Lyric on the Lips: Death upon the Tongue

JEFFEREY SIMONS
Universidad de Huelva

In “The Fictional Technique of Ulysses,” Schutte and Steinberg view the “Telemachia” as

in many ways the most closely integrated portion of Ulysses: each episode concerns itself more narrowly than the preceding one with the mind of Stephen, to the growing exclusion of the interests and thoughts of other characters; each gives us a view of the world more selectively focused through the prism of Stephen’s consciousness; each relies more heavily on the stream-of-consciousness technique.¹

Distinguished by its concision, Schutte and Steinberg’s insight would not likely startle a Joycean soul today. As one looks through the lens of “Proteus,” the prism of Stephen’s consciousness spectacularly bends all light. The narrowing the scholars identify reaches its pitch; in lieu of the world one views the words streaming through Stephen’s thought. Tracing these words’ evolving routes, Ellmann notes that “Proteus” “begins with Stephen reading, and it ends with his writing a poem, adding his signature to the signatures of all things.”² This writing a poem caps a similarly sweeping progression. What startles and stirs a Joycean soul aloft in the “Telemachia” is Stephen’s lyric—not the feeble, vampire-inspired quatrain later to surface in “Aeolus” (U 7.522-25),³ but the would-be poet’s lyric-infused, provocative carried-away-ness with language.⁴

By lyric one ought to denote something more specific than the neighboring, polysemous lyrical, often appearing in writing on Joyce. Ellmann’s preface to the Gabler edition of Ulysses, for example, includes lyrical last in a lengthy enumeration: “A whole galaxy of new devices and stances and verbal antics, extravagant, derisive, savage, rollicking, tender, and lyrical, is held in Joyce’s ironic dominion.”⁵ Lawrence, in turn, makes consistent use of the adjective in characterizing “The Dead,” A Portrait, and Ulysses; describing the “literate, formal, poetic language” of the “Telemachia,” she shifts grammatical category in identifying “Woodshadows floated silently by through the morning peace from the stairhead seaward where he gazed” (U 1.242-43) as “a narrative statement that ‘borrows’ Stephen’s lyricism.” Yet Kenner’s twin use of lyrical in the slender Joyce’s Voices leads discussion closest to the idea of lyric proposed above.

Kenner initially selects lyrical to describe the imaginative flights of Mr. Leopold Bloom. Bloom’s mind, contrary to Stephen’s, is given to lexical near misses, and these instances of perifrastic searching extend, Kenner argues, to the congenial character’s “lyrical fantasies.”⁶ To evidence their coincidence, the scholar quotes from among the early lines of “Calypso”:

A shiver of the trees, signal, the evening wind. I pass on. Fading gold sky. A mother watches me from her doorway. She calls her children home in their dark language. High wall: beyond strings twanged. Night sky, moon, violet,
colour of Molly’s new garters. Strings. Listen. A girl playing one of those what do you call them: dulcimers. I pass. (U 4.93-98)

Characterizing the “Telemachia,” Kenner again selects lyrical, here in the context of narrative technique. Joyce, Kenner asserts, “commences Ulysses as a sort of duet for two narrators, or perhaps a conspiracy between them.”

Of the duettists in “Telemachus,” one “attends to the chapter’s housekeeping” and is “better informed about stage management,” while the other, “a more accomplished lyrical technician,” weaves passages of sonorous magic. Kenner chooses the following—the initial sentence of which Lawrence cited above—to evidence this duettist’s music:

Woodshadows floated silently by through the morning peace from the stairhead seaward where he gazed. Inshore and farther out the mirror of water whitened, spurned by lightshod hurrying feet. White breast of the dim sea. The twining stresses, two by two. A hand plucking the harpstrings, merging their twining chords. Wavewhite wedded words shimmering on the dim tide. (U 1.242-47)

This duettist’s Wavewhite wedded words evince expression not, at the very least, prototypically narrative; the offices of prose stand briskly overshadowed by a burst of lyric energy. Yeats’s White breast of the dim sea, whose two by two stressed monosyllables thump at either end of the quoted phrasing, initiates, with the disappearance of finite verbs, a spectacular acoustic eddy along the episode’s narrative stream. The second duettist’s signalling A hand plucking the harpstrings, moreover, recalls in the passage quoted previously the twice named strings twanged and Strings of Bloom’s what do you call them: dulcimers. Both passages allude and, in the linguistic terms specific to them, aspire to a music; both evoke mockingly the music of the lyre; both intimate lyric along the lines of prose.

The section to follow—“His lips lipped and mouthed fleshless lips of air” (U 3.401)—sets forth a model for Stephen’s lyric-infused expression, after which evidence of its presence in the “Telemachia” stands under the subsequent heading “Ghoul! Chewer of corpses!” (U 1.278).

“His lips lipped and mouthed fleshless lips of air”

One ought to begin the making of a model for Stephen’s lyric with a disclaimer: it would be consummate foolery to affirm that, after more than two millennia of debate and productive disagreement, such complex phenomena as lyric and narrative will be definitively, or even partially, resolved here. Rather, the model below—to which evidence later adduced may be compared—establishes lucid parameters for the lyric expression identified. Taking the cue from Senn’s inductive precepts and subtle wit, the purpose underlying inquiry “is not to say anything new but to subsume, under a specific focus, part of what we already know.”

As lyric typically appears cast in lines of limited length grouped in stanzas of limited number, more than the mere typographical arrangement of words on the page informs the model to follow. Having dismissed the typographically visible, however, one is drawn to the pronominally patent: lyric, whose sine qua non constituent since the Renaissance is individual, subjective utterance, posits an I pointing to its presence in the world. Jakobson, a keen observer of poetic language, asserts that, if reduced “to a simple grammatical formula,” lyric implies “invariably the first person of the present tense.” Yeats, in what Vendler terms “one of lyric’s most
joyous self-proclaimings,” simply announces: “I am I, am I . . . ’/All creation shivers/With that sweet cry.”

