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Music and Sound in the Life and Literature of James Joyce

Joyces Noyces

Gerry Smyth



Palgrave Studies in Music and Literature

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Gerry Smyth

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of James Joyce

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INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

LOVELY VOICES AND LONGING HEARTS

You asked me to write you a long letter but really I hate writing—it is such an unsatisfactory way of saying things.

James Joyce, letter to Nora Barnacle, 29 September 1904

The lovely voices came to me across the water, and my heart was filled with such a longing to listen that with nod and frown I signed to my men to set me free.

Homer, *The Odyssey*, 199

This book had its genesis in or around January 1979, on the top deck of a packed No. 46a bus travelling from Belfield Campus on Dublin's south-side towards the city centre. In the streets outside it was cold, dark and foggy. The windows were dripping with condensation, making it difficult to guess where we were. The bus crawled at a snail's pace through the early evening rush hour. Inside, the grey faces drew deeply on their Majors and Carrolls Number 1s, sending desperate jets of smoke out into the general fug. Looking back, it seems closer in some ways to the setting of *Ulysses* than to the post-Tiger, Covid-ravaged city of 2020.

Stamping out my own fag, I settled down to scan my notes from the morning's lecture on *Dubliners*. I found Joyce's writing compelling—I especially loved being able to traverse the same cityscape as the characters in his stories. The sense of something vital pulsing beneath the veneer of

language was (and remains) thrilling. The process of studying this writing, however, I found difficult to the point of alienation. The logistics were not great, for one thing: four long bus journeys a day; enormous lecture theatres where everyone seemed to know someone else; the deadening financial grind. In some senses the scepticism with which I had already started to battle in the preceding months has continued to assail me ever since: Writing? Really? You *study* it, like? Really?!

My mother wanted me to be a teacher—wasn't that what 'English' was for, after all? There were two other options. A *real* job: nine months pumping petrol at Smith's Garage on Harcourt Street, and a stint stacking shelves at Superquinn Knocklyon, convinced me that such was not for me. The other was music. In a band, playing gigs, writing songs, I had already committed to the politics of post-punk popular music in a way that I could never (so I believed) commit to an understanding of Joyce's writing, or the scholarly process which addressed itself to that writing.

As I sat on the bus from Belfield that winter evening in 1979, I wrote the words of a song which was not only *about* James Joyce but tried also to utilise some of the techniques and ideas to which I had been introduced in my time as a First Year Arts student at UCD. It was a brutal song—never even made rehearsal. Band mates grinned, but there was a palpable sense in the room that something was changing, or had already changed. Something had indeed: the principle of a connection between the professional and the personal areas of my life had been broached. And in some ways that principle has informed every choice I've made ever since—including the choice to leave Dublin. Literature *and* music, work *and* leisure, criticism *and* creativity, the university office *and* the concert hall, Dublin *and* ... anywhere else: my 'work' in the forty years since that bus ride has been a search for connections between the first and the second elements in these binaries.

James Joyce was always going to figure in this quest—in the first instance, for the reasons alluded to above: the glamorisation of Dublin, and the fascinating power of the writing. But there was another reason, coming into focus over a number of years and a number of research projects. Joyce, it turns out, was immersed (to the point of obsession) in music—the music of the past and the music of his own day. He seriously considered a singing career, and his regret at the choice he eventually made, as well as the frustration he felt towards writing as a means of communication, were lifelong. That frustration accounts in some degree for Joyce's determination to incorporate music into his writing as both

thematic constant and formal device. Music is everywhere in Joyce; even when the characters are not performing it or listening to it or discussing it, the author is deploying musical principles in order to achieve effects not readily available in other forms of writing.

Literature, music, Dublin, exile: for anyone (including the scholar) interested in this matrix of practices and relationships, Joyce is inevitable. To be clear: I'm not comparing myself to Joyce, or my experience with his; I'm remarking the way in which patterns of experience echo in time and space, and probably echo quite resonantly in circumstances of temporal and spatial proximity. This book is about Joyce's attitude towards music, his understanding of its cultural history, its role in his own artistic development, and his consistent deference towards music as a privileged field of human understanding. As I discover more about Joyce I discover more about myself, refracted through his choices and experiences; as I listen for his voice, I am better able to articulate my own. I write in order to learn; I try in order to fail better. To pretend otherwise in this day and age, to hold forth once again in the voice of the authoritative critic, is to comply with a system that is, I firmly believe, *against* Joyce, *against* music, *against* literature, *against* life.

