Between Aesthetics and Politics:
Music in James Joyce, Ezra Pound, and Sylvia Townsend Warner

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Figure 1. *Wind Quintet Op.26*, Arnold Schoenberg (1923–4).

Figure 2. Canto 75, *The Cantos of Ezra Pound*. New York: New Directions, 1996.
Abstract

This thesis explores the relationships between music, literature, aesthetics and politics in the novels of James Joyce, Sylvia Townsend Warner, and the poetry of Ezra Pound, to show the political relevance of how discourses of musical transcendence appear in these texts. These authors were notably political: Pound was involved with Italian fascism, Warner a Communist Marxist, while Joyce critics have been invested in claiming for him a liberal, humanist political position that is reflected in his writing. This allows me to analyse their engagement with music in light of their politics in order to make connections between aesthetics and politics through music in modernist literature.

The texts analysed in this thesis are Joyce’s Chamber Music and Ulysses, Pound’s Cantos, his early essays and articles, and his musical theories ‘absolute rhythm’ and ‘Great Bass’, and finally Warner’s Mr Fortune’s Maggot, ‘The Music at Long Verney’, and The Corner That Held Them. I use a methodology, informed by the musicology and philosophy of T.W. Adorno, that moves between aesthetic and social approaches to music. I analyse the political significance of Joyce’s and Pound’s appropriation of musical forms as part of a radical departure from traditional aesthetic practices to articulate a newly modern subjectivity, and arrive at an analysis of Warner’s exploration of the tension between music as both transcendent aesthetic paradigm and material object with political meanings and functions. I argue that the extent to which writers and scholars continue to refer to discourses of musical transcendence as a way of exploring and representing humanity’s relationship with the world means that analyses of music’s social grounding, which can reject problems of signification and meaning, are not sufficient to explain the variety of functions music can fulfil in writing and in thought.
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Introduction

This thesis analyses music in texts by James Joyce, Ezra Pound and Sylvia Townsend Warner to explore how modernist authors handled the traditions of aesthetic autonomy they inherited, and how they navigated emergent ideas about art as socially grounded. Music in the work of Joyce and Pound shows that the break with nineteenth-century aesthetics is not as definite as modernism proclaimed, and through comparison with Warner’s fiction we can see the enduring significance of historical discourses of musical transcendence from which the ‘high’ modernists attempt to, but do not fully, disassociate themselves. While analyses of music (and music in literature) have moved from the aesthetic to the social, by using a methodology informed by Theodor W. Adorno’s dialectical approach to music I bring the two poles into a productive tension, drawing out the political relevance of aesthetic judgements, and how aesthetic experiences affect and inform social and political interactions. Through music canonical authors are revisited and the extent of their radicalism is revised, and analysing Warner’s writing after Joyce and Pound shows the complexity of her engagement with music, and the necessity of an approach to music in modernist literature that considers both aesthetics and politics.

Drawing on Adorno’s dialectical method to analyse music makes it possible to revisit these texts in relation to his conception of modernism. Adorno explicates the negative dialectic of modernist art as not just asserting its newness through innovation, but negating that which went before it: ‘The experience of the modern says more, even though its concept, however qualitative it may be, labours under its own abstractness. Its concept is privative; since its origins it is more the negation of what no longer holds
than a positive slogan’.¹ If modern art is the necessarily failed attempt to master the experience of modernity because it recognises the failure of language to sufficiently communicate meaning, modernism becomes a negative category as primarily a negation of tradition. As Fredric Jameson understands this, ‘what drives modernism to innovate is not some vision of the future or the new, but rather the deep conviction that certain forms and expression, procedures and techniques, can no longer be used, are worn out … and must be creatively avoided’.² The use of musically-inspired language and form by Joyce and Pound is part of innovative attempts to communicate the experience of modernity, because music, as Brad Bucknell notes, appears to offer a medium for non-lexical communication of ‘deeper significance’.³ However, and without negating those observations about the creative ways modernists referred to music, by analysing music we can see some of the traditions and concepts that still hold in texts by Joyce, Pound, and Warner, and thus some conceptual categories that are still useful for understanding human experiences.

Texts by Joyce, Pound and Warner are particularly appropriate to explore musical aesthetics as historically situated and altering. To claim aesthetic elevation through musical writing, as Pound does through his musically-inspired use of *vers libre* (free verse), and as Joyce does by emulating musical form in the ‘Sirens’ chapter of *Ulysses*, is to subscribe to notions of musical transcendence, whilst these artworks

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³ Brad Bucknell, *Literary Modernism and Musical Aesthetics: Pater, Pound, Joyce and Stein* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 1. Eric Prieto explains that for many European Modernist authors attempting to move away from nineteenth-century Realism, ‘music offers a set of formal, expressive, and referential principles that can be used in the attempt to better represent the inner space of consciousness’. Eric Prieto, *Listening In: Music, Mind and the Modernist Narrative* (London: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), x.
simultaneously assert their difference from nineteenth-century aesthetics through formal innovation to ‘make it new’. In Warner’s texts, music is materially shaped and derives meaning from the context in which it is located, but her texts also explore in detail that which the ‘high’ modernist texts play out implicitly. Warner shows that music is often understood as having universal or unchanging significance, and this attitude is apparent in the assumptions made by Joyce’s critics and the early Pound. By transporting notions of musical transcendence and non-referentiality into their analyses and literary innovation respectively, they approach these ideas as universally relevant whilst also claiming or seeking escape from them. These modernist texts do not radically depart from nineteenth-century aesthetics and their longer history, but through them achieve some of their key forms and concepts.

Through music we can see the traditions from which these artworks wish to depart, and also the ways in which they do not quite succeed. Conceptualisations of music as a purely aesthetic, non-referential art form were significant in the nineteenth-century and earlier, from Pythagoras to Neoplatonism, through German Romanticism, French symbolism and British aestheticism. This thesis builds on Vincent Sherry’s work on the influence of decadence in modernism⁴ by exploring the musical concepts that were being revised but which continued to be relevant. Joyce holds musical sublimity and materiality in opposition in the ‘Sirens’ chapter of Ulysses, suggesting the positive potential of musical abstraction by claiming musically-inspired formal innovation to transform the function of language, but shows too the limitations of aesthetic contemplation and surrender to the affective power of music through Bloom’s asocial,

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emotional response in the Ormond Bar. Pound struggles to reconcile his appreciation of non-referential musical meaning and abstraction with his desires for pure linguistic representation and material specificity. Warner’s texts explore the significance but also the invisibility of attitudes to music that are culturally and historically specific, but have an enduring relevance and claim to universality: in Mr Fortune’s Maggot, music’s claim to aesthetic purity means that Timothy cannot see religious and Western ideology at work in it. That non-lexical communication and the way music affects individuals continue to be important in these texts points to a commonality in human experience and understanding that situates modernism as a different aesthetic response to recurrent questions of how it is possible to achieve pure representation and meaning.

Music offers an avenue to re-evaluate and re-historicise the work of Joyce and Pound in dialogue with the continuing relevance, but also the invisibility, of musical transcendence in Warner’s work. This contributes to Adorno’s critique of modernist formal innovation in Aesthetic Theory. For Adorno, ‘[t]he new is a blind spot, as empty as the indexical gesture “look here”’.\(^5\) It has been a blind spot for critics as well as within the artworks, but as Oleg Gleikman identifies, ‘[m]aking it new, modernism gestures towards the void that propels it’.\(^6\) It is in the case of music specifically that authors and critics have not been able to see the historicity (and political significance) of the ideas to which they refer. The use of music as formal innovation by Joyce and Pound has produced a ‘blind spot’ in which it has been understood only as ‘new’, engendering critical engagements with their work that respond to it on its own terms.

To assert, as critics of Joyce have, radical formal innovation through reference to

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\(^5\) Adorno, Aesthetic Theory, 20.

\(^6\) Oleg Gelikman, “‘This new evolution of art’: Adorno’s Modernism as a re-orientation of aesthetics”, in Modernism and Theory: A Critical Debate, ed. Stephen Ross (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), 156.
classical musical forms, as with the alleged appropriation of fugal form in ‘Sirens’, is to make a contradictory claim for the new by wholesale adoption of the traditions from which *Ulysses* is said to depart or revise. Pound imposed his own ordering schema upon music in his theories of ‘absolute rhythm’ and ‘Great Bass’, whilst music has also been treated as a rational ordering system through which the *Cantos* can be decoded, yet Pound’s initial reasons for referring to music were heavily indebted to French symbolism’s interest in music as a means of non-rational communication. Joyce’s and Pound’s engagement with musical transcendence through aesthetic traditions needs drawing out against discussions of their radical newness, while Warner’s writing – despite not asserting its ‘newness’ through formal radicalism in the same way as work by Joyce and Pound – explores the interactions between music’s materiality and transcendence. The examples of ‘high’ modernism do not fulfil the functions that are often claimed for them: achieving aesthetic freedom from history by effecting definite departures from traditions.

Analysing music also shows how these authors’ texts avoid the pitfalls of Adorno’s critique of modernist formal innovation as becoming limited by its own abstraction and negation of traditions. Modernism, for Adorno, does not ‘negate previous artistic practices, as styles have done throughout the ages, but rather the tradition itself’. ‘Given’, Adorno says, ‘that the category of the new was a result of historical process that destroyed a specific tradition and then tradition as such, modern art cannot be an aberration susceptible to correction by returning to foundations that no longer should or do exist’. Narratives that assert their novelty and difference place themselves

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8 Ibid., 23.
outside of history as the ‘new’ and reject their foundations in the history of thought. The wish to enact a complete separation means modernism risks becoming nothing but a denial, with no positive content. Focusing on the aesthetic traditions Joyce and Pound are engaging with and developing shows that their work is fraught with complications and contradictions rather than a break with tradition that situates the work above and beyond history. By re-establishing the value of historical ideas about transcendence and considering how these interact with the recent emphasis on materiality, we can see how Warner’s texts relate to the utopian Marxism of Adorno and the Frankfurt School, in that she presents art as something that has the potential to inspire positive social change but is nonetheless always materially and historically situated.

In addition to demonstrating considerable engagement with music, Warner and Pound had known political commitments. Joyce’s critics have found political statements in his texts, claiming that his liberal-humanism is apparent in *Ulysses* to corroborate assertions of his moral and intellectual superiority. For Tim Middleton Joyce is the ‘saving humanist of English-language modernism, redeeming the tradition as a whole from the disappointing sense of narrowness’. By ‘narrowness’, Middleton gestures to the political dogmatism of which Pound, for example, is justifiably considered guilty due to his fascism and anti-Semitism. Pound was indicted for treason against the United States for his radio broadcasts in support of Mussolini’s fascist government.

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9 As Martin Jay explains, ‘Although he applauds the modernist intent to abandon exhausted models of universalizing aesthetic normativity, Adorno accuses the fetish of newness for its own sake, the need always to innovate and leave behind the past, of complicity with the very forces it tries to negate’. Martin Jay, ‘What’s new? On Adorno and the modernist aesthetics of novelty’, *Modernism and Theory: a Critical Debate*, ed. Stephen Ross (London: Routledge, 2009), 171.

during the Second World War,\textsuperscript{11} and I explore his aesthetic judgements in light of his known politics. Warner began her career as a professional musicologist compiling ten Carnegie-funded volumes of \textit{Tudor Church Music}, and was also an active member of the Communist Party from the 1930s.\textsuperscript{12} By exploring musical aesthetics as historically situated, socially mediated and politically intentioned, and considering this in relation to the diverse politics of these authors, I explore the relationships between aesthetics and politics in modernist literature.

This thesis is structured into three chapters on the work of each author to explore the diverse ways they handle music as material and transcendent, and I arrive at Warner’s writing after that of Joyce and Pound to show that her ideas about music are intensely radical despite her texts being less self-consciously innovative at a formal level. Building on Adorno’s arguments that music has political as well as aesthetic functions and meanings at the level of its formal structure, I use Marxist approaches to cultural production and formal analysis to draw out the social and political relevance of the appropriation of musical forms and discourses of musical transcendence.

**The critical field**

The complex and often contradictory ways music is handled in these authors’ texts, and the shift in critical/theoretical approaches to music, means that two competing ways of thinking about it must be brought into dialogue: as a transcendent aesthetic paradigm to which ‘all arts constantly aspire’, and as a culturally mediated product,

\cite{Feldman2013}

\cite{Harman1989}

\cite{Harman1994}
reflective of the society in which it was produced and capable of having political meanings. In analyses of its social production and reception music’s aesthetic autonomy is disregarded as fiction, while in literary criticism it is often approached through discourses of ‘absolute music’ inherited by modernist writers. Neither purely aesthetic nor purely material approaches to music are sufficient to analyse the tensions in the work of Joyce, Pound and Warner: through music their texts engage with political questions about the role and function of art in society, but they also show that concepts of musical transcendence have their own basis in material history, and remain central to the way music is understood and creates significance in peoples’ lives.

(i) New musicology and sociology

Since the 1980s new musicology has used cultural theories of gender, race and politics to explore the composition and listening processes as inseparable from historically specific ideologies and subjectivities. However, as part of this important social grounding it is often argued that people are falsely invested in the concept of musical transcendence. Music’s ‘mysterious’ qualities are considered an illusion that is wilfully perpetuated but possible to be rid of. For Susan McClary, ‘[b]oth musician and layperson collude in this mystification, both resist establishing connections

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between the outside, social world and the mysterious inner world of music’. This neglects the epistemological and discursive significance, and the philosophical depth of ideas about music’s transcendence, as well as the complex ways these interact with music as materially shaped.

Musicological analyses that have sought to ‘free’ studies of music from notions of musical transcendence neglect the importance of those ideas in the formation of their own field of study. Janet Wolff’s excellent foreword to McClary and Leppert’s *Music and Society* traces the concept of art’s aesthetic autonomy mainly back to nineteenth-century Britain, arguing that it is illusory since ‘contemporary art education originated in a close relationship with industry’. The price of framing the idea that music is or ever was an aesthetically pure realm as a ‘trick’ or illusion – rather than a long and complex philosophical engagement with metaphysics and meaning that dates back to Greek philosophy, as I will discuss – has been to divest these ideas of their very real significance in artworks and individuals’ experiences. Wolff briefly cites Vasari’s *The Lives of Painters* (1550) as ‘the most important early example’ of a tradition that sees ‘fine art as transcending the social and the historical’, and ties this to music by saying that ‘aesthetics – the philosophy of art – colludes in this exercise, since this discipline also exists in a symbiotic relationship with the idea of “Art” as comprehensible in terms which are purely intrinsic’. Explaining the material basis for the formation of aesthetics as a discipline is important, but it neglects a range of ideas that have contributed to the notion of music specifically as an aesthetic paradigm.