Jakobson’s formulaic mention of the present tense draws attention to notions of time, crucial to the discerning of lyric along lines of narrative prose. Lawrence, distinguishing in “Proteus” two contrasting species of literary time, finds the “retrospective narrative voice of a conventional novel . . . replaced almost entirely, so that ‘plot’ changes from a form of narrative memory to a rendering of ‘the very process in which meaning is apprehended in life.’” This shift from a form of narrative memory to a present rendering, occasioned in “Proteus” by interior monologue, yields an eclipse of narrative’s sequencing of events recalled. Kenner views these eclipses—those owing to interior monologue and those attributable to the free indirect discourse of his lyrical technician—as “installed in a pocket of time outside the scene’s time clock.” When an I speaking in the present inhabits a pocket of time in the “Telemachia,” two of the three requisites for lyric stand fulfilled.

Regarding the third, Kenner observes that, “taking note of sequential happening in the way of all narrative,” Ulysses complicates the procedure in more than temporal ways, for “what happens in plain sight is sometimes so sparsely narrated we must piece its epiphenomena together, and is sometimes almost concealed by linguistic energies that are affirming motifs of their own.” These concealing linguistic energies constitute a final parameter for Stephen’s lyric-infused expression. Attuned to Joyce’s “orchestration of acoustic, echoing and mating sounds,” Senn characterizes these energies as “a choreography of signifiers that clamour for attention”; Jakobson’s detailing of poeticity yields a schematic understanding of their dance. Engaged in “promoting the palpability of signs,” poeticity does so by heightening the incidence in proximity of equivalent items. Seeking to identify “what kindred grammatical or phonological categories may function as equivalent,” Jakobson reaches the conclusion that “on every level of language the essence of poetic artifice consists in recurrent returns.” In the pages to follow, identification of recurrent returns, whether syntactic, morphological, lexical, phonemic or prosodic, informs the third characteristic of Stephen’s lyric.

Before applying the model above, under the heading “‘Ghoul! Chewer of corpses!’” to Stephen’s inspired evocations of death, one might conduct two trial runs to verify the model’s applicability and fine-tune its accuracy. Mirroring the linguistic self-reflexivity evident in the prior Wavewhite wedded words shimmering, the two trial runs pertain to Stephen’s evocations of language; the second, where the tooth-troubled poet’s lips lipped and mouthed fleshless lips of air, announces the arrival of his vampire-peopled quatrain. The passage to follow, in which wavespeech sounds, constitutes an initial, sustained lyric excursus lending itself to analysis:

In long lassoes from the Cock lake the water flowed full, covering greengoldenly lagoons of sand, rising, flowing. My ashplant will float away. I shall wait. No, they will pass on, passing, chafing against the low rocks, swirling, passing. Better get this job over quick. Listen: a fourworded wavespeech: seeso, hrrs, rsseeiss, oois. Vehement breath of waters amid seasnakes, rearing horses, rocks. In cups of rocks it slops: flop, slop, slap: bounded in barrels. And, spent, its speech ceases. It flows purling, widely flowing, floating foampool, flower unfurling. (U 3.453-60)

The prosodic returns above are relatively minor when compared with other acoustic procedures, yet uninterrupted sequences of accented syllables
nonetheless catch the ear, particularly in the two by two stresses of flowed full
and wavespeech and in the longer, percussive series slops: flop, slop, slap.24
Apart from these drumbeats, rhythm, when demonstrating pattern, tends
to descend, as in the superabundant twelve present participles, ten of which
are disyllabic. The imperative Listen,25 deeply significant due to its
introducing the singular fourworded wavespeech, similarly descends, as do the
moment’s concluding words purling, widely flowing, floating foampool, flower
unfurling, all trochaic disyllables, with the exception of unfurling, an
amphibrachic trisyllable lengthening the close. Such rhythmic regularity
giving way to ending variation may suggest the rippling movement of surf.

This, in itself, pronounced prosodic play is all but overshadowed by the
passage’s extraordinary phonemic returns, initiated in the opening sentence
by the alliterative long lasses and by the consonance echoing in flowed full,
in Cock lake and in greengoldenly lagoons, this last phrasing almost
luxuriously engaging in acoustic iteration. Midway through the moment
and onward to its close, phonemic returns again overwhelm, consonants
standing out in rearing horses, rocks and bounded in barrels, assonance and
consonance sounding in: (1) rocks it slops: flop, slop, slap; (2) spent, its
speech ceases; and (3) flows purling, widely flowing, floating foampool, flower
unfurling. Such density of acoustic iteration recalls Senn’s identifying a
choreography of signifiers clamorously calling attention to its heightened, self-
referential energies. When to these signifiers one adds the semantically
empty seesoo, hris, rsseeiss, ooos, an onomatopoeic rendering of wavespeech
indeed, one is undeniably in the midst of what might be named the writing
of sound.

The writing of sound introduces significant fine-tuning to the model for
lyric proposed above. “Etymology,” Senn asserts, “is the unveiling of past
Protean shapes,” and lyric’s past Protean shapes lead straight to music.
Derived from the Greek lyra, lyric may be distinguished from its generic
counterparts—narrative or epic and dramatic poetry—by virtue of its
retaining “most prominently the elements which evidence its origins in
musical expression.”26 Clearly one no longer expects to hear lyric sung; the
melodious strains sweetening the air would likely hold the effects they held
for the Duke in Twelfth Night: “. . . surfeiting,/The appetite may sicken, and
so die.”27 Neither is discussion advanced by facile, mystic confusion of
music and language, for each organizes the air in decidedly differing ways.
Elements evidencing lyric’s origins in music, rather, lie in phonological
patterning, in rhythmic and phonemic iteration, in echoing attention to how
words, alone and in combination, sound. Foregrounding so the acoustic
properties of language, lyric, more intensely than any other species of verbal
art, engages in the equivalence inherent in poeticity.

