ANOTHER LISTEN TO THE MUSIC IN JAMES JOYCE'S "A MOTHER"

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Since the Joycean critical tradition began to consolidate around about the middle of the twentieth century, attention to the musical aspects of his work has ranged across the entire *oeuvre*, from *Chamber Music* to *Finnegans Wake*. During the same period that same tradition has also adopted a wide range of discursive emphases: biographical, socio-cultural, aesthetic, literary historical and musicological. As a writer whose aesthetic vision was profoundly influenced by music, Joyce is sometimes regarded as emblematic of one strand of modern literature – that running between, say, the proto-modernist poetry of Charles Baudelaire and the late modernist drama of Samuel Beckett; and including within its compass novelists such as Gabriele D'Annunzio, Thomas Mann and Marcel Proust.[1] In this tradition music operates as a recurring presence, mitigating both the conceptual thrust and the formal organisation of the literary text within which it is invoked.

It's fair to say that *Dubliners* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* have featured less strongly in this particular critical tradition than either *Ulysses* or *Finnegans Wake*. In his study of Joyce's music allusions, Zack Bowen dedicates a mere twelve pages to the first (11-23) and fifteen to the second (30-45), whereas the catalogue of references in *Ulysses* takes 300 pages (46-346). This is doubtless a reflection of the fact that Joyce's response to music developed as a function of his aesthetic maturity, and that he came to regard his own extremely positive engagement with music as more than just a matter of taste. Music, rather, represented something fundamental and essential about human experience – hence its capital significance for the artist attempting to capture and communicate that experience. Music, it seems, was multitudinously locked into the ordinary Dublin life that was Joyce's consistent theme; as an artist who had dedicated himself to the encapsulation of that life he simply could not afford to ignore it, and this was something that struck him more as his insight developed and his technique adjusted.

Such a judgement should not lead us to underestimate the significance of music in the earlier work, however. Joyce himself came to regard his mature writing "as a continuation of the expression of myself which I now see I began in *Chamber Music*" (qtd. in Ellmann 217). The same is true of the short stories he began writing and publishing whilst still living in Dublin – *before* his departure with Nora Barnacle in October

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[1] See Aronson 1980, *passim*. His university friend C.J. Curran goes so far as to insist on D'Annunzio (rather than Ibsen) as the greatest influence on Joyce's artistic development, most especially in respect of the Italian's regard for music. Stanislaus Joyce reported that his student brother considered D'Annunzio's *Il Fuoco* 'the highest achievement of the novel to date' (*My Brother's Keeper* 154).

1904, and the commencement of his artistic majority.[2] Music might be regarded in the first instance as simply an impulse of the cultural milieu from which the author was in the process of emerging, or as an obvious ongoing preoccupation for someone who was still seriously considering a career as a professional singer. But the musical matters bearing upon the stories collected in *Dubliners* function much more significantly in relation to the Joycean canon taken as a whole. Certainly, these matters transport the reader back to a nineteenth-century musical landscape incorporating elements such as light opera, street ballads, nationalist songs, parlour pieces, music hall, as well as an uneven and inconsistent engagement with the European art tradition (White). Certainly, also, much of the time they emerge (as we shall presently see) directly from documented experiences in the author's biography. But they also anticipate the later work in which particular ideas relating to music were integrated into the complex literary aesthetic which characterised Joyce's take on the cultural paradigm known as 'modernism'.

We may observe all these forces at work in "A Mother" – "perhaps the most overlooked and underrated story in *Dubliners*" (Miller 407), but also the one (along with "The Dead") in which music features most significantly. The conflict between Mrs Kearney and the agents of the fictional *Eire Abu* society have generally been regarded as a typical manifestation of Joyce's jaundiced view of a city under the unpropitious sway of Revivalism. Against the backdrop of a musical concert the author ruthlessly exposes Dublin's desperately damaged moral economy. Critics have by and large reproduced what they regard as Joyce's critical attitude towards Mrs Kearney; so, in his article "Silence in *Dubliners*", for example, Jean-Michel Rabaté hears only her spiteful obstinacy and her husband's collusive 'silence' – qualities which mark them both down as yet "another symptom of paralysis" (70). The termagant confronts the chancer under the egregious eye of the press; the next generation is mortified (Kathleen) or recruited as betrayer (Miss Healy); and thus the pattern of paralysis is confirmed and repeated.