As with all my music-related research, I struggle to define a set of methodological practices or theoretical principles which might comprise a discipline. In previous studies I have affiliated with the musicologist Lawrence Kramer's description of 'a full, open engagement with music as lived experience, experience rendered vivid and vivified by a host of overlapping cultural associations' (2003: 134). I have been equally engaged by Jacques Attali's radical reclamation of 'noise', and his contentious claim that 'Western knowledge has tried to look upon the world. It has failed to understand that the world is not for the beholding. It is for hearing. It is not legible, but audible' (1985: 1). The emergence of Sound Studies has emboldened me to elevate 'the audit' alongside 'the gaze' as an equally important mode of cultural analysis. And underpinning all this is the realisation (in the words of evolutionary psychologist Victoria Williamson) that '[we] are the most musical animal this planet has ever seen. In this sense, our musical lives provide a unique glimpse into what it means to be human' (2014: 6).

These strike me as important insights, but they're in no danger (at least in my mind) of coalescing into a field or a discipline, or even a method. What these and similar propositions enable, rather, is an open, receptive, nomadic approach to the consideration of music as a factor of

perennial significance in a range of human practices and products. I like music and reading and finding out about history, and I like finding echoes and patterns between these different practices. Music may be (as Leopold Bloom suspects) just the manipulation of abstract numerical values; but it's many other things besides. Music's omnipresence in human affairs means (for me) that there should in theory be no limit to the ways in which one might approach it, hear it, understand it, enjoy it.

I've often wondered (as others have) why Joyce chose Odysseus rather than Orpheus as his mythological avatar. It may be because Odysseus is a listener rather than a performer—someone for whom the beauty of music sets off powerful emotions, emotions which in turn embolden him to pursue freedom beyond the bonds which detain him. Music, as Odysseus discovers, is absorbing, powerful, dangerous and potentially liberating. Therein lies the reason for its perennial presence in cultural history; and therein, perhaps, lies the reason for Joyce's instinctive incorporation of music as an ineluctable presence within his own work.

* * *

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The final sections of this book were written during lockdown for the Covid-19 pandemic and the global movement for *Black Lives Matter*. What an extraordinary unifying and divisive time it’s been! I would like to thank all the people—friends and strangers—who supported me, in one way or another, during uncertain times. In particular I would like to thanks my immediate family for helping to establish an environment of love and solace: my children and stepchildren Duncan, Holly, Esther and Lizzie, and my wife Stacey.

PRAISE FOR *MUSIC AND SOUND IN THE LIFE AND LITERATURE OF JAMES JOYCE*

“The intimacy between music and fiction has long been a preoccupation of Joyce scholarship, but this intimacy is deepened to a surpassing degree in Gerry Smyth’s brilliant new study of Joyce’s musical reliances. This book is, among much else, an acutely-aware retrieval of Joyce’s musical soundscapes, a cultural history in miniature of musical meaning during Joyce’s formative years as a writer and a sequence of virtuoso readings which extends from Joyce’s early poetry to *Finnegans Wake*. The result is a book in which Joyce’s lived experience nimbly consorts with his artistic originality through the vital conduit of music itself. In that enterprise, the nature of Joyce’s auditory imagination is sensitively and generously reconceived. It is also wonderfully contextualized, not only in relation to Joyce’s literary inherences (the chapter on George Moore is a tour-de-force), but also in relation to the everyday collisions of sound and sense which meant so much to Joyce himself.”

—Harry White, *Professor of Music, University College Dublin, Ireland*

“Like Joyce’s musical interests, this book covers a variety of topics—from previously unidentified musical allusions, to sound studies, to evolutionary studies, to aesthetics, to spatial considerations, to music history—presenting a study that is both far-ranging and immensely impactful on the fields of musical and Joyce studies. Smyth’s uniquely personal understanding of Joyce’s utilization of music brings together a seemingly disparate set of elements to show that intertextual repetition, soundscapes

and allusion dovetail unexpectedly in Joyce's works. Smyth's application of his concepts onto *Dubliners* and *Ulysses* is particularly impressive and he has a gift for distilling important and previously undetected elements of music history onto Joyce's works. This is an important addition to the wealth of criticism on Joyce and music."

