup>9</sup> Of course, the natural response would be, “Why not?” Joyce spends much of *Ulysses*, particularly later episodes, revisiting earlier themes and concepts – it would not be a stretch for him to immediately re-explore the idea of simultaneity after “Wandering Rocks.” That being said, “Wandering Rocks” is very specifically dedicated to this experiment, while “Sirens” is not.

characteristics – they are the structural markers of the genre, the means by which students learn to analyze fugues and composers learn how to write them. In “Sirens” there is simply too much material for a fugue, were we to take the identification literally. Beyond the difficulties of translating music to text and vice versa, none of the many themes that exist in the episode ever see an exact repetition – one of the most important features of fugal compositions.

If, for the moment, we propose that “Sirens” could contain a fugal structure, the most defensible argument would consider the constant reference to the opening line, “Bronze by gold, miss Douce’s head by miss Kenney’s head, over the crossblind of the Ormond bar heard the viceregal hoofs go by, ringing steel” (*U* 11.64-65), which returns throughout the episode in various forms including: “Yes, bronze form anear, by gold from afar, heard steel from anear, hoofs ring from afar, and heard steelhoofs ringhoof ringsteel” (*U* 11.112-112); “Bronze by a weary gold, anear, afar, they listened” (*U* 11.937); and “Near bronze from anear near gold from afar they chinked their clinking glasses all, brighteyed and gallant, before bronze Lydia’s tempting last rose of summer, rose of Castile” (*U* 11.1269-1271). This final iteration, combined with the regular addition of “voices” (characters) to the texture and their voices sounding in stretto (“Near bronze from anear near gold from afar they chinked their clinking glasses all...”), does generally resemble an episodic fugal form. But, again, the main theme is never restated exactly and is crowded by other unrelated thematic material. This is not to mention that the slow addition of characters to a scene is a literary trope that extends far back into the

history of narrative, and is therefore relatively unremarkable despite its parallels to fugal structure.<sup>10</sup>

This does not necessarily delegitimize all articles written which attempt to identify the fugue, some of which offer useful ways to see the structure of the episode and recognize recurring patterns (though I may disagree with their ultimate conclusion). It is also not to say that writers should not attempt to understand the manipulations of the episode as music, since the text so obviously refers to musical ideas. However, certain claims about the episode stand up to scrutiny more than others.

I also want to maintain the possibility that Joyce, in his creativity, managed to create an analytically accurate fugue within the episode, one which simply has not yet been found. This is particularly possible because Joyce's notes, rather than outlining eight voices in a fugue, outline eight *sections* found in a fugue, which goes counter to typical approaches in analysis. Still, I do not believe that pursuing the question of identifying a fugue is a useful analysis at this point.

Finally, we should acknowledge that to accurately interpret "Sirens" with musical considerations in mind requires an expertise of musical form and history in addition to whatever requisite literary criticism informs an analysis, which few literary critics can boast. This fugal approach also, by default, limits itself to a narrow analytic focus. A

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<sup>10</sup> One alternative possibility for precise explanation is that the entire episode demonstrates use of Wagner's *leitmotifs*. Wagner, in his operas, adopted the practice of "assigning" musical motives – a melody line, a harmony, a rhythmic pattern – to characters, places, and objects. Whenever these characters or objects appeared on stage, its theme would sound in some part of the score. Joyce's thematic manipulations based on themes stated at the beginning of the episode certainly suggest that kind of musical use. Still, that has almost nothing to do with fugues, and has relatively little impact on how we might analyze the episode – it is simply another observation about the musicality of "Sirens."

purely structural dissection of “Sirens” is certainly worthwhile given the discourse, but sacrifices deep close reading for the sake of identification. Even if this type of “Sirens” critique was consistently accurate, it rarely brings its analyses past the level of observation and into a thorough investigation of significance and meaning.

The second broad category of “Sirens” analyses solves this problem by ignoring the musical elements altogether, choosing instead to interpret meaning through standard methods of literary criticism. Margaret Honton, Joseph Valente, and Marilyn French have all written compellingly on “Sirens” without giving much thought to its supposed musical structure or the musical idioms integrated into the language.

For example, in “The Voices of the Sirens in Joyce’s ‘Ulysses’,” French analyzes the episode by investigating different styles – poetic and prosaic writings she refers to as “tones” – and how they craft our understanding of the characters and their interactions. She compares tones, highlighting how “all blend together to create a single voice, one that in the episode as a whole contrasts with the voice of Leopold Bloom” (6). The narrative voice frames and exposes a certain emotional voice by using poetic devices; Bloom, in turn, experiences the emotions described, resulting in a duality of description and experience for the reader. This analysis creatively and effectively captures themes in the episode, but French does it with no consideration of the music. This does not necessarily render the analysis illegitimate since it still reveals meaningful implications about the text. However, it leaves out an obviously critical element of the episode, one which could expand such an analysis in intriguing directions.

The third general category of analysis pursues these intriguing directions to a small extent, investigating Joyce’s musical writing without getting stuck in procedural

labelling processes. Cheryl Herr and David Herman have each written compellingly along this framework. Herr analyzes in “Nature and Culture in ‘Sirens’ Episode of Joyce’s *Ulysses*” cultural conventions of music and of human attraction as reflected in the language Joyce utilizes. She states:

This narrative organization of ideas suggests that a listener’s response to music depends on the sum of his experiences, each one a packet of cultural data. In *Ulysses* the power of music is attributed to a mechanism of tapping, rapidly, and blending in varying patterns a series of personal associations. (51)

As a result, and taking into consideration the narrative’s renaming and unhelpful re-identification of characters, the episode “itself becomes... a gathering of cultural topoi. The reader finds that in ‘Sirens’ conventions fabricate both art and life” (57), and so disgruntles attempts for the characters to “intensify a[n] apprehension of the self” (49). This article combines the linguistic manipulations in “Sirens” with perspectives on popular culture to demonstrate how Joyce’s characters fall victim to cultural norms and procedures, markers of society that accrue meaning simply through their repetition and consequent exploitation.

David Herman’s “‘Sirens’ After Schönberg” suggests that Joyce’s writing technique should not be considered as an examination of the relationship between musical and linguistic aesthetics, where one approach subjects the other to its structures. Instead, analysis of “Sirens” should situate itself so it “centers on the discovery and formalization of rules for the (re)arrangement of elements — whatever their material

constitution or denotative force — into well-formed sequences or strings” (475). In music, this is most clearly mirrored through Schönberg’s serial composition techniques. Herman argues that this perspective shifts analysis from a semantic to a syntactic lens, from trying to identify what each word means to identifying how phrases transform through time.

Further, he claims that the simultaneous awareness of the opening “canon” (which he takes from Lees) and the development of the episode forces us to “read the text as we would listen to a fugue: in the split temporality of a double awareness... resolving every sequential or ‘melodic’ development back into the stasis of its ‘harmonic’ situation” (484). While reading we are simultaneously conscious both of how phrases develop from earlier statements and how they function in the moment, as we are conscious of the harmonic and melodic structures of Schönberg’s 12-tone fugal compositions. This approach is refreshing because we broaden our aesthetic considerations to form, rather than debating Joyce’s individual textual experiments. More than other analyses, Herman justifies how we can read the episode as a fugue, perhaps how Joyce intended.

Nestrovski’s writing goes even further in “Joyce’s Critique on Music” and “Blindness and Inwit: James Joyce and the Sirens,” moving Joyce’s language past typical signification altogether. In “Joyce’s Critique,” he vastly enlarges the discussion of Joyce’s treatment of music by first engaging Joyce’s aesthetic philosophies. He traces through *Dubliners* and into *Finnegans Wake* the “signaling presence of musical allusions... the portrayal of musicians, paramusicians and musical events... and the evolution of combinatorial, serial thinking” (Joyce’s Critique 249) and how these characteristics reflect Joyce’s mythology of music. Significantly, he recognizes that the

“text of these ballads is amenable to mythical treatment in so far as they provide a set of traditionally fixed character-functions allowing for potentially infinite reduplication”

(261). As a cumulative result:

There is... a real sense in which [Joyce's] prose asks to be read as music — but this is not what is usually referred to as the ‘musicality’ of his language, since this ‘musicality’ is a literary trope which really has very little to do with music — but rather a sense of tone and overtones, of colour and detail, which stares at us in the same way music does, from its seemingly impenetrable self-containment. (267)

Nestrovski suggests that “Sirens” marked Joyce’s first steps in approaching a reclamation of literary autonomy, that is, a text that uses itself and its previously defined tropes as a source of signifying material. The episode capitalizes on the generative, recyclable quality of myth that Joyce exploits in his writing, approximating writing as “a reconstruction of time which simultaneously designs its form and goes beyond its means, speaking to the non-rational, aesthetic ear” (269). In other words, Joyce’s writing presents as a musical composition because rather than pulling from standard language use for syntactic reference, it pulls from its own created material to weave a text whose significance begins and ends within the texted material itself.

He directly confronts the question of “Sirens” in “Blindness and Inwit,” stating that “There is a sense in which every word here is pastiche... each word, each song, each gesture, is allusion; each character, an engraving” and that Joyce’s use of trope, pun, irony, and narrative shifts all combine to destroy realistic signification within the episode

(Blindness 20). He also in this essay comfortably dismisses attempts to analyze the chapter for fugal structure. Instead we should understand the fugue in the way “Sirens” provides and instills with meaning its own selection of signifying motives, as a “fugue provides... a lexicon, a source of tropes and emblems of its art” (22). As such, through his specific textual recreations or puns on musical techniques, Joyce “will make, have made, us, look, at, words, for all they’re worth” (24).

Andreas Fischer, in his “Strange Words, Strange Music: The Verbal Music of ‘Sirens,’” analyzes specifically this function of language and text in the episode. He draws attention to important distinctions between language and vocal music, highlighting the arbitrary nature of language as a representational medium. He then explores the musical functioning of language in “Sirens,” ultimately asserting that the literary musical devices “form a whole that transcends the sum of its part and that the strangeness of this whole is both novel and significant in ways not appreciated so far” (248). Joyce’s “music” not only approximates composition, but disrupts our expectations of linguistic function in the process.