Not unsurprisingly, "A Mother" has more recently yielded more suggestive possibilities with the bringing to bear of different conceptual (such as gender) and theoretical (such as feminism) emphases. The story is unusual, as Jane Miller points out, in its "portrayal of a woman venturing outside the domestic sphere and interacting with men in a business situation" (407). The animosity towards Mrs Kearney on the part of the story's male characters derives from a social context in which gender relations were managed according to a strict (although seldom openly articulated) discursive economy. "Ireland", in short, "was a society pervaded by male values" (Kiberd 396). This situation was the product of a particular set of religious (Catholicism), political (colonialism / nationalism) and social (familialism) influences, and was itself structured in terms of a series of binaries which operated flexibly throughout contemporary

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[2] 'The Sisters' was published in *The Irish Homestead* on August 13 1904, under the *nom de plume* of Stephen Daedalus.

Irish society, *and* the culture it produced: domestic / public; passive / active; emotional / material; corporeal / cerebral; and so on. Mrs Kearney's danger is that she threatens to undo these implicit binaries – by leaving her home; by being proactive in her dealings with the committee; by concerning herself with financial matters; by standing up for her rights; ultimately, by believing that the contract she signed with Mr Holohan possessed any force outside the domestic sphere which is her 'proper' theatre of operations.[3]

It would be a mistake, however (and it is a mistake to which many readers, including professional critics, have fallen prey), simply to align the author's intentions with those of the male characters in the story, or to acquiesce in the narrative's apparent endorsement of Mrs Kearney's 'defeat'. Joyce's target is not (or not only) the tawdriness of this banal little *contretemps* as simply another instance of the moral paralysis into which Ireland has fallen; it is also, and more significantly, an indictment of the discursive field which has produced the very terms of the conflict – the contemporary gender relations in which Mrs Kearney's voice simply cannot be heard, nor her perspective seriously countenanced. Mrs Kearney is not so much an agent of, but a rebel against, the presiding paralysis of contemporary Dublin; her 'defeat' is a blow against the community at large – as Miller points out:

> Ironically, so many critics, while concentrating on what they believe are Joyce's intentions in the story have unwittingly fallen into his trap. Neither understanding nor appreciating the very real grounds for Mrs. Kearney's anger, they can only see that she is stepping beyond the social norms of acceptable conduct for a 'lady,' and, mimicking the action of the story, they censure and dismiss her. It is easy to be seduced by the crowd when faced with the 'unbending' Mrs. Kearney, but in the end, those readers who approve of her defeat ally themselves with the stiflingly conformist Dublin society that Joyce wished to indict in *Dubliners*. (424)

Feminism and critical theory offer an array of methodologies and concepts with which to recast and rethink "A Mother".[4] My argument here is that music provides the same service. By *listening* to the text – its contexts and traditions as well as its own inherent musicality – we hear it, and thus read and understand it, differently.

According to Richard Ellmann, "A Mother" was completed in Trieste by the end of September 1905 (*James Joyce* 207); but its roots lie in three concerts in which Joyce sang during the auspicious summer of 1904. The first of these was on Saturday May 14th as part of the recently developed *Feis Ceoil* (Music Festival); Joyce famously was relegated from first to fourth (eventually third) prize after he refused to attempt a sight-reading test. The second and third performances were staged as part of the August Horse Show celebrations, and took place at the Antient Concert Rooms on Monday 22nd and Saturday 27th.

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[3] Margot Norris reminds us of the significance that "the contract" would have had for women such as Mrs Kearney in the wake of the Married Women's Property Act of 1870 (187).

[4] Norris, following Valente, deploys the concept of the *differend* (developed by French postmodernist philosopher Jean-François Lyotard) to discuss the operation of gender in "A Mother". Lyotard's description of the *differend* as a point of difference between disputants who lack common terms, and his recurring metaphors of *voice* and *silence*, are highly suggestive in the present context.