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18 Ibid., 4.
Notions of musical transcendence are considered outdated by scholarship that argues music is socially produced and that other ways of explaining it are therefore false and problematic, ¹⁹ but this can result in simplistic approaches to music that fail to take into account the problems of translating signification and meaning from a non-lexical form into language. John Shepherd suggests a very simple theory of form as straightforwardly reflective of the society and individual through whom the music was produced, so that art and culture risk being considered a mirror for understanding people and the world:

because people create music, they reproduce in the basic structure of their music the basic structure of their own thought processes. If it is accepted that people’s thought processes are socially mediated, then it could be said that the

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¹⁹ Wolff also writes that ‘The notion that Art – at least Great Art – transcends the social, the political and the everyday has been under attack for fifteen years or so’, and explains that the need to add musicology to this trend by ‘challenging the notion of music as autonomous’. She explains the social and cultural production of notions of musical transcendence as a way of ridding them of their power: ‘the individualism of the liberal-humanist thought associated with mercantile capitalism and with the bourgeoisie confirmed and reinforced the aesthetic ideology of the artist as sole and privileged originator of the cultural work.’ Wolff, foreword to Music and Society, ed. Leppert and McClary, 1, 3. For sociologist Peter J. Martin, ‘a sociological concern with the uses of music seeks to return such cultural objects to the social contexts in which they are produced and experienced’. Peter J. Martin, Music and the Sociological Gaze (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 2. In musicology, Jean-Jacques Nattiez has explained that ‘the [musical] work is also constituted by the procedures that have engendered it (acts of composition), and the procedures to which it gives rise: acts of interpretation and perception’. Jean-Jacques Nattiez, Music and Discourse: Towards a Semiology of Music, trans. Carolyn Abbate (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), ix. This position is widely reflected in ethnomusicology, which is described by Bruno Nettl as: ‘(1) [the] comparative study (of musical systems and cultures)...; (2) comprehensive analysis of the music and musical culture of one society – essentially anthropological; (3) the study of musics as systems, perhaps systems of signs, an activity related to linguistics or semiotics; (4) the study of music in or as culture, or perhaps music in its cultural context, with techniques derived from anthropology, often called “anthropology of music”; and (5) historical study of musics outside the realm of Western classical music, using approaches of historians, area studies specialist, and folklorists’. Bruno Nettl, The Study of Ethnomusicology: Thirty-One Issues and Concepts (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 4–5. Ethnomusicology is also often understood as the study of world music and world cultures (usually meaning ‘non-Western’), acknowledging culture-specific understandings of music. For Ted Solis, ethnomusicologists who teach the study of non-Western musical cultures often ask ‘how do we represent the rich cultures we revere while we acknowledge and deal with the cultural distance between us and our students, and between both of us and these cultures?’ See Ted Solis, ‘Teaching What Cannot be Taught: An Optimistic Overview’, in Performing Ethnomusicology: Teaching and Representation in World Music Ensembles, ed. Ted Solis (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 1–2.
basic structures of different styles of music are likewise socially mediated and socially significant.\textsuperscript{20} This implies that the ‘thought processes’ of socially produced individuals are easily readable and directly communicated through music, which neglects the complexity of the mediation that occurs during artistic production, as well as the full range of multifaceted, opaque, and contradictory ideas that often comprise human thought. Peter J. Martin places the emphasis on empirical observations: ‘sociological interest is in \textit{actual} associations between music and meaning, and the use of music in real situations, rather than in philosophical speculation about its potential significations for hypothetical “subjects”’.\textsuperscript{21}

The empirical study of music and the desire to ground it in ‘actual’ social observations is indicative of a shift towards affect and empiricism in the humanities and social sciences, which rejects things that are abstract and difficult to define. As universities increasingly function as the research tool of businesses, research output is designed to respond to the market-driven need for simple data, eliciting straightforward and limited consumer responses that are easily measured to hone products accordingly.\textsuperscript{22} One problem with this kind of thought is that it declines to historically situate the knowledge available in a given moment, treating ‘actual’ observations of affective responses as unmediated data that can be unproblematically communicated and

\textsuperscript{21} Martin, \textit{Music and the Sociological Gaze}, 5. His emphasis. It is unclear why Martin undermines theoretical or philosophical analysis of music. He suggests that associations made by people are ‘actual’, while theoretical assertions (which he belittles as ‘speculation’) are not. Association made in ‘real situations’ by ‘actual’ people could be based on simple error. Although these can gain purchase in a given culture, it is unclear why Martin implies these should carry more weight than a theoretical association (or ‘philosophical speculation’) that might be rooted in formal analysis, the philosophical analysis of how a piece of music engages with traditions, or technical observations about its formal structure.
\textsuperscript{22} See for example, Stefan Collini, \textit{What Are Universities For?} (London: Penguin, 2012).
apprehended. In other words, affect theorists engage ontological questions about the nature of being and existing in the world, but work from the assumption of a firm ontological foundation from which questions can be asked and data can be analysed. For Ruth Leys, affect theorists are united in ‘the belief that affect is independent of signification and meaning’, and affect theory is motivated by a desire to ground understanding in observations of affective emotions that are biologically fundamental, universally applicable and not conditioned by the intervention or interpretation of reason or a learned system of rational thinking.\(^2\) This thesis argues that since specific, intentioned language must be used to describe and categorise phenomena – even if those phenomena appear to exist independently in the world – the articulation of ‘facts’ and ‘actual observations’ is always complicated by the historical concepts, knowledge and epistemologies that are inscribed within a particular language system, since that which it is possible to think, as well as ‘actual’ permissions and impossibilities in daily life, are informed by what can be thought and articulated at a given moment. As such, affect theory and the refusal of the aesthetic and immaterial does not get away from questions of signification and meaning. In the case of music, the operation of discourses of transcendence needs to be addressed, as concepts that have and continue to contribute to how we can think about the world.

At this moment when the a priori refusal of the transcendent is dominant, I argue that we are able to see the dogmatism of this position. We need to revisit why the potential for non-conceptual understanding available in the non-referential way music inspires meaning and emotion is significant. Although it is always produced and received in a

\(^2\) Leys also notes that this is connected to a belief that ‘most philosophers and critics in the past (Kantians, neo-Kantians, Habermasians) have overvalued the role of reason and rationality in politics, ethics, and aesthetics’. Ruth Leys, ‘The Turn to Affect: A Critique’, Critical Inquiry 37, 3 (Spring 2011): 443, 436.
social context, any attribution of political or social meaning by analysing music’s effects involves interpretation of what it ‘says’ or ‘does’ into language. In this way, both aesthetic and social analyses of music, or music in literary texts, are instances of the interpretation of a non-linguistic medium with the language available. This makes considering the role of rationality, signification and meaning essential. The modernist authors I have selected can be used to discuss how far language can communicate experience: something not addressed when the metaphysical exploration of music is rejected outright. Joyce and Pound, and Warner’s exploration of the material and metaphysical through music, also need to be seen historically.

(ii) The historicity of musical transcendence

There is a culturally and historically established precedent in philosophy, religious discourses and literature for considering music as a purely aesthetic art form: one that does not refer to the social due to the non-conceptual way it creates meaning without language or re-presenting the material world. The idea of music as a ‘transcendent’ art form has a long and complex history in Western thought, and has been visible at different times and in conjunction with competing ideas. Neoplatonist philosophy, appropriated by early Christians, claimed proof of God’s existence can be seen through the natural structure and organisation in the world which could only occur through intelligent design, and used Pythagorean observations about correspondence between pitch and ratio as evidence.24 The use of classical and mathematical knowledge to

justify religious truth points to a longstanding relationship between materiality and transcendence. Neither has existed independently. A consideration of their interaction is necessary, instead of simply rejecting notions of aesthetic purity and replacing them with factual or material observations. I return to these ideas in more detail in chapter three, as Warner explores the significance of Pythagorean observations about music in *The Corner That Held Them*, and also in chapter two when I discuss Pound’s attempt, following on from Pythagoras, to arrive at a further rational ordering system for music in his theories of ‘absolute rhythm’ and ‘Great Bass’.

Music’s non-referential manner of communication became increasingly significant as a way of accessing non-conceptual understanding during German Romantic philosophy’s negotiations with how it is possible to discern meaning in the world, which moved away from trying to access the objective or enduring ‘truth’ of an object. Kant established the importance of phenomenological experience because he acknowledged the impossibility of accessing the thing-in-itself outside of human experience.25 He and the German Romantics stressed the importance of aesthetic

25 Kant’s transcendental idealism claims that we can experience only the appearance of the thing, rather than the thing-in-itself (*Ding-an-Sich*). Kant thus distinguishes between two classes of object: appearances, and the thing-in-itself (or, two aspects of the same object). The impossibility of ever accessing the thing-in-itself means that the object of study becomes human experiences of those things. The way this relates to music and to art in general, is that we are able to make aesthetic judgements based on our own experience of the thing, rather than attempting to access something immutable or essential about it that we can never know: ‘We have therefore wanted to say that all our intuition is nothing but the representation of appearance; that the things that we intuit are not in themselves what we intuit them to be, nor are their relations so constituted in themselves as they appear to us; and that if we remove our own subject or even only the subjective constitution of the senses in general, then all constitution, all relations of objects in space and time, indeed space and time themselves would disappear, and as appearances they cannot exist in themselves, but only in us’. See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. and trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 168. Kant focuses on aesthetics in the ‘Critique of the Aesthetic Power of Judgement,’ discussing what aesthetic beauty is and how it can be characterised. See Immanuel Kant, ‘Critique of the Aesthetic Power of Judgement’, in *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, ed. Paul Guyer, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 96, 104, 120.
contemplation by placing the emphasis on the way the object is experienced.\footnote{26} Carl Dahlhaus describes how notions of instrumental music’s specific transcendence ‘originated in German Romanticism’\footnote{27} where instrumental music began to derive special status as ‘absolute music’.\footnote{28} With no vocal parts and therefore no narratives that could be used to reinforce existing social or moral codes, it appears to offer a pure form of communication, distinct from language or reasoning which usually mediates experience.\footnote{29} Arthur Schopenhauer’s writing on music developed Kant’s arguments about aesthetic purity,\footnote{30} and his examination of music as the highest art form

\footnote{26}{T.J. Reed notices the emphasis placed on aesthetics by German Romantics, but also notes that Schiller and Goethe wrote extensively on the aesthetic in the 1790s. See T.J. Reed, ‘The “Goethezeit” and its Aftermath’, in \textit{Germany: A Companion to German Studies}, ed. Malcolm Pasley (London: Methuen, 1972), 517. See also the reference to Karl Philip Moritz in n.29, who is also credited with influencing early Romanticism.}

\footnote{27}{Dahlhaus, \textit{The Idea of Absolute Music}, 4. Despite influencing Schopenhauer and Walter Pater, who both considered music to have a special status, Kant did not hold the same opinions about music. He considered music to have the ‘lowest place’ among the arts because it ‘merely plays with the sensations’: for Kant, music ‘moves the mind in a greater variety of ways and more intensely’ than other arts, ‘although only transitorily’. See Kant, \textit{Critique of the Power of Judgement}, 174, 172.}

\footnote{28}{Andrew Bowie notes that before the Romantic era music ‘generally did not become an object of pleasurable contemplation for its own sake’, but ‘[t]he emergence of philosophical aesthetics and nature’s new importance for music are closely connected: both involve the idea of relationships between humankind and nature that transcend what can be understood in conceptual terms’. Andrew Bowie, ‘Romanticism and Music’, in \textit{The Cambridge Companion to German Romanticism}, ed. Nicholas Saul (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 250.}

\footnote{29}{Dahlhaus notes a historically established precedent for the prioritisation of vocal music over instrumental music in Western Europe until the eighteenth century. He explains this as the result of moral philosophy and the perception of ‘art as a means of discourse about problems of morality,’ which rendered instrumental music superfluous. Dahlhaus cites Karl Philip Moritz as reacting against art as something that should be socially useful as a way of maintaining bourgeois ideologies. Moritz, Dahlhaus claims, ‘proclaimed the principle of \textit{art pour l’art} with a bluntness attributable to his disgust with moral philosophy’s rationalizations about art, and to the urge to escape into esthetic contemplation from the world of bourgeois work and life that he found oppressive’. See Dahlhaus, \textit{The Idea of Absolute Music}, 4. Moritz declared ‘merely useful objects’ to be inferior to those which have meaning or are beautiful in and of themselves: the aesthetic object should be ‘perfect in itself; that is, constitutes a whole in itself, and gives me pleasure for the sake of itself’. See Karl Philip Moritz, \textit{Schriften zur Ästhetik und Poetik}, ed. Hans-Joachin Schrimpf (Tübingen: Neimeyer 1962), 3. Quoted in Dahlhaus, \textit{The Idea of Absolute Music}, 5.}

\footnote{30}{Schopenhauer’s philosophy can be thought of as Kantian as far as he agrees that the subject/object distinction is the primary condition for knowledge, but Schopenhauer critiques the notion that the thing exists independently of the mind. See Schopenhauer, ‘Appendix: Criticism of the Kantian Philosophy’, in \textit{The World as Will and Representation}, vol. 1, ed. Judith Norman, Alistair Welchman, and Christopher Janaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 441–566.}
significantly influenced many composers. Music’s special status, for Schopenhauer, derived from its ability to represent the thing-in-itself directly, without referentiality. For Schopenhauer, music is absolute communication, unlike language which functions as a system of signs:

it [music] does not express this or that individual or particular joy, this or that sorrow or pain or horror or exaltation or cheerfulness or peace of mind, but rather joy, sorrow, pain, horror, exaltation, cheerfulness and peace of mind as such in themselves, abstractly.

What music says, according to Schopenhauer, is not a particular instance of an emotion, but the abstract emotion itself, which is related to his notion that ‘the purpose of all art is the communication of the apprehended Idea’, where the Idea is the Platonic Idea (that the abstract and not the material thing is the highest form of reality). The development of these ideas can be traced through French symbolism and late Victorian British Aestheticism into modernist thought and art.

31 Lydia Goehr describes Schopenhauer as a ‘central reference point’ in the most significant historical debates about the nature of music and musical aesthetics. Lydia Goehr, ‘Schopenhauer and the musicians: an inquiry into the sounds of silence and the limits of philosophizing about music’, in Schopenhauer, Philosophy and the Arts, ed. Dale Jacquette (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 200. While there are numerous criticisms of Schopenhauer’s ideas, he significantly influenced many composers such as Brahms, Wagner, Mahler and Schoenberg. For Schopenhauer’s influence on composers, see Goehr, ‘Schopenhauer and the musicians’, 200–228; Bryan Magee, The Philosophy of Schopenhauer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 350–402. Wagner wrote of his interest in Schopenhauer in a letter to Liszt in 1854: ‘I have of late occupied myself exclusively with a man who has come like a gift from heaven, although only a literary one, into my solitude. This is Arthur Schopenhauer, the greatest philosopher since Kant’. Letter from Wagner to Liszt, 29th September 1854, Correspondence of Wagner and Liszt, trans. Francis Hueffer (New York: Vienna House, 1973), 53. For criticisms of Schopenhauer’s ideas about music, see Malcolm Budd, Music and the Emotions (London: Routledge, 1992), 96; Magee, The Philosophy of Schopenhauer, 240–243.

32 Schopenhauer realised, however, that his claim that music represents the thing-in-itself is difficult to support with evidence: ‘I recognize, however, that it is essentially impossible to demonstrate this explanation [Aufschluß], for it assumes and establishes a relation of music as a representation to that which of its essence can never be representation, and claims to regard music as the copy of an original that can itself never be directly represented’. Schopenhauer, The World as Will and Representation, 257.

33 Ibid., 289.

34 Ibid., 263. For Plato’s theory of forms and its place in philosophical metaphysics, see n.53.
French symbolism’s interest in musical-literary relations is also related to music’s potential for absolute, non-linguistic communication. Brad Bucknell and Peter Dayan have explored French symbolism as a significant precursor to the modernist preoccupation with music’s aesthetic potential.\(^{35}\) Baudelaire thought that writers had often aimed towards musicality, and claimed that poetry looks to music not just in attempts to sound aesthetically pleasing, but also in its desire to communicate in a way that is ‘true’ and beyond the capacity of ordinary language:

> Which of us has not, in his ambitious days, dreamt the miracle of a poetic prose, musical without rhythm or rhyme, supple enough and striking enough to suit lyrical moments of the soul, undulations of reverie, the flip-flops of consciousness.\(^{36}\)

For Baudelaire, something can be musical ‘without rhythm or rhyme’ because of the communicative ideal that music represents, as something that is suitable for representing both sides, or ‘flip-flops of consciousness’.\(^{37}\) Many of the same ideas are present here as in philosophical discussions of music, such as music’s connection to the abstract world of emotions, but also to the ‘soul’, which suggests its capacity for communicating a fundamentally human truth that cannot be put into words.

\(^{35}\) For Bucknell, Mallarmé’s use of music is in line with the ‘idealism in aesthetic thought concerning music’ during the nineteenth-century, and he explores the extent to which modernism is indebted to French symbolism. Bucknell, *Literary Modernism and Musical Aesthetics*, 17. For Peter Dayan, Baudelaire and Mallarmé exemplify ‘a style of writing that refused to recognise clear boundaries between the literary, the critical, and the musical’ and he argues that this continues to be relevant into the twentieth century, seeing parallels between Derrida’s metaphysical discussion of ‘presence’ and the attempt in French symbolism to use music’s potential for communicating the thing-in-itself. Peter Dayan, *Music Writing Literature: From Sand to Debussy via Derrida* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), ix. Werner Wolf discusses ‘the history of intermediality’ through examples of nineteenth- and twentieth-century fiction in English, though his study is centrally concerned with ways of measuring and achieving ‘terminological precision’ in discussion of fiction that has claims to ‘musicalization’. Werner Wolf, *The Musicalization of Fiction: A Study in the Theory and History of Intermediality* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999), 3, 5.


\(^{37}\) For a detailed discussion of the way Baudelaire and Mallarmé utilise music in their writing, see Helen Abbott, ‘Songs without Music’, *Between Baudelaire and Mallarmé: Voice, Conversation and Music* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2009), 183–222.
The influence of German Romanticism, particularly Kant, can also be seen in British thought: most famously in that of Walter Pater, among the leading figures of the British Aesthetic movement, who argued for ‘[t]he love of art for its own sake’, and famously wrote that ‘[a]ll art constantly aspires to the condition of music’. David Aram Kaiser notes Pater’s influence on ‘strains of aesthetic modernism’, arguing that his ‘advanced expression in twentieth-century aesthetics…regard the question of an artwork’s effect on the individual viewer, or on society as a whole, as aesthetically irrelevant’. Pater considered music to be the highest form of art because it is non-referential, while literature, and to a lesser extent art and architecture, he considered

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38 Pater, *The Renaissance*, 117. The British aesthetic movement was primarily concerned with aesthetic beauty and the separation of aesthetic concerns from social and moral life. It was partially based in the British reception of German Romantic thought, as well as responding to the French *art pour l’art* movement and reacting against Victorian materialism and the bourgeoisie. Jonathan Freedman describes the British aesthetic movement as ‘valorizing art in general and visual art in particular as a means of provoking intense experience in a society that seems able to deaden the senses and the spirit alike’. Jonathan Freedman, *Professions of Taste: Henry James, British Aestheticism, and Commodity Culture*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 2. William Hamilton’s *The British Aesthetic Movement* (London: Reeves & Tucker, 1882) defined the movement, and included sections on such significant figures as John Ruskin and Oscar Wilde. Ruskin emphasised and popularised the importance of the aesthetic contemplation of art in Britain, but as a way of creating a moral society: good art, he said, excites ‘the best of the moral feelings’. See John Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, vol. 1 (London: Smith, Elder & Co.: 1843), 14. Ruskin’s use of pre-determined religious doctrines as a moral guide is something that Pater and Wilde moved away from. Pater’s included a philosophical scepticism and relativism: he claimed that ‘To the modern spirit nothing is, or can be rightly known, except relatively and under conditions’. See Walter Pater, ‘Coleridge’, in *Appreciations: With an Essay on Style* (1901; London: Macmillan, 1924), 66. Wilde’s aestheticism was similarly rooted in the idea of art’s separation from issues of morality: he warns against the moral interpretation of the work of art: ‘Art is at once all surface and symbol. Those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril. Those who read the symbol do so at their peril’. See Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (London: Penguin, 2012), 8. Freedman also describes the movement as being deeply influenced by restrictive Victorian sexual codes: ‘All represent a protest against the sexual mores of Victorian England, whether implicitly (as in the case of Ruskin's confused and sorry sexual history, or Pater’s subtle evocation of his deeply repressed homosexuality), or explicitly (as in with the case of Wilde, Swinburne, or Rossetti’s flamboyant sexual adventurism’). Freedman, *Professions of Taste*, 2.  


limited in their ability to achieve pure expression by their lexical or pictorial reference to the material world.41 Pater’s famous, often-quoted dictum about music states:

All art constantly aspires to the condition of music. For while in all other kinds of art it is possible to distinguish the matter from the form, and the understanding can always make this distinction, yet it is the constant effort of art to obliterate it.42

For Pater, music’s unique and transcendent capacity is derived from the unity between form and content, in addition to its apparent separation from material concerns. Art represents the world, but is limited to a representation by its own form: it can never be the thing that it represents. In saying that art wants to ‘obliterate’ the distinction between form and content, Pater notices how the artistic impression points towards the thing that it represents, attempting to bridge the gap between the artwork-as-representation and the object itself, but is unable to do so. Because music, however, points to nothing outside itself, yet still appears to mean something, Pater considered it the supreme form of art.