These essays much more substantively suggest a valuable musical understanding of “Sirens” – certainly they frame Joyce’s text in a much more holistically critical way than other writings. That being said, they skirt around the direct integration of musical and literary significance, offering instead valuable meta-discussions about how Joyce went about creating a sense of musical composition in “Sirens.” If we take their arguments to be valid we can read the episode as a self-referential text filled with musical tropes and allusions, but not necessarily as a purposeful fugue (or other compositional structure). Joyce approximates the results of music through linguistic manipulations



(pointed out by writers like Lees and Herman) and through a more general aesthetic theory governing the text (pointed out by Nestrovski).

I suggest, however, that we take this analysis a step further. Rather than discuss loosely music's influence on text, we can read and interpret "Sirens" as music without tenuously assigning musical structure to the text. We should thus consider techniques of musical criticism when reading to help guide our understanding of the references and manipulations Joyce included.

### *Music and Semiotics*

To analyze "Sirens" through the lens of music theory, of course, requires an understanding of how music is itself analyzed and interpreted. This topic alone has spawned the penning of many books promoting one approach over another, and is a complex discipline in and of itself. Semiotics is, however, again a convenient starting point for understanding how music and musical gestures can represent meaningful ideas outside of music.

In *Music and Discourse*, Jean-Jacques Nattiez considerably traces the development of relevant writings on semiotics as they relate to music, thus framing a discussion of interpreting meaning in music. Nattiez references both Saussure's and Pierce's theoretical contributions to semiology; notably, Saussure's observation that signs do not "exist within a system of signs except by opposition to and difference from the other signs in the same system" (5) and Pierce's demonstration that

the thing to which the sign refers — that is, the interpretant — is also a *sign*... because the process of referring effected by the sign is *infinite*... the sign is a *virtual* object, that does not exist except within and through the infinite multiplicity of interpretants, by means of which the person *using* the sign seeks to *allude to* the object. (7)

Nattiez clarifies this point by using as an example the term “happiness” – the word makes sense to any reader, but attempting to explain its content yields a series of new *signs* like “bliss,” “satisfaction,” or “fulfillment” (7). In this way Nattiez demonstrates that signs, or *symbolic forms*, are complex, infinite series of referents that only approximate an existing object. This leads him to define meaning as “when an individual places an object in relation to areas of his lived experience — that is, in relation to a collection of other objects that belong to his or her experience of the world” (9). Meaning can thus only emerge through the juxtaposition of signs and personal experience of the world.

From here, Nattiez outlines a *semiological tripartition*, a three-part process delineating the components of signs and how they contain/create meaning. The three elements are: (1) the *poietic* process, whereby an object is intentionally created by someone (in terms of music, when a piece is written by a composer<sup>11</sup>) and meaning emerges in the act of creation; (2) the *esthesis* process, where an observer of the symbolic form constructs and assigns some meaning to the signs they confront (an audience or

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<sup>11</sup> This definition itself is not necessarily universally accepted. Critics would challenge that the “object” of music, while notated by a composer, cannot exist without a performance, and that the sonic event of performance is the true semiological, poietic object. Subsequently, others would challenge this critique, stating that there is no “pure” existence of the piece except for the score, and therefore the score is the true manifestation of a work.

individual listening to a piece of music); and (3) the *trace* (or *neutral level*), which is the material manifestation of the symbolic form, accessible to the five senses (e.g. musical symbols, words, etc.) (11 - 12). In musical analysis, critics often take one of these three levels as a starting point for interpretation, where the levels roughly correspond to (1) the intent of the composer, (2) how a listener responds to a piece of music (what it means for them, qualitative judgments), or (3) the structural existence of a piece of music (chords, harmony, texture, form, etc.).

Nattiez then makes a critical distinction about how meaning exists in the tripartition. He explicitly states that “semiology is not the science of communication. However we conceive of it, it is the study of the specificity of the functioning of symbolic forms, and the phenomenon of ‘referring’ to which they give rise” (15). What this means is that artistic creation does *not* involve an artist conceiving an idea, instilling that idea into their particular aesthetic form and, in doing so, communicating that idea to an audience. The poietic process begins with authorial intention and results in the generation of a trace or neutral level, but the “esthetic process and the poietic process do not necessarily correspond” (17). An audience member listening to a piece of music will assign meaning to that piece based on their experiences. This process that will not always line up with the composer’s intended meaning because of the arbitrary nature of semiotic representation, particularly in music.

This cannot be stressed enough, because one of the primary reasons that music does not communicate like a language does is its inability to signify – unlike language, there are not necessarily any compositional techniques composers can use to directly say something to an audience. This, in turn, prevents composers from instilling a definitive

meaning in a composition, instead resorting to an approximation of ideas based on the suggestions of musical gestures.

Raymond Monelle specialized in discussing the ways composers *did* attempt to communicate through their compositions, particularly by using *tropes*. A trope is a musical idea which, through its contextual association with extra-musical concepts or previous appearance in music, comes to take on some level of specific meaning. This explains how listeners can infer that a horn call refers to a hunt or royal fanfare, or that high winds mimic the sounds of birds, when neither of those musical techniques literally “are” or “describe” their corresponding ideas.

Monelle states in his *Linguistics and Semiotics in Music* that music “is clearly not referential, and for this reason the whole idea of signification in music, and the suggestion that music is a language, are rejected by some of the most sophisticated modern writers” (13). This is further broken down into distinctions between denotation and connotation regarding how music communicates ideas. Monelle remarks, “It has been said that musical meaning is entirely connotative, since no ‘literal’ meaning can be ascribed to musical terms. Each musical motive or fragment relies on context for its signification” (15), as is the case with musical tropes. This is especially contrasted against the function of language, in which words can meaningfully exist and represent something in isolation from other words.<sup>12</sup>

A corollary of these theoretical discussions is fundamental disagreement on how to analyze music. Should analysis try as much as possible to understand and listen for the

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<sup>12</sup> This makes interpreting “Sirens” as direct musical gestures particularly difficult. Not only is the text functioning in a way that prevents us from understanding linguistic signifiers reliably, but the musical gestures they supposedly approximate would not “mean” anything specific even if they were in their expected musical context.

composer's intentions, ultimately judging whether or not they imbued meaning into a piece? Should analysis focus solely on how a listener understands a piece, with no heed paid to the intentions of the composer? In the past century, much analysis confined itself to a purely structural level (championed by Pierre Boulez, among others) to avoid ambiguities in interpretation, a supposed way to strike to the heart of music's inherent value given the arbitrariness of musical meaning from any other approach. But can a structural analysis describe a listener's extra-musical associations (like the hunt), associations established through sonic troping but nevertheless present? If we take Nattiez's claims about the simultaneous working of the poietic, esthetic, and neutral level processes, can any of these approaches be substantiated, or is it impossible to truly understand the meaning of music with so many levels at work?<sup>13</sup>

### *A New Analysis*

Nicholas Cook responds to this dilemma in his 2001 article "Theorizing Musical Meaning." He begins with an overview of recent discrepancies in ethno/musicology circles, particularly focusing on Susan McClary's infamous analysis of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. McClary claims that, based on the development of sonata form and the language historically used to describe different themes in this larger compositional structure, we can understand Beethoven Nine as the domination of a resisting subject, a metaphorical musical rape.

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<sup>13</sup> These questions exist at the heart of Nattiez's further discussion, which critiques modes of musical analysis for their interpretive and cultural biases, exploring what we can assert as being music in the first place, the sacredness of "the work" in the ontology of music, and the ramifications for applying such discussions to musical phenomena in cultures that do not conceptualize of their sound production as music (or, at least, not as we might).

Among the critiques Cook surveys is Kofi Agawu's complaint that in such analysis the "emphasis is always on the interpretation and not the analysis that underlies it, which accordingly comes across as just how the music is" (171). Further, Cook draws attention to critiques of how McClary-esque writing relies on a homologous relationship between music and social structures – that is, that there is always a correspondence in our understanding of musical phenomena and social constructs, and vice versa. This initially confusing assertion stems from the legacy of Theodor Adorno's writing where, even there, "it is hard to put your finger on exactly how the linkage between musical and social structure is meant to work" (172). Critics state that musicologists engaging in this kind of "social" writing ignore that, like music, there is no permanent construction of social structure, and their arguments concerning association are unsubstantiated.

In the light of the difficulty in establishing this homology, Cook traces the historical reasoning that "the only safe model of the relationship between music and meaning would appear to be a Saussurian one—in other words, that it is arbitrary" (173), a restatement of the arguments delineated above. This arbitrariness potentially leads to unconstrained interpretation (as some might categorize McClary), the instability of which saw "the development later in the [20<sup>th</sup>] century of more formalized approaches to analysis as an attempt to regulate debate through principled reference to the relevant empirical data, in other words, the score" (173); in other words, the structural analyses championed by Boulez.

Cook launches from this dense history of critique into an attempt to "understand at least some of the meanings ascribed to music as at the same time irreducibly cultural *and* intimately related to its structural properties" (173-174). Positing theories of meaning

in this inherent-versus-socially-constructed opposition, he proposes that the challenge facing music theorists is to reconcile this opposition with a third method of analysis. After exploring various theories on semiotics from the perspectives of materiality and language, he proposes:

what we think of as ‘a piece’ of music should really be conceived as an indefinitely extended series of traces... bundles comprised of an indefinite number of attributes from which different selections will be made within different cultural traditions, or on different occasions of interpretation (179).

A piece of music, he contends, should not be thought of as having one meaning, but indefinite possible meanings activated through the context of each listening experience.

He then couples this observation with a dilemma. Following arguments that music can express base emotions (e.g., happiness and sadness), while failing to capture nuances within those emotions (e.g., joy/elation, grief/despondency), Cook reasons that because “music cannot supply formal objects... it is restricted to simple, objectless emotions or moods” (180). However, he quickly turns this argument on his head; citing Eduard Hanslick, Cook argues that “emotions like longing, hope, or love depend on a formal object, in the absence of which, ‘all that remains is an unspecific stirring’... music conveys not unnuanced emotion, but emotionless nuance” (180). The “emotionless nuance” is therefore only tangibly grounded by a listener’s personal experience, where the listener/interpreter provides the context through which musical meaning can “activate” into a holistic interpretation.