In recurrent returns at the level of words, the wavespeech excursus
demonstrates similarly dense iteration. Lexical identities double in the
present participles passing and flowing and in the plural noun rocks, while
polyptoton outstands as the passage’s dominant trope, linking the
grammatically various water, waters; flowed, flowing, flows; float, floating; pass,
passing; and the oblique wavespeech, speech. Attention to grammatical
categories, moreover, draws the eye to finite verbs, which move from the
past (flowed) to the future (will float, shall wait, will pass on) to the present (an
elided modal in Better get, the imperative Listen, and slops, ceases, flows). The
passage, particularly in its temporal transformation and movement to an
enduring present, thereby engages in the second parameter for Stephen’s
lyric set forth above.

As a moment assigned to the sphere of Stephen’s evocations of language,
the passage, after its seesoo, hrss provection, identifies wavespeech as Vehement breath of waters, breath being the antecedent to the subject pronoun in it slops and to the possessive adjective in its speech ceases. The passage thereby posits a primary language of nature, echoing both the episode opening “Signatures of all things I am here to read, scaspawn and seawrack, the nearing tide, that rusty boot” (U 3.2–3) and the previous Waveshite wedded words shimmering in “Telemachus.” The first citation, given its emphasis on breath and speech, and the latter two, given their Signatures and words shimmering, together present this primary language as a bivalent whole—as sound and sign. The reader hears invisibly breathing worldspeech, and objects visible to the eye become a writing to be deciphered by reading.

Not all Stephen’s language-viewing evocations, however, bear lofty metaphysical reflection. In its Joycean conception, the language of nature could not help but envelop the less lofty language of women and men. What more explicit example to cite than the would-be poet’s writing as “Proteus” draws to a close. Rhythm plays a part, yet other returns steal the show, in this second trial run:

At the passage’s outset, Stephen has received what all poets tune their ears to: inspiration. One suspects the inspired phrasing appears just prior to the deictic Here—in the jumbled, macabre “He comes, pale vampire, through storm his eyes, his bat sails bloodying the sea, mouth to her mouth’s kiss” (U 3.397–98). Not wishing to lose what has been kind enough to arrive unexpectedly, Stephen seeks to write it down, as Senn interprets the initial Put a pin in that chap, will you. Yet, rummaging through his pockets in search of paper, Stephen finds only banknotes and Old Deasy’s letter, on the blank end of which, narrative notes, Stephen scribbled words. The putting of the pin in the phrasing spans the entire moment quoted, resonant with the writing of sound. Phonemic play inheres in: (1) Put a pin in that chap; (2) you . . . two . . . glue; (3) tablets . . . kiss . . . Must . . . mouth’s kiss . . . lips . . . fleshless lips; (4) moomb. Oomb, allwombing tomb; and (5) mouth moulded. In iteration of lengthlier items, polyptoton stands out, particularly in the six variations on mouth,” the three on lips, and the two on roar. Simple lexical repetition appears in the abbreviated em, Here, and kiss. Indeed, in No. Must be two of em. Glue em well, Stephen affirms one of the several patterns of repetition detailed above.

As Kenner’s lyrical technician takes over in His lips lipped and mouthed fleshless lips of air, one hears a ten-syllable sequence whose opening and close rise iambically. These fleshless lips of air allude to the inspired phrasing received; Stephen speaks it to hear how it sounds. Yet Stephen’s recitation fails to reach its second noun, drifting quickly into moomb. Oomb, allwombing tomb and, taking up again the unspeeched, then shooting off into a cataclysmic, universe-forming ooeelah: roar of cataractic planets, globed, blazing, roaring wayawayawayawayaway. To Ulysses’ resident fledgling poet alighting on inspiration, this is the birth of the writing of sound.
“Ghoul! Chopper of corpses!”

When, after three episodes getting to know Bloom and midway through “Aeolus,” one suddenly views the verses whose origin “Proteus” holds, one is struck by their polished ludicrousness. The Stephen of Ulysses, it is a commonplace to affirm, differs markedly from the Stephen at the close of A Portrait; few readers indeed would have foreseen the young, poetic artificer of A Portrait setting out to voice “the uncreated conscience of my race” (P 5.2790) producing the lines of verse below:

On swift sail flaming
From storm and south
He comes, pale vampire,
Mouth to my mouth. (U 7.522-25)

One may be forgiven for not having predicted Ireland’s uncreated conscience were peopled by vampires sailing swiftly aflame over stormy seas straight to a lyric speaker’s mouth.

Moving from confident ambition to morose brooding, the Stephens of A Portrait and Ulysses, Kenner discerns, differ in one particularly significant way—their shifting views of father and mother:

Stephen in Ulysses is no longer in search of a father, as he was in the Portrait. He is obsessed by a dead mother [emphasis added], and as for fathers, living or mythic, elected or adopted, his present instinct is to get clear of them.

Implicit in the appeal of a pale vampire, hinted at in the previous, rhythmically-sprung moomb. Oomb, allwombing tomb, this obsession yields Stephen’s inspired evocations of death.