Joyce’s early work is heavily indebted to Paterian ideas about music.43 In chapter one I highlight Joyce’s dynamic revisiting of inherited ideas about musical and artistic

41 Pater’s ideas were not universally accepted. John Addington Symonds disagrees with Pater’s attribution of special status to music. In the essay ‘Is Music the Ty pe or Measure of All Art?’ Symonds claims Pater’s assertion is either ‘personal partiality’ or an ‘inconclusive, aesthetical hypothesis’: ‘beauty is the sensuous manifestation of the idea – that is, of the spiritual element in man and in the world – and that the arts, each in its own way, conveys this beauty to our percipient self. We have to abstain on the one hand from any theory which emphasizes the didactic function of art … fine and liberal art, as distinguished from mechanical art or the arts of the kitchen and millinery, exists for the embodiment of thought and emotion in forms of various delightfulness’. John Addington Symonds, Essays Speculative and Suggestive (London: Chapman and Hall, 1893), 367.


transcendence by exploring the presence of these concepts in Chamber Music before showing how this aesthetic perspective is later complicated in Ulysses. In chapter two I discuss the similarity between Pound’s early conceptualisation of music and that of the French symbolists. Building on Vincent Sherry’s observations about the extent to which Pound’s early poetry draws on decadence and that ‘the poetic coteries originally associated with décadence and symbolisme in fin-de-siècle Paris actually overlapped’, 44 I explore the similarities between Pound’s and Mallarmé’s concept of music’s value, but show that Pound also goes on to distance himself from these associations to assert the newness of his writing and world-view.

Exclusive use of approaches from in sociology and new musicology are not appropriate for analysing this literature, because the work of Joyce and Pound is indebted to philosophical notions of musical sublimity and its potential for non-conceptual communication. 45 Yet the acknowledgement of music’s basis in material

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44 Sherry, Modernism and the Reinvention of Decadence, 6.
45 Josh Epstein claims the ‘fenced off autonomy of music is an aggressively modernist fiction: an extension of Pater and a reaction-formation to the twentieth-century’s “hyper-political” violence’. Yet modernist writers responded to ideas about musical transcendence that were established long before the twentieth century: as I have discussed, the British aestheticism epitomised for Epstein by Pater responded to Kant and German Romanticism more broadly. To be sure, concepts of musical transcendence appear reconfigured and in writing that is often radically different from the traditions that are referred to, yet the historical precedent is significant because it remains present in modernist works. Incorporating new musicology into his literary analysis allows him to celebrate modernist literature as radically new and essentially progressive, so that, despite being heavily indebted to Adorno’s approach in many ways, elements of Epstein’s work contain the ‘blind spot’ of attitudes to the new that Adorno identifies. Josh Epstein, Sublime Noise: Musical Culture and the Modernist Writer (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), xx, xvi. Epstein acknowledges his debt to Attali, who argues that the boundary drawn between music and noise is a form of ‘appropriation and control [that] is a reflection of power, that it is essentially political’. Jacques Attali, Noise: The Political Economy of Music, trans. Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), 6. Acknowledging the politics of aesthetics is necessary, but instead of a re-assertion of Attali’s and others’ arguments, now it is the significance of the transcendent that needs to be recuperated in the face of a recent and often oversimplifying preoccupation with material data.
culture that has now happened in these disciplines was beginning to be recognised in modernist literature. Literary analyses which engage thoroughly with philosophical discourses of musical transcendence but do not analyse the social or political significance of the ways music is used or interpreted are equally insufficient to fully explore the complex ways music is referred to in modernist texts. The problems with entirely aesthetic approaches to music in Woolf studies has been noted by Emma Sutton, who identifies that work on the musicality of The Waves treats the text as ‘apolitical’, while Woolf in fact uses ‘Wagner’s leitmotivic technique to undercut the political work and rhetorical allure of myth’. This thesis builds on Sutton’s approach in arguing for the political significance of an author’s appropriation of musical aesthetics, but does so informed by T.W. Adorno’s musicology. Adorno’s method is useful because it finds social significance in music by considering it as the result of

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46 While Epstein argues problematically that musical transcendence is an ‘aggressively modernist fiction’, his introduction is useful in mapping out key modernist compositions that are formally and rhythmically innovative as a way of providing context to his assertions that music was undergoing a ‘sea-change’ at the start of the twentieth-century, which he connects to attempts among composers and artists to disassociate themselves from nineteenth-century aesthetics and notions of music’s aesthetic autonomy. Epstein, Sublime Noise, xiii.

47 The literary analyses of Peter Dayan and Daniel Albright are concerned only with identifying aesthetic relationships between literature and music – borrowings, similarities, and sometimes incongruities – and they do not attempt to draw out relationships between innovation inspired by music and social or political interpretations of the texts. Their work considers the mutual aesthetic influence of modernist art forms, as with Albright’s study of ‘collaboration’ between artists working in different mediums, and Peter Dayan’s work focuses on music’s influence in French literature. Albright separates discussions of aesthetics and politics, most notably in his treatment of Pound, in which he never mentions fascism. Daniel Albright, Untwisting the Serpent: Modernism in Music, Literature, and Other Arts (London: University of Chicago Press, 2000). Dayan reacts against musicologists and cultural theorists for whom music only ‘expresses, signifies, or reveals something which pre-exists in a given culture’ – although he does not give any specific examples of the restrictive approaches he criticises, nor engages with them at length. Dayan, Music Writing Literature, viii.

historical processes but does not seek to entirely de-mystify it, so that he does not draw a firm line between the aesthetic and the social.

**T.W. Adorno’s musicological method**

This thesis suggests that a dialectic method of analysis is required; that is, one that moves between aesthetic and social approaches to music. By considering the musical composition as a product of the consciousness of an individual which is itself produced by social relations, Adorno draws conclusions from music that have political relevance, without disregarding the complexity of music’s social mediation or the difficulty of putting musical experience into words. I register critiques of Adorno’s thought and my use of it is critical and evaluative. His writing does not provide a straightforward methodology that can be transferred onto particular texts, but encourages close reading with attention to form that also takes into account social and historical situations.

Musical material, Adorno suggests, ‘is itself a crystallization of the creative impulse, an element socially predetermined through the consciousness of man … the material is of the same origin as the social process’.\(^{49}\) This is distinct from methods that expect the basic reproduction of ‘thought processes’ in the structure of music.\(^{50}\) For Adorno, although musical material is ‘of the same origin’, this does not mean that identifiable social structures will be mirrored in musical structures, and he also acknowledges the difficulty of speaking about music since lexical meaning cannot be directly extracted:


\(^{50}\) I refer here to John Shepherd’s methodology quoted earlier: ‘because people create music, they reproduce in the basic structure of their music the basic structure of their own thought processes’. Shepherd, ‘Towards a sociology of music styles’, 57.
Music resembles language in the sense that it is a temporal sequence of articulated sounds which are more than just sounds. They say something, often something human … But what has said cannot be detached from the music. Music creates no semiotic system.\textsuperscript{51}

Music seems to say something ‘human’, since it is produced by people and can profoundly affect the emotions – it entreats us to decipher it. Yet the process of comprehending our response must be carried out through language, and because the gap between music and language is unbridgeable it must always be kept in sight: ‘Music resembles a language…But music is not identical with language. The resemblance points to something essential, but vague’.\textsuperscript{52} In other words, music’s power to ‘say’ things that are socially relevant is central to Adorno’s analyses, but the abstract manner of its saying is not something to be overcome with social or empirical analyses, but is an essential aspect of music’s distinctive communicative capacity.

In Adorno’s philosophy, the fascination with music as something which is what it describes – or in the Paterian terms I discussed earlier, achieves the ideal union between form and content – is placed in the broader context of Western philosophy’s contemplation of the metaphysical, to which music relates as a form of ‘absolute’ signification.\textsuperscript{53} The place of metaphysics in religious discourses is in the idea of God

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{53} Adorno describes metaphysics as the search for ‘the “last things” on account of which human beings first began to philosophize’, so that metaphysics is the search for origins or fundamentals, or the study of things that do not change. Adorno, ‘Lecture 1: What is Metaphysics?’ in \textit{Metaphysics: Concepts and Problems} (Stanford, CA: University of Stanford Press, 2001), 1. Discussions of metaphysics and universals go back to Ancient Greek philosophy, particularly Plato’s theory of forms (not a self-contained theory but an explanation of Plato’s ideas found throughout his writing, particularly the middle period). In the \textit{Phaedro} for example Plato differentiates between particular material forms, and universal, unchanging forms which include concepts. See the Argument from ‘recollection’ of forms (72e–78b) in which he discusses abstract ‘Justice’ and the Argument from affinity of soul to forms (78b–84b). Plato, \textit{Phaedro}, ed. and trans. David Gallop (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).
as the guarantor of the sign. Words are not the thing that they describe, but a ‘sign’, meaning that investment in the accuracy of the sign requires belief in a verifying or guaranteeing principle independent of human discursivity. Music’s theological or metaphysical aspect lies in its direct communication, Adorno says, rather than in being a system of signifiers:

The language of music is quite different from the language of intentionality. It contains a theological dimension. What is has to say is simultaneously revealed and concealed. Its Idea is the divine Name which has been given shape. It is demythologized prayer, rid of efficacious magic. It is the human attempt, doomed as ever, to name the Name, not to communicate meanings.

Since music does not rely upon an external guaranteeing principle, it appears to offer an instance of absolute signification: ‘the identity of these musical concepts [lies] in their own nature and not in a signified outside them’. Yet musical meaning is never absolutely apprehended because it must be communicated in lexical terms. This is why, in both language and music, the human attempt to ‘name the name, not to communicate meanings’ is ‘doomed’. As Adorno explains: ‘Music finds the absolute immediately, but at the moment of discovery it becomes obscured, just as too powerful a light dazzles the eyes, preventing them from seeing things which are perfectly visible’. Music engages questions of metaphysics in the sense that it appears to offer

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54 This idea can be seen, for example, in Descartes’s Meditations, where he describes God as ‘a substance that is infinite, independent, supremely intelligent, supremely powerful’ which allows Descartes to believe in a notion of verification that exists transcendent of human-level discourse. René Descartes, ‘Meditations on First Philosophy’, in The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, trans. John Cottingham, Dugald Murdoch and Robert Stoothoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 31.

55 In Derrida’s discussion of metaphysics, he explains this by saying that ‘[t]he sign and divinity have the same place and time of birth. The age of the sign is essentially theological’. According to Derrida, the understanding of the sign assumes an ‘ideal’ of pure intelligibility – some sort of pure, immediate knowledge of the world, such as we experience in the present – and this, as with Descartes, is derived from the idea of God as the pure face of intelligibility: ‘the intelligible face of the sign remains turned toward the word and the face of God’. Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 14, 13.

56 Adorno, Quasi Una Fantasia, 2.

57 Ibid.

58 Ibid., 4.
a pure, unmediated way of saying something or knowledge of the world. But it also frustrates questions of metaphysics because its discussion and comprehension must always be mediated through language.

While new musicology approaches transcendence as an outdated illusion from which we need to be freed, for Adorno it is part of a longstanding Western philosophical engagement with questions of metaphysics. Equally, however, music is not an aesthetically pure realm for Adorno. It is not without meaning or ‘intention’, despite that meaning being difficult to apprehend:

Music aspires to be a language without intention. But the demarcation line between itself and the language of intentions is not absolute; we are not confronted by two wholly separate realms. There is a dialectic at work. Music is permeated through and through with intentionality.\(^{59}\)

The meanings or intentions available in music are informed by social and historical processes, so that musical forms derive meaning or significance from the historical context of their formation. Music can contain ‘concepts’ in a manner similar to language, since it ‘makes use of recurring ciphers … established by tonality’ such as ‘cadential progressions…stock melodic figures which are associated with the harmony’. The abstract nature of these musical structures has been given meaning ‘by the context in which they were located’.\(^{60}\)

Despite mediating between two ways of studying music that are frequently opposed, Adorno’s approach rarely features in writing on music and literature.\(^{61}\)

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\(^{59}\) Ibid., 3.  
\(^{60}\) Ibid., 2.  
\(^{61}\) Alan Shockley, for example, demonstrates that novels can use musical forms by selecting ‘prose works that use musical structures and techniques’, yet he is concerned with success or failure in purely aesthetic terms that are divorced from any social or moral attribution of value such as we find in Adorno’s analyses. Shockley’s strategy is recuperative and explanatory as he seeks to justify attributing value to texts based on their incorporation of ‘musical’ forms, such as the
been frequent charges of elitism for the sweeping negativity of his statements about ‘mass culture’. and there are musicologists have made criticisms of Adorno’s judgements about specific musical works, particularly Stravinsky by Rose Rosengard Subotnik and Andreas Huyssen. While Huyssen and Subotnik critically engage with Adorno’s writing, when literary critics refer to Adorno the level of their engagement is often minimal and they exhibit poorly justified ill-feeling towards his ideas, such as Alex Aronson’s unfavourable comparison between Adorno and Thomas Mann’s Adrian Leverkühn, despite which Aronson offers no analysis of Adorno’s ideas or any explanation for his apparent hostility towards them.


For problems with Adorno’s critique of mass culture but also a way of positively reading parts of mass culture through Adorno, see Bruce Baugh, ‘Left-Wing Elitism: Adorno on Popular Culture’, *Philosophy and Literature* 14, 1 (April 1990): 65–78. David Jeneman is particularly thorough in answering charges that Adorno is an ‘anti-American intellectual elitist’ by showing that ‘Adorno was thoroughly engrossed by the day-to-day life of radio networks and studio filmmaking’, and thus ‘comes by his criticism – no matter how biting – honestly and with sensitivity for its material conditions’. David Jeneman, *Adorno in America* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), xv, xviii.

Rose Rosengard Subotnik has identified the extent to which Adorno’s listening strategies prioritise ‘structural values and concepts that originated in Viennese Classicism’ and criticised his ‘inability to imagine alternative, equally honest, stylistic definitions of or solutions to the social problems surrounding music’. Parts of Rosengard’s study are centred around deconstructing Adorno’s ideas, and her criticism does come close to accusing him of ‘not doing enough’, but the close engagement with the complexity of Adorno’s thought attests to the extent to which the ideas are considered worth engaging with. A similar argument could be made about Adorno’s extensive engagement with ‘mass culture’ as a way of answering basic charges of elitism. Rose Rosengard Subotnik, *Deconstructive Variations: Music and Reason in Western Society* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 156, 167. For Andreas Huyssen, Adorno’s theories rely on ‘certain strategies of exclusion which relegate realism, naturalism, reportage literature and political art to an inferior realm’, but he maintains that ‘any critique of the culture industry theory must be grounded to Adorno’s modernist aesthetic’. Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 25.