This completes Cook's proposal that musical meaning, rather than being a static entity, emerges through the dialogic relationship between potentialities in a piece of music and the interpreter's referential context. "It is wrong to speak of music *having* particular meanings," Cook asserts. "Rather it has the potential for specific meanings to emerge under specific circumstances" (180). This, in turn, justifies the "radical" interpretations made by McClary regarding Beethoven's Ninth, as "a critical theory of musical meaning would entail the attempt to hear works... as fugitive amalgams of the potentially meaningful attributes that underlie [dominant] interpretations" (189). Rather than unfoundedly grafting social commentary onto musical procedures, McClary's interpretation can be explained as a logical emergence of the negotiation between musical techniques and her cultural position as a feminist theorist attuned to the emotional implications of dominance.

The question then remains; how can listeners practically apply this new theory of analysis to interpreting music, or – as in this case – to a non-musical entity like *Ulysses*? Even further, why bother mixing interpretative approaches between distinct aesthetic media? To answer the latter, a simple response is, why not? *Ulysses* ("Sirens" in particular) has withstood the rigors of a century's literary analysis, yet the text is constantly subjected to and interpretation. Using so specific a theory for analysis will hopefully supplement the literature with a fresh critique.

However, I think that "Sirens" warrants this musical approach for a few specific reasons. First, the episode overflows with musical allusions, whether it be text replicating composition techniques, the constant insertion of musical terminology and references, or the general format of the episode. All of those characteristics serve as musical tropes,



expanding the episode's "bundle of potentialities" into the complex world of music (which also helps explain the multitude of valid analyses that I discussed above).

Second, there is a quality of Joyce's text that demands an untraditional approach to interpreting language, as Fischer points out. Music theorists often speak of music's ineffability, implying that inherent musical meaning (if it exists) cannot adequately be captured in words, an "unreachable" quality of the work. In the same way, Joyce's linguistic manipulations prevent us from reading "Sirens" as a traditionally signifying text, to the point where we can interpret the text as a medium that is largely connotative – as we interpret music. These two characteristics of "Sirens" suggest that a more "musical" analysis would not only be possible, but beneficial.

Both Nattiez and Cook provide excellent theoretical frameworks to approach such a musical analysis of "Sirens." Nattiez's explicit categorization of the elements of a symbolic form and how they interact is invaluable to a discussion of Joyce, providing a space where we can reconcile Joyce's Linati Schema, his language in "Sirens," and our reactions to his musical discourse. Similarly, Cook frees us from the need to "solve" the puzzle of the episode, instead encouraging us to take the complex emotional and thematic currents of "Sirens" and develop them into a useful, substantive analysis.

Ironically, Cook also gives us leave to deny the validity of certain interpretations of "Sirens" made prior to ours. He points out that "there is an intimate binding between the unfolding of music and the emergence of meaning," a binding which implies that "the construction of meanings through music's sounds can be understood as being socially negotiated but *not* arbitrary" (177). For a musical example, we might hear the oboe's dotted-note patterns in Haydn's *La Poule* as "a hen, or equally as an expression of

merriment... but what [we] cannot credibly do... is argue ‘that it is a funeral dirge, or paints the storming of the Bastille’” (177). As an example from “Sirens,” we can take the changing of “wavy heavy” into “wavyavyeavyheavyeavyevyevy” much more credibly as a trill before a cadence, rather than the often-argued prolongation, a claim that does not make sense considering the constant motion in the manipulated word.

We can also take J. Peter Burkholder’s “A Simple Model for Associative Musical Meaning” as a practical guide to navigating this analysis. In an attempt to establish a working model for musical interpretation, Burkholder posits a five-step system whereby listeners rely on prior experience and knowledge to analyze a piece of music. The listener will: (1) recognize familiar elements in a piece of music; (2) recall other pieces or structures that contain those elements, associating the new piece with previous examples; (3) acknowledge musical and extra-musical associations that generate from those other examples; (4) recognize, in the new listening experience, any changes to those familiar elements; and (5) interpret this collected information, including both the associations and the divergences (Burkholder 79). This model, purposefully designed to be accessible to a wide-listener base with varying musical experience and knowledge, will be particularly useful in an analysis of “Sirens” that incorporates both extensive literary and musical critiques, the knowledge of which will expand our analysis of “Sirens” to a more holistic consideration of elements.

Before attempting any of this, however, it will be useful to attempt such an analysis on a piece of music. Samuel Barber’s “Solitary Hotel” from his song-cycle *Despite and Still* brilliantly lends itself to such an analytic case-study. It is an approachable 20<sup>th</sup> century composition, free from some of the denser techniques of post-

tonal writing but innovative enough to provide points of interest in analysis. Even further, the text of the song comes from the “Ithaca” episode of *Ulysses*, and will allow for an initial foray into analyzing text with musical considerations in mind. With this analysis as a basis, we can then sufficiently move towards a holistic critique of “Sirens.”

### Chapter 3: Samuel Barber's "Solitary Hotel"

This analysis will take Nattiez's semiological tripartition as a framing mechanism to explicitly show how my interpretation generates through my musical and literary background interacting with the structure of the piece. I do not necessarily mean to prioritize this approach over Cook's or Burkholder's, but I think it will be helpful to clearly delineate the material with which I am engaging and how I engage it. Further, my purpose is not necessarily to posit a definite analysis of the piece. Instead, I am trying to demonstrate a practical application of the complex theoretical discussion outlined above, which I hope will logically bridge theory with our analysis of "Sirens."

#### *The Neutral-Level*

Before discussing the musical structure, let us consider the text, a critical element of art song and important for my later discussion of the piece. As mentioned, Barber's work, the fourth of a five-song cycle entitled *Despite and Still*, sets text from the "Ithaca" episode of *Ulysses*. At this point, Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom have returned to Bloom's home late at night, and the episode documents their interaction in a catechistic, encyclopedic writing style (according to the Linati Schema). The text Barber chose to set is an excerpt from this interaction:

Solitary hotel in mountain pass. Autumn. Twilight. Fire lit. In dark corner young man seated. Young woman enters. Restless. Solitary. She sits. She goes to window. She stands. She sits. Twilight. She thinks. On solitary hotel paper she

writes. She thinks. She writes. She sighs. Wheels and hoofs. She hurries out. He comes from his dark corner. He seizes solitary paper. He holds it towards fire. Twilight. He reads. Solitary.

What?

In sloping, upright and backhands: Queen's Hotel, Queen's Hotel, Queen's Hotel.  
Queen's Ho... (U 17.612 - 620)

This passage follows a lengthy description of Bloom's imagined inventions and their usefulness (or lack thereof). After that discussion, the narrative voice queries, "What suggested scene was then constructed by Stephen?" (U 17.611) to which Stephen responds with the excerpt. The writing style is paratactic, a technique where descriptors are listed side by side without creating a hierarchy of subordinating conjunctions. As a result, his disjointed and minimal answer does not *explain* the scene per se but approximates a visual description as closely as possible.

The semi-fractured construction is immediately apparent in reading. Repeated observations of female character and one-word sentences like "twilight" and "autumn" provide for us source materials to build an image of this fabricated scene. For another example, the description of action ("On solitary hotel paper she writes...") ends, but Stephen does not tell us *what* the young woman wrote. Only after the narrative voice asks, "What?" do we find out the content of the note; simply, "Queen's Hotel, Queen's Hotel, Queen's Hotel, Queen's Hotel, Queen's Ho..."

Another significant observation about the text, particularly when considered with Barber’s setting, is its prosody. This is not totally abnormal – plenty of composers take text from prose sources – but the conventions of poetry and poetic form often lend themselves to a more conducive, lyrical text setting. This is not a qualitative statement regarding what texts are appropriate in art song; however, the structure of Joyce’s writing will play a key role in our current analysis and later analysis of the “Sirens” episode, and is worth recognizing at the outset.

How did Samuel Barber set this passage into music? “Solitary Hotel” is a cut-time tango, dwelling almost entirely in the key of e-minor and consisting largely of repeated passages, called *phrases*, which in combination create eight-bar *periods*. The harmonic structure of the first period is:

Key of e minor:	i (e minor)	i (e minor)	iv (a minor)	iv (a minor)
Measure:	m. 4	m. 5	m. 6	m.7
	i <sup>6</sup> <sub>4</sub> (e minor)	v7 (b minor)	i (e minor)	i (e minor)
	m. 8	m. 9	m. 10	m. 11

and the piece continues following that basic pattern. Both the vocal line and piano accompaniment grow from small motives stated early in the piece; for example, the piano plays a habanera rhythm against a quarter-note triplet melody for almost the entire song, changing only for the sake of texture. Similarly, the vocal line uses only a few small musical ideas for the bulk of its content, in particular using repeated pitches to sing in quasi-recitative (a setting of text that closely resembles speaking). The statements are short and separated, much like the fragmentary text from which it draws, and rarely stray outside the harmonic structure of the accompaniment.

That being said, the piece does contain a number of unexpected harmonic and textural deviances that stand out against the otherwise regular structure. Among these is the inclusion of added notes, particularly the pitch 9 notes above the chord root (the 9<sup>th</sup>), in the harmonic structure of a chord. For example, in measure 6 the iv chord (a-minor triad) actually contains the notes a-e-b, the b-natural acting as an added 9<sup>th</sup>. The c-natural that would “complete” the chord is not heard until the end of the piano line in measure 7, and whether or not we should include that as a chord member is debatable. Similarly, the spelling of the b-minor seven (v7) in measure 9 is murky; the left hand plays only b-e-a, while the right hand melody articulates d-f# that would complete the triad. How Barber exaggerates the incorporation of these added notes throughout the piece will be of importance for further analysis.

A related example of this is the use of the lowered second scale degree at the end of periods. This is related because periods in this piece often end with the tonic chord, the 9<sup>th</sup> chord member of which is the second scale degree. In measure 10 the vocal line moves from e-natural to the chromatic neighbor-tone f-natural (the lowered 2<sup>nd</sup>, or a flat-9 for jazz musicians) before reaching the g-natural which completes the e-minor triad. This short movement to f-natural and return to e-natural occurs, respectively, on the words, “young man,” the first introduction of a human character into the text. This idea returns in measure 18, when both the piano and vocal lines articulate an f-natural — this time with no subsequent g-natural to complete the chord — on the phrase, “she goes to window.” Barber also truncates the end of the period by substituting one measure of three-two for two measures of cut-time, a technique that repeats throughout the song.