Prominent throughout the “Telemachia,” evocations of death fuse with lyric expression in attention to two contemporaries, one anonymous, the other known. The deaths of these contemporaries, by virtue of their repeated hold on Stephen’s imagination, inform the lyric excursus to follow. Verses drawn from Milton’s Lycidas in “Nestor” (U 2.64-66, 78-79), indicating the elegy’s inspiration in the death by drowning of Edward King in the Irish Sea, echo mention in “Telemachus” and Proteus of the anonymous contemporary: a drowning victim whose body has yet to surface. In episode 1 Stephen overhears two men—“businessman, boatman” (U 1.669-70)—speculating about the appearance of the unrecovered body. The latter conjectures: “There’s five fathoms out there . . . It’ll be swept up that way when the tide comes in about one. It’s nine days today” (U 1.673-74). In instant recognition of the death, Stephen’s interior monologue reads:

The man that was drowned. A sail veering about the blank bay waiting for a swollen bundle to bob up, roll over to the sun a puffy face, saltwhite. Here I am. (U 1.675-77)

Pronounced phonemic returns, particularly of sputtering bilabials, run through about the blank bay and bundle to bob up, while labiodental consonance underlines puffy face, a phrasing aligned semantically with swollen bundle. Assonantal emphasis on the search for the body in sail . . . bay waiting draws attention to a curious inversion in the passage: the sail is anthropomorphized as waiting, while the dead body is reduced to a
dehumanized bundle to bob up, the verb proper, in the context of water, to fishing and to floating fruit.

By way of syntax, one notes the recurring absence of principal verbs, with the striking exception of Here I am, as emphatic an affirmation of lyric presence as one might desire. Thus distancing discourse from recalled temporal succession, syntax casts as well peculiar light on saltwhite, owing to the adjective’s odd, comma-prefaced placement after a modified noun. This procedure resembles in sequence what Steinberg identifies as “typical of Stephen’s stream of consciousness—the appositive,”37 patent in the sentence “They are coming, waves” (U 3.55-56). Slightly different in grammatical nature, Stephen’s delaying specificity above involves a second adjective reformulating a first, thereby conferring heightened ghostly pallor to a puffy face.

The brief passage’s outstanding returns may be rhythmic, for the three three-to-four stress sequences blank bay wait(ing), bob up, roll ov(er), and face, saltwhite yield to the concluding Here I am. Rhythmically prefigured, Here I am enact identification with the unrecovered victim—a vivid enacting of identity indeed, conjuring the bobbing-up, rolling-over appari tion of the corpse’s puffy face only to see through its vacant eyes. With grim Baudelairean delight,38 the concluding Here I am recalls the children’s game hide-and-seek, for the child looked for, once found, joyously utters the phrase. This playful undertone of colloquial usage mimics both the literal search for the victim and the larger linguistic, even theatrical play in the passage.

References to The man that was drowned multiply in “Proteus,” where mention of “The man that was drowned nine days ago off Maiden’s rock” (U 3.322-23) first appears amid Stephen’s interior questioning of his own bravery. With acoustically similar principal verbs and admirably juxtaposed gerunds, Stephen reproachfully compares his fear and Mulligan’s strength: “He saved men from drowning and you shake at a cur’s yelping” (U 3.317-18). Having witnessed Stephen gravitate toward all that is ghastly, one sees him here in a less macabre light; he desires to save The man—“The truth, spit it out. I would want to. I would try” (U 3.323)—yet doubts his ability to do so: “I am not a strong swimmer. Water cold soft” (U 3.323-24). The lengthly associational sequence in which this first mention stands turns comic before concluding with pathos. Stephen would have saved the victim

If I had land under my feet. I want his life still to be his, mine to be mine. A drowning man. His human eyes scream to me out of horror of his death. I ... With him together down ... I could not save her. Waters: bitter death: lost. (U 3.327-30)

Dehumanized in “Telemachus” as a swollen bundle about to bob up, The man that was drowned here appears matter-of-factly restored—A drowning man—and given piercing vision with the metaphor His human eyes scream. Contrasting with the bleached puffy face through which, like a mask, Stephen sought to see in Here I am, these human eyes resist identification, reaching out of horror of his death. No longer mere play, the prospect of dying here delights Stephen less.

Conjuring the moment of death rather than the drowned man’s surfacing, the prose above draws on numerous patterns of equivalence. Syntactic parallelism inheres in his life still to be his, mine to be mine; the highlighting of stressed, parallel pronouns foreshadows the subsequent, isolated I ... and sudden, discordant her in I could not save her—a clear allusion to the second death haunting Stephen’s mind. Lexical repetition stands out in the sole
word death, while phonemic returns link human . . . horror and the
chiastically consonantal Waters . . . lost. Yet rhythm stands out as the
passage’s principal protagonist.

Attridge characterizes the experience of reading meter as “an onward
movement which at times approaches a marked regularity and at times
departs from it, constantly arousing and thwarting rhythmic expectations.”
Something similar occurs in the prose above. The passage begins with the
rhythmically parallel If I had land//under my feet, leaves this pattern only to
fall into the equally parallel, counterpointed still to be his,//mine to be mine,
after which iambics appear in A drowning man. His human eyes. Departing from
iambic regularity, the prose soon recovers it in the lengthly, concluding With
him together down ... I could not save her. Waters: bitter death, the phrasing
following the ellipsis being a perfect iambic pentameter. The sequence
thereby leaves lost prosodically—and, by virtue of punctuation,
syntactically—alone at passage-end, drawing attention to the stressed
adjective’s removal from a clear noun modified; lost may refer to her or may
refer to him, an ambiguity only resolved by seeing it modify both.