Aronson praises Mann but makes an unfavourable comparison between Adorno and Leverkühn, essentially likening Adorno to the fictional, syphilitic composer who sells his soul to the devil: ‘Adorno’s interpretation of Schoenberg’s musical innovation is put into Leverkühn’s mouth as if it were his own discovery, while Mann, surely, could not have helped realising that the “tragically cerebral relentlessness of [Adorno’s] critique of the contemporary musical situation” related him intellectually to his fictitious composer’. Aronson, *Music and the Novel: A Study in Twentieth-
Edward Said, however, finds Adorno’s methods valuable and offers a possible explanation for the neglect of such ideas and approaches to music:

And while I am very far from rejecting all, or even a significant portion, of what musicologists do by way of analysis or evaluation, I am struck by how much does not receive their critical attention, and by how little is actually done by fine scholars who, for example, in studying a composer’s notebooks or the structure of classical form, fail to connect those things to ideology, or social space, or power, or the formulation of an individual (and by no means sovereign) ego. Theodor Adorno may have been the last thinker about Western classical music to attempt many of these bigger things. I have little idea what his influence or status is in musicology today but I suspect that his intransigent theorising, complicated philosophical language, and vast speculative pessimism do not endear him to busy professionals.\(^\text{65}\)

Said’s suggestion that Adorno’s writing style and dialectical approach is too impenetrable for many to engage with substantially is apparent in the way he is dealt with, even in discussions of music and literature where his ideas would seem to be most relevant.\(^\text{66}\) Daniel Albright’s defensive condescension to Adorno’s ideas\(^\text{67}\) shows

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\(^\text{66}\) Adorno recreates the tension between what music says and the articulation of what music says in his writing, as he oscillates between describing music’s intentionality and abstraction: ‘Music bereft of all intentionality, the merely phenomenal linking of sounds, would be an acoustic parallel to the kaleidoscope. On the other hand, as absolute intentionality it would cease to be music and would effect a false transformation into language. Intentions are central to music, but only intermittently. Music points to true language in the sense that content is apparent in it, but it does so at the cost of unambiguous meaning, which has migrated to the languages of intentionality. And as though Music, that most eloquent of all languages, needed consoling for the curse of ambiguity – its mythic aspect, intentions are poured into it. “Look how it constantly indicates what it means and determines it.” But its intentions also remain hidden’. Adorno, \textit{Quasi Una Fantasia}, 3.

\(^\text{67}\) Albright’s reference to Adorno shows the attitude Said notices most explicitly. He claims that ‘[t]he intellectual dazzle of Adorno’s prose tends to disguise the simplicity of some of his assumptions about art’. Albright, \textit{Untwisting the Serpent}, 14. Instead of seeing the density and complexity of Adorno’s writing as a marker of the dialectical thinking he undertakes, Albright
unjustified and unexplained hostility that validates Said’s assessment that the
difficulty of Adorno’s writing creates a negative response to his work among scholars.
Through critical and evaluative use of Adorno’s musicology and Marxist formal
analysis, I attempt to bring into productive opposition two approaches to music that
rarely meet in literary criticism: the aesthetic and the social, by retaining understanding
of the cultural and non-referential power of music, whilst connecting formal
developments to ideology and political intentionality.

claims it as unnecessary complexity in order to undermine its relevance. The word ‘assumptions’
is telling, as it claims for Adorno some ill-arrived at conclusions about what art actually is, rather
than approaching Adorno’s writing as a methodological choice designed to draw out complexities
and contradictions through the dialectical use of language – a technique that Adorno explains
succinctly in Minima Moralia: ‘Dialectical thought is an attempt to break through the coercion of
logic by its own means. But since it must use these means, it is at every moment in danger of itself
acquiring a coercive character’. Adorno, Minima Moralia, trans. Edmund Jephcott (1948; London:
Verso, 2005), 150. Adorno’s critique of Stravinsky is an obstacle to Albright’s positive aesthetic
analysis, and Albright attempts to discredit Adorno’s style since he apparently cannot discredit the
ideas themselves, yet he does not explain himself fully enough for the critique to carry weight: he
gives no examples of how Adorno’s technique manages to make simple ideas look complicated.
Adorno, who first discussed Stravinsky in ‘Stravinsky and Restoration’, in Philosophy of Modern
Music (1947; 2007), 100–157, usefully elaborates on the ways in which the chapter has been
misread in Quasi Una Fantasia (1963; 1998) – the same misreading that Albright is guilty of
despite having access to this explanatory text. Adorno claims ‘that chapter on Stravinsky has been
more misunderstood than any other. It began with the accusation that I had no feeling for order,
for ontology, in music – whereas what I objected to in Stravinsky was not order but the illusion of
order. At the other extreme I was rebuked for calling him a schizophrenic, whereas what I
repeatedly insisted on was that the complexion of his music was derived from the lesson of
obsessional neurosis and schizophrenia – that is, that he had chosen this method as a stylistic
principle, or had constructed schizophrenic models … It never occurred to me to treat Stravinsky
himself as a pathological case or to diagnose him with the aid of some intrusive psychological
theory … It is the act of a philistine to confuse the objective form of a work of art with the psyche of
the man who created it’. Adorno, ‘Stravinsky’, in Quasi Una Fantasia, 148. Albright
completely disregards the political aspect of Adorno’s critique and re-focuses it as a personal
aversion to the aesthetic qualities he prizes – he considers Stravinsky a good example of the
‘convergent’ art forms his book praises because the relationship between dance and music in The
Rite of Spring supposedly ‘asks the eye to do the work of hearing’ in some way. Albright,
Untwisting the Serpent, 18. Adorno, however, is motivated by a ‘complex of hatreds’ for Albright
(Untwisting the Serpent, 14), who completely misses the fact that the philosopher is critiquing the
music, rather than the person, as well as the utopian potential of Adorno’s thinking. This has been
elucidated by Yvonne Sherratt, who argues that Adorno’s philosophy often appears negative
because it engages in a sustained critique of Western rationality, its genesis and its cultural
products, but despite this his philosophy actually contains a model for a fully enlightened mode of
thought. See Yvonne Sherratt, Adorno’s Positive Dialectic (Cambridge: Cambridge University
Press, 2002). Critical theory such as that exemplified by Adorno (and other members of the
Frankfurt School) is, in addition, fundamentally utopian, because its goal is social transformation.
Albright’s book, again, focuses only on aesthetics, avoiding the more difficult activity of making
connections with social issues.

34
Structure of the thesis

This thesis is organised into three chapters on Joyce, Pound and finally Warner. Approaching these texts in this order, we can see that they explore the conflict between music as aesthetically pure and materially grounded, while musicology and literary scholarship has attempted to resolve this tension, or taken one position over the other. The texts are approached broadly chronologically: I discuss Joyce’s *Chamber Music* (1907) and *Ulysses* (1922),\(^{68}\) Pound’s writing in sequential order between 1910 and 1948, and finally Warner’s novels and a short story published between 1927 and 1971. There is a discernible shift in Joyce’s writing and approach to music between *Chamber Music* and *Ulysses* that first ascribes to and then complicates aesthetic notions of musical purity. Pound’s approach to music is continually shifting between an aesthetic interest in music’s abstraction and a desire to ground it empirically. Warner is consistent in identifying the complex material production of music, which she complicates with the unpredictable effects of music’s cultural status as aesthetically pure. Using the Frankfurt School thought of Adorno, but also Max Horkeheimer and Herbert Marcuse, to analyse modernist texts builds on Tyrus Miller’s observation that these thinkers are ‘particularly adapted to enrich our understanding of the twentieth-century modernist’ artwork.\(^{69}\)

In chapter one, Adorno’s method of grounding formal analysis in social and cultural processes will be used to develop a new reading of ‘Cyclops’ in *Ulysses* which relates formal innovation to the social conditions of modernity rather than classical musical forms, such as the fugue, that are no longer sufficient for communicating the

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experience of modernity. Adorno’s analysis of Schoenberg’s serialist technique will be used to examine formal structures of fragmentation in ‘Cyclops’. In chapter two, in relation to Pound’s writing, the way Adorno navigates music’s abstraction will be contrasted with Pound’s unsuccessful and reductive attempts to rationalise and define the non-lexical production of meaning. Appreciating the way music offers but also withholds non-lexical ways of producing meaning enables us to see why it is so important to Pound, as well as why at times he attempts to ground it empirically. Adorno will not be used to read Warner’s texts in chapter three, but instead I will show what her writing shares with the utopian Marxism of Adorno and the Frankfurt School. The historical content of her work is refracted through a materialist Marxism which identifies how ideology works within music, but still retains a space for the cultural importance of musical transcendence.
Chapter 1

James Joyce and the Politics of Musical Form

Joyce claimed, in a letter to Harriet Shaw Weaver in 1919, that the ‘Sirens’ chapter of *Ulysses* was modelled on a ‘*fuga per canonem*’, and critics have debated what kind of classical musical form the chapter most resembles. Yet the musical forms to which ‘Sirens’ is usually compared – the fugue, sonata and symphony – are not the most appropriate for analysis of Joyce’s *Ulysses*. The fragmentation, dissonance and abstraction that are key characteristics of modernist writing are not available in the unified and totalising musical structures that Joyce adopts. Instead of referring back to traditional musical structures, I consider how the changes in form in *Ulysses* relate to changes in musical form in Europe at the start of the twentieth century, by reading ‘Cyclops’ with Adorno’s analysis of twelve-tone technique’s relationship to the social experience of modernity. The social meanings and functions in Arnold Schoenberg’s music at a formal level enhance our understanding of the political content of ‘Cyclops’, connecting the fragmentation techniques in Joyce’s novel to the social conditions of the text’s production.

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70 Letter from James Joyce to Harriet Shaw Weaver, 6th August 1919. See Richard Ellmann, ed., *Selected Letters of James Joyce* (London: Faber, 1975), 242. It is unclear what Joyce meant by adding ‘*per canonem*’ after ‘*fuga*’ as this could mean either ‘by the rule’ or it could be a reference to a ‘*canon*’.

71 ‘Sirens’ has been compared with other than ‘classical’ (in the broad sense) forms, by the Italian serialist composer Luigi Dallapiccola, ‘On the Twelve-Note Road’, trans. Deryck Cook, *Music Survey* 4, 1 (October 1951): 318–32; and David Herman, ‘Sirens after Schönberg’, *James Joyce Quarterly* 31, 4 (Summer 1994): 473–94. Dallapiccola discusses Joyce’s influence on his own compositional style, and Herman argues that both Schoenberg’s compositions and ‘Sirens’ are best understood as concerned with the relation between ‘structures of elements, on the one hand, and rules or principles for ordering’ on the other hand (Herman, 473). They focus on patterns and structures within the text, and do not discuss ‘Sirens’ or Schoenberg’s compositions in their broader social context.
Joyce needs to be read with an awareness of a shift in his work away from the presentation of music as aesthetically pure, and towards an engagement with music’s dual qualities of thought-provoking abstraction and propensity to encourage introspective sentimentality. Joyce was schooled in British Aestheticism and classical musical traditions,72 as is evident from his early collection of poetry, *Chamber Music*, where music is associated primarily with beauty and aesthetic purity. He diverged from these traditions when writing his radical later works. In *Ulysses* there is an engagement with the radical and reactive potentials of artistic – specifically musical – forms.

Analyses that focus purely on the form of the ‘Sirens’ and its relationship with music do not acknowledge the tension in the chapter between the positive and damaging effects of music, but draw unreflectively on nineteenth-century concepts of music’s positive aesthetic potential. The use of musical form is approached as having purely aesthetic value that requires only schematic and technical explanation. ‘Sirens’ demonstrates music’s positive potential through the attempted appropriation of musical form, which produces an ambiguous narrative that requires an enhanced degree of interpretation and promotes independent thought. On the other hand, the musical performance in the Ormond Bar serves to critique conceptions of music as entirely positive: Simon Dedalus’s singing provokes Bloom’s retreat into an emotional sentimentality that prohibits social interaction.

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Readings of ‘Sirens’ that are based on Joyce’s statement about its musicality are limited because they only aim to prove his intentions and radical artistry. ‘Sirens’ is not musical because it replicates fugal or canonic form, but because it uses repetition as a formal device to give additional meanings to certain words. Joyce’s innovative and musically-informed use of language conveys meaning through form – specifically, by repetition and association within the chapter – rather than through the traditional meanings of particular words. Instead of arguing for Joyce’s intentional use of a specific musical form or attempting to produce a definitive reading of any part of his texts, I investigate what happens to the way language produces meaning when a literary form is (reportedly) influenced by music. I explore the moments where critics have struggled to make the text fit a specific musical model to consider what this can tell us about literary and musical form respectively.

This chapter begins by discussing the influence of Walter Pater and nineteenth-century Aesthetics in Chamber Music, which helps to contextualise my analysis of the musicality and form of ‘Sirens’ that follows. This reconstructs Joyce as someone who produced texts that were influenced by a particular education and traditions which became destabilised due to shifting social, economic and political conditions. Additionally, the formal fragmentation and dissonance in Ulysses, particularly the ‘Cyclops’ chapter, means it should be considered with other radical, modernist art forms that were contemporary with Joyce. Closely analysing the form of ‘Cyclops’ through Adorno’s analysis of Schoenberg’s twelve tone row and focusing on the social significance of the fragmentation techniques informs the way we read the political content of ‘Cyclops’. While critics have been keen to read the chapter as endorsing
either Bloom’s or the citizen’s political opinions. I show that the narrative does not prioritise one ‘voice’ in the episode as they claim. Rather, like the twelve-tone row, ‘Cyclops’ resists traditional development and resolution.

Chamber Music

Joyce’s first published literary work was Chamber Music (1907), a collection of thirty-six lyric poems narrating the development and decline of a love affair. Joyce is working within an established poetic form – the lyric originated in Ancient Greece as verse usually accompanied by a lyre, underwent a revival in German Romanticism and subsequently re-emerged in nineteenth-century Britain and France as the dominant poetic form. Joyce insisted that ‘[t]he book is in fact a suite of songs and if I were a musician I suppose I should have set them to music myself’. In addition to situating the poems in the lyric tradition, this shows his desire to claim an innate musical quality for the collection. That the poems aspire to be music calls up the elevated position of

74 James Joyce, Chamber Music (London: Elkin Matthews, 1907).
music in Walter Pater’s thought, whose influence is well-noted in Joyce studies. Although *Chamber Music* is not a musical work in Pater’s sense – it does not provide sustained engagement with the formal qualities of music that were significant in Pater’s thought – Joyce’s statement shows how heavily his early thought draws on nineteenth-century aesthetics and discourses of transcendence associated with music and poetic form. Lyric poetry, which has an established relationship with subjective experience, is itself embedded in historical discourses of transcendence: it had an elevated position in Hegel’s aesthetic thought, for example, who considered the lyric the art form most fully able to express subjectivity. Joyce’s poems are broadly in the lyric tradition, narrating a personal experience, and they are suitable as lyrics due to their regular rhyme and metre. But while rhyme and metre are formal characteristics that can affect how meaning is produced, they still create meaning linguistically. For


80 M.H. Abrams notes that the lyric has been ‘connected by critics to the state of mind of the author’. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*, 76.

81 Hegel claimed: ‘Therefore, in order to be the centre which holds the whole lyric work of art together, the poet must have achieved a specific mood or specific situation, while at the same time he must identify himself with this particularization of himself as with himself, so that in it he feels and envisages himself’. G.W.F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, vol. 2, trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 1133.

82 Angela Leighton has discussed the importance given to the rhythms of sentences and verses in W.B. Yeats’s poetry, and Yeats’s influences extend back ‘through Pater, Tennyson, and Hallam, to Keats’ – all writers who thought of rhyme and metre as able to produce, in Yeats’s words, ‘a beauty so preoccupied with itself that its contemplation is a kind of lingering trance’. Angela Leighton, *On Form: Poetry, Aestheticism, and the Legacy of a Word* (Oxford: Oxford University
Pater, instrumental music’s unique quality of transcendence is distinct from lyric poetry. It was derived from music’s ability to create meaning without referring to the material world through language, combined with its ‘ideal’ fusion of form and content since music does not point to anything outside itself. As such, even if Chamber Music was set to music, the songs would not exhibit the non-lexical qualities of instrumental music that is significant for Pater, because the poems (or lyrics) would constitute a linguistic element.

While poetry can certainly achieve musical effects, it is not necessary to police the boundaries between language and music to notice that overall Chamber Music is far more concerned with the visual than with music or the auditory, and the collection should be considered amongst the least musical of Joyce’s writings. The first poem of the collection exemplifies this:

I
Strings in the earth and air
Make music sweet;
Strings by the river where
The willows meet.

There’s music along the river
For Love wanders there,
Pale flowers on his mantle,
Dark leaves on his hair.

All softly playing,
With head to the music bent,
And fingers straying
Upon an instrument.83

The ‘music sweet’ heightens the atmospheric effect of the pastoral landscape imagery.

In the final stanza the instrument is used within the visual image of the leaf-adorned

83 Joyce, Chamber Music, I.
Love bent over with ‘fingers straying’. In poem XIV, the inclusion of music provides skill and craftsmanship to ‘The odorous winds’ that ‘are weaving / A music of sighs’, giving a visual element to the otherwise invisible wind. Music is used to create a visual impact and contribute to the romantic atmosphere. These poems primarily appeal to the optical: musical instruments are used to emphasise the beauty of visual images. The poems refer to music but do not create meaning through their form alone; there is no sustained engagement with the idea of music or how it creates meaning.