These three events involved Joyce in Dublin's complex music politics, wherein a host of questions relating to the identity, meaning and scope of 'Irish music' was under constant scrutiny.[5] They also exposed him to the demands of competitive singing and the rigours of public performance. Thus far in his life, music had been part of a wider array of social and cultural accomplishments. In his various writings Stanislaus Joyce described the musical milieu in which the family was raised; their father (who had himself contemplated a musical career, and retained a high estimation of his own voice) exposed his children to a great fund of arias and ballads. His wife May was "a brilliant pianist" (Gorman 12), and from her they gleaned some knowledge of the nineteenth-century Romantic art tradition. Their eldest son built on this inheritance, developing a musical alongside a literary imagination throughout his student and undergraduate days.[6] Joyce sang regularly at the home of the Sheehy family, especially when there was an opportunity to impress the various daughters; he collected early modern English songs and attended concerts by Palestrina and Victoria with close friend Vincent Cosgrave; he set his own lyrics to music, as well as poems by Mangan and Yeats; and he learned to appreciate the range, the power and the sensitivity of music as a supremely endowed mode of engagement with the phenomenon of human consciousness.

To expose this appreciation in the marketplace of competitive performance must have struck Joyce as a somewhat conflicted usage of his own musical abilities. No doubt he wished to win and reap the potential rewards (as John McCormack had the previous year); and no doubt also he was fully aware of the financial considerations with which musical practice of every kind and every era was symbiotically enmeshed. Music speaks the language of the heart; but it speaks also the languages of the head and the pocket, and this always tends to mitigate any idealistic claims made on its behalf.[7] Just so on the occasion of Joyce's performance in the *Feis*: such a realisation, in the context of an artistic competition with overtones of financial reward, sensitised the developing artist to music's vulnerability in the face of economic reality; and to the possibility that art, no matter how idealistically oriented towards the true and the beautiful, could all too easily end up in the service of the tawdry and the self-serving.

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[5] See the chapter "Music and the Literary Revival" in White (94-124) in which he discusses a range of contemporary engagements with "the idea of an Irish music at once sensitive to the myths and materials of the revival and yet committed to the language and syntax of European romanticism" (113).

[6] All the friends and relations who published on the subject of Joyce's development have remarked on what Curran referred to as his 'abiding passion' (40) for music; for Joyce, according to Padraic Colum, "what was sung transcended in appeal everything that was written" (185).

[7] In a letter to Curran dated 23 June 1904, Joyce ironically describes being paid for a recent performance with "nods and becks and wreathed smiles" (49).

The latter scenario describes in some respects the situation depicted in "A Mother", and this ties in with the traditional view of the story as participant in Joyce's indictment of main-chance Revivalism. Mrs Kearney's interest is prompted in the first instance by her determination "to take advantage of her daughter's name" (123) within the context of vogueish cultural nationalism; and this might be regarded as symbolic of the fact that every aspect of Irish life is (in Joyce's view) significant only in terms of its cash equivalent value. Once established, moreover, the association of music with money is maintained throughout – becoming, indeed, the crux of Mrs Kearney's grievance. The reality of the cash nexus is belied, however, by a combination of ideological effects: the pretext of cultural nationalism on the one hand, and the appeal to an asymmetrical gender politics, on the other. And behind each of these forces lies Joyce's own conflicted attitude towards the fatal infection of art with economic considerations – a conflict that he could never resolve in his own life, and which recurred in a great variety of forms throughout the canon of his work.

The two August concerts bear more directly on the events described in "A Mother". Joyce's *Feis* performance from earlier in the summer earned him an invitation to perform at a 'Grand Concert' organised under the auspices of an 'Irish Revival Industries Show'. He rehearsed at the home of accompanist / conductor Eileen Reidy; and although not included on the evening bill Joyce sang two songs – "My Love She Was Born in the North Countree" and "The Coulin" – well enough at a Monday matinee to earn an invitation to perform at Saturday's more prestigious event. That event, as described by contemporary diarist Joseph Holloway, was a pretty ramshackle affair, despite the involvement of star-in-waiting John McCormack. It started late, and there was a considerable delay after the first item, causing the audience to grow 'noisy and irritable' (qtd. in Ellmann 168). The problem seems to have been caused by Reidy's decision to leave; her substitute was so incompetent that Joyce "had to sit down at the piano and accompany himself in the song 'In Her Simplicity'" after she had made several unsuccessful attempts to strum out "The Croppy Boy". Joyce also sang the Yeats favourite "Down by the Sally [sic] Gardens", and encored with "North Countree".[8]