—Michelle Witen, *Junior Professor of English and Irish Literature,
Europa-Universität Flensburg, Germany*

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PART I

Reading and Writing



Joyce and Music a Critical Fantasia

Abstract This chapter is comprised of ten sections, each considering a different musical issue bearing upon Joyce's musical imagination. They are: (1) Three Lives (Éamonn Ceannt, Ina Boyle and John McCormack); (2) Music and/as Language (issues relating to music and human evolution); (3) Listening to the Novel (the impact of music on fiction after the late nineteenth century); (4) Real People (some of the historical persons incorporated into Joyce's work); (5) Aesthetics (debates concerning aestheticism, decadence, realism and modernism in the 1890s and 1900s); (6) Joyce as Composer? (the state of music in the Ireland of Joyce's youth); (7) Joyce's Missing Music (the absence of Turlough O'Carolan and Irish traditional music from Joyce's musical reservoir); (8) Popular Music (Joyce's love of music hall); (9) Playback Technology (the rise of the record player and its impact on modern musical practices) and (10) Space and Place (the locations where Joyce's music is made and heard).

FANTASIA. The word is Italian for 'fancy', and its musical application is to any kind of composition in which form takes second place in deference to the demands of imagination or even of mere wilfulness—or, indeed, to any kinds of composition for which no other name happens to occur to the composer.

Percy A. Scholes, *The Oxford Companion to Music* (1938), p. 309

[For Joyce] music was a language and perhaps even something more. It was an atmosphere, a condition of thought, an *aura* beyond all words, which nevertheless was to be found in the words, grouping them, guiding them, giving them breath of life. For Joyce, a sentence was not severable from its melodic qualities, for they alone gave existence to it. Attention has been drawn many times to this fact and the remark has become trite: Joyce's art is primarily musical. It was for Joyce that the divine rule of Verlaine's *Art Poétique* appears to have been dictated: *De la musique avant toute chose ...*

Louis Gillet, *Claybook for James Joyce*, (1941), p. 110 (original emphases)

1 THREE LIVES

Three lives, three modes of Irish identity, three music-makers.

Edward Kent was born on 21 September 1881 in the village of Ballymoe in Co. Galway. The family of nine moved to Ardee in Co. Louth when father James, a policeman in the Royal Irish Constabulary, was transferred. On his retirement in 1892 they moved again, this time to Dublin.

Kent's strong Catholic upbringing and interest in history primed him for politicisation. He took a clerical job with Dublin Corporation, but his primary energies were devoted to the cause of Irish independence. In 1899 he joined the Gaelic League, which had been founded a few years earlier (1893) with Douglas Hyde as its first president. Kent became fluent in Irish, Gaelicised his name to Éamonn Ceannt and became a dynamic force in the League's cultural programme.

In February 1900 Ceannt, along with the cultural activist Edward Martyn founded the Dublin branch of *Cumann na bPíobairí* (The Pipers Club). The uilleann pipes (originally known as the Union bagpipe, or sometimes just the Irish pipes) is 'one of the world's most distinctive multi-reed instrument' (Ó hAllmhuráin 1998: 74). It evolved from a simpler design in the early eighteenth century, and its strong national credentials made it a popular choice for nativist musicians, among the diaspora as well as in the major cities across the island. The Dublin Club was in fact a cradle of nationalist sentiment, with Ceannt among its most active and ardent agents.

Ceannt was treasurer of the Dublin Pipers Club until he retired following his marriage to the club's secretary Áine Brennan in June 1905. In the same year he was elected a member of the League's governing body, although he was already beginning to question what he considered

to be its abbreviated remit. The following year he won a gold medal for his playing at *An Oireachtas*; two years later, as a member of the Catholic Young Men's Society, he performed in Rome for Pope Pius X.

By 1906, the Pipers Club was in financial difficulties.

The following year Ceannt joined Sinn Féin.

In 1911 the club was in a 'moribund' condition.

In 1912 Ceannt was sworn in as a member of the Irish Republican Brotherhood.

The last entry in the minute book (dated 14 October 1913) is a request relayed by Éamonn Ceannt for pipers to play at Pádraig Pearse's Irish-language school St Enda's.