As “Proteus” draws to a close, these previous evocations of The man that
was drowned, including a verse—Sunk though he be beneath the watery
floor—lifted intact from “Lycidas,”40 converge in a striking new one:

Five fathoms out there. Full fathom five thy father lies. At one, he said. Found
drowned. High water at Dublin bar. Driving before it a loose drift of rubble,
fanshoals of fishes, silly shells. A corpse rising saltwhite from the undertow,
bobbing a pace a pace a porpoise landward. There he is. Hook it quick. Pull.
Sunk though he be beneath the watery floor. We have him. Easy now.

Bag of corpsegas sopping in foul brine. A quiver of minnows, fat of a spongy
tibit, flash through the slits of his buttoned trouserfly. God becomes man
becomes fish becomes barnacle goose becomes feather bed mountain. Dead
breaths I living breathe, tread dead dust, devour a urinous offal from all dead.
Hauled stark over the gunwale he breathes upward the stench of his green
grate, his leprous nosehole snoring to the sun.

A seachange this, brown eyes saltblue. (U 3.470-83)

Previous evocations appear above in the characteristic Joycean recycling
of phrasing and scene. The initial boatman, businessman conversation is
echoed in the identical five fathoms out there, in at one, recalling about one, in
High water, recalling When the tide comes in, and in the imagined dialogue
There he is. Hook it quick. Pull . . . We have him. Easy now.41 Allusions to the
Here I am passage surface in the identical saltwhite, in bobbing a pace a pace a
porpoise, recalling bundle to bob up . . . a puffy face, in There he is, adapting Here
I am, and in snoring to the sun, recalling roll over to the sun. Less prominent,
the Waters: bitter death: lost sequence’s human eyes scream prefigure
concluding attention to brown eyes saltblue.

Enveloping these revoicings, the lengthly moment surpasses them in
iterative design. Lexical equivalence takes over where the twofold repetition
of death in the Waters: bitter death: lost passage left off. In grammatically
varying category, dead begins, ends, and stands in the middle of Dead breaths
I living breathe, tread dead dust, devour a urinous offal from all dead, thereby
constituting an instance of epanalepsis. The word, moreover, is
phonemically underscored by assonance (Dead breaths . . . tread dead) and
by the trippingly alliterative tread dead dust, devour, while prosodic
highlighting inheres in the superaverage seven stresses amid the sequence’s
first nine syllables, notably in the uninterrupted breathe, tread dead dust.
These interweaving iterative patterns are complemented by the polyptoton
breaths . . . breathe . . . breathes, in sharp semantic contrast to the death around it. Stephen, engaging in paradoxical breathing of Dead breaths, seeing himself tread dead dust and devour a urinous offal from all dead, establishes an interwoven unity of being and dying.

Outstanding at the passage’s close, lexical returns are prominent at its outset, particularly in the chiastic Five fathoms . . . fathom five, blending the boatman’s prediction with Ariel’s song in The Tempest.42 The superabundant alliterative “F’s” in Five fathoms . . . Full fathom five thy father lies anticipate, in addition, the consonantal, period-enclosed Found drowned, whose two stressed monosyllables also engage in internal rhyme. An oblique polyptoton reaching across the greater part of the passage, saltwhite winks at saltblue. Simple, fourfold iteration of becomes just before the instance of epanalepsis strings together a sentence whose rhythmic behavior is striking: God becomes man becomes fish becomes barnacle goose becomes featherbed mountain. Stephen’s opening “Rhythm begins, you see. I hear . . .” (U 3.23-24), while slightly erroneous in the descriptive exactness it flaunts, alerts the reader to instances of rhythmic regularity: the italicized sequence above unites six acatalectic dactyls and a final, expectation-thwarting trochee.

Morphological returns, finally, locate the moment well outside the scene’s time clock. The present tense conjugations lies/is/have/becomes/breathe/tread/breathes, the reported speech At one, he said, the six present participles, and the two imperatives transpose the prose from a retrospective form of narrative memory, as Lawrence put it above, to a vivid rendering of a mind in flight. Phonemic patterning, in addition to that noted above, accentuates the vivid imagining in drowned . . . Driving . . . drift//fiasco of fishes, silly shells//Hook it quick//Bag of corpse gas sopping . . . brine//quiver of minions/offal from all//green grave//and nosehole snoring. Capping the writing of sound, uninterrupted stresses thump through the concluding brown eyes saltblue.

The anonymity of The man that was drowned along with the corpse’s unknown surfacing allow Stephen the dispassionate distance—exemplified by the Baudelaire-inspired mockery of death as sleep in leprous nosehole snoring to the sun—from which to let his mind move at playful ease. This is not the case with the second contemporary to inspire lyric excursus; this death stands Stephen’s hair on end. Alluded to in the aforementioned change of pronominal gender With him together down . . . I could not save her. Waters: bitter death: lost, the death of Stephen’s mother, “Mrs Mary Dedalus (born Goulding)” (U 17.952), leaves Stephen “trembling at his soul’s cry” (U 1.282).

Imagining his conception in “Proteus,” Stephen singles out his mother’s breath and father’s voice and eyes:

Wombed in sin darkness I was too, made not begotten. By them, the man with my voice and my eyes and a ghostwoman with ashes on her breath. They clasped and sundered, did the coupler’s will. (U 3.45-47)

The phrasing a ghostwoman with ashes on her breath, whose sole compound anticipates the subsequent, threefold “Bridebed, childbed, bed of death, ghostcandled” (U 3.396), constitutes an eerie instance of the Joycean leitmotif.44 The distinctive ashes previously appear in “Nestor,” transformed and amplified along with an odour of rosewood in phrasing similarly evoking Stephen’s mother’s death: “She was no more: the trembling skeleton of a twig burnt in the fire, an odour of rosewood and wetted ashes” (U 2.144-46). This image of a burning body, particularly the rhythmically counterpointed,
kinesthetic trembling skeleton of a twig, lends intensity and semantic coherence to its wetted ashes.