The concert described in "A Mother" closely parallels the one in which Joyce sang on that Saturday evening in August 1904. In the story the baritone (J.C. Doyle) and first tenor (McCormack) arrive together – "stout and complacent … they brought a breath of opulence among the company" (128). Like their real-life counterparts, Madame Glynn (Madame Halle) sings "Killarney", and the "young lady who arranged amateur theatricals" (Máire nic Shiubhlaigh) delivers a "stirring patriotic recitation" (131). Like the author himself, the second tenor, Mr Bell, has won a bronze medal at the *Feis*

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[8] The Saturday programme is reproduced in the annotated edition of *Dubliners*, 131.

Ceoil, and is also “extremely nervous” (127).[9] And as with the real event, the fictional concert features a selection of Irish airs (played by Kathleen Kearney, when she does finally manage to get on stage) “which was generously applauded” (131).

It was Reidy’s unexplained withdrawal, however, that provided Joyce with the germ of his story; it may indeed have been an issue concerning payment or some other financial consideration; there may have been a medical or other emergency.[10] Speculation aside, it seems clear that Joyce adapted the events of the evening to write a story that would serve his larger purpose – the purpose, that is to say, of unmasking the pretentions of revivalist culture, and of exposing what he described to his brother in a letter of November 1906 as the perennial Irish propensity for “blatant lying in the face of the truth” (qtd. in Ellmann 129).

It’s worth returning to that concert, however, in order to confront the possibility that closer attention to an array of musical considerations might mitigate to some degree a traditional critical view of “A Mother” (and *Dubliners in toto*) as simply another witness in Joyce’s damning indictment of contemporary Ireland. And such a possibility could commence with Reidy herself, whose mysterious *silence* represents the paradoxical *voice* around which the story is structured.

Eileen Reidy had been trained at the Royal Irish Academy of Music and was typical in many respects of a growing cadre of middle-class Irish women who worked hard throughout the nineteenth century to establish music as a viable female profession. The Royal Irish Academy of Music, inaugurated in 1848 and properly professionalised in 1856, was a typically cultural nationalist initiative in terms of its mission to create an Irish musical culture that was not dependent on English talent or English taste. In one aspect it did buck nationalist trends and follow the lead from across the water, however: women were deeply involved from the outset in all aspects of the academy’s activities – as students, administrators and teachers (O’Connor 47). The same is by and large true of the *Feis Ceoil* which, as we’ve seen, features in “A Mother” in terms of the author’s experience and of the general musical milieu within which the story takes place.

A key figure here was Dr Annie Patterson who, as scholar, administrator, critic, journalist, organiser, teacher and adjudicator, was a powerful presence in Dublin musical circles during Joyce’s time in the city. Patterson was the first woman to receive a doctorate in music from the Royal University of Ireland; she was also a key figure in the founding of the *Feis Ceoil* (launched in 1897) and, when that proved unlikely to meet all her nationalist aspirations, of another competitive forum called *An t'Oireachtas* (*The Assembly*) which, unlike its more inclusive counterpart, "focused completely on the promotion of Irish culture through Irish music and the Irish language" (O'Connor 213). A republican and a feminist, Patterson managed to support a household through her earnings while at the same time maintaining a respectable public profile in what was, after all, a society suspicious to the point of antagonism in respect of female agency outside the domestic sphere.

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[9] As a consequence of Mr Bell’s admission (albeit under a certain amount of duress) that he believes Mrs Kearney “had not been well treated” (132), Miller suggests that the fictional second tenor “seems to be a clue, playfully dropped, as to whose side Joyce is on” (424).

[10] In *James Joyce Remembered* Curran writes intriguingly: “Eileen Reidy, the accompanist, left early – for good reason” (45), but he neglects or declines to say what that reason was.