This manipulation of period length becomes the focal point for consequent harmonic and textural changes. At measure 25, the harmonic motion stops on an altered-dominant chord (in this case, a B-major with an augmented fifth), a chord that moves away from the piece's relatively traditional tonal language. This chord resolves into a very distant g-sharp minor chord, then chromatically descends to the key of f-minor, which significantly emphasizes the importance of f-natural as a harmonic insertion. The text throughout these three measures is "...she writes. She thinks. She writes," the phrase "she writes" moving from g-sharp minor to f-minor.

Measure 32 – which ends another period – is the starkest change in texture, harmony, and tone, a harsh thrust away from prior material. Both piano and voice suddenly change dynamic to *forte agitato*, as the vocal line declaims, "Wheels and hoofs. She hurries out." "Out" is sustained as a half-note f-natural, the highest and longest note of the vocal line and another instance of the emphasized lowered-second degree. Out of this turbulent measure returns our tonic key of e-minor, the line that follows almost an exact repetition of first period of the piece.

The song then shifts narrative focus to the "young man seated" who "comes from his dark corner" as the original accompaniment takes over. In this iteration, the dramatic emphasis again occurs at the end of the period, where the vocal line declaims "fire" on the high f-natural while the piano plays an e-minor chord spelled e-f-a-b (missing the third, g-natural – again, reminiscent of the opening period). This elides with the final full period of the piece, ending with the vocalist sustaining, "what?" on an unaccompanied e-natural, followed by a *sforzando* cluster chord in the piano. This brings us to the coda, a recapitulation of the introduction where the vocal line repeats "Queen's Hotel" as the



accompaniment meanders through final statements of e-minor, ending with a low e-natural as the vocal line cuts off on “Queen’s ho -“.

*Esthetic Analysis, pt. 1*

The above structural analysis is not particularly helpful in terms of meaningfully interpreting “Solitary Hotel” – for a trained musician this results from a Roman Numeral analysis, a structural cataloguing of parts that recur and interact with one another.<sup>14</sup> However, for the sake of our analytic approach, this clear categorization provides a point from which we can generate an analysis of the piece based on our knowledge of musical gestures, reference, and text interpretation.

The style of Barber’s piece is an immediate source of dialogic interpretation. “Solitary Hotel” is the only song of *Despite and Still* that uses so distinct a musical form as the tango, a form which calls to mind various associated meanings. McClary, when discussing the “Habañera” from Bizet’s *Carmen*, goes so far as to say that these dance rhythms “indicate that [Carmen] is very much aware of her body... She arouses desire; and because she apparently has the power to deliver or withhold gratification of the desires she instills, she is immediately marked as a potential victimizer.” (Feminine Endings 57). While I do not think that McClary’s interpretation applies to Barber’s setting, it is an important analysis to keep in mind; the tango is a dance, suggesting at the least some sort of choreographed movement between two people. Even further, in Bizet’s

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<sup>14</sup> It should also be noted that conducting such an analysis without any traces of interpretation is surprisingly difficult. Even my statement above, “a harsh thrust away from prior material,” while not a radical claim is still the result of my understandings of functional harmony, the use of sixteenth-note figurations and glissandos, and techniques for conveying certain emotions. To operate beyond simply documenting the structure of the music is an esthetic-level creation of meaning, the process outlined in Cook and Burkholder’s writing.

opera Carmen is distanced as a potential threat, musically playing “with our expectations not only by lingering but also by reciting in irregular triplets that strain against the beat,” (Feminine Endings 58); she is Other’ed, set apart from our identity and our world.

We could make a similar claim about the scene of “Solitary Hotel” in the context of Barber’s setting. The three-against-four rhythms of the piano create an atmosphere that does not quite come into focus, while Barber’s subtle insertions of added notes add to a sense of... what? Ambiguity? Mystery and allure? Resistance, maybe even the suggestion of threat? Depending on a listener’s experience, it could be any or none of those attributes; in my listening, it at the least establishes a distance between us and the world of the scene described, “an atmosphere of emotional distance, like a memory preserved in a faded photograph” (Heyman 169). The music is Other’ed in a way that does not necessarily terrorize or victimize us, but separates us from full comprehension.

This distancing effect directly relates to the character relationships in the text of *Ulysses*, both in the entire book and the excerpt from “Ithaca.” This short scene establishes an ambiguous relationship between the woman and man – do they know each other, is the woman reacting to the man when she hurries out, or does she not even realize that he is there? There is certainly distance between the two, at least physically, adding to a sense of accompanying emotional distance. This is not to mention the distance between the events of the scene and our comprehension of them – what does the note mean, and why is the woman writing in such a panicked manner?

The scene, in many ways, captures the relationships of *Ulysses* in a microcosm. Bloom is both emotionally and physically distanced from his wife, Molly, under the knowledge that she is having an affair. A similar distance separates Bloom and Stephen,

though one much vaguer and constructed. The death of Bloom's son years prior to the events of *Ulysses*, coupled with Stephen's estranged relationship with his father and pervasive grappings with identity, creates a narrative parallel and father-son relationship between the two characters. Barber's stylistic decisions thus plays both on themes from the scene and sentiments carried throughout *Ulysses*.

Barber's text setting reinforces this constructed distance. The original passage as Stephen describes it is a poor representation of the way a person imagines a scene. His delivery makes the image flat, leaving expanses of detail vague and undescribed (contributing again to the distanced lack of clarity in the passage). In some ways this represents Stephen's failure as an artist, which mirrors Bloom's failure as a scientist articulated immediately before. Even further, the delivery suggests significant separation between idea statements, a texture found often in music either through the use of staccato notes or rests between statements.

Barber's setting exposes this failure by augmenting the ambiguity of the passage. The setting distinctly resembles a recitative, an operatic idiom where the vocal line declaims so as to closely resemble natural speaking rhythms. This makes sense given the fragmented style of the original passage. The separation of words in the excerpt does not allow for fluid reading and, for Barber, does not allow for fluid or over-embellished text setting. This choice of style highlights the direct nature of the text — all the while, the tango supplements with a distancing allure.

In fact, even the tango has textual significance beyond its function of ambiguity. For me, the tango imposes a Spanish inflection on the scene. This, in turn, recalls Molly Bloom, noted multiple times throughout *Ulysses* for her Spanish heritage. Coupled with

Molly's characteristics as unattainable, this reinforces the Other'ing effect of the tango as it functions in the context of *Ulysses*. Whether Barber was aware of this theme in *Ulysses* when choosing the tango style does not mitigate the tango's thematic import for an aware listener.

A more technical, yet critical, element of the composition is the significance of the note f-natural, the Neopolitan pitch of our tonic key e-minor which lies outside the traditional diatonic scale. Once it is introduced Barber employs it at significant structural points, most obviously when the singer rises to the high f-natural on the text, "She hurries out." The change of scene and affect is reflected by this measure of textural contrast: the bar is performed at a *sforzando* (suddenly loud), the piano abandons its tango accompaniment, and the woman of the scene panics at the sound of another person and flees. If the activity of the music was not enough to mark the line as a significant turning point in the text, Barber's exaggerated emphasis on the f-natural certainly forces a sense of urgent discomfort – the non-diatonic note stands out for its dissonant clash with the tonal texture of the piece. Similarly, when the young man takes the woman's written message and "holds it towards fire," the music rings out the same f-natural.

The absence of the f-natural also marks a significant juncture. Immediately before the coda, as the voice and piano have diminished to less than *pianissimo* and the melody has slowed to a halt, the vocal line rings out a *sforzando*, "what?" on e-natural, to which the piano responds with a crashing polychord. Why in this moment, an obvious gestural parallel to the previous two instances, does the voice sing a half-step lower than before?

There are a few potential explanations, the first directly tied to the text. This question, "what?" is the only paragraph break in the excerpt. At this point, Stephen is no

longer describing this scene for us; the interrogator is demanding more information. The narrative frame has shifted, and the music shifts to reflect that — particularly effective since the vocal line immediately resumes its usual recitative style. One could also interpret this measure as an amalgamation of all prior events. The voice declaims on the tonic pitch, while the piano’s clashing F-major and g-sharp minor chords combine the two most important tonal changes in the piece. As we wait to hear the contents of the woman’s writing, we face a summary of elements from the piece that occurred *while* she was writing the note.

*Poietic Analysis and Esthetic Analysis, pt. 2*

The above analysis exemplifies how Cook and Burkholder’s theories of interpretation might practically play out in criticism. I am fortunate enough to have a background in both literature and music, and many of the points I made stem directly from my prior knowledge in those fields. This is not the only possible interpretation of this piece, but hopefully a clear demonstration of how this analytic process unfolds.

I now want to incorporate a discussion of the third level of Nattiez’s tripartition, the poietic process by which meaning emerges from the act of artistic creation. This is an odd level to account for – first of all, there are only few direct statements we can use from James Joyce or Samuel Barber that definitively state intention about the material of “Solitary Hotel.” Second, conjecture about what an author meant is inherently an interpretation, considering that we can never fully access their conscious (or subconscious) motivations. However, knowledge of the writings and actions of authors will absolutely inform interpretation.

There is a tendency for analysts in both literature and music to approach the idea of intention with a degree of trepidation, if at all. As Boulez said regarding his interpretation of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*, "must I repeat here that I have not pretended to discover a creative process, but concern myself with the result, whose only tangles are mathematical relationships? If I have been able to find all these structural characteristics, it is because they are there" (Nattiez 138). In the realm of literature, the process of asserting the author's intention as justification for claims is commonly known as invoking the intentional fallacy. This phenomena, as discussed by Wimsatt and Beardsley, inadequately displaces a work of literature from its writer's intentions. They say that the "intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art" (468), and instead claim that all aesthetic authority resides in the work itself.