Earlier the same year Ceannt had joined the Irish Volunteers and was one of the principal architects of its successful gun-running operation.

On the morning of 8 May 1916 Éamonn Ceannt was executed by firing squad at Kilmainham Gaol for his role in the Easter Rising.

During the twentieth century the uilleann pipes emerged as one of the most popular and most recognisable of traditional Irish musical instruments. *Na Píobairí Uilleann Teoranta*, based in Henrietta Street in Dublin, continues to thrive in the present day.¹

* * *

Ina Boyle was born in Enniskerry in Co. Wicklow on 10 March 1889 to a well-to-do Protestant family. Her clergyman father William engaged a governess to provide Ina and her sister with lessons on violin and cello. Her obvious talent warranted further investment, so she continued her studies with Samuel Myerscough, and also took correspondence classes in composition with the Irish composer Charles Wood, whose other pupils included Ralph Vaughan Williams and Herbert Howells. Other acclaimed teachers were Percy Buck (later knighted), non-residential professor of music at Trinity College between 1910 and 1920, and Charles Kitson, organist and choirmaster at Christ Church Cathedral as well as professor of music at University College.

By now Boyle had decided that she wished to embrace the life of the composer—a decision which seemed to be justified when she won first *and* second prize for original composition at the Sligo *Feis Ceoil* of 1913.

¹The information on piping included in this section is drawn from Vallyely (1999). See also <https://pipers.ie/>.

The Great War, as well as a decade of civil unrest in Ireland, curtailed her progress, although her orchestral rhapsody *The Magic Harp* (1919) was selected for performance by the London Symphony Orchestra at the Royal College of Music. It's a brooding piece of late Romantic Victoriana which makes absolutely no concessions at all to continental modernism; nor, despite the harp reference, does it contain much in the way of a recognisably 'Irish' tonality.

Between 1923 and 1937 Boyle travelled regularly to England to take lessons' with Vaughan Williams—actually more like friendly inquiries about her current compositions and encouragement to keep faith with her calling. Boyle seems to have been unlucky with her family's health—she was obliged to care for both her parents and her younger sister for much of their lives—and this also stymied her career development. She continued to compose, however, although the majority of this work—chorales, song-cycles, string quartets, tone poems, operas as well as three ballets—remained unperformed. Her papers languished in the Manuscripts and Archives Research Library of Trinity College until, under the impetus of restorative feminism, a *Lyric FM* documentary of 2010 and a Trinity exhibition of 2013 went some way towards reviving her reputation. Ita Beausang's 2018 biography finally enabled us to hear another of the lost voices of modern Irish history.

* * *

John McCormack was born in Athlone, Co. Westmeath on 14 June 1884, the fifth of eleven children to immigrant Scottish parents. Throughout his youth and teenage years he sang in church choirs and in concerts. In 1902 McCormack auditioned for the newly formed Palestrina Choir in Dublin's Pro-Cathedral where its director Vincent O'Brien, recognising an extraordinary talent, accepted the young man.

McCormack's first taste of the fame that he was to so enjoy came in May 1903 when he won the gold medal in the tenor section of the *Feis Ceoil*. (The same prize had been won two years earlier by a well-regarded Dublin tenor named Augustine 'Gus' Boylan—Costello 1992: 192.) It was during these early days in the city that he made the acquaintance of a slightly older Dubliner whom he encouraged to consider a singing career. The bronze medal that JJ won in the following year's *Feis* had a resounding afterlife in his imagination, in his work, and in his attitude towards McCormack himself.

With money generated through recording and sponsorship, McCormack moved to Milan to study with one of Italy's premier singing teachers, Vincenzo Sabatini. His professional operatic début came on 13 January 1906 when he sang the title role of Pietro Mascagni's *L'Amico Fritz* (1891). McCormack promptly married his Irish sweetheart—Lily Foley, also a singer, whose career mysteriously stalled at this point.

Thereafter McCormack's star commenced a spectacular career across the musical heavens of the twentieth century. With Europe conquered he headed for the home of the new technologically driven mass media. Overnight celebrity was achieved with his performance in *La traviata* (at rival New York opera houses, and alongside different divas) in November 1909. He had already commenced what was to be an incredibly successful recording career, aided in no small measure by his ability to perform repertoire from opera, art song, popular song and folk ballad. Besides making him a household name around the world McCormack's subsequent career as a concert singer made him a very wealthy man.