The collection has been overshadowed by Joyce’s later works: it has received limited critical attention and responses are mixed. Joyce engages with an established poetic form without irony, making it the work of a writer attempting to master a well-known style. Chamber Music’s non-satirical use of cliché and old-fashioned language84 does not sit easily beside the liberal use of parody and pastiche in Ulysses, and the radical reforming of language in Finnegans Wake. Kenneth Grose finds the poems ‘soft-centered’; ‘an empty exercise in factitious emotion-mongering’.85 To make the poems ‘fit’ with Joyce’s later, much more experimental work, William York Tindall tries to find the Joyce of Ulysses in Chamber Music: recalling Molly Bloom ‘on her pot in the last chapter’ of Ulysses, he argues ‘Joyce never wasted anything so good on a single reference’, so that ‘we may take it … as a clue to one of the meanings of his title’.86 Joyce’s departure from the lyric form is significant in showing how traditional modes

84 Clichéd and archaic language can be found in poem IX, where the allusion to the nursery rhyme ‘Ring a ring o’ roses’ (‘Dancing a ring-around in glee’) is followed five lines later by the exclamations ‘Welladay! Welladay!’ – a variation of ‘wellaway’, an interjection derived from the Old English wei lâ wei. See Hans Kurath, Sherman McAllister Kuhn, Robert E. Lewis, Middle English Dictionary, vol. 18 (Ann Arbour, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 806.
of expression are becoming unconvincing, however, and the collection does not need to be reconciled with his later work.\textsuperscript{87}

According to Lee Spinks, however, the ‘strengths and weaknesses of [\textit{Chamber Music}] come into relief when considered in the context of the Imagist movement with which his work was directly contemporary’.\textsuperscript{88} One of Joyce’s poems was included in the 1914 anthology \textit{Des Imagists}, edited by Ezra Pound, who had praised the ‘delicate temperament’ of the collection.\textsuperscript{89} Joyce’s directness, simplicity of phrase and limited use of adjectives aligns the work with Pound’s Imagist requirements, which favoured economical language and clear visual representation.\textsuperscript{90} The extent to which the majority of \textit{Chamber Music} is heavily indebted to lyric poetic traditions may explain why it was the final poem of the collection – one of the ‘tailpieces’\textsuperscript{91}, as Joyce called it, markedly different in structure and tone to the first thirty-four – that the author of the ‘make it new’ slogan chose to publish:

\textsuperscript{87} That \textit{Chamber Music} is not generally considered a successful work of art in its own terms suggests the difficulty of writing a fictive lyric ‘I’ in modernity with traditional language. Adorno comments on this difficulty in his discussion of lyric poetry: ‘Today … individual expression, which is the precondition for the conception of lyric poetry what is my point of departure, seems shaken to its very core in the crisis of the individual’. Due to Adorno’s role in this thesis, one might expect this text to feature more in my discussion of \textit{Chamber Music}. However, Adorno’s central thesis is that ‘the lyric work is the subjective expression of a social antagonism’. To maintain my focus on music, a detailed discussion of what \textit{Chamber Music} presents in terms of the lyric subject’s relationship to society and nature is not possible here, and this would be necessary for a thorough engagement with Adorno’s statements about the lyric in his essay. As such, I do not wish to labour the point about \textit{Chamber Music} being an unsuccessful appropriation of an established form in the context of Adorno’s essay, because I do not wish to misrepresent the essay as being solely about this issue. Further, \textit{Chamber Music} is only one example of an unsuccessful ‘modern’ lyric, and I do not want to risk holding it up as an indicator of the ‘correctness’ of Adorno’s thesis, or using Adorno’s essay as simple methodology through which \textit{Chamber Music} can be judged. T.W. Adorno, ‘On Lyric Poetry and Society’, in \textit{Notes to Literature}, vol. 1, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 46, 45.


XXXVI
I hear an army charging upon the land,
And the thunder of horses plunging, foam about their knees:
Arrogant, in black armour, behind them stand,
Disdaining the reins, with fluttering ships, the charioteers.
They cry unto the night their battle-name:
I moan in sleep when I hear afar their whirling laughter.
They cleave the gloom of dreams, a blinding flame,
Clanging, clanging upon the heart as upon an anvil.
They come shaking in triumph their long, green hair:
They come out of the sea and run shouting by the shore.
My heart, have you no wisdom thus to despair?
My love, my love, my love, why have you left me alone?92

While the auditor is subservient to the ocular in the majority of the collection, in the final two poems the auditory produces the visual. The narrator-lover, appearing to recall troubled sleep, hears sounds to which he fixes images of ‘an army charging upon the land’. The ‘soft sweet music’ (III) of the early poems gives way to ‘noise’ (XXXV), and the narrator experiences anguish and despair through loud and abrasive sound. For the majority of the collection music is gentle and pleasant, but in the final poems noise torments: ‘All day I hear the noise of waters / Making moan’ (XXXV). Music is produced beside the river during leisure time, through instruments crafted from trees, but noise is the unharnessed natural world, and the result of man’s violence exerted upon it for survival: the army is heard ‘Clanging, clanging upon the heart as upon an anvil’ (XXXVI). Chamber Music presents a dichotomy: music is artfully constructed and pleasant, while noise it dangerous and sinister. By the time Joyce writes Ulysses, however, the way he deals with music is very different: music has both positive and negative potential in ‘Sirens’. None of these poems use musical form, despite Joyce’s insistence that they are in fact songs, and there is none of the attempted structural engagement with musical form that Joyce claims for the ‘Sirens’ chapter of Ulysses.

92 Joyce, Chamber Music, XXXVI.
‘Sirens’

The desire to test the validity of Joyce’s claim that ‘Sirens’ contains ‘all the eight regular parts of a fuga per canonem’ means that analyses usually try to pin the chapter down to a specific musical form. For Stuart Gilbert and David Cole the chapter successfully emulates the structure of a fugue. A. Walton Litz, Stanley Sultan, and Timothy Martin have claimed the chapter is modelled on an operatic overture. Don Noel Smith makes a case for the resemblance of ‘Sirens’ to part of a sonata, and Robert Boyle argues that Ulysses resembles a ‘frustrated’ sonata form. For Lawrence Levin ‘Sirens’ achieves a polyphonic effect, but any discussion of what this musical appropriation does besides create ‘many different moods’ and provide an example of ‘a virtuosic display of [Joyce’s] craftsmanship’ is absent. Margaret Rogers ‘believes Joyce used a variety of devices to encipher his music in ‘Sirens’

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93 Letter from Joyce to Harriet Shaw Weaver, 6th August 1919. Ellman, Selected Letters of James Joyce, 242. Fuga per canonem appears to mean ‘fugue according to the rule’ (from the Latin canon – rule). Brad Bucknell claims this is an early sixteenth-century form, ‘essentially what we would call today a canon’ but provides no reference for this claim. Bucknell, Literary Modernism and Musical Aesthetics: Pater, Pound, Joyce and Stein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 122. Susan Brown even claims that ‘no contemporaneous standard musical dictionary or encyclopedia in English or Italian offered a definition or entry for “fuga per canonem,” “tela contrapuntistica,” or “stretto maestrale”.’ Susan Brown, ‘The mystery of the fuga per canonem solved’.


included encoded notes based on a Renaissance model’. Nadya Zimmerman is certain that Joyce manages to accurately emulate fugal form – she provides a diagrammatic chart to ‘illuminate the specific ways in which Joyce translates a fuga per canonem into an entire chapter of prose’. Alan Shockley’s is among the most recent discussions of musical form in ‘Sirens’, and in keeping with the way the chapter is usually approached, thinks of it as something that can succeed or fail in aesthetic terms and in its accuracy of musical representation. For Shockley, ‘there is no denying Joyce’s success with “Sirens.” “Sirens” is an intensely contrapuntal work on many levels’, because ‘[t]he text makes it clear that several streams of sound occur here simultaneously’.

While critics have debated what kind of musical form ‘Sirens’ uses, most agree that the chapter attempts to evoke simultaneous events or voices using narrative techniques that are distinct from those used anywhere else in the novel. For Brad Bucknell, ‘Sirens’ imitates music by evoking ‘a simultaneity of various spaces’ which is ‘probably as close to a narrative counterpoint as Joyce can come’. Yet those who argue for the achievement of polyphony or simultaneity are also aware of the limitations of this idea due to the problems of translating between musical and literary form. Writing about ‘Sirens’, Werner Wolf notes ‘the difficulty language, the “monadic” medium of (narrative) literature, has in imitating musical polyphony’.  

101 Alan Shockley, Music in the Words: Musical Form and Counterpoint in the Twentieth-Century Novel (London: Ashgate, 2009), 73.
102 Bucknell, Literary Modernism and Musical Aesthetics, 144.
Zimmerman acknowledges that ‘[b]oth the fugue and the canon depend upon a fundamental attribute – simultaneity. Clearly a prose rendering of any musical form will not be able to achieve such simultaneity; at any given moment, there is only a single line of narrative’. 104 Shockley also agrees about the obvious ways in which ‘Sirens’ cannot replicate the simultaneity of polyphonic music: ‘Admittedly, Joyce writes a constrained polyphony. This is literature, after all, and the author does seem to accept the left-to-right, single-line-at-a-time limitations of his printed pages’. 105

Linearity is often considered a limiting aspect of literature to which music can provide relief, and commentaries usually argue that musical form helps the text escape language’s limitations to some degree. Criticism thus works with notions of music’s aesthetic purity and transcendence, as though it has internalised Pater’s famous statement about music. This is implicit in most discussions of ‘Sirens’ that claim it achieves polyphony, simultaneity or a contrapuntal effect, as Zimmerman states:

The developmental narrative of events occurring in temporal succession has come to dominate the way in which we conceptualize life, the ways in which it proceeds, and in which we relate past, present, and future. By evoking a musical form, Joyce derails this linearity with the simultaneity that only music possesses. 106

Zimmerman sets up a strict demarcation between what music alone can do, as opposed to literature, but then argues that ‘Sirens’ transcends its literary confines, doing the

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104 Zimmerman, ‘Musical Form as Narrator’, 110. Zimmerman’s reference to ‘both the fugue and the canon’ show how she is trying to ensure her analysis matches Joyce’s own claims about his work. Even though these are different forms, there is the desire in criticism to claim that Joyce is so in control of his work that he can successfully mediate or combine these two musical forms and translate them into text. It is possible that Joyce was incorrect, attempting to impress his patron (Harriet Shaw Weaver), or just trying to give a broader suggestion of musicality to his work rather than tying it to a specific musical form.

105 Shockley, Music in the Words, 54. Emphasis added.

thing that ‘only music’ can do. This polices the boundaries between literature and music, whilst still arguing that Joyce escapes them.

Literature, however, can invoke simultaneity in different ways. A narrative, although it must usually be read one line at a time if we want to make sense of it, can evoke and describe many different characters, opinions, points of view, languages, cultures and so on. Music may allow for the simultaneity of different sounds, but being non-lexical these cannot hold their own distinct viewpoint in the same way as language, or impart as much diverse information as a narrative, for example, is able to when it communicates the quality of light in a room, its smells, sounds, appearances, the emotions and aspirations of its characters, and so on. When music is notated the same imposition of linearity is afforded as we find in written literary text, and when music is heard this must always be a passive act; we are obliged to hear the notes in the order in which they appear. In contrast, when reading a text, there is nothing (apart from our own desire to read in a way that allows us to understand the text) forcing us to read it in this way, while listening to the ‘correct’ order of notes in a musical performance is enforced. The idea of linearity being ‘limiting’ then is only relevant if the text ‘aspires to be’ like music, and even then a musical performance, rather than a written musical text, when our only concern must be hearing different sounds simultaneously. Otherwise, music, a listener and a performer are ‘bound’ by many of the same ‘restrictions’ as literary texts.

These analyses do not engage thoroughly with historical notions of music’s transcendence, although they rely on the notion of music transcending language to claim Joyce’s use of musical form escapes languages limitations. In Paterian terms, of
course, it is in the cohesion of form and content that the unique and transcendent capacity of music is located, not in its ability to achieve simultaneity of sounds. If music were to be used as a model for elevating the communicative potential of language, then it would not be in order to achieve ‘simultaneity’, but to edge closer to that ideal union of form and content, which (for Pater and Schopenhauer, for example) means that music is the *Ding-an-Sich*.\(^\text{107}\) When a similarity to music is figured only in terms of simultaneity, and this is itself derailed due to the differences or limitations of linear text, then the pay-off of these analyses becomes unclear.

Analyses that claim a specific musical form for ‘Sirens’ are misguided. ‘Sirens’ becomes more like music because the way language is used alters the way it produces meaning, rather than in its emulation of a particular musical form. The criticism I have discussed suggests a transcendent capacity to music which is figured only in terms of ‘simultaneity’ through the replication of fugal or polyphonic form, when this is not music’s hallmark of transcendence, and literature can in fact achieve simultaneity in different ways. In other words, simultaneity is not ‘achieved’, but it is suggested. It is communicated – not in a way that gets around the linearity of a written text, or by direct explanation – but by the inference that we glean from the repeated words and thematic material that ties events together.

The focus in scholarship on testing authorial intention has also prevented detailed discussion of how the language and the form of the chapter work together. Arguments for the ‘achievement’ of polyphony/simultaneity only consider positive aspects of

music, when ‘Sirens’ contains ideas about music that are much more varied and complex. The chapter does not straightforwardly promote the benefits of the abstract way that music creates meaning, since in the Ormond Bar music has the damaging effect of promoting self-absorption.

Repetition in ‘Sirens’

Joyce attempts to emulate musical form through repeated words and phrases, which appear at the chapter’s opening as a nonsensical list. Over the course of ‘Sirens,’ though, these words are endowed with an additional function. They begin to indicate something specific within the chapter in addition to their usual meaning(s), similar to a musical leitmotif with is frequently repeated to signify the return of a particular character or setting.\textsuperscript{108} The chapter opens with sixty-three lines of short phrases that do not appear to have any relation to each other, the first three of which are:

\begin{enumerate}
\item Bronze by gold heard the hoofirons, steelyringing
\item Imperthnthn nthnthnthn.
\item Chips, picking chips off rocky thumbnails, chips.
\end{enumerate}

These phrases lack context and do not form a traditional narrative. As the chapter progresses they return in a context through which they can be understood: the language

\begin{enumerate}
\item A leitmotif is generally understood as a short, recurrent musical phrase that has a representational function, and in this sense the opening words and phrases of Joyce’s chapter work like a leitmotif. According to Barry Millington, a leitmotif’s ‘purpose is to represent or symbolize a person, object, place, idea, state of mind, supernatural force, or any other ingredient in a dramatic work’. Barry Millington, \textit{The New Grove Guide to Wagner and His Operas} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 153. However, I will explain later how this is not entirely accurate, and that Joyce’s usage of words is somewhere between a reminiscence motif (an earlier precursor to the leitmotif) and the later Wagnerian conception of leitmotif. Wagner’s development of the leitmotif is significant, because he comes to understand and use it as the musical expression of a particular idea, where the idea is the thing-in-itself, capable of an overwhelming mental and emotional effect. As Heath Lees explains, it is intended to function as the ‘musical embodiment of a suggested but often unexpressed idea’. Heath Lees, \textit{Mallarmé and Wagner: Music and Poetic Language} (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), xvi. Joyce’s use of words is neither entirely like a Wagnerian leitmotif, nor entirely like a reminiscence motif, because the recurrent material alters.

\item James Joyce, \textit{Ulysses} (Harmondsworth: The Bodley Head, 1986). Hereafter cited parenthetically with a chapter and line number.
\end{enumerate}
of the opening section gains its significance from the context in which it reappears. ‘Bronze’ and ‘gold’ are quickly revealed to refer to Miss Douce and Miss Kennedy, who have bronze and gold hair and the colours are frequently substituted for their names (11.64–5, 74, 84, 97, 115). ‘Imperthnthn thnthnthn’ later returns as the phrase mumbled by Pat the waiter, mocking Miss Douce as he retreats from her criticism (11.100–101) and ‘Chips, picking chips’ signifies Simon Dedalus, whose thematic material returns when ‘Into their bar strolled Mr Dedalus. Chips, picking chips off one of his rocky thumbnails’ (11.192–3). There is often more than one set of thematic or leitmotif-like material associated with each character. At the opening of the chapter the meaning of the initially nonsensical phrase ‘Trilling, trilling: Idolores’ (11.9) is eventually revealed to be Miss Douce’s singing: ‘Gaily Miss Douce polished a tumbler, trilling: – O, Idolores, queen of the eastern seas!’ (11.225–26), so that variations on this and ‘bronze’ indicate Miss Douce’s presence in the narrative.

The words and phrases from the opening gain meaning through repetition within the context of the chapter, on the text’s own terms. This takes the prose closer to how meaning is produced in music: through form and its own internal relations, rather than referentially.110 Adorno’s discussions of music can help us consider how music creates meaning in more critical detail than the scholarship on ‘Sirens’ so far discussed. Meaning can be inferred from music, but in music the meaning is contained within the form and its manner of implementation. What is ‘said’ by music cannot be directly translated into language, but due to the repeated use of particular techniques and forms, over time, however, melodies and harmonic structures can become reified: well-known musical structures, in a particular culture at a particular time, certainly have meaning that refers to something outside themselves. For example, I discuss the cultural connection between the plagal cadence and ‘Amen’ in Church of England religious services in chapter three in relation to Mr Fortune’s Maggot.