Yet, in reality, both music and literature analysts rely heavily on the purported motivations of composers and authors, despite the fear of intentional fallacy or the ineffability of either medium. As pointed out above, much of the literature on *Ulysses* is genetic, tied to Joyce's letters, schema for the book, and miscellaneous comments about the writing process – for instance, readings of the text all but begin with the Linati Schema. In music, Kofi Agawu cites comments made by Gustav Mahler as a means of focusing his analysis of *Kindertotenlieder* and justifying his claims about Mahler's developmental composing (to point out just one example of musical analysis using historical information).

There are countless other examples of critics legitimately leaning on authorial sources to guide their analysis. However, we have to reiterate an important point about

the influence of these sources on analysis. As Nattiez states, *the intent of the composer is not the same as the effect of that intent on our analysis of a piece of music*. Having knowledge about what the composer meant to convey through their work only effects our esthetic analysis, how we as interpreters understand the work.

This is not to say that the desires of the creator should mitigate other meanings interpreted by listeners or readers; in fact, the point of this discussion is to demonstrate that taking as many of these considerations into account can supplement any eventual discussion of meaning in art. Thus, we can refocus our current analysis with considerations of both James Joyce's and Samuel Barber's intentions, and how the former may or may not have informed the latter.

Joyce was very aware of the complexities of his text, "taking notes for the entire book at once, even while he was writing specific early sections" (Groden, *In Progress* 77). As his writing style developed and shifted, he even returned to earlier chapters and altered them to better reflect the conceit of the novel (Groden, *In Progress* 18). The composition of *Ulysses* is thus understood to have occurred in three stages, as retroactively identified by Joyce. "Ithaca", the episode from which "Solitary Hotel" takes its text, was composed in the last of these three stages, though at the time Joyce "gave no indication that... he anticipated an episode very different from the ones he had recently completed" (Groden, *In Progress* 166 - 167). He began writing with no expected troubles, though "such expectations quickly proved unrealistic" as the episode gradually developed into a

mathematical catechism in which all events are resolved into their cosmic physical, psychical etc. equivalents, e.g. Bloom jumping down the area, drawing water from the tap... so that not only will the reader know everything... in the baldest coldest way, but Bloom and Stephen thereby become heavenly bodies, wanderers like the stars at which they gaze. (Groden, *In Progress* 186)

As regards Joyce's thought process writing the text of "Solitary Hotel," we have a few important intra-textual references. The location Queen's Hotel is where Bloom's father committed suicide, and "in the earliest extant version of 'Ithaca,' [Joyce] provided the complete address of the scene of Bloom's father's suicide" (Groden, *In Progress* 199). This was one detail reworked in Joyce's revising processes, where he eventually pared down the location to, "Queen's Hotel" after retroactively adding references the suicide earlier in the text,<sup>15</sup> one example of Joyce's significant experimentation with narrative style.

What were Samuel Barber's motivations for setting this text from *Ulysses*? Composed in 1968, during the last fifteen years of his life, the song cycle *Despite and Still* emerged from a time when "Barber struggled with emotional depression, alcoholism, and creative blocks that profoundly affected his productivity" (Heyman 461). The songs followed on the heels of Barber's failed opera *Antony and Cleopatra* which, on opening night, fell to harsh criticism ranging from a slew of mechanical problems that beset the production to critiques of Barber's failed originality and compositional product.

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<sup>15</sup> This passage is an example of what became the self-perpetuating world of *Ulysses*, where any themes of correspondences in the book became new material for further and retroactively fitted cross-reference (Groden, *In Progress* 54 - 55).



This context is well-remembered when analyzing *Despite and Still* and “Solitary Hotel,” as Heyman points out that “The diverse texts... might seem an illogical grouping, especially to those with only a casual knowledge of the composer’s personal demons.” However, as she continues, “all the texts of the five songs... suggest that the cycle has profound biographical significance... they probe bleak themes about loneliness, lost love, and isolation” (465). “Solitary Hotel” specifically ties to Barber’s emotional state, as the text follows an earlier question pondering how “originality, though producing its own reward, does not invariably lead to success” (Heyman 467).<sup>16</sup>

Taken into account, these historical notes can expand our interpretive knowledge of “Solitary Hotel”. Joyce’s and Barber’s intentions, by themselves, constitute the poietic level of the works, and cannot be changed or determined by outside readers and listeners. However, we revise and reinforce our original analysis by taking their intentions into consideration.

First, Joyce’s explanation of the “Ithaca” episode reinforces the idea of a purposefully disconnected scene. His characterization of Bloom and Stephen as “heavenly bodies” certainly lends itself to our characterization of the “Solitary Hotel” text, where the characters exist in and observe an intangible space. Further, Joyce’s thought process about the whole of *Ulysses* reminds us that the ambiguity we face is purposeful – as he said regarding an earlier episode, “I want the reader to understand always through suggestion rather than direct statement” (Grodin, *In Progress* 15).

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<sup>16</sup> These observations, of course, are not Samuel Barber’s but his biographer’s. They are still valuable insights, but do not technically qualify as Barber’s known intentions for the composition of “Solitary Hotel.”

Similarly, the idea that Barber would latch onto this text in particular makes sense given the context of Barber's life. Stephen in *Ulysses* is, in many ways, a failure, a once-escaped artist who did not succeed in "forging in the smithy of [his] soul the uncreated consciousness of [his] race" (253) as he set out in the close of *Portrait of the Artist*. Whether or not Stephen was conscious of how ineffective his constructed scene was, or whether the paratactic style was Joyce's (or the narrator's) own decision, we cannot say. However, the idea of failed originality present in the "Solitary Hotel" text resonates strongly with Barber's life and recognition of criticism.<sup>17</sup>

### *Going Forward*

There are many other critiques of "Solitary Hotel," each crafted by the critic's prior knowledge about music and text. Hopefully, this analysis adequately demonstrates how the analytic theories discussed in chapter 2 practically manifest in interpretation. We can then lean on this example to frame a discussion of "Sirens" in a way that incorporates all elements, text and music alike, into a cohesive analysis. This analysis will not value text or integrated musical references over one another, but will combine these two realms of potentialities through one inclusive reading.

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<sup>17</sup> It is interesting in this context to remember that Barber considered *Despite and Still* a more challenging, untraditional aesthetic than his typical compositions.

## Chapter 4: An Analysis of “Sirens”

### *A Short Theory*

Before interpreting “Sirens,” an element needs clarification. In the analysis of “Solitary Hotel,” I described how different levels of meaning emerge through their semiological relationship; specifically, considerations of meaning account for authorial intent, reader/listener response, and the “trace” of the creative process manifested in notes and/or text. I did not do this because I felt that that frame was more effective than others, but because I felt that it would help draw out the theories of Nattiez, Cook, and Burkholder in a tangible way. Rather than divide my “Sirens” analysis in this manner, I will briefly touch upon those levels now as a framing preface for my critique.

The neutral level is the text of “Sirens,” significant for several reasons. First, it is the direct manipulation of this text that creates the musical significance suffused through the episode, and many points of import emerge less from what sentences *mean* than how they relate to one another. Second, and sitting at the core of my analysis, the text in this episode does not reliably signify in a way we conventionally expect from language. Joyce’s experimentation with spelling, syntax, and form challenges linguistic significance while highlighting, in addition, structural significance we often take for granted in narrative (Fischer 258).

The esthetic level is my interpretation – how I derive meaning based on my understanding of the novel, the episode, literature, and music. I will specifically develop this further, but this is my point of departure from typical critiques of “Sirens,” since my analysis integrates literary and musical knowledge in as equal a way as possible.

The poietic level, in this case, is Joyce's attempt at instilling in the episode both the sense of musical composition *and* the fugal structure. This is a somewhat tricky ontological point, but only Joyce's motivations fall into this category. Even if, in my view, Joyce failed in his efforts to do this, his well-known intentions inform the meaning that exists within the episode. Remember, this level operates separately from the esthetic, meaning that how I interpret "Sirens" with prior knowledge of Joyce's intentions is still *my* interpretation.

This is important because my disregard for Joyce's supposed fugue does not fly in the face of the semiological tripartition; it is simply the esthetic level manifesting based on my prior knowledge and understanding of as many operative elements as possible. I want to clarify this because, though Joyce's insistence on the fugue will not factor into my analysis, music as his writing "technic" will.

By thus broadening our musical scope in analysis, we develop a newfound appreciation for how Joyce integrated musical techniques into the writing structure of the episode. Combining this with literary close-reading creates an interdisciplinary, integrated approach that presents as cohesive and well-reasoned an analysis as possible. It does not privilege a literary analysis over a musical one (or vice versa), but hopefully demonstrates how the two in combination create layers of meaning that extend far beyond the scope of previous analyses.

We can frame this as a new, musical, theory of narrative analysis guided by the techniques of musical analysis described by Nattiez, Cook, and Burkholder. This approach adds new dimensions to the text, emerging from the "bundle of potentialities" in the episode interacting with my musical experience. I tap into this knowledge of music,

apply my understanding of musical allusions I encounter in reading, and use those associations to support and supplement a reading of the text.

What exactly does this integration mean, and how is this different from just a literary analysis with attention paid to style? Let's take one example and clearly separate the literary and musical elements of the passage. The short line, "Will? You? I. Want. You. To." (*U* 11.1096) is a direct, concise request, especially compared to Bloom's typically wandering and incomplete thoughts. From a literary perspective, therefore, we understand the clarity of this question in the context of an otherwise scattered interior monologue. We can also consider the passage musically; it distinctly suggests crisp staccato notes, as critics have pointed out (Fischer 255). Staccato notes are used in a variety of capacities, one of which is clarity, separating a note from its immediate surroundings by punctuating the texture of the music. In this way, the understanding of musical reference supplements our literary critique.