McCormack took American citizenship in 1919, and divided the remainder of his life between homes in Kildare and California. His final concert appearance was at London's Albert Hall on 27 November 1938 (he continued to record), before retirement to a Dublin suburb where he died on 16 September 1945.

McCormack is remembered as a consummate professional tenor, possessed of superb breath control, immaculate diction and purity of tone, all presented with great charm and charisma. More unusual (in the light of the egregious cult of the twentieth-century superstar) was his ability to enjoy a life lived largely. JJ's profuse admiration for McCormack (as described, for example, by Sylvia Beach: 1959, 186–7) remained tinged with jealousy.²

2 MUSIC AND/AS LANGUAGE

Charles Darwin struggled to find a coherent place for music in his theory of evolution by natural selection. In both *The Descent of Man* (1871) and *The Expression of the Emotions* (1892), Darwin offered pretty weak responses to account for the power of music in human affairs, writing (in the first):

²For the material included in this section see the entry by Ian Fox for 'John McCormack' in White and Boydell (2013), II, 645–6.

But if it be further asked why musical tones in a certain order and rhythm give man and other animals pleasure, we can no more give the reason than for the pleasantness of certain tastes and smells... As neither the enjoyment nor the capacity of producing musical notes are faculties of the least use to man in reference to his daily habits of life, they must be ranked among the most mysterious with which he is endowed. (2013: 559–60)

And in the second:

Music has a wonderful power ... of recalling in a vague and indefinite manner, those strong emotions which were felt during long-past ages, when, as is probable, our early progenitors courted each other by the aid of vocal tones. (1892: 229)

Darwin's speculations with regard to music—in particular his guess 'that musical sounds afforded one of the bases for the development of language' (2013: 572)—emerged in time as an important issue in its own right, with generations of researchers from a range of disciplines developing theories which continue to be updated and refined.³

How Musical is Man? (1973) is the title of an influential study by the English musician, ethnomusicologist and social anthropologist John Blacking. Based on extensive research among the Venda people of South Africa, Blacking was interested in music as an articulation of what he referred to as 'humanly organised sound'—which is to say, a phenomenon that emerges as a function of the biological, physiological, mental, social and cultural evolution of the species. All music, to quote Louis Armstrong, is folk music inasmuch as it's created, organised and listened to by 'folk'. True, it's created, organised and listened to in different contexts; and true also that it has over the course of modern history been profoundly stratified into complex styles, genres, disciplines, etc. But it's precisely this historical and formal sense of music that Blacking rejects or brackets, for 'it is the activities of Man the Music Maker' in his view, 'that are of more interest and consequence to humanity than the particular musical achievements of Western man' (1973: 4).

³Darwin puts in two appearance in *Ulysses* (1993: 388, 669), and one in the *Wake* (252).

Blacking's study has many fascinating implications, but none more than the one which places music at the centre of human evolutionary experience. This is the idea picked up and developed by Steven Mithen in his book *The Singing Neanderthals: The Origins of Music, Language, Mind and Body* (2006). Mithen adduces a range of evidence—archaeological, neurological, palaeoanthropological, linguistic, etc.—to propose music as the basis for a form of pre-linguistic communication inherited by our early ancestors from one of our competitor hominid species, *Homo neanderthalensis*. This form of communication he refers to as 'Hmmmm', which stands for

Holistic, manipulative, multi-modal, musical and mimetic. Its essence would have been a large number of holistic utterances, each functioning as a complete message in itself rather than as words that could be combined to generate new meanings. (172)

'Hmmmm' is not a 'language' as such, but a means of utilising the body's sound-productive capacities to organise and modify reality in ways that will aid the survival of the individual and the community of which they form a part.⁴ Although lacking grammar and the denotative principle which characterises modern compositional language (*this* sound means or stands for *this* thing), 'Hmmmm' was an extremely subtle and flexible system. Its evolutionary significance extends beyond mere survival, however, as one of its functions was to foster the development of a sophisticated emotional life among practitioners. 'Hmmmm' provided our ancestors with the beginnings of a means both to identify and to express emotions. And although it was in time (a very long time—tens of thousands of years) superseded by compositional language, according to Mithen it's the deep-seated memory of this intense emotional life—before we possessed the abstract means to refine and articulate it—that subsists within all subsequent musical phenomena.