These leitmotifs, to appear prominently amid Stephen’s lyric-infused expression, find their first mention early in “Telemachus.” The paragraph to follow introduces them and seems so ingenuously narrative as to give no hint of Stephen’s shadowy presence:

Stephen, an elbow rested on the jagged granite, leaned his palm against his brow and gazed at the fraying edge of his shiny black coatsleeve. Pain, that was not yet the pain of love, fretted his heart. Silently, in a dream she had come to him after her death, her wasted body within its loose brown graveclothes giving off an odour of wax and rosewood, her breath, that had bent upon him, mute, reproachful, a faint odour of wetted ashes. (U 1.100-105)

With the omniscient clarification that was not yet the pain of love, narrative yields to Stephen’s experience as he might articulate it. The distinctive an odour of... of wetted ashes, along with her soiled body within its loose brown graveclothes, draw unequivocally on Stephen’s linguistic resources, as free indirect discourse repeatedly reveals.

Lyric moments inspired by Mary Dedalus’s death appear as Stephen’s interior monologue does. A first instance follows right on the heels of Woodshadows floated silently by... quoted at this essay’s outset. The virtuosity of Kenner’s lyrical technician spills over Wavewhite wedded words shimmering on the dim tide and into the paragraph below before giving way to first-person discourse:

A cloud began to cover the sun slowly, wholly, shadowing the bay in deeper green. It lay beneath him, a bowl of bitter waters. Fergus’ song: I sang it alone in the house, holding down the long dark chords. Her door was open: she wanted to hear my music. Silent with awe and pity I went to her bedside. She was crying in her wretched bed. For those words, Stephen: love’s bitter mystery.

Where now? (U 1.248-54)45

Recurrent phonemic returns first catch the eye, sounding initially in the alliterative cloud... cover and unmistakably in the assonantal slowly, wholly, shadowing, whose “o’s” later echo through bowl, alone, holding, chords, door, open, and those. The resonant metaphor a bowl of bitter waters reverberates in two directions. Its bowl harks back to the previous “A bowl of white china had stood beside her deathbed holding the green sluggish bile which she had torn up from her rotting liver by fits of loud groaning vomiting” (U 1.108-10). In contrarily forward movement, bitter waters nods toward the adjective’s lexical repetition in bitter mystery and, much further along, to the chiastically opening Waters: bitter death: lost.

Acoustic equivalence does not end here. From the internally rhyming bay... lay, assonantal deeper green, and alliterative house, holding one moves to pronounced prosodic patterning. Stephen’s singing of “Who Goes with Fergus?,” lexically foregrounded by the polyptoton song/sang, receives rhythmic emphasis in the counterpointed Fergus’ song and in the percussive long dark chords. In by turns binary and ternary groups, rhythm rises through A cloud began to cover the sun, descends in slowly, wholly, shadowing, and rises again through the bay in deeper green. A repeating pattern throughout is of rhymes seemingly that fall at their ends, manifest in a bowl of bitter waters//Her door was open//she wanted to hear my music//and I went to her bedside. These sequences suggest death as descending breath and prefigure the descending, syllabically expanding love’s bitter mystery.46
The lyric moment above ends with the question Where now?, whose elision yields ambiguity, and whose adverb shifts discourse into the present. The question at once asks where the dead Mary Dedalus has gone and, in light of the prose that follows, where Stephen continues to find her: in his mind’s eye’s memories, particularly its soul-piercing images unveiled in dreams. These images In a dream inform a final lyric moment whose opening free indirect discourse holds the leitmotifs identified:

In a dream, silently, she had come to him, her wasted body within its loose graveclothes giving off an odour of wax and rosewood, her breath, bent over him with mute secret words, a faint odour of wetted ashes.

Her glazing eyes, staring out of death, to shake and bend my soul. On me alone. The ghostcandle to light her agony. Ghostly light on the tortured face.

Her hoarse loud breath rattling in horror, while all prayed on their knees. Her eyes on me to strike me down. Liliata rutilantium te confessorum turma circumdet: iubilantium te virginum chorus excipiat.

Ghoul! Chower of corpses!

No, mother! Let me be and let me live. (U 1.270-79)

Morphological equivalence stands out above as it has not stood out before. Recurring infinitives of purpose, to begin, accent the dream’s explicit reproach. One knows from Mulligan that Stephen refused to kneel at his dying mother’s bedside.\(^{26}\) The dream above dramatizes the moment in which Stephen refused to do so: Her hoarse loud breath rattling in horror, while all prayed on their knees. Her eyes on me to strike me down. Just as the infinitive of purpose to strike me down reveals why Her eyes stare, the previous Her glazing eyes, staring out of death—eerily evoking an opaque glow—hold a similar motive: to shake and bend my soul.\(^{26}\) These three infinitives—complemented by a differently behaving fourth one in The ghostcandle to light her agony—stand intensified by the syntactic doubling On me alone . . . Her eyes on me. Prosodically highlighted as well, their rhythm rises in iambic, reproving vigor.

Other morphological returns stand out. After the opening paragraph’s had come to him, conjugated verbs disappear, yielding to the infinitives above and to the present participles giving off, glazing, staring, and rattling. In each case, the participle is semantically supercharged: the first modifies the compound graveclothes and has as its direct object the leitmotif an odour of wax and rosewood; the second and third modify the eerily luminous eyes; the fourth onomatopoeically mimics hoarse loud breath, sickly breathing that accords with the prior loud groaning vomiting.