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over time traditions are produced to which it is possible to attach meaning. For Adorno:

[Music] makes use of recurring symbols, insignia that bear the stamp of tonality … But the identity of these musical concepts lies in their own existence and not in something to which they refer. Their invariance has become sedimented, a kind of second nature … Music without any signification, the mere phenomenological coherence of the tones, would resemble an acoustical kaleidoscope. As absolute signification, on the other hand, it would cease to be music and pass, falsely, into language. Intentions are essential to it, but appear only intermittently. Music points to the true language as to a language in which the content itself is revealed, but for this it pays the price of unambiguousness, which has gone over to the signifying languages.¹¹¹

Traditional signifying language aims towards the potential of unambiguousness, since at its most basic level it functions as a communicative tool. Yet the way language is used in ‘Sirens’ is intentionally ambiguous to begin with, and the words come to have a particular meaning and function only later on in the text. The ‘tonality’ Adorno talks about, in the sense of the Western musical tradition more broadly, is clearly something much more established and vast than one chapter of Joyce’s Ulysses. The words that Joyce employs as thematic material do not continue to have these meanings outside ‘Sirens’ in the broader tradition of literature or language more generally, but the salient point here is that they gain another level of meaning through the form of the chapter, and music also creates meaning through its form, having no lexical capacity.

Certain words are given an additional meaning in a manner that can be compared to how music creates meaning: through recurring words and patterns that must be interpreted via an engagement with the text in its own terms, not through external things to which the words point. The chapter does not achieve meaning in exactly the same way as music, because the referentiality of the initial phrases, and all the other

words that are used to communicate the character, setting, subject matter and so on, are unavoidable. We understand the meaning of the word ‘bronze’ – a colour or metal – but its repetition comes to signify the presence of Miss Douce and her bronze hair in the narrative, so that the thematic words have meaning bestowed upon them by the form of the chapter, in addition to their everyday capacity of signification.

Joyce’s use of repeated words encourages the recollection of a character and moment in the narrative. The thematic words also indicate a return to a point in time already narrated (and usually the narration of that moment from another character’s perspective). For example, the reference to Miss Douce and Miss Kennedy hearing hooves on the road outside appears three times. This does not signify three separate occasions when they hear horses go past the Ormond bar, but announces the return of the narrative to that specific point in time. The phrase is modified each time it appears, first of all in the opening thematic material – ‘Bronze by gold heard the hoofirons, steelyringing’ (11.1) – and then later on towards the end of the chapter: ‘Bronze by a weary gold, anear, afar, they listened’ (11.937). While similar to a musical leitmotif in some senses, in most cases in ‘Sirens’ the recurring words do not have the structural and psychological significance of the leitmotif, and are more akin to the reminiscence motif (Reminiszenzmotiv, Erinnerungsmotiv) – an earlier precursor signifying a character’s recollection of the past. In Wagner’s later compositions, the leitmotif is intended to fully encompass an idea or concept in a musical phrase in a way that is exceptionally stimulating to the emotions, since the musical phrase has a particular

\[112\] This use of the leitmotif is not available in all Wagner’s works, but is something that he developed during his career. Barry Millington points out that ‘a leitmotif is to be distinguished from a reminiscence motif (Erinnerungsmotiv), which, in earlier operas and in Wagner’s works up to and including Lohengrin, tends to punctuate the musical design rather than provide the principal, ‘leading’ thematic premisses for that design’. Barry Millington, Wagner and His Operas, 153.
connection to the concept it signifies. Raymond Furness explains it as capable ‘of compressing into a few bars the most profound emotional and psychological experience’.\footnote{Raymond Furness, \textit{Wagner and Literature} (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982), 7.} This does not simply signify the return of a particular character, as the word ‘bronze’ signifies Miss Douce in Joyce’s narrative. A reminiscence motif, however, usually returns unaltered, while the leitmotif returns in rhythmic or intervallic variations, so that Joyce’s use of thematic words draws on features of the leitmotif and reminiscence motif.\footnote{See Arnold Whittal, ‘Leitmotif’, in \textit{The New Grove Dictionary of Opera}, second edition, ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Oxford University Press, 1992), 1137. David Fanning explains that ‘When earlier composers, such as Mehul, Cherubini, Marschner and Spohr, used motifs with character or situation associations but without Wagner’s degree of thoroughness, those motifs have become generally known as ‘Erinnerungsmotive’ – reminiscence motifs’. David Fanning, ‘Leitmotif in \textit{Lady Macbeth}’, in \textit{Shostakovich Studies}, ed. David Fanning (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 151.}

It is not only the suggestion of simultaneous events that is significant, however, but how this sense is created through literary form. It requires close reading to understand how the thematic material works throughout the text, promoting independent thought and interpretation by simulating the ambiguity of a non-lexical form. The reader is recruited, in a manner more demanding than in other texts, as an active participant in order to make sense of words for which the meaning is partially constructed in the text’s own terms through its form. While the function of the words is comparable to the function of music, unlike music they still refer to something outside themselves, so that the way language functions is highlighted at the same time as those functions are challenged.
The significance that I have derived from considering the text as musical differs from the consequences others have noticed. Zimmerman, for example, finds multiple layers of sound and argues this gives the chapter a positive, implicitly democratic potential. In her formulation, ‘Sirens’ succeeds in emulating the simultaneity of music, which is ‘closer to the reality’ of everyday life:

However, with the fuga per canonem structure, the reader can also experience the counterpoint shared by the characters. No one develops independently of the others because their actions and thoughts are interconnected by verbal simultaneity. And, perhaps this is closer to the reality of the ways we live – we develop not in a vacuum, but in counterpoint with our surroundings, building life’s narrative in each moment.\(^{115}\)

This suggests the positive potential of music: its formation out of several separate parts (or lines or voices) apes the social, which is also comprised of multiple voices.\(^{116}\) Yet the reference to counterpoint and the resulting connotations of harmony elides the conflict that is a necessary part of daily existence, and the conflict between what is expressed about music in the chapter’s content, as opposed to its form. At the opening of the chapter, words are divorced violently from their established context (11.1–63), so that they are conspicuously nonsensical, and after this new meanings are enforced upon the initial thematic words and phrases by the form of the chapter. This is not the kind of activity we might associate with a democratic plurality of voices.

The attempted fusion of musical and literary form – and the related critical discussions – reveals problems of interpretation and comparison that have much wider implications for criticism in general. Categories of form and genre such as ‘music’ and ‘literature’ allow us to police boundaries and distinctions between phenomena in the

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\(^{115}\) Zimmerman, ‘Musical Form as Narrator’, 118.

\(^{116}\) Even this, though, can be considered idealistic. The democratic element to music is only accessible via a level of education and understanding that many do not possess. The potential of music be truly democratic is limited, since the ability to access it (either in terms of the music itself or to perform a listening or analysis that realises the democratic potential) is not shared by everyone.
The similarities between spoken language, narrative and musical ‘voice’ can be strongly sustained by the language we use, in terming the musical element to which we refer ‘a voice’ rather than a ‘line’ of music. Arguments sustained through stylistic use of language, or careful but uninterrogative use of particular words like ‘voice’ are often used to make connections that support authorial intention: the equation of ‘voice’ in music and literature is utilised to support Joyce’s claim that he uses fugal form to evoke multiple simultaneous ‘voices’, for example, and this has obstructed (in the context of the available criticism) other ways of reading the text.

The way ‘Sirens’ engages with music is more complex than discussions of simultaneity allow for. Joyce refers to music specifically in ‘Sirens’ because he is communicating a complexity of mental function not yet put into words – not just making intellectual points and showing skill. The words ‘jingle’ and ‘jaunt’ come to signify Bloom’s repressed but very significant knowledge of his wife’s meeting with her lover, Blazes Boylan. Variations on the words ‘jingle’ and ‘jaunt’ indicate

117 Jacques Rancière argues that the construction form and genre categories, or more broadly aesthetic categories, are part of a political process: since an individual must have a role in society, forms of activity and the time and space in which they happen are differentiated and the boundaries between them are monitored. This is also the case for artistic activity as well as ‘occupation’ in the sense of daily work. Rancière refers to this as the ‘distribution of the sensible’, as in, the distribution of sense experience, arguing that ‘There is thus an “aesthetics” at the core of politics’ because ‘Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it’. Jacques Rancière, The Politics of Aesthetics, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (2000; London: Bloomsbury, 2004), 8. I agree with Rancière that the policing of aesthetic categories is part of the process of organising daily life which is connected to other forms of policing activity and ensuring ‘working’ citizens. As such, I do not wish to suggest that the distinctions between art forms ought to be policed or that comparisons between art forms are fundamentally problematic – as I hope to have shown in my own analysis. Rather, I mean to suggest that the way these similarities and differences are spoken about can be fluid and diverse, and that sometimes, and in the case of much criticism on ‘Sirens’, music and language are spoken (written) about in a way that is designed to support Joyce’s authorial intention, and that this can limit the way the text is perceived, and other forms of analysis which can have social and political relevance.
Boylan’s presence both real and imagined at different points in the chapter. The jingling and jaunting refers to him driving around in his car, from the Ormond Bar to meet Molly at four o’clock. Bloom contemplates following Boylan, but remains in the Ormond Bar: ‘Jingling on supple rubbers it jaunted from the bridge to Ormond quay. Follow. Risk it. Go quick. At four. Near now. Out’ (11.304–5). After this, Boylan’s theme ‘jingle’ returns in a different way, slipping into Bloom’s inner monologue:


The memory of Boylan’s jingling and jaunting, and the knowledge of where he is going, is a passing thought that Bloom tries to suppress but cannot. The passage recounts Bloom’s disjointed thoughts, combining his actions at the table with the doyley, his memories of Molly, and the painful knowledge of her meeting with Boylan that he is attempting to ignore. Boylan’s presence in Bloom’s thoughts is indicated in a very oblique way, through the repetition of the thematic material.

In this case, the musically-inspired form communicates a truth of which Bloom is not yet fully cognisent:

- Twopence, sir, the shopgirl dared to say.
- Aha…I was forgetting…Excuse…
- And four.
  At four she. (11.306–9)

Bloom’s awareness of Molly and Boylan’s impending meeting is communicated, not through Bloom dwelling on it, but through significant words and phrases. He finds

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118 Boylan’s opening thematic phrase is ‘Jingle jingle jaunted jingling’ (11.15), and the material returns linked to Boylan when ‘With patience Lenehan waited for Boylan with impatience, for jingle jaunty blazes boy’ *(U* 11.289–90).
particular significance in the shopgirl saying ‘twopence…and four’ because of Molly’s meeting with Boylan at four. Bloom stops short of making the connection, not naming his ‘she’ (Molly). The sentence abruptly ends, but we are able to see what Bloom is not prepared to admit to himself directly. We see this again when he asks ‘Who said four?’ (11.352) when nobody has said four. Joyce reportedly asked a friend, ‘Don’t you find the musical effects of my Sirens better than Wagner?’ and this points to the complex emotional aspect of what is being communicated, because it refers to Wagner’s (and Joyce’s) attempts to display the complexity of human psychology through leitmotifs, and language used like a lietmotif.

The significance of how Joyce refers to music in this chapter can be productively compared with the way Adorno formulates how music produces meaning:

Music … is a temporal succession of articulated sounds that are more than just sound. They say something, often something human … But what is said cannot be abstracted from the music; it does not form a system of signs.

For Adorno, music has a capacity for communicating ‘something human’. In ‘Sirens’, referring to music allows us to see a particularly human truth that cannot be communicated through words. We need the musical form to communicate Bloom’s pre-conscious, because it can allow us to see these things that Bloom is not fully prepared to acknowledge. The complex form requires a level of absorption and concentration from the reader, too, and this detracts attention away from our social world and into the text. The form of ‘Sirens’ is much more complex than the ‘democratic plurality’ of voice and perspective that has been claimed for it.

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119 Ellmann, *James Joyce*, 460.
Music in the Ormond Bar

‘Sirens’ stages two separate arguments about music, and allows us to contemplate its positive and negative potential. While there has been much critical debate about whether Joyce successfully used musical form or not, the rest of the music in the chapter has not received as much critical attention. ‘Sirens’ contains a critique of music’s capacity to stimulate the emotions. Like the song of the Sirens in the Odyssey, which is alluring but devastatingly dangerous, the music in the Ormond Bar promotes an anti-social and potentially damaging self-absorption.

In the Ormond Bar music is potentially dangerous. Music is equated with war and violence when Ben Dollard plays the piano: ‘Boomed crashing chords. When love absorbs. War! War! The tympanum’ (11.20). At one moment, the musical instrument is placed in its social context as an appendage to violent rituals when Bloom imagines the ‘Hunter with a horn’ (11.1240),121 while Ben Dollard’s musical performance is an ‘attack, booming over bombarding chords’ (11.528–9) and he leaves the keyboard ‘punished’ afterwards (11.473). When Ben Dollard plays, he becomes ‘the warrior’ (11.532) according to Father Cowley, and the sound he produces is an assault on the ears; a physical affect that those nearby are powerless to do anything about: ‘—Sure, you’d burst the tympanum of her ear, man, Mr Dedalus said through smoke aroma, with an organ like yours’ (11.536). Through his huge size, Ben Dollard’s voice and pounding on the keyboard involve real violence that carries (at least anecdotally) the threat of physical injury. Similarly, in the Odyssey, Circe warns Odysseus that nobody

121 There is a sexual pun on the word ‘horn’: thoughts of ‘Molly in her shift in Lombard street west, hair down’ are followed with the sexually suggestive ‘Wet night in the lane. Horn. Who had the?’ (11.1240, 1253). Both references to the ‘horn’ here refer back to Lenehan’s comment to Boylan early in the chapter, ‘Got the horn or what?’ (11.432), which produces anxious echoes in Bloom’s consciousness: ‘Horn. Have you got the? Horn. Have you the? Haw haw horn’ (11.526–7).
who hears the song of the Sirens can survive.\textsuperscript{122} The threat of death associated with the Sirens of the \textit{Odyssey} is also present in Joyce’s ‘Sirens.’

Music is also associated with another form of danger – that of extreme ‘inwardness’ and reflection, similar to the critique of music Kant makes in the \textit{Critique of the Power of Judgement}. For Kant, music was afforded the ‘lowest place’ among the arts because it ‘merely plays with the sensations’: although music ‘moves the mind in a greater variety of ways and more intensely’ than other arts, it does so ‘only transitorily.’\textsuperscript{123} Despite Miss Douce and Miss Kennedy apparently taking the place of the Sirens, it is not their singing that is the Sirens’ song. In ‘Sirens’ music appeals to the mind, rather than the body: the men are physically attracted to the barmaids – they are the ‘sweets of sin’, ‘[t]empting poor simple males’ (11.202) – but it is Simon Dedalus’s singing that touches the ‘human heart soul spine’, signifying not a physical allure but one of the mind and soul. Likewise in Homer’s text, the Sirens’ appeal is also not to the flesh or physical gratification, but to the mind or the spirit: they know ‘all that the Argives and Trojans suffered on the broad plain of Troy by the will of the gods, and we know whatever happens on this fruitful earth’.\textsuperscript{124} The magnetism of the Sirens in the \textit{Odyssey} is the promise of unmediated personal knowledge which appeals to the mind, constituted in the form of a song: the form and content of the Sirens’ song comprises the dangerous totality. Since the sirens know everything that has happened in Odysseus’s and his crew’s past, according to Adorno and Horkheimer, ‘[t]heir

\begin{footnotes}
\item[122] Circe warns: ‘Your next encounter will be with the Sirens, who bewitch everybody who approaches them. There is no homecoming for the man who draws near them … For with their high clear song the Sirens betwitch him, as they sit there in a meadow piled high with the mouldering skeletons of men, whose withered skin still hangs upon their bones’. Homer, \textit{Odyssey}, Book XII, trans. E.V. Rieu (London: Penguin, 1991), 180 (lines 39–47).  
\item[124] Homer, \textit{Odyssey}, Book XII, 184 (lines 190–4).
\end{footnotes}
allurement is that of losing themselves in the past’. In Joyce’s corresponding chapter, Simon Dedalus’s song allows the possibility of retreat into the inwardness of personal remembrance that elides the social in the sense of peoples’ ability and wish to engage with one another. Immediately as the song begins the threat of loss of self appears: ‘—A beautiful air, said Bloom lost Leopold. I know it well’ (11.642). The familiarity of the song for Bloom, like the familiarity of the past for Odysseus and his crew, prompts the recollection of the past self that has been integral to the construction of the present self, and thus requires protection at all costs. Yet the reverie about the past (self) removes the individual from the present, acting out the destruction of the self in the present and thus threatening the destruction of the self as a whole. Homer’s Sirens, for Adorno and Horkheimer, prompt ‘euphoria in which the self is suspended’ and this is rooted in self-preservation but produces self-destruction.