Another interesting contribution to Joyce's fictional entertainment is the "stirring patriotic recitation delivered by a young lady who arranged amateur theatricals" (131). As noted already, this appears to be a reference to Máire nic Shiubhlaigh (Mary Walker), who performed in the second part of the Saturday concert. Nic Shiubhlaigh had connections with Inghinidhe na hÉireann and the Abbey Theatre, and would continue to be active, "along with many other passionate thespians" (Foster 112) in various agit-prop initiatives up to and including the Easter Rising. Like the fictional Kathleen Kearney (and the real-life Annie Patterson) "she was a believer in the language movement" (123); and her credentials for involvement in a 'Grand Irish Concert' were solid.

Reidy, Patterson and nic Shiubhlaigh were just three of the "vivid faces" identified by Foster – part of "a vital minority who did *not* hold with an unquestioning spirit to the inherited state of things" (xxiii, original emphasis). The career of each is indicative of a social milieu that cultural critics and historians are bringing increasingly into focus, one in which women emerge as fully engaged agents working across a range of complementary fronts, including nationalism, republicanism, feminism and socialism – what Foster refers to as "the associational counter-cultures that tended to be written out of Irish history in the period of post-revolutionary stabilization" (26). What these same critics and historians have also discovered is that such agency invariably found itself in opposition to an entrenched patriarchal culture that was deeply complicit with the imperialist-capitalist discourses it ostensibly looked to replace.[11]

Molly Bloom represents Joyce's most fully realised fictional engagement with the question of women and music; but it's important to acknowledge that the complexities and ambivalences that famously attach to her character are anticipated throughout the earlier writing – in "The Dead", certainly, with its focus on the three Morkan women and Gretta Conroy's impassioned response to an old ballad, and also (and, indeed, equally forcefully) in "A Mother" with its depiction of the Misses Healy and Kearney, as well as the latter's musically ambitious parent.

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[11] Declan Kiberd points out that when Anna Parnell assumed *de facto* leadership of the Land League in the wake of her brother's imprisonment, "she was soon being denounced as 'fanatic' and 'harridan' by dismayed nationalists as well as by enemy imperialists" (396). "The painful uncertainty of nationalism-republicanism vis-à-vis its gender status", he goes on, "was a condition calculated to generate endless crises of self-legitimation, and with them a nervously patriarchal psychology" (406).

What of Joyce's musical contributions to the various concerts in which he participated? The two songs set for the *Feis* competition were "No Chastening" and "A Long Farewell" – the first from Arthur Sullivan's early oratorio *The Prodigal Son* (1869), the second a ballad arranged by the Scottish folklorist Alfred Moffat. The first was marked by the composer as 'Recitative and Aria' for tenor, and it was (and remains) a challenging piece, particularly in terms of phrasing and enunciation. With its descriptions of God scourging those whom he loves, and its offer to teach children 'the fear of the lord', moreover, the text (taken from *Psalms* and *Hebrews*) must have been interesting for a young man just coming to terms with his own apostasy.

The melody for "A Long Farewell" had first been collected by George Petrie in his *Ancient Music of Ireland*, in which he noted that it was based on a street-ballad entitled "O Nancy, Nancy, Don't You Remember" he heard sung by a servant girl around about the year 1805. Petrie felt that the tune appeared to have "as much of an English as an Irish character", and more than likely had been imported from across the water; "it would be strange", he went on,

> if, during the last seven centuries, in which our island has been so largely planted from England, no melodies should have been introduced amongst us which had sufficient beauty to insure their perpetuation, even after they had been forgotten in the country in which they had their origin: and it would be equally strange if the incorporation of the two races did not give birth to a class of melody indicative of the mixed character so produced, and to which the term Anglo-Irish might with propriety be applied. (110-11)

A Gaelic version entitled "Slán le Máigh" was translated as "Farewell to the Maig" by the poet Edward Walsh and published in his Irish *Popular Songs* of 1847 (87). This was the version set as "A Long Farewell I Send to Thee" by Moffat in 1898 (2) and included shortly thereafter as a competition option in the *Feis* programme. As with the Sullivan piece, Joyce must have been struck by both the musical and the lyrical resonances of this song, with its 'traditional' melody, its macaronic language (*uch ochón*), and its dramatisation of an alienated figure, exiled from homeland and friends, condemned to "wander lonely" through the world.