Lexical equivalence yields the twofold presence of odour, eyes, breath, let and the complex polyptotons ghostcandle to light . . . Ghostly light. These repetitions, together with the Latin prayer’s Liliata rutilantium, foreground the dream’s attention to sight and scent. Attention to sound inheres in the passage’s own choreography of signifiers, particularly in the consonantal hoarse . . . horror, in the alliterative graveclothes giving//breath, bent///let . . . live, and in the assonantal odour . . . rosewood//glazing . . . staring . . . shake/// soul . . . alone . . . ghost///Ghoul! Chewer.

Underlying rhythms, moreover, pulse beneath the phonemic soundstream. The iambic infinitives of purpose extend their rhythmic pattern to contiguous phrasing, as in: (1) to shake and bend my soul. On me alone; (2) while all prayed on their knees; and (3) Her eyes on me to strike me down. Instances of counterpoint are prevalent. Ternary counterpoint opens the passage—In a dream, silently—and anticipates the subsequently counterpointed, binary Ghostly light on the tortured face. The rhythmic patterning in The ghostcandle to light her agony, no less regular, is more
challenging to characterize; the iamb to light serves as a hinge uniting two identical sequences. Percussive stresses, finally, beat through the uninterrupted sequences loose graveclothes giving//hoarse loud breath rattling//and the monosyllables Let me be (and) let me live.

Woven together, these myriad patterns of equivalence compose elevated lyric expression. Yet as the passage draws to a close, syntax signals a shift. The phantasmagoric, affirming fragments of Stephen’s dream give way to a sudden, exclamative negation: No, mother! In the parallel imperatives that follow, Stephen, capable of the fine lexical precision inherent in Ghoul!, semantically gains little in repeating Let me be and let me live. The repetition owes to acute emotion, yet it also gives the lie to a Ghoul! outside his mind. Morose brooder, Chewer of corpses!, would-be poet of meager verse, Stephen, obsessed, as Kenner observed, by a dead mother, is sunk in what the scholar terms ‘anguished unbelief.’

“. . . ineluctable modality of the audible”

Hopkins wrote, describing the lengthy reflection leading to his metrical innovations: “I had long had haunting my ear the echo of a new rhythm.” To the reader of Ulysses, Joyce’s unfolding words on the page leave a similar haunting of the ear. Something ineluctably audible inheres in the writer’s selecting and sequencing of signs.

This ineluctable audibility is as difficult to pin down as it is easy to perceive. For uncanny echoing in Ulysses, Senn observes, extends even to the portrayal of a miniscule Master Patrick Aloysius Dignam, whose brief appearance in “Wandering Rocks” (U 10.1121-74) yields “a kind of temperamental tune that we intuit much better than we could accurately describe.” If the fleeting presence of an orphaned adolescent stands dignified in Joyce’s acous tic cosmos with a kind of temperamental tune, one might well listen for the music of a Stephen or a Bloom.

The passages in the “Telemachia” examined above, occurring amid the silence of scene, on the one hand, and the silence of reading, on the other, move sonorously through the mind if silently through air. The paradox points to a principal facet of Joyce’s genius: the writer’s words, like A Portrait’s “drops of water in a fountain falling softly in the brimming bowl” (P 1.1847-48), overflow and spill with sound. The paradox lends strength to the conviction that, in setting lyric on Stephen’s lips and death upon his tongue, Joyce leaves before the eye writing for the ear.

Notes

4. The phrasing proactive carried-away-ness appears here in the sense that Senn gives it in “Joycean Provections.” Far from belonging, as the scholar puts it, to a select group of “gasp terms” intended to elicit “respiratory indication of reverence,” the noun provection simply signals “a recurrent, basic, Joycean motion” demonstrating “a tendency to overdo, to break out of norms, to go beyond.” See


7. Lawrence 42.


12. The verse in “Who Goes with Fergus?” just prior to “And the white breast of the dim sea”—“And rules the shadows of the wood”—helps to clarify the passage-opening *Woodshadows*, a self-explaining compound otherwise resisting explanation.


17. Yeats 156.

18. Lawrence 40. The author quotes Goldberg’s *The Classical Temper* at her sentence’s close.

19. Kenner, *Ulysses* 98. Evoking axes rather than pockets, Ellmann conceives of the contrasting species of time in light of the limits of Joyce’s Homeric borrowing: “. . . at a certain point Homer . . . did not suffice as Joyce’s example. The clarity, the movement across seas and years, the sequentiality, the Attic light—these were very well, and Joyce sometimes imitates them . . . [Yet] Joyce had in mind another movement, which might be called vertical as against Homer’s horizontality, and which would be characterized not so much by progression as by a furling and a refurling of thought” (emphasis added). See Richard Ellmann, *The Consciousness of Joyce* (London: Faber, 1977) 43-44.


21. Senn 45-46. Senn’s striking metaphor springs from inspection of the following sentence in *U* 17.2241-43: “He kissed the plump mellow yellow smellow melons of her rump, on each plump melonous hemisphere, in their mellow yellow furrow, with obscure prolonged provocative melonsmellonous osculation.” “In this sensuous whirl,” Senn observes, “abstractions are momentarily suspended. We may experience *mellow* as touching *yellow* and generating *smellow* and squinting at *furrow*. Or we notice how *plump* kisses the distant word *rump* and *obscure* strives to mate with *osculation*. The sounds and shapes of words seem to match the bodily shapes and sensations.”

22. Jakobson 70.


25. The imperative Listen appears as well in Bloom’s what do you call them: dulcimers moment quoted above. When the reader overhears a character conatively telling himself to listen, one’s ears perk up.