The Sirens’ song in the Odyssey is dangerous because it has not yet been, in Adorno’s words, ‘rendered powerless by reduction to the condition of art’. In Homer’s Odyssey, the song of the Sirens is ‘divine’: it is a form of absolute beauty and knowledge, rather than an imitation. It is not a representation (re-presentation), but is beauty and truth itself so undiluted and irresistible that one cannot bear to extract themselves from it once they have heard it. The reduction of music to the condition of art has taken place in Ulysses, making it less dangerous, although still able to produce a problematic emotional response that prohibits engagement with others. Bloom takes the place of Odysseus in Joyce’s chapter, but he does not need to tie himself to the

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126 Ibid.
127 Ibid.
128 Homer, Odyssey, Book XII, 183 (line 158).
mast: he gestures to Pat, the waiter (who is deaf and so does not require his ears to be stopped with wax like Odysseus’s crew) to open the door. Pat replaces the sailors, who do the labour at Odysseus’s bidding to enable him to hear the music. The door, a physical construction allowing or preventing movement like the mast which facilitates the sails, is not used by Bloom to stop the music, as Odysseus uses the mast as a restrictive apparatus, but to let it in:

Braintipped, cheek touched with flame, they listened feeling that flow endearing flow over skin limbs human heart soul spine. Bloom signed to Pat, bald Pat is a waiter hard of hearing, to set ajar the door of the bar. The door of the bar. So. That will do. Pat, waiter, waited, waiting to hear, for he was hard of hear by the door. (11.666–69)

With the door propped open, Bloom is susceptible to the inwardness and loss of self provoked by the music during its performance. Music performs a less deadly but still problematic diversion than in the *Odyssey*, distracting Bloom from the present. His reminiscences about Molly culminate in a verbal description of emotional-physical surge or tumescence that is matched to the musical crescendo: ‘Tenderness it welled: slow, swelling. Full it throbbed. That’s the chat. Ha, give! Take! Throb, a throb, a pulsing proud erect’ (11.701–2). His mind and his body are at entirely at the whim of the music, to which Bloom’s emotional response is intimately personal and others are necessarily excluded from the experience. He takes no action in the present, sitting apart from Simon Dedalus, Ben Dollard and the others in the Ormond Bar, entirely consumed by his own thoughts, and taking no action in relation to Molly’s impending meeting with her lover Boylan. Music is not directly life-threatening as in the *Odyssey*, but it does encourage Bloom’s retreat from action as he sinks into sentimental thought.

Stuart Allen has argued that Bloom is uniquely capable of avoiding the dangerous emotional pull of music, while the rest are transfixed by the spell. For Allen, Bloom
alone notices music’s artifice and responds to it when he postulates, ‘Words? Music? No: it’s what’s behind’ (11.703). Here, says Allen, ‘Bloom peers beyond the inward results of the affects of music (and poetic language) to the original source of sensuality – the material world and the people in it’. 129 Allen suggests that Bloom can access the physical world independently of the mediation of language, implying access to some kind of reality for which language and music are merely a veil: ‘Bloom recognizes the bullying artifice, the commandment, that passes for natural and feeling relations’. 130 Likewise, David Herman argues that Bloom’s musings about ‘what’s behind’ words and music constitutes ‘an antiprogrammatic, even Pythagorean view of music. He absolutizes musical structures and deemphasizes the particular phonic substance in which those structures might be realized’. 131 This reading constructs Bloom as the quotidian hero, uniquely able to resist the ‘bullying artifice’ of songs that inspire emotion.

Yet Bloom rather puzzles over the effect of music, rather than peering past its power. His response to the music is mixed and he adjusts it as he thinks it through:

Numbers it is. All music when you come to think. Two multiplied by two divided by half is twice one. Vibrations: chords those are…Musemathematics. And you think you’re listening to the ethereal. But suppose you said it like: Martha, seven times nine minus x is thirtyfive thousand. Fall quite flat. It’s on account of the sound it is.

Instance he’s playing now. Improvising. Might be what you like til you hear the words…Time makes the tune. Question of mood you’re in. Always nice to hear. (11.830–42)

Bloom recognises that music has mathematical underpinnings, but goes on to acknowledge the problems of music-as-mathematics: music is made of ‘sound it is’,

130 Ibid., 453.
131 Herman, ‘“Sirens” after Schönberg’, 478.
whereas maths is not. He wants to disarm music of its power, because you only ‘think you’re listening to the ethereal’, but his mathematical explanation is ultimately insufficient. Bloom’s contemplation only attempts to de-mythify the impact of music, rather than actually achieving it: music may be partially ‘numbers’ yet this thought is not sufficient to explain music’s allure – it is still ‘Always nice to hear’. While Allen’s and Herman’s analyses want to see Bloom as uniquely able to extract himself from the dangers of music’s artificially constructed inwardness, really Bloom is just as susceptible to the emotional impact of music, as his tumescent and reflective emotional response to it reveals.

The desire to see Bloom as contemplative and scholarly is another way that reverence for Joyce manifests itself in (and clouds) critical discussion. When Bloom thinks about mathematics and acoustics he doesn’t follow his thoughts through to their conclusion, stopping when he muddles and confuses himself. Leo Bersani has noted this tendency to read for positive moral affirmations, either of Joyce or of Bloom, in Joyce studies. He argues that much scholarship attempts to read *Ulysses*, contradictorily, as both ‘pure linguistic effects’ whilst also reaching towards a ‘type of psychological and moral appreciation made obsolete by the New Criticism of half a century ago’.\footnote{Leo Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 158.} This is something that is further evidenced in readings of ‘Cyclops’, which attempt to claim a specific political position for Joyce and/or Bloom, exemplifying what Bersani terms ‘the paranoid response to what might be called the irreducibility of voice in literature to locations and identities’.\footnote{Ibid., 159.} Likewise, the desire to read Joyce positively and find affirmative statements in writing that is ‘perspectivally shifty’ (to use Bersani’s...
phrase) has resulted in limited engagement with the complexity of the presentation of music in ‘Sirens’.¹³⁴

Joyce’s professed attempt to use musical form can be seen working together with the effects of music in the Ormond Bar to produce a critique of music as producing sentimentality and introspection as well as indicating its positive potential to communicate differently from language. Joyce brings two opposing ideas about music into tension in ‘Sirens’, displaying music that promotes inwardness and distracts from the present in the Ormond Bar, while appropriating musical techniques throughout the form of the chapter in order to promote independent thought and analysis. Judging the ‘success’ of the chapter by the extent to which it fuses musical and literary form assumes a positive potential in music that is only one aspect of what how music is presented. When only the form is considered, and the aim is to argue for the successful combination of musical and literary form, other aspects of the text (such as the responses music provokes in the Ormond Bar) that work together with the experimental form can be overlooked. Often, the purpose of readings that seek to evidence Joyce’s claims about the musicality of the chapter are not immediately obvious, because the aim is simply to prove Joyce’s assertions about the musicality of ‘Sirens’ to be true.

But just as Bloom is lost in a personal reverie as a result of his musical experience, the text requires a level of absorption from the reader due to the musically-informed form of the chapter. Therefore, there is not a simple opposition between what is communicated in the form and the content of this chapter, with the former suggesting

¹³⁴ Ibid.
music’s positive capacity and the latter its potential to promote introspection. The concentration required by the form encourages introspection and engrossment in the reader, of the kind of that Bloom succumbs to during Ben Dollard’s performance. On the other hand, our recognition of the lack of social engagement as a result of Bloom’s reverie alerts us to the negative potential of music in which Kant’s critique is based, as that can move us affectively and sensationally, but in a manner that is not critical and often transitory.  

In the next section I argue that comparing music and literature can be productive and have a particular purpose. By ‘productive’ I mean that analysing music and literature together can produce a new reading that is contingent upon the knowledge arrived at through the interpretation of music, or by analysis of the differences and similarities that are illuminated when music and literature are read together. In addition, reading literature with music can affect the way we interpret the political content of the text, and to show this I analyse the ‘Cyclops’ chapter, which contains some of the most expressly political dialogue in the novel.

‘Cyclops’

Dissonance, conflict and departure from traditional artistic forms are recognised as central to artistic responses to modernity. But forms such as the fugue and the sonata contain none of these characteristics. Joyce’s *Ulysses* ought to be considered with the ‘new music’ that was being composed in the early twentieth century which also rejected established artistic forms in favour of forms that embrace dissonance. Schoenberg’s compositional techniques and *Ulysses* reject functional harmony and

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traditional narrative structures respectively and new, highly organized, dissonant forms appear in their place. Joyce’s ‘Cyclops’ and Schoenberg’s twelve-tone row employ fragmentation techniques to resist resolution and traditional unity. Schoenberg achieves this by avoiding functional harmony, which is characterised by the dominant-tonic relationship, while *Ulysses* achieves this at the level of its narrative style, which changes from chapter to chapter, but also within the ‘Cyclops’ chapter itself, resisting traditional forms of storytelling that have a consistent narrative voice.

‘Cyclops’ moves constantly between different styles of narration: John Nash has identified ‘thirty-three parodies’ in the chapter that ‘parody general literary or newspaper styles’. The different sections are of indeterminate length and can only be identified by the altering narrative styles: they are not separated in the text beyond the usual use of paragraph indentations. By moving through these thirty-three parodies, there is a systematic and considered erosion of any dominant narrative voice. This can be illuminated by comparing and contrasting it with the social conditions that Adorno argues are reflected in the formal structure of Schoenberg’s twelve-tone row. Building on Nash’s claim that ‘[i]t is by reading the form that the problem of voice can be answered’, I argue that a renewed focus on form is useful for reading ‘Cyclops’ because it enables us to read the political content differently, although I do not claim to provide a final reading or an ‘answer’ to the problem posed by the text.

There is some evidence that Joyce took an interest in avant-garde music whilst in Paris and Zurich, and that he was aware of Schoenberg’s compositions. Composer Otto

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137 Ibid., 192.
Luening recalls Joyce stating: ‘For me there are only two composers. One is Palestrina and the other is Schoenberg’.\footnote{138 Jack W. Weaver, \textit{Joyce’s Music and Noise: Theme and Variation in the Writings} (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1998), 193–94.} Jack W. Weaver notes that Joyce attended the premiere of Georges Antheil’s ‘Ballet Mechanique’ in Paris, and claims that by the time Joyce had finished writing \textit{Ulysses} he greatly admired Schoenberg’s ‘experimental atonal music’.\footnote{139 Ibid., 92.} While it is useful to know Joyce was aware of Schoenberg, I do not claim that he intentionally appropriated or was influenced by the composer’s musical style. The twelve-tone method was not made public until 1923, so Joyce’s text could not have been modelled on the technique.\footnote{140 Schoenberg announced in a letter to the composer Joseph Matthias Hauer, 1st December 1923, that his method of ‘twelve-note composition’ is ‘now more precise than it has ever been’, although ‘[a]dmittedly I have not yet taught this method’. See Arnold Schoenberg, \textit{Letters}, ed. Erwin Stein, trans. Eithne Wilkins and Ernst Kaiser (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1964), 104.} Rather, I compare Joyce and Schoenberg using Adorno’s texts and his version of Frankfurt School Marxism, whereby composition and any artistic endeavour is considered to be intricately bound up with historical subjectivity. Work by Joyce and Schoenberg was influenced by the material and historical circumstances in Western Europe at the start of the twentieth century. An Adornian reading would see the shared structural elements in their work reflecting the social condition of the individual in modernity.

Both Joyce and Schoenberg produced work that expresses dissonance not only in their formal structures, but also in the way that their radical forms work by reference to classical art forms. \textit{Ulysses} references the classical epic the \textit{Odyssey} in its name, the titles of its chapters and their structures, but diverges from it in narrative form, setting and subject matter.\footnote{141 For a thorough discussion of the correspondences between \textit{Ulysses} and the \textit{Odyssey}, see Gilbert, \textit{James Joyce’s ‘Ulysses’}, 93–344.} While the \textit{Odyssey} is an epic of homecoming and years of grand
adventures, the narrative of *Ulysses* is about one day in Dublin, ending with a homeless Stephen Dedalus and without the promise of stronger social relationships. The novel both calls up the *Odyssey* and distances itself from it, the result being the juxtaposition of the old form and the new. Similarly, Schoenberg’s twelve-tone row expresses dissonance at the level of form in a radical departure from functional harmony. The music works referentially to the classical music it eschews: its stark difference due to its atonality can be identified only in relation to the functional harmony it differs from. Joyce and Schoenberg’s fiction and music are radical because there is a previous, historically established precedent for traditional narratives and tonal music.

It is specifically in the form of Joyce and Schoenberg’s work that the rejection of traditional modes of expression can be found. Artistic responses cannot consciously, or by synthesis resist the system of domination, but can only do so through their formal structure. Rejecting established forms responds to the social conditions of modernity, which has rendered traditional modes of expression insufficient for communicating the true condition of the individual in society. According to Adorno and Horkheimer, economic and industrial modernity has produced an alienated subject: the increasing efficiency of modes of production results in the division of labour which both alienates the individual from the object produced and allows more standardised, efficient production.\(^{142}\) The continuing success of society’s domination over itself is dependent on the imperceptibility of its systems of control to the individual: ‘Concentration and control in our culture hide themselves in their very manifestation. Unhidden they would provoke resistance. Therefore the illusion … must be maintained.’\(^{143}\)

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\(^{142}\) Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 22.

Adorno’s rejection of synthesis is evident in the aphorism ‘The whole is the false’ – an inversion of Hegel’s dictum ‘the whole is the true’.¹⁴⁴ Where Hegel considered the arrival at truth possible through the synthesis of the whole, Adorno rejects synthesis entirely.¹⁴⁵ Instead he shows an active interest in fragmentation. This aphorism asserts that there is no such thing as a complete truth, history or discipline. The totalitarian nature of the systems of material and cultural production profess a wholeness and unity that is rather a veil for reality – something that is opposed by the assertion that wholeness is false, and by the nature of aphoristic thinking. Conceptual wholeness is further opposed in Minima Moralia by the ‘disconnected and non-binding character of the form’.¹⁴⁶ The absence of wholeness and unity from modernist texts has been comprehensively noted by Sara Haslam, who sees fragmentation themes recurring in the literature of modernism and the historical discourses of the early twentieth century. ‘Where modernism is credited with a pattern, and it usually is’, she says, ‘it is more than likely that the concept of fragmentation is prominent in it’.¹⁴⁷

The ‘truth content’ of Schoenberg’s music for Adorno lies in its ability to reveal, at the unconscious level of form, the dissonance and fragmentation that remains hidden

¹⁴⁵ Otherwise translated as ‘The True is the whole’. G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 20. Hegel’s subject is the Absolute, or universal totality, which can only be arrived at through engagement with negative and positive concepts in a developmental process: ‘Only this self-restoring sameness, or this reflection in otherness within itself – not an original or immediate unity as such – is the True. It is the process of its own becoming, the circle that presupposes its end as its goal, having its end also as its beginning; and only by being worked out to its end, is it actual’ (18). Slavoj Žižek describes this process as ‘tarrying with the negative’ in *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993).
but is the true condition of society.\textsuperscript{148} Since society has been atomised through the micro-division of labour, and the meaningful interactions surrounding the production of the necessary staples of life have been removed, the individual exists in a relatively new state of isolation.\textsuperscript{149} For Adorno, the only art that has truth-value is that which internalises the fractured nature of the social fabric, reproducing and reflecting it through the work of art which displays at the level of its form similar dislocation, fragmentariness and mutilation. These formal devices are the tools by which the opacity of modernity’s reality is exposed, and the result of the exposure is fragmentation that can be perceived as disordered or chaotic, but is nonetheless controlled at the level of form through ordered structures. Modern music, he says ‘sees absolute oblivion as its goal. It is the surviving message of despair from the shipwrecked’.\textsuperscript{150} These highly structured forms betray nostalgia for a pre-modern transparency that only reinforces the extent of separation from it.

For Adorno, composition and any artistic endeavour is intricately bound up with historical subjectivity. Composers such as Schoenberg wrote in direct relation to both their experience of contemporary society and the compositional language that had been built up historically before them. Twelve-tone technique is a response to functional harmony, not a complete negation of music. It has a relationship with

\textsuperscript{149} The use of the word ‘isolation’ is slightly different from the previous term alienation (\textit{Entfremdung}). While the term ‘alienation’ is heavily indebted to Marx’s use of the term, the words ‘isolation’ (\textit{Isolierung}) and ‘loneliness’ are used to describe the conditions that the fragmentation of society, through the alienation of the subject, has produced. Adorno refers to a ‘formula of loneliness’ (\textit{die Formel des Stils der Einsamkeit}) which is present in the music of Schoenberg. See T.W. Adorno, \textit{Philosophy of New Music}, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 45–6. See also T.W. Adorno, \textit{Alban Berg}, trans. Juliane Brand and Christopher Hailey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 300.
\textsuperscript{150} Adorno, \textit{Philosophy of New Music}, 133.
tradition, but becomes restricted by its own form and internal relations. Schoenberg inherited a musical language of tonality, tempered tuning and particular precedents of harmonic progression, such as modulations through the circle of fifths, or to the relative minor. These principles, Adorno says, ‘inscribe the (hi)story of subjectivity. They are the congealed residues of past subjectivity’, in the sense that these forms of artistic expression convey the state of an individual’s existence in the time they were written.\textsuperscript{151} The result is that the existing music and historical precedent that a composer works with is ‘the critically reflected objective state of the technical productive forces of an age in which any given composer is inevitably confronted’.\textsuperscript{152} The rise of dissonance in the music of the early twentieth century, like the comparable shift away from narrative traditions in Ulysses, shows that certain composers no longer felt traditional tonal approaches to music sufficient to express contemporary subjectivity.\textsuperscript{153}

The twelve-tone technique was developed by Schoenberg as a way of tightly structuring music to ensure total escape from any suggestion of functional harmony, and the meanings or ‘intentions’ that had become inscribed within it. It uses a then-new method of extreme organisation to obliterate traditional harmonic relationships. Functional harmony is characterised by the dominant-tonic relationship and audible in particular cadences used in classical music. Even in atonal music, it would be possible to hear vestiges of this if a certain note were audibly dominant. This would mirror a


\textsuperscript{153} Other works which make use of the tritone include Stravinsky’s \textit{Rite of Spring} and Sibelius’ 4\textsuperscript{th} Symphony, and Wagner’s Tristan chord. See Peter Hill, \textit{Stravinsky: The Rite of Spring} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 39, 49–50, 63–66. James Hepokoski compares the fourth and fifth symphonies of Sibelius, referring to historians who ‘draw a line between Sibelius’s dissonant, austere Fourth Symphony (1911) and the seemingly more accessible, comfortable Fifth’, in \textit{Sibelius: Symphony No. 5} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 1.
piece of tonal music as a dominant note could be audibly perceived as the tonic. If a dominant note or chord can be heard, cadential relationships may be audible in the music, lending it the (even fleeting) appearance of tonality. The organisation of the notes into a row of twelve tones allowed Schoenberg to ensure that no note was repeated more times than any other note, so that no note would appear dominant. Adorno explains this in the following terms:

That the row uses no more than twelve tones is a result of the endeavour to give none of the notes, by means of greater frequency, any emphasis which might render it a ‘fundamental tone’ and thereby evoke tonal relationships … With every new pitch the choice of remaining pitches diminishes, and when the last one is reached there is no longer any choice at all. The force exerted by the process is unmistakeable.\(^{154}\)

The aim was to eliminate hierarchical tonal relationships. With the dominance of any note avoided through the rigid structure of the twelve-tone system, any attempt to navigate the music through traditional chord relationships, cadences or modulations is impossible.