This example, though showing a correspondence between the music and the text, is in some ways a surface-level passage. As Robert Adams remarks in the conclusion of *Surface and Symbol*, "The close reading of *Ulysses* thus reveals that the meaningless is deeply interwoven with the meaningful in the texture of the novel" (245). Regardless of whether we approach analysis from a musical or literary perspective, we arrive at similar conclusions that do not open to a much deeper interpretation. This is common throughout the episode – much of the musical syntax only amounts to enjoyable word play and superficial connections.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> One of my favorite examples of this is when Simon Dedalus remarks, "By Jove... I often wanted to see the Mourne mountains," (*U* 11.219) a comment later used to reinforce his character through the description, "He see. He drank. With faraway mourning mountain eye" (*U* 11.273)

However, there are points of significance whose meaning can only emerge from the consideration of both perspectives, an example of which is the repeated “tap” motif. In the midst of the activity of the Ormond, we suddenly encounter this insertion:

Ah, now he heard, she holding it to his ear. Hear! He heard. Wonderful.  
She held it to her own. And through the sifted light pale gold in contrast glided.  
To hear.

Tap.

Bloom through the bardoor saw a shell held at their ears. He heard more faintly that that they heard, each for herself alone, then each for other, hearing the splash of waves, loudly, a silent roar. (*U* 11.930 - 938)

This tapping continues intermittently for the remainder of the episode, randomly punctuating the narrative and increasing in number, eventually reaching a frantic “Tap. Tap. Tap. Tap. Tap. Tap. Tap. Tap” (*U* 11.1223). Of course, anyone who has previously read *Ulysses*, or even just “Sirens,” knows that this tapping is the sound of the blind piano tuner’s cane as he approaches the Ormond. However, to truly appreciate its significance, we need to consider this phenomenon as if we did not know that.

What does this reveal? Well, first of all, we witness a breakdown in the functionality of language. As Fischer points out, “Joyce’s cutting and splicing results in severely weakened textual cohesion within the episode” (253), only resolved by retrospective analysis once we reach “Tap. A youth entered a lonely Ormond hall” (*U*

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– an obvious thematic repetition, though separated by enough content to escape conscious scrutiny by the casual reader.

11.1273). The taps are “erratic blocks of language” (Fischer 253) that, devoid of context, derail the narrative flow of events and prevent a satisfying literary analysis.

The function of the taps changes radically when considered from a musical perspective. The motive is rhythmic and percussive, and could be considered an ornament on the events of the Bar – even that would be a helpful suggestion to reconcile its otherwise bizarre insertion. However, we can explore the word further. The increased frequency and number of taps suggests either the speeding up of tempo, the imminent statement of a complete idea, or a metaphorical “approach” of something drawing nearer – as found in the brass in the introduction Gustav Mahler’s *Symphony No. 1*, movement four. It parallels the compositional idea of stating fragments of a motive with increased frequency until it climaxes at a point of release or at a full statement of the idea, as the tapping does when the piano tuner finally reaches the bar.

This consideration also reveals a deep irony about the nature of music in the episode. The piano tuner, whose blindness partially shields him from the suggestive allure of the barmaids (the allegorical Sirens of the episode), controls the music of the episode. He tuned the piano, which gives leave for other characters to play it, and is himself an excellent pianist whose ability Miss Douce praises (*U* 11.278). His ear is obviously attuned to tonality – yet he is assigned an overtly rhythmic motive. This is not to say that rhythm is unmusical, just that it does not necessarily have a distinct pitch.

This irony is paralleled and supplemented by Pat, the deaf waiter. Pat is the one character who cannot appreciate the music or conversations surrounding him, but is given perhaps the most auditorily musical passages:

Bald deaf Pat brought quite flat pad ink. Pat set with ink pen quite flat pad. Pat took plate dish knife fork. Pat went. (*U* 11.847-848)

Bald Pat who is bothered mired the napkins. Pat is a waiter hard of his hearing. Pat is a waiter who waits while you wait. Hee hee hee hee. He waits while you wait. Hee hee. A waiter is he. Hee hee hee hee. He waits while you wait. While you wait if you wait he will wait while you wait. Hee hee hee hee. Hoh. Wait while you wait. (*U* 11.915-919)

Joyce's wordplay with Pat approaches music from the perspective of audition versus reading. Reading Pat's passages aloud reveals the musical repetition of mostly monosyllabic phonemes, creating a character who "makes music linguistically although on the level of plot he makes no music at all" (Fischer 258). Pat's highly musical passages serve as an ironic converse to the piano tuner's, the keeper of music whose literary motive is overtly rhythmic.

The connection between Pat and the piano tuner is supplemented by the literary connection between the characters. The "tap" of the tuner's cane and Pat's name are obvious palindromes, reinforcing the converse relationship between the characters' disabilities and assigned motives. As Eichelberger points out, "the blind stripling is defined by sound and Pat through writing; through their physical presence in language, they complement and complete each other" (64). Even more, their characteristics and roles are obvious literary complements. However, most significant for us is the fact that this important musical and literary connection would be lost if not for a musical analysis



of the tuner's tapping motive. Understanding that insertion as music helps to establish the significance of the tuner, whose significance is in turn reflected by Pat both in description and in palindrome.

This manner of integrated approach will generate understanding of the deep saturation of music within the text of "Sirens." Without heeding both musical and literary analysis in equal weight, many points of significance in the text would go by without note. As other critics have perhaps unwittingly demonstrated, heeding only one approach erases the significance of the other. Attention to the complexities of Joyce's literary construction as they relate to musical construction thus exposes the nested layers of meaning at play in this episode.

#### *Analysis of Climax in "Sirens"*

Rather than simultaneously pursuing this musical analysis while mining "Sirens" for an as-yet unread interpretation (which might not even be possible anymore), it serves us to apply this approach to a commonly recognized feature of the episode: climax. The theme features prominently and certainly would not find some fundamental interpretive disagreement among critics. Further, climax manifests in many ways in "Sirens" – sexual and musical, emotional and narrational – ways relatively easy to identify with both musical and literary idioms. Not only does this lend itself well to an intersectional consideration of the text, but the presence of climax serves an irreplaceable function in both music and literature. Our multi-faceted analysis of "Sirens" can thus broaden our understanding of the importance of climax in the episode.

Many authors have written directly about or with passing mention of climactic moments inside the Ormond bar. French notes that one passage “express[es] the feeling of a sustained high note in music and an emotional high note like the moment of orgasm” (9); Honton writes, “climaxes musical and sexual are reached and passed while Bloom sings dumb, admiring. He is not simply diverted by the music; he is consumed” (43); Herr concisely remarks that:

Almost all actions center on the social contexts of the sexual in this chapter... the narrative is woven from references to the social customs and jokes that define the sexual in Joyce’s Dublin... the culture of *Ulysses* binds its characters to infinite stylizations of the erotic and the aesthetic. (52)

Further, these climactic moments operate on multiple levels of discourse. The characters experience moments of both sexual and musical climax as the hour progresses inside the Ormond, amidst the singing of songs and allure of the barmaid Sirens. The text itself also writes climactically, employing erotic language and musical allusion to linguistically depict tension and release.

This fixation on climax is not surprising, given the episode’s place in *Ulysses*. First, and most obviously, “Sirens” occurs during the 4:00 p.m. hour, the time of Molly and Boylan’s tryst. This moment is a multi-faceted climax. Narratively, the event that has haunted Bloom’s thoughts during the day finally arrives, causing an emotional Bloom to release his anxious anticipation when he hears “a jing, a little sound. He’s off. Light sob of breath Bloom sighed on the silent bluehued flowers. Jingling. He’s gone. Jingle. Hear”

(U 11.457-458). The affair is overtly sexual, another obvious moment of climax. “Sirens” is also a climactic turning point in Joyce’s writing style. As I previously mentioned, Groden states that “By the end of ‘Sirens’ Joyce had distorted his initial style about as much as possible while still retaining it” (*In Progress* 42), in a sense “concluding” his previous technique and releasing the extensive syntactic transformations that would evolve through the rest of the book and into his later writing.

However, the climaxes scattered throughout the chapter are not limited to concerns of Boylan’s and Molly’s affair. Even at the offset miss Douce and miss Kennedy, while recalling the grotesque image of a man in the Antient Concert Rooms, reduce themselves to

a giggling peal young goldbronze voices blended, Douce with Kennedy your other eye. They threw young heads back, bronze giggle gold, to let freefly their laughter, screaming, your other, signals to each other, high piercing notes. Ah, panting, sighing, sighing, ah, fordone, their mirth died down. (U 11.158-161)

But only for the moment – miss Kennedy quickly loses composure again, and

Shrill, with deep laughter, after, gold after bronze, they urged each each to peal after peal, ringing in changes, bronzegold, goldbronze, shrilldeep, to laughter after laughter... Exhausted, breathless, their shaken heads they laid, braided and pinnacled by glossycombed, against the counterledge. All flushed (O!), panting, sweating (O!), all breathless. (U 11.174-179)

These two paragraphs affect a sense of climactic arrival. The text abandons periods and synthesizes words as though the text overtakes itself, bursting out of standard syntax into a denser use of language. The barmaids, our veritable sirens, also build to a breaking point in their interaction. They release previous inhibitions about their demeanor, throwing back their heads “to let freely their laughter, screaming... high piercing notes,” eventually depleting their energy and winding down into their formerly sedate state. The passage also begs a musical interpretation – for the first time, the two speak (or laugh) simultaneously, their “voices blended” increasing the number of sounding parts to some sense of homophony. This, coupled with the synthesis of words, suggests a musical overlapping of events. Even further, the “pitch” range of sound increases, “Shrill, with deep laughter” broadening the subdued giggles to a larger palate of frequencies. Before any other character arrives to the bar, the sirens have previewed the repetitive climactic pattern into which the episode will fall.

It is the barmaids themselves who provoke certain climactic moments for the bar attendants, particularly sexual ones. Lenehan, the desperate joker, gasps “at each stretch” of miss Douce’s “bust, that all but burst, so high,” only to be “seized” and “led... low in triumph,” an ultimately frustrated climax (*U* 11.360-364). However, moments later, Lenehan insists that miss Douce continue and, after a moment’s hesitation:

She looked. Quick. Miss Kenn out of earshot. Sudden bent. Two kindling faces watched her bend.

Quavering the chords strayed from the air, found it again, lost chord, and lost and found it, faltering.

—Go on! Do! *Sonnez!*

Bending, she nipped a peak of skirt above her knee. Delayed. Taunted them still, bending, suspending, with wilful eyes.