30. In a footnote to "Anagnostic Probes," Senn identifies a comic link between Mr. Deasy’s letter and Stephen’s quatrains: "Ironically, Deasy’s letter, the part not usurped by Stephen, also contains 'mouth.' Ireland’s agricultural threat and Stephen’s fictional conceit seem to chime when, just after we read ‘Mouth to my mouth,’ Professor MacHugh puts his foot in: ‘Foot and mouth?’ (U 7.527)” (30).

31. The unexpected discovery in “Aeolus” of writing begun in “Proteus” illustrates Senn’s notion of reading *Ulysses* as “a halting temporal progression with inevitable glances backward that reinterpret what was apprehended before, in perpetual retroactive resemantification” (75, emphasis added). “No reader” of "Proteus," Senn continues, “could tell what exactly the words are that Stephen records, except that ‘mouth’ and ‘kiss’ are probably featured. Revelation has to await a scene in the newspaper office of ‘Aeolus’ when a bit of paper torn off elicits comment. It is then that we read, this time in Stephen’s mind, but arranged as though they were laid out on paper, four neat lines of verse…” (85).

32. It is striking to note that Stephen’s quatrains resemble—in syllable count and rhyme scheme—two stanzas in *Chamber Music*, specifically the third of XVIII, “O sweetheart, hear you,” and the opening of XX, “In the dark pinewood.” It may be that with *On swift sail flaming* … Joyce sought to burlesque his own early poetry.

33. Kenner, *Ulysses* 17 (emphasis added).

34. The foregrounding of war in “Nestor,” for example, conjures often gruesome imagery, particularly as the episode advances. The grisliest evocation appears amid Stephen’s equating the schoolboys’ game of hockey and military struggle; while both owe to “the joust of life” (U 2.315), the latter yields “slush and uproar of battles, the frozen deathspew of the slain, a shout of spearspikes baited with men’s bloodied guts” (U 2.317-18).


36. The *sail veering* here vaguely anticipates the *swift sail flaming* in Stephen’s quatrains above.


38. Borrowed Baudelairean celebration of the putrid and the rotting surfaces particularly in “Proteus.” “Une Charogne,” poem XXIX of *Les Fleurs du Mal*, depicts with hideous pleasure a carcass similar to the “bloated carcass of a dog” which, narrative notes, “lay lolling on bladderwrack” (U 3.286). The fourth stanza of “Une Charogne” reads: “Et le ciel regardait la carcasse superbe/Comme une fleur s’épanouir./La puanteur était si forte, que sur l’herbe/Vous crûtes vous évanouir.” See Charles Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975) 1: 31. Something similar to this sky-sighting of a *carcasse superbe* inheres in Stephen’s remaining seated “on a stool of rock” (U 3.284) near the dead dog’s *bloated* body, in the paronomastic lay loll’d on bladderwrack, and in narrative attention to the living dog Tatters’ inspection of his swollen *brother*: “The carcass lay on his path. He stopped, sniffed, stalked round it, brother, nosing closer, went round it sniffing rapidly like a dog all over the dead dog’s bedraggled fell” (U 3.348-50).


40. Gifford (65) identifies the verse, previously lineated and italicized in “Nestor” (U 2.66), as line 167 of the elegy.

41. It is curious to note how the verse from “Lycidas” is placed smack in the midst of this imagined dialogue. One would not expect rescuing boatmen to be ready of tongue with elegiac recitation. The placement signals just how deeply the imagined dialogue is infused with Stephen’s utterance.

42. In typical Joycean doubling, Prospero’s magical conjuring of the storm—and apparent drowning victims—parallels Stephen’s linguistic conjuring above. Unquoted fragments of Ariel’s song— “Those were pearls that were his eyes” and “But doth suffer a sea change” — prefigure the concluding *A seachange this, brown eyes saltblue*. See William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, ed. David Bevington, 3rd ed. (Glenview: Scott, 1980) 1.2.399 and 401.
43. By Kenner’s count (Ulysses 152), “Stephen’s mother has been dead for fifty-one weeks.” Kenner bases his calculation on mention in “Ithaca” of Bloom’s “statement explanatory of his absence on the occasion of the interment of Mrs Mary Dedalus (born Goulding), 26 June 1903, vigil of the anniversary of the decease of Rudolph Bloom (born Virag)” (U 17.952-53).

44. Litz highlights this stylistic practice: “Ulysses contains hundreds of leitmotifs, ranging from important associations to distinctive phrases, and these are repeated, amplified, and transformed to create a feeling of ‘musical’ development.” See A. Walton Litz, The Art of James Joyce: Method and Design in Ulysses and Finnegans Wake (London: Oxford UP, 1961) 65.

45. Ellmann records in James Joyce the immense significance Joyce attached in youth to “Who Goes with Fergus?” After seeing Yeats’s The Countess Cathleen performed in 1899, Joyce, deeply moved by the lyric’s “feverish discontent and promise of carefree exile,” “set the poem to music and praised it as the best lyric in the world.” Ellmann further details Joyce’s almost liturgical singing of the lyric to his dying brother and mother, the exact circumstances, regarding the latter, evoked above. See Richard Ellmann, James Joyce, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1982) 67, 94, and 135-36.

46. Mary Dedalus’s abovequoted loud groaning vomiting is identically rhopalic.

47. “You could have knelt down, damn it, Kinch, when your dying mother asked you” (U 1.91-92).

48. Despite their different tenor, Stephen’s evocations of his mother’s death and of The man that was drowned share one characteristic: heightened attention to eyes. The mother’s glazing eyes, staring out of death recall the drowning victim, whose human eyes scream. With this common element in mind, Stephen’s pronounal lapse—shifting from him to her—in the Waters: bitter death: lost sequence makes more sense.

49. Kenner, Ulysses 37.

50. Hopkins 143-44.

51. Senn 70.