The most significant piece from Joyce's *Feis* performance, however, is the one that's missing – the one he refused to attempt from notation, and that cost him the competition and possibly (following McCormack's footsteps) the realistic opportunity of a musical career. Joyce was understandably disappointed and frustrated at the outcome; but the experience would serve him well inasmuch as the missing piece embodies a paradox: silent (or absent) music – a paradox that speaks readily to novelistic discourse (the music invoked in the novel cannot be heard), and more fundamentally to the human practices and experiences that the novel looks to represent. Joyce found in the concept of 'silent music' – which is to say, the silence that precedes, follows and inheres *within* music – a potent symbol of our paradoxical relation to language, one that recurs (in many different forms) throughout his work.

We observe an early instance in "A Mother", in which the absence of music (Kathleen's refusal to play, albeit at her mother's insistence) precipitates the central conflict on which the story's moral crisis turns. The *leitmotif* has already been established in the marriage with which Mrs Kearney silenced the loosening tongues of her friends (122); the "ladylike" (110) silence she initially maintains in the face of Mr Fitzpatrick's provocation; and the "painful" (114) silence which pervades the backstage area during the stand-off between mother and committee. The latter instance occurs, paradoxically, against a cacophony of "clapping and stamping … [and] whistling" (130) coming from the impatient audience, once again revealing the extent to which silence is not an absolute condition but a discursive effect that is always produced in a particular context (Hepburn, 199). Kathleen *plays*, her music *sounds* temporarily but is then withdrawn; the writing *ends*; and the reader is left to speculate as to the *meaning* of what Joyce wrote as well as the *significance* of what he did not write. Absent music thus comes to mark all three related levels: story (the narrative event), text (the writing event) and consumption (the reading event); and the effects and insights afforded by this flexible economy would inform Joyce's art for the remainder of his career.

Moving on to the August concerts, on Monday afternoon Joyce sang two traditional ballads from the pages of Moffat's *Irish Minstrelsy*: "The Coolin" (66) and "My Love She Was Born in the North Countrie" (151) – each of which represents an interesting choice in the context of his wider profile. The Saturday concert seems to have been more problematic. Horse Show week was busy in Dublin; there were competing entertainments all across town, but the Antient Concert Rooms was fully booked and Joyce was nervous, especially as he would be performing in public before his girlfriend Nora for the first time. In Part I he was programmed to sing "Down by the Sally [sic] Gardens" – the Yeats lyric which first appeared in *The Wandering of Oisin and Other Poems* (1889). The most popular setting of this lyric was made by the composer Herbert Hughes in 1909, when (after consulting with the poet himself) he put it to an air entitled "The Maids of Mourne Shore".[12] A question mark remains, therefore, regarding the melody that Joyce sang on this occasion (the song is not included in Moffat); it was in all likelihood a well-known ballad entitled "Rambling Boys of Pleasure", which seems to have been the song imperfectly remembered by Yeats when composing his own version.

Joyce was programmed to sing "The Croppy Boy" in Part II; there are in fact two popular versions of this ballad, each telling the story of an Irish volunteer of 1798 betrayed to his death. The version particularly associated with Joyce sees a young man on his way to join the rebel army, stopping off to go to confession at which point he is captured by a yeoman captain disguised as a priest – this is the version that figures throughout *Ulysses*, especially in the chapter entitled "Sirens" where it underpins the motif of betrayal which was itself so decisive an influence on both this particular novel and on its author (Smyth 69-91). Reidy had already departed by this stage, however, and Joseph Holloway reports that *after* her replacement had made 'several unsuccessful attempts' (qtd. in Ellmann 168) to play the programmed item, Joyce was obliged to accompany himself on a different song. This seems to imply that Joyce did not in fact sing "The Croppy Boy" on this occasion, moving instead to an alternative once the original had been compromised in such an embarrassing fashion. Monday's review in the *Freeman's Journal* (once again as reported in Ellmann), however, states unequivocally that Joyce did in fact give "a pathetic rendering" (168) of the ballad.

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[12] In 1933 Hughes edited a book of settings of Joyce's poems.