One problem with the idea of music as an expression of the emotions is its vagueness: what sound, or combination of sounds, expresses 'jealousy', for example, or 'anger', or 'love'? Music is a socio-historical phenomenon, as Blacking averred; but it's also intensely subjective—you and I will hear

⁴ An echo of this form of communication may still be heard in modern speech directed towards children or pets which, according to one psychologist, 'has been reported in every known language tested to date' (Williamson 2014: 23).

and respond to different things in the same piece of music, and we can never be sure if the responses it generates or the meanings we attribute to it have any basis in common experience.

This was a problem that the English musicologist Deryck Cooke attempted to solve in his book *The Language of Music* (1959). By ‘music’, Cooke was referring to a very specific discourse: the tradition of art music that had emerged in Europe from about 1400. ‘Composers’, he suggested, ‘have always been bound by certain expressive laws of the medium, laws which are analogous to those of language’ (2001: 15). ‘Music’, he went on,

is, in fact, ‘extra-musical’ in the sense that poetry is ‘extra-verbal, since notes, like words, have emotional connotations; it is, let us repeat, the supreme expression of universal emotions, in an entirely personal way, by the great composers. (33)

Cooke’s thesis is that genius composers learn the emotional language embedded within the system of tonality that evolved in Western Europe after the medieval period, and they use this language to express the ‘universal emotions’ of the species in endlessly subtle and complex ways. This is not a vague assertion: in a series of chapters the author methodically takes his reader through the intervals that comprise the twelve notes of the western scale, attributing gradated responses of pleasure and pain to each. Thus he talks about the ‘straightforwardly and contentedly joyful’ major third (64); the ‘longing’ (69) characterising minor and major sixths as they await harmonic resolution; the ‘mournful’ and ‘melancholy’ minor seventh (74); and so on.

‘Music’, Cooke concludes, ‘is primarily and basically a language of the emotions, through which we directly experience the fundamental urges that move mankind, without the need of falsifying ideas and images—words or pictures’ (272). Music shares with the other arts (literature and painting, for example) a desire to express a human response to the mystery of life; it remains first among equals, however, insofar as its language intuitively ‘speaks’ to a much more primordial level of our consciousness.

Cooke’s hope, that his extremely tentative steps would signal the beginning of a great research project to understand the ‘grammar’ of musical language as it related to human emotion, has by and large failed to be realised. His principal insight, however (shared with the other researchers mentioned here)—that music was locked into the story of

human evolution in fundamental ways—has proved enduringly influential, and underpins all the critical discourses that attempt to account for its ubiquitous presence in human cultural endeavour.

3 LISTENING TO THE NOVEL

In 2008 I published a book entitled *Listening to the Novel: Music in Contemporary British Fiction*, in which I suggested that:

Music has played an important role in the development of the novel in Britain since the early eighteenth century. Anyone even passingly familiar with the history of that particular literary form will probably already be aware that music represents a significant consideration for many of the authors who have contributed to the tradition. A reader fully sensitised to the role and representation of music is bound to encounter it throughout the canon of British fiction. (1)

Part One consisted of two chapters, the first a long theoretical exposition of different aspects of what I referred to as ‘the music-novel’: music as inspiration; music as metaphor; and music as form. The second chapter took the form of an overview of ‘British’ fiction between Lawrence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* (1760–67) and Anthony Burgess’s *Mozart and the Wolf Gang* (1991), analysing a number of indicative examples: *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) by Jane Austen, *Wuthering Heights* (1847) by Emily Brontë, *Middlemarch* (1871–2) by George Eliot, *Jude the Obscure* (1895) by Thomas Hardy, *Howards End* (1910) by E. M. Forster, *Point Counter Point* (1928) by Aldous Huxley, and *Absolute Beginners* (1959) by Colin MacInnes. These analyses were undertaken in order to demonstrate

that the music-novel is not a marginal practice—simply one of any number of ‘special interest’ ways of approaching literary history; the suggestion here, rather, is that music *has been* fundamental to the evolution of the modern British novel, and therefore *it remains* fundamental to the understanding of that discourse down to the present day. (59, original emphases)

The point holds, I think: music is present in one form or another in a significant proportion of the fiction that has ever been published. How could it not, given the novel’s basis in human experience, and

the enduring centrality of music to that experience? It's true that the music-centred novel represents an important sub-genre in its own right; but even when the narrative has no ostensible connection with music, we find it loitering in the margins of the text: an overheard radio, a remembered melody, a popular reference, a whistled phrase. Like all 'marginal' phenomena, on examination such references actually turn out to be essential aspects of the fictional world created by the author and of the characters populating that world.