—*Sonnez!*

Smack. She set free sudden in rebound her nipped elastic garter smackwarm against her smackable a woman's warmhosed thigh.

—*La cloche!* cried gleeful Lenehan. Trained by owner. No sawdust there. (*U* 11.405-415)

This overtly erotic passage serves a few purposes. It is the first sexualized climactic moment of the episode, signaling the thematic undercurrent of “Sirens.” It harkens to the episode’s namesake, the Sirens being mythical female creatures whose song lures male sailors to their watery deaths.<sup>19</sup> Coupled with Simon Dedalus’s piano playing, the passage uses musical textures to outline the postponement of climactic fulfillment – the straying, lost chords slowly navigate towards their resolution while miss Douce delays and taunts Lenehan and Boylan. Even further, the “suspended” elastic alludes to a musical suspension, which is when a note prolongs past its harmonic rhythm, dissonantly extending into the next harmony and delaying resolution. This resolution finally arrives in another punctuation-less, homophonic, percussive sentence, mirroring the climactic syntax established earlier.

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<sup>19</sup> Which one could categorize as the function of the Ormond bar in general.

Ironically, and perhaps tellingly, miss Douce's true target in this act is actually Blazes Boylan – as soon as he enters the bar, he “touched to fair miss Kennedy a rim of his slanted straw. She smiled on him. But sister bronze outsmiled her, preening for him her richer hair, a bosom and a rose” (U 11.356-358). His stay is filled with subtle sexual references and flirtations. As miss Douce pours his drink, “Shebronze, dealing from her oblique jar thick syrupy liquor for his lips, looked as it flowed (flower in his coat: who gave him?), and syruped with her voice” (U 11.365-368); later, “Bronzedouce communing with her rose that sank and rose sought Blazes Boylan's flower and eyes” (U 11.398-399). However, he spurns her advances and leaves after finishing his drink.

This erotic climax is a miniature of Boylan's upcoming sexual encounter. Miss Douce's rose, which is fastened to her chest, is conflated with the rose of Castile, an earlier pun of Lenehan's that alludes to Molly Bloom. In this way, miss Douce is only a reminder of Molly, and her sexuality a reminder of the affair for which Boylan is already late. His abrupt departure also occurs as Simon finishes singing, the words “*sweetheart, goodbye!*” (U 11.425) accompanying Boylan out the door. Boylan at this point in the text has a few textual motifs associated with him – among these, plays on the word “impatience” suggest his inability to wait for a climax. At the least, it suggests that he does not wish to postpone his meeting with Molly any further, and he begins rushing towards his affair.

This scene is not the only time miss Douce's actions inspire sexual tension desiring release. Later, as Bloom ponders music, Molly, and his own written love affair:

On the smooth jutting beerpull laid Lydia hand, lightly, plumply, leave it to my hands. All lost in pity for croppy. Fro, to: to, fro: over the polished knob (she knows his eyes, my eyes, her eyes) her thumb and finger passed in pity: passed, reposed and, gently touching, then slid so smoothly, slowly down, a cool firm white enamel baton protruding through their sliding ring. (*U* 11.1112-1117)

This moment, however, does not result in a climactic sexual resolution – it results in Bloom abruptly leaving the bar (similar to Boylan’s exit prior). This has a number of significant musical, narrative, and sexual implications to which I will return. However, for now it stands to demonstrate the alluring pull of miss Douce, entreating the inhabitants of the Ormond to sexual fulfillment that is only sporadically achieved. It also reinforces her position of power, the word “baton” acting as both phallic symbol and conductor’s “instrument,” both of which she controls and one of which controls music and, consequently, the satisfaction of resolution.

Performed music provides the most substantial climactic moments of the episode, prolonging the buildup of tension towards a satisfactory release. When Simon begins to sing, immediately “Braintipped, cheek touched with flame, they listened feeling that flow endearing flow over skin limbs human heart soul spine” (*U* 11.668-669), and the music overtakes Bloom and Goulding’s sorrow by singing to their still ears and still hearts. Amidst comments about the sexual success of tenors is another building of emotive and sexual anticipation, as “tenderness it welled: slow, swelling, full it throbbed. That’s the chat. Ha, give! Take! Throb, a throb, a pulsing proud erect” (*U* 11.701-702). Sexual

language is directly used to describe a musical event, supplementing the idea of orgasmic tension and release.

This language conflating music and sex during Simon's song continues for a number of lines as we observe "Bloom. Flood of warm jamjam lickitup secretness flowed to flow in music out, in desire, dark to lick flow invading. Tipping her tepping her tapping her topping her. Tup. Pores to dilate dilating. Tup... Flood, gush, flow, joygush, tupthrob" (*U* 11.705-709). This combines multiple previous motifs, including the "flow" of women which tenors increase in exchange for their music. The repetitive "tipping" variations also call to mind a musical sequence, where the same melody is mimicked at different pitch levels, eventually resolving to a desired end point. This prefigures the blind piano tuner's "Tap" motif, which begins another rising tension, directly linking his approach with the musical anticipation. The "tipping" variations also, according to Don Gifford, "have in common the (archaic) meaning: to copulate as animals" (303), again conflating the musical with the sexual.

There is also, in this moment, a discourse and exploration of musical substance beyond sexual climax. Bloom loops and unloops, nodes and disnodes (*U* 11.704) a band around his fingers, anxiously playing upon this elastic (which recalls the sexualized elastic band of miss Douce). Nodes, as associated with string instruments, are points upon which players can create natural harmonics, or tones from the harmonic overtone series. After commenting, "Words? Music? No: it's what's behind" (*U* 11.703), Bloom is now exploring the harmonic substance of music and tones by noding and disnoding his band while listening to Simon sing. This unsurprisingly triggers memories of Molly, his wife



the opera singer, who sang *Waiting* at their first meeting – an ironic remark about the prolonged desire for release in (and, possibly, from the ensnarement of) music.

These scattered thoughts are suddenly disrupted by Simon’s “cry of passion dominant to love to return with deepening yet with rising chords of harmony” (*U* 11.736-737). Now music, sexuality, and narrative merge – the “cry of passion dominant to love” previews the upcoming sexual release of the music, while the word dominant invokes a remarkably powerful musical allusion. As I discussed in chapter 1, in traditional music the “dominant” chord or chord-sequence is the final musical event before the climactic resolution to the tonic,<sup>20</sup> in some sense an announcement of the impending end. Simon’s emotive delivery, nearing the end of the song, similarly serves to announce the coming climactic release. Singing, his penultimate note:

soared, a bird, it held its flight, a swift pure cry, soar silver orb it leaped serene,  
speeding, sustained, to come, don’t spin it out too long long breath he breath long  
life, soaring high, high resplendent, aflame, crowned, high in the effulgence  
symbolistic, high, of the ethereal bosom, high, of the high vast irradiation  
everywhere all soaring all around about the all, the endlessnessnessness..... (*U*  
11.745-750)

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<sup>20</sup> There is a theory of musical analysis called Shenkerian analysis which, at its core, suggests that all musical compositions can be analyzed as a progression away from the tonic to the dominant, and subsequent return to the tonic (in chapter 1). Any chords, melodies, or modulations within a piece can be explained as subsets of this macro-structural analysis.

finally releasing in “Siopold!” (*U* 11.752), a combination of the names Simon, Leopold, and Lionel (Lionel is the name of the opera character who performs the song Simon has been singing).

This passage is emblematic of climaxes and how we understand them within the episode. Once again, the sentence structure deteriorates, abandoning full stops in a continuous thought process quickening towards its resolution. However, more than previous climaxes this instance explores the all-encompassing role of music, specifically Simon’s voice. It combines aesthetic and technical description of the note, while also adopting musical idioms as part of the syntax (“sustained, don’t spin it out too long”). Extremely high in pitch, which in itself is a compositional technique for emotionally climactic musical moments, his voice is “a bird... soaring high... in the effulgence symbolic,” a beacon of freedom and release from bonds.

Simultaneously, there is an awareness of the technical demands of such a delivery, including the frantic “don’t spin it out too long long breath he breath long life,” which uses common terminology for vocal breath support to describe the air control and physical endurance of Simon’s singing. This finally comes to a close, as his voice grows to an emotional vibrato (“endlessnessnessness...”) before resolving. In trained singing, vibrato is the natural result of well-supported delivery, and indicates a mastery of technique. This paragraph, frantically edging towards resolution, provides perhaps the most visceral example of narrative and musical climax combining in an almost sexual release of tension. This release resolves into the simultaneous “sounding” of Simon, Bloom, and Lionel – not a musical chord resolution, but as close to one as might be approximated by words.

Bloom's thoughts, following this delivery, range from music to relationships to life and death. However, amidst his scattered ponderings about Molly and becoming sadly obsolete to her, his elastic band snaps. The elastic is his instrument – recall the nodes, and the fact that “He drew and plucked. It buzz, it twanged... Yet more Bloom stretched his string” (*U* 11.796, 11.802-803). This gentle tension serves as metaphorical point of access to both the disguised eroticism of the bar (in reference to Miss Douce's elastic band) and to the emotional insistence of music (in reference to the band's metaphorical musical properties). Yet he either navigates these access points incorrectly or too aggressively, and climactically severs these connections.

This sets up a further series of shortcomings for Bloom, which end the chapter amidst climactic success for others. Bloom ponders his failures as a husband, a father and a Jew, while Ben Dollard sings “The Croppy Boy.” All the while, the “Tap.” of the piano tuner grows more insistent, suggesting nearness. Similarly, Boylan arrives at Molly's, announced as “One rapped on a door, one tapped with a knock, did he knock Paul de Kock with a loud proud knocker with a cock carracarracarra cock. Cockcock” (*U* 11.986-988). As Dollard's song nears its end, and “On the smooth jutting beerpull paid Lydia hand, lightly, plumply,” these various motives sound in quick succession and Bloom abruptly leaves in a telling passage:

With a cock with a carra.

Tap. Tap. Tap.

I hold this house. Amen. He gnashed in fury. Traitors swing.

The chords consented. Very sad thing. But had to be.