So who was right? The career of the imaginary Mr Mcintosh in *Ulysses* reveals that Joyce was not unfamiliar with the proposition that press reportage could on occasion fail to meet the highest standards of the profession. In "A Mother" the "plausible" (129) *Freeman* reviewer Mr Hendrick arrives at the venue but cannot attend the concert – indeed, "concerts and *artistes* bored him considerably" (129); his intention, rather, is to go on to the Mansion House to report on a lecture by an American priest, leaving his crony Mr O'Madden Burke to write and deliver the review.[13] In the meantime, he is happy to exploit his position of relative power in order to flirt with Miss Healy and to avail of free drink. All in all it's not a flattering portrait; whether or not his own performance was misreported in this particular instance, the inherent speciousness of journalistic reportage became for Joyce a special instance of the *partiality* (in the dual senses of incompletion and bias) of all discourse – the perennial failure, by turns comic and heroic, of language itself.

The song (according to Holloway) to which Joyce turned in the circumstances was an established favourite from his repertoire. "In Her Simplicity" is an English version of an aria entitled "Elle ne croyait pas" sung by the character Wilhelm in *Mignon*, an opera first performed at the *Opéra-Comique* in Paris in 1866. Composed by Ambroise Thomas, *Mignon* was adapted from the novel *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (*Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*) written by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and first published in 1795-6. Although the libretto (by the well-established team of Jules Barbier and Michel Carré) refocused the story on the character of the eponymous gypsy girl, Goethe's original themes – education through experience, the theatre as a metaphor for 'real life' – remain just about discernible. Besides its effectiveness as a tenor showcase,[14] Joyce was no doubt attracted to "In Her Simplicity" because it embodied a mainstream Romantic cultural tradition with which he was still coming to terms, especially that strand wherein the young hero turns away from the conventions of his parents' generation in order to embrace the life artistic.

In any event, Joyce must have performed the song pretty well, for he was called for an encore and chose to sing one of his pieces from the Monday concert. A version of the song "My Love She Was Born in the North Countree" was first collected by Patrick Weston Joyce in his *Ancient Irish Music* (68) under the title "Fair Maidens' Beauty

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[13] This character is based on the journalist William O'Leary Curtis, and features also in *Ulysses* (Igoe 40-41).

[14] A recorded version by McCormack from 1908 demonstrates the effectiveness of this song for a tenor singing to a sparse chordal accompaniment.

Will Soon Fade Away". This is the ballad that Stephen Dedalus sings for Emma Cleary in *Stephen Hero*, eliciting her comment that she loves Irish music because "it is so soul-stirring" (141).[15] Joyce (and Stephen) certainly recognised the power of these traditional ballads to stir the soul – indeed, it was just that quality that he admired when it resurfaced in somewhat altered form in the poetry of Mangan and Yeats. At the same time, "soul-stirring" retained overtones of "the rabblement", and of "surrendering to the popular will" ("The Day of the Rabblement" 50). The increasing association of Ireland's musical heritage with a kind of insular bourgeois nationalism rendered it problematic for Joyce in a number of respects, and made engagement with it (in the act of singing) a deeply ambivalent undertaking.[16]

Music and literature were locked together in Joyce's imagination from an early stage of his aesthetic development, and this was as much a formal as a thematic concern: "a song by Shakespeare", he wrote in *Stephen Hero*, "discovers itself as the rhythmic speech of an emotion otherwise incommunicable" (74).[17] In *Dubliners*. as Allan Hepburn writes, "singing enacts identity, not straightforwardly, but in a medium that revels in ambiguity. In these stories, not hearing music accurately, not listening for encrypted clues, leads to wrongheaded actions" (190). As for the primary literary text, so for the secondary critical commentaries: listening with an ear for the subtleties and the complexities of Joyce's musicalized method (which comprehends a literary style as well as a musical content) enables us to better understand the subtlety and the complexity – ultimately, the ambiguity – of his own response to the competing cultural and political traditions within which he found himself caught up.

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[15] This song also features in *Ulysses* (185) and *Finnegans Wake* (622, 628).

[16] 'My Love She Was Born in the North Countrie' is included in Moffat's *The Minstrelsy of Ireland* (151), clearly a popular resource for contemporary singers in search of repertoire. As with "A Long Farewell", both the provenance and the afterlife of this particular ballad implicate Irish music within an expansive international framework.

[17] Later, in conversation with Cranly, Stephen says: "Song is the simple rhythmic liberation of an emotion" (158).

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