My research for *Listening to the Novel* discovered a concentration of musicalised fiction during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁵ All the literary arts felt the pull, but for writers of fiction, as Timothy Martin has pointed out, 'the affiliation with music was particularly strong' (1991: 145). There are many reasons that might be adduced to account for this, but one of the most obvious must be the emergence of the tendency known as 'literary Wagnerism'. In fact, Wagner's powerful influence touched all the arts in the decades after his death in 1883, but it's in literature, and particularly in the novel, that we discover a curious engagement with many of the great composer's formal, thematic and aesthetic concerns. One of the most committed of literary Wagnerians was Gabriele D'Annunzio, whose regard for music was such that he famously incorporated into the political programmes that were to dominate his later career. JJ's fellow student Con Curran insisted that D'Annunzio (rather than Ibsen) was the greatest influence on his friend's artistic development (1968: 105ff); and Stanislaus Joyce reported that his brother considered the Italian's *Il Fuoco* (translated as *The Flame of Life* in 1900) to be 'the highest achievement of the novel to date' (1958: 154).

Literary Wagnerism was among other things a multi-national phenomenon, as was the general fascination with music which it generated. Besides the Italian D'Annunzio, this phenomenon was adapted in exemplary fashion by two of the most music-obsessed novelists of the period: the German Thomas Mann, and the Frenchman Marcel Proust. Mann's 'Tonio Kröger' (1903) is a story *about* music, certainly, but it's also a story whose telling looks to adapt some of the formal aspects of musical discourse for literary ends. It was the narrative, Mann later

⁵JJ reviewed a lost example of the musical novel entitled *A Ne'er Do Well*, about a gypsy violinist, for the *Daily Express* in September 1903. He criticised the use of a pseudonym (although started publishing under the name of Stephen Daedalus less than a year later), and was offended at the novel's 'pretentiousness' (2000: 81).

claimed, in which he ‘first learned to employ music as a shaping influence in my art’ (quoted in Brown 1948: 212). That ‘shaping influence’ was evident in two particular instances: the attempt to organise the narrative in terms of sonata form, and the attempt to develop character with reference to the Wagnerian principle of ‘leitmotif’.

Like *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, ‘Tonio Kröger’ is a form of *Künstlerroman* focusing on key moments in the artistic evolution of a central male character. As in JJ’s novel, this evolution is represented in terms of the relationship between an artistic sensibility which needs to be free of bourgeois restrictions, and a bourgeois sensibility which, although in some respects inimical to true art, nevertheless provides the human material (emotions, characters, situations) from which effective art must be made. And as with JJ’s work, music—all music, any music—comes to represent a kind of primordial life-force: the sonic articulation of what it means to be alive with a body that *feels*, a mind that *thinks* and a spirit that *yearns*.

For Marcel Proust, music was locked into the key category of memory—one of the defining faculties of the species, and thus one of the keys to the emotional evolution of the individual consciousness. Of equal importance with the famous ‘madeleine’ is the ‘little phrase’ that the eponymous hero of *Swann’s Way* (the first of the seven-volume series) discovers is from a sonata for piano and violin by an uncelebrated composer named Vinteuil. The narrator goes into great detail to explain the manner in which Swann first experienced the little phrase, the effect it had on him at the time, and the meaning it came to have for him when, unable to identify the composer or locate the score, he was obliged to rely on memory to keep it alive in his imagination.

Proust is relentless in his attempt to detail Swann’s precise emotional response to every recurrence of the little phrase; and yet there always seems to be something more, something that cannot be said. There’s always, in other words, a tacit melancholy residing in the gap between the music itself, the memories it invokes, and the meanings ascribed to it. Such would appear to be one of the key insights that music provides the modernist novelist: the existence of states of consciousness which are, apparently, beyond the ability of language to render. With Proust in mind, Alex Aronson writes:

[A] sequence of sounds played or sung at a certain pitch or rhythm or a change from major to minor key are found to evoke a variety of associations