Get out before the end. Thanks, that was heavenly. (*U* 11.1118-1121)

Bloom's departure from the Ormond synthesizes the main climactic themes of "Sirens" while, significantly, frustrating a successful resolution for Bloom. Immediately after Miss Douce's gestures, Boylan's rhythmically insistent knock sounds again, a reminder of sexual relations withheld from Bloom and his emotional response. This is quickly followed by the piano tuner's announcing gesture – the character who controls the quality of music in the episode ironically led in by a percussive strike. This is also a continuation of the building anticipation of his reaching the bar.

The next lines are inherently musical. "I hold this house. Amen..." comes from "The Croppy Boy," and very appropriately characterizes Bloom's fluctuating emotions about Boylan entering his home (and also plays on the usurper theme from Stephen's earlier struggles). This is also, according to Gilbert, where "The song reaches its climax" (Gilbert 294). The piano quickly following suit, "consenting" to the "very sad" music that "had to be," suggesting the inevitability of the song's climactic close as well as the inevitability of Molly's affair.

Rather than suffer these crowding finales, Bloom exits, passing "By rose, by satiny bosom, by the fondling hand... greeting in going, past eyes and maidenhair, bronze and faint gold in deepseashadow, went Bloom, soft Bloom, I feel so lonely Bloom" (*U* 11.1134-1137). On one hand, Bloom successfully escapes the ensnaring sexual allure in the bar; on the other, he is robbed of resolution. The other characters "chinked their clinking glasses all, brighteyed and gallant, before bronze Lydia's tempting last rose of summer, rose of Castile. First Lid, De, Cow, Ker, Doll, a fifth" (*U* 11.1269-1271),

engaging in a climactic celebration ending the episode under the erotic temptation of the barmaids. This is lent weight by the scale-like litany of names, “Lid, De, Cow, Ker, Doll” very reminiscent of pedagogical *solfege* syllables *do, re, mi, fa, so*. These notes climb to the fifth – again, the dominant tone – just before the episode ends.

### *Conclusion and Reflection*

This analysis exposes levels of meaning beyond typical literary critique, particularly for “Sirens.” To reiterate, many significant moments of the episode escape literary analysis because they must be interpreted for their musical implications. Bloom’s anxious nodding of his band, the vibrato of Simon Dedalus’ voice, and the “tipping” variations contain valid levels of musical meaning, though inaccessible from a literary standpoint. Even further, many moments of climax are supplemented by the joint consideration of musical and literary significance. The use of the word “dominant,” while a demonstrative word to be sure, *immediately* suggests impending resolution from a musical understanding. When taken into consideration, the use of that word guides the reading of (and listening to) many significant passages, not the least of which include the end of Simon’s song and the conclusion of the episode as a whole.

It may seem as though, to some extent, this analysis is little more than a glorified analysis of the text, an interpretation by someone who happens to command a specialized knowledge of music. That is an oversimplification; there are certainly passages whose significance emerge without attention to music, or simply with attention to certain stylistic traits of Joyce’s writing. Yet even bringing musical understanding to those

passages radically shifts the dimensions of understanding and possible analysis, opening a new layer of meaning inadequately explored by many Joyce critics.

More importantly, there are multiple passages whose significance hinges entirely on an understanding of music, passages completely closed off from critics who analyze “Sirens” as *just* text. Musical considerations introduce new ideas to the episode, ideas that amplify or refocus certain literary critiques. When integrated, these analyses expose new potential for interpretations of the episode.

## **Conclusion:**

Sometime after James Joyce finished writing “Sirens” he wrote to his friend Harriet Weaver, saying, “...each successive episode dealing with some province of artistic culture (rhetoric or music or dialectic), leaves behind it a burnt up field. Since I wrote *Sirens*, I find it impossible to listen to music of any kind” (Ellman 461). I have no idea what exactly Joyce meant by this comment; at the least, it reflects the intensity with which he engaged in music while writing this episode.

In this thesis, I wanted to uncover some of that intensity. Even in this relatively small-scope analysis, attention to music as an analyzable medium uncovers new points of significance and supplements ideas already proposed by some literary critiques. I chose to specifically discuss climax because it is an already accepted theme of “Sirens,” but there are opportunities for further musical analysis strewn throughout the chapter.

There are also many questions left concerning my approach: where else can it be applied, both within *Ulysses* and in other texts? Are there other understandings of musical analysis that would supplement or alter my interpretation? Do the songs themselves that the characters sing have significance, and can we read the historical context of these songs like we read the text of the episode itself? And, despite my doubt, *did* Joyce actually include a fugue in the text of “Sirens,” or is that approach truly a dead end that critics should stop pursuing?

While I cannot address all of these as adequately as I would like, I have some thoughts about them. In general, this “musical” approach could be applied to many moments in *Ulysses*. While Joyce wrote that the technic for “Sirens” was music, the thematic manipulation and suffusion of musical references is a constant throughout the

entire book, not just the eleventh episode. One could do a critical musical analysis of Molly's music – what operas she has sung, what textual themes are associated with her throughout the text, and whether these uncover new implications about Molly's character. For example, in "Molly Bloom, Soprano," James Van Dyck Card calls attention to the possibility that Molly may not be the accomplished opera singer we think she is, much in line with Bloom's and Stephen's failures in their respective fields.

It is hard to say whether this method could be carried beyond *Ulysses*, or at least beyond the works of Joyce (it would probably be an effective interpretive method for *Finnegans Wake*). Justifying a musical interpretation would be difficult in situations where there is not an overtly stated motive behind the writing process. However, I'm sure it would certainly bear interesting corollary interpretations in other works.

As far as other musical considerations, the realm of music analysis is vast. Critics could conduct interpretations using almost exclusively musical tropes and their significance as they are used in *Ulysses* – similar to the implications that the tango had on my interpretation of "Solitary Hotel." This approach would uncover semiotic dualities of the novel where the text signifies as both a literal linguistic sign and a musical referent, out of which I'm sure would emerge really fascinating conclusions. One could also pursue a sort of Shenkerian distillation of the episode, an analysis that condenses the entire episode into its larger structural markers and creates macro-scale outline of events.

A further musical consideration, addressed by the third question, would examine the musical works mentioned or performed in "Sirens" as independent works (which they are) and then incorporate that understanding into the reading of the episode. This work has actually already been done by a few critics, mostly significantly by Zack Bowen in



*Bloom's Old Sweet Song*, with fascinating implications for an analysis of the content of "Sirens." Bowen shows beyond doubt how intentional Joyce was in his choice of songs and references, and these extra-textual elements correspond closely with the significances in the episode proper.

This, perhaps more than other methods, can be applied throughout *Ulysses*. Bloom is constantly referencing various works of opera, such as Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, and the musical and narrative motives from those works intermingle with Bloom's stream-of-consciousness in almost every episode. One exciting project, and one which I considered taking on, would be to choose one of these recurring musical works and trace it through the book, examining the influence and correspondence between it and the events of the novel. There are many works to choose from in the text that would yield newly comprehensive analyses.

Returning to "Sirens," there will, of course, always be the question of whether Joyce actually enmeshed a contrapuntal fugue into the episode. As I've repeatedly mentioned, I do not think that he did – but let's entertain the thought for a moment. First of all, whatever resemblance Joyce's fugue shares with a musical fugue would be loose by default. Markers like the repeated iterations of "Bronze by gold..." could potentially function as a repeated theme marking the return of an exposition. And, again, the recently discovered notes Joyce left about his understanding of "eight equal parts" suggest that redirected attempts at structural analysis might be more beneficial than their predecessors.

I nevertheless think that critics would do well to stop translating the text to music and focus, instead, on the larger structure of the episode. This is partially because of my

belief that the fugue must be more abstract than in composed music, but also because critics are unable to make consistently defensible claims about these translations. This tactic, instead of bolstering their argument, weakens what are otherwise strong ideas.

Of course, experienced musicians might specifically attend to this realm of criticism. Someone with both extensive literary and musical backgrounds could, perhaps, make a well-justified argument for the *fuga per canonem* of “Sirens,” provided they are diligent and cautious in their claims. There is certainly something very attractive about attempting to solve this century-old problem. For now, however, the most valuable analysis on the episode and on *Ulysses* should embrace the multi-facted approach I used above, one that I hope revealed new things about “Sirens.”

Beyond what my analysis proposes about the text, I hope that my approach demonstrates in general a new perspective on Joyce and on *Ulysses*, a perspective that demands consideration of things beyond literary interpretation. This is the most valuable lesson of my analysis. To continue reading *Ulysses* as only a great novel – which, to be fair, it absolutely is – is to do both the text and Joyce a disservice. This book calls for a personal reading, for the generation of interpretation based on what the reader knows. For some, this may not drastically alter their appreciation of the text; for others, it might open worlds of significance previously unexplored.

This, in turn, calls for a diversified audience reading *Ulysses*. Few people can boast the wide-ranging intellect of Joyce – I certainly cannot adequately address all the multitude of disciplines in the book. For that reason, critics and enthusiasts should encourage readership beyond the typical academic circle. We should invite into the world

of Joyce people who would otherwise be absent because they are the readers who have the ability to bring new light to such a thoroughly-read novel.

This interdisciplinary and reader-focused examination of a multi-disciplinary text is a significant aspect of my work. While Joyce's output was linguistic, that does not mitigate the existence of other spheres of knowledge. Too often, as I traced in Chapter 2, literary critics are unable to adequately address both the complexities of text and of other media. This may stem from lack of experience, but another large factor is lack of framework from which to operate. How can critics be expected to account for such wide-ranging discussions, all of which require expertise?

I hope, then, that this project sets forth a working outline with which future Joyce scholars can mine the depths of *Ulysses* for all of its intricacies. The process will vary by discipline and by individual reader, and many will likely be more successful than others. However, if critics are willing to explain their discipline, readers will appreciate the complexities addressed by such integrated approaches. It's a large task, but a necessary one for the sake of renewed interest and original interpretive conclusions.

As Joyce predicted, the criticism dedicated to his monumental work has immortalized him. I, personally, have no problem with this. A work as complex as *Ulysses* deserves all attention garnered, and continues to reveal new implications about itself, Ireland, and narratives as we understand them. If this drive to read can be coupled with outside passions that intersect with *Ulysses*, readers can even more satisfactorily explore the intricate ends of Joyce's world.

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