Schoenberg’s system ensures the absence of tonal relationships and chord progressions associated with functional harmony.\(^{155}\) Serialism thus avoids the totality that a piece of tonal music has by virtue of it beginning and ending on the tonic note, and the music also resists progression in the traditional sense, since harmonic relationships, chord sequences and modulations do not occur, and it is these that give the sense of traditional development, or moving through time. In the example below,

\(^{154}\) Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 72–73.

\(^{155}\) Adorno did also note some problems with twelve-tone technique: it subjects the composer and musical material to strict governing rules that are just as limiting as the functional harmony from which it seeks to escape, so that for Adorno the technique was not an improvement on free atonality. Additionally, ‘the row, valid for one work only, does not possess the comprehensive universality that would, on the basis of schema, assign a function to the repeated event, which as a reiterated individual phenomenon it does not have’. In other words, the row creates works that are rigidly structured, characterised by repetition, and which are ultimately isolated. Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, 73.
the numbers of the twelve-tone row have been added to the score so that it is possible to see how the construction of the row avoids traditional harmonic relationships:

Figure 1. Wind Quintet Op.26, Arnold Schoenberg (1923–4).

In the top line of the music (the flute part) the first interval between notes one and two is a minor sixth. With the absence of an interval of a fifth, this is instead an interval through which it is not possible to discern a tonic or dominant relationship. Both notes, G natural and E flat, could be found in the scale of E flat major. However, any possible relation to this key is immediately dispelled by note three of the row (A natural), which is not present in the E flat major scale. This is in fact a sharpened fourth, the key accidental in the lydian mode, noted for its mystical sound which blurs the sense of major-minor tonality. The notes in the row are carefully arranged in such a way as to avoid intervals (particularly the fifth and major or minor third) that would imply tonic-dominant relationships that form the basis for functional harmony.

Joyce’s ‘Cyclops’ similarly resists traditional methods of textual navigation by moving through different styles of narration. ‘Cyclops’ is a series of parodies that systematically eradicates continuity in the narrative, and the reliability of the narrator is continuously undermined as the chapter appropriates different voices and parodies
different styles of discourse. An unidentified narrator begins ‘Cyclops’, saying, ‘I was just passing the time of day with the old Troy of the D.M.P. at the corner of Arbour hill there and be damned but a bloody sweep came along and he near drove his gear into my eye’ (12.1–3). The first person narrator recounts events in which they participate but is never officially identified, and the narrative switches without explanation from a conversation with ‘Joe Hynes’ (12.5) to detailing a list of ‘nonperishable goods’ and the rules of their purchase (12.33), before changing style once more to a monologue of pastoral pastiche beginning ‘In Inisfail the fair there lies a land’ (12.68). 156 After moving back into dialogue between the anonymous narrator, an unidentified ‘he’ and the citizen, the narrative launches into a long list of the names of ‘Irish heroes and heroines of antiquity’ (12.176).

The alterations in the narrative that fluctuate between dialogue and hyperbolic description mean it is not possible to perceive events or conversations as one would experience them in reality; as a series of events happening in real time in a specified location. The conversation between the characters, from whom the reader is alienated because there is no indication of who they are, is regularly suspended and punctuated by narrative changes, causing a disruption in the reading experience that prohibits a clear sense of moving through linear time. Changes in tone are continuous, from the banal observations of daily life such as ‘I was just passing the time of day,’ to hyperbole of a magical and mythical scale in the description of the ‘widewing nostrils … of such capaciousness that within their cavernous obscurity the fieldlark might easily have lodged her nest’ (12.159–61).

These changes in tone make it difficult to navigate the chapter in terms of voice, space and direction; they give the sense of moving from the streets of Dublin to rural Ireland, from Barney Kiernen’s Tavern to a mythical land. The sense of any reliability in the narrative is weakened further by the descriptive passages, which often reproduce the same events previously explained by the anonymous narrator in a way that contradicts the previous account. These continuous twists and turns in the structure of the chapter perform an assault on conventional senses of time and place, since the banal and the mythical, as well as different versions of events exist in the same narrative space.

By moving through these different narrative styles and parodies there is a systematic and considered erosion of any central or dominant narrative voice or traditional narrative trajectory, and the force exerted by the process is as unmistakable as the eradication of tonal centre achieved by Schoenberg’s twelve-tone row. Both Joyce and Schoenberg use tightly ordered structures to methodically destroy a sense of key, centre or dominant. The listener’s or reader’s attempt to map that which they are experiencing, via the tools used to understand the language of diatonic music and the traditional novel respectively, is made impossible by the fragmentation techniques that divorce parts of the composition from each other, resisting traditional senses of narrative or harmonic progression.

Yet there has been, in scholarship, a desire to resolve the tensions in the chapter, since it also features a political disagreement between Bloom and the citizen. John Nash has connected this with the difficulties posed by the form of the chapter, saying that ‘one of the principal problems facing the reader of Ulysses lies in identifying the relative
authority of the different narrative positions’. The “winner” of the argument and overall meaning of the chapter has been much debated because there is no clear victor, which is in keeping with the discontinuity and disconnect in the narrative. Yet scholars have been keen to decide who is dominant in the debate between Bloom and the citizen. The initial tendency has been to affiliate Joyce’s own position with Bloom’s liberal humanism, and therefore to declare Bloom the dominant voice in the chapter. One conventional position on this chapter is that ‘Joyce abhorred the “Citizen’s” political stance and recognized the nobility of the liberal humanitarian sentiments in Bloom’. Yet Herring also qualifies his position, noting that because of ‘Joyce’s use of exaggeration (“gigantism” is the technique here) and irony … it is impossible in this episode to take anything seriously’. Similarly Vincent J. Cheng describes Bloom as being able to step outside the narrow view of his ‘xenophobic fellow Irishmen’, resulting in an oversimplification which assigns Bloom a dominant, liberal humanist voice and the citizen racism and xenophobia. More recently criticism has attempted to move away from the default position of assuming the dominance of Bloom’s voice in this chapter. Emer Nolan attempts to counter this trend, arguing against the dominance of the liberal Bloom. She asserts that ‘the language of the individuals who constitute its primary focus are implicated in a practice of verbal or symbolic violence’. However, as John Nash has noted, her argument merely assigns the dominant voice to another individual, ‘placing greater authority and credibility in the [voice] of the citizen’. Despite many critics giving prominence to Bloom’s tolerant humanism (as they see it), the unidentified narrator mocks his sentimentality.

157 Nash, ‘Newspapers and Imperialism’, 175.
158 Herring, Joyce’s Ulysses Notesheets in the British Museum, 14.
159 Cheng, Joyce, Race and Empire, 177, 178–184.
160 Nolan, James Joyce and Nationalism, 118.
161 Ibid., 120.
sarcastically cutting in with ‘Love loves to love love’ (12.1485) after Bloom’s assertion that ‘love’ will solve the problems (serious problems, such as imperial violence and corporal punishment) they are discussing.  

*Ulysses* and Schoenberg’s twelve-tone compositions convey dissonance through formal devices that exile their writing from traditional modes of narrative or tonality. These in turn exile the receiver, as the experience of communication between medium and reader or listener is strained. The constantly shifting narrative of *Ulysses* elides a passive reading, requiring active interpretation. That so much is required of the reader works against an increasingly industrial society in which products are standardised and the consumer response is presupposed. The exile from traditional forms of narrative, by which the reader enters a foreign space, is what gives the novel the same truth-value as that which is present in Schoenberg’s atonal music. As David Clarke has noted, Schoenberg’s music ‘denies its bourgeois consumers illusory solace from reality’, and the effect of the music for Adorno is that ‘when confronted with utterly unleashed sound that defies the net of organised culture, such culture is revealed as fraud’. The same unleashed force is present in the variety of voices in ‘Cyclops’, which does equal work towards revealing the fraudulence of organised culture with its fragmented narrative comprised of dissonant voices.

Joyce treats loneliness and exile as a structural law in *Ulysses*. Removing the traditional means of textual navigation and understanding of the narrative, Joyce

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163 John Nash discusses what is at stake in the debate in Barney Kiernan’s tavern, where the subject is the British Imperial rule, corporal punishment and nationalism. ‘Newspapers and Imperialism’, 186–9.


places the reader in a position of loneliness that is the true experience of contemporary subjectivity. The individual parodies in ‘Cyclops’ inherently undercut each other, so that its form reproduces the fragmented structure of society where traditional social relationships have been removed and individuals now exist in dissonant relation to each other, apparent here through the fragments of different parodies. The whole novel is the sum total of the chapters which work together (and against each other) to destabilise traditional methods of textual navigation. This works in the same way as the composition: the sum total of many twelve-tone rows, it destabilises historical notions of subjectivity concerned with unity and totality. What it presents instead is a fragmentary, fractured experience, where parts of the whole exist in dissonant relation to each other, yet just about hang together.

Reading ‘Cyclops’ with music allows us to avoid the binaries that have been constructed by critics through a renewed attention to form. ‘Cyclops’ displays the competing and opposite politics of the citizen and Bloom: in the form of the chapter there are no direct opposites, only perpetual change. Yet critics responding to ‘Cyclops’ – and ‘Sirens’ – have sought to organise and explain through established frameworks of classical musical forms or radical versus reactionary politics. Joyce, according to Bersani, has become ‘one of the darlings of that branch of narratology obsessed with origins, with determining where narrators are located, over whose shoulder they may be speaking, from what temporal perspective and from whose voice they address us’. Critics often read the texts with ordering methodologies: replacing the scaffolding of Homeric myth with fugal form in ‘Sirens’, or trying to find evidence of the endorsement of one side of a binary politics displayed in ‘Cyclops’.

166 Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption*, 159.
Like the twelve-tone compositional method, *Ulysses* performs and celebrates dissonance. Discussing Joyce’s *Work in Progress* in 1929, Samuel Beckett wrote that ‘Here form is content, content is form … His writing is not about something; it is that something itself’ – words are drunk when the characters are drunk; at other times words go to sleep with them.¹⁶⁷ Conversely, in *Chamber Music*, although Joyce claimed for it a sort of musicality it is noticeably absent in Paterian terms comparable with the musicality that Beckett here claims for Joyce’s later work. In ‘Sirens,’ a kind of musicality is present because by reading it with attention to form and how music produces meaning, we can see that its form and content are not in opposition, because it explores the possibilities and limitations of music through both form and content. Both ‘Sirens’ and ‘Cyclops’ show the difficulty of taking a position on how music can function within literature, because texts and forms, like the world and its representation in art, are sites site of unsettling and often paradoxical obscurity. In each case, analysing the music in the text, or just the text itself with attention to the abstract way music creates meaning, can illuminate but also give political significance to the tensions and dissonances that scholarship otherwise seeks to resolve or explain. While this obscurity is something that *Ulysses* celebrates, scholarship has taken ordering and explanatory approaches to music, the kind of which are available in exaggerated form in Pound’s writing on music.

Chapter 2

Ezra Pound, Music, and Fascism

In this chapter I discuss Pound’s approach to music, which oscillates between the aesthetic and the empirical, the transcendent and the rational. He takes one position and then the other vehemently, but altogether this makes his oeuvre a complex engagement with music, the sufficiency and limitations of language, and the politics of aesthetics. There is a complex negotiation taking place in Pound’s thought, between emergent empirical approaches to music and historical notions of musical sublimity. In Pound’s early writing music is a transcendent art form, the effects of which cannot be put into words, but he also wants to reduce it to an essence that can be used in poetry. In his musical theories ‘absolute rhythm’ and ‘Great Bass’, Pound tries to simplify music and makes reductive conclusions which reject ambiguities and close down interpretive possibilities. His claim that music is ‘[p]ure rhythm; rhythm and nothing else’ negates the physical complexity of sound production and music’s cultural meanings and uses. However, music is culturally situated in the Cantos, which works against his reductive claims in the musical theories. The enduring significance of music as non-lexical and escaping definition in other parts of his writing shows too the insufficiency of Pound’s attempts to explain music in material, empirical terms alone.

Throughout this chapter I assess the form of Pound’s writing on music, and make connections with the structure of his political thought. The form of the poetry is not consistent with the fascist and anti-Semitic ideas he is well-known for propagating.

although elements of a way of thinking relevant to fascism are present in his writing on musical form. Pound’s strength of feeling about the importance of music for poetic composition is demonstrated by the title of the *Cantos*, meaning songs, and assertions such as ‘Poets who will not study music are defective’169 – the latter also showing his tendency to make reductive judgements. By understanding the simplifying mode of thought with which Pound often writes about music, we can see that music in the *Cantos* is a site of multiple – although not equal – meanings. It is situated in complex cultural and historical contexts that work against the assertion that it can be reduced to a singular truth. By selecting and arranging fragments of different languages and texts, the *Cantos* often presents the same events from different perspectives, so that the form of the poems contrast with Pound’s reductive and totalising aesthetic judgements in ‘absolute rhythm’ and ‘Great Bass’.

Work on Pound often focuses solely on the aesthetic ‘accomplishment’ of the *Cantos* and separates issues of aesthetics and politics. David Ten Eyck seeks to recuperate Pound’s ‘poetic achievement’170 in the Adams Cantos from analyses that cast them as ‘regime art’ or ‘fascist realism’,171 and Anthony Woodward’s study of the Pisan *Cantos* focuses on the ‘poetic achievement’ of Pound for ‘whoever admires the man,


170 Eyck repeatedly mentions ‘Pound’s poetic accomplishment’ in his introduction, separating Pound’s ‘formal strategies’ from his politics. He claims ‘the value of such poetry resides in Pound’s ability to select and effectively juxtapose material from his source’ and returns repeatedly to ‘Pound’s poetic achievement’, ‘Pound’s accomplishment’, ‘Pound’s poetic achievement’, and ‘Pound’s achievement’. David Ten Eyck, *Ezra Pound’s Adams Cantos* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 1, 7–8, 9, 10, 11.

whatever his flaws’. This puts Pound as an artist and admirable personality at the centre of the study, but also paradoxically marginalises the fascist, anti-Semitic parts of his personality that cannot be respected. Eyck and Woodward avoid the combination of political dogmatism and artistic achievement in Pound’s life and work, which necessitates analysing the relationship between his aesthetic and political judgements.

This chapter takes a chronological approach to Pound’s writing. I begin by considering his early work (1910–1918), which struggles to define the important qualities music offers poetry and decide if its ‘primary pigment’ is pitch or rhythm. This early writing also shows an interest in essences and totalities that is related to his allegiance to fascism, and becomes the driving force behind his attempt to explain why music is ‘pure rhythm’ in ‘absolute rhythm’ (1924) and ‘Great Bass’ (1938). The two musical theories are the basis of my second section, and I argue that they exhibit a thought that desires resolution, definitive answers and attempts complete mastery of the topic in question, showing the link between the structure of his aesthetic and political judgements. The musical theories are also full of inconsistencies, errors and generalisations, which shows the limitations of his reductive attempts to explain music in purely physical, material terms. Arriving lastly at readings of the Cantos, I analyse the poems that contrast with the totalising thought in the musical theories by keeping open a variety of interpretative (but still not equal) possibilities. I explore Pound’s attempt to recast his interest in essences as aesthetic rather than political in Canto 75,

and how music’s social functions and individual enjoyment come to the forefront in Canto 21, diverging from the absolute claims about music’s essence in the theories.

**Pound’s early approach to music (1910–1918) – and fascism**

For the early Pound, poetry should look to music for formal and rhythmic qualities to endow verse with additional, non-linguistic meanings: music’s value is its potential for communicating abstractions. In his 1917 article ‘Vers Libre and Arnold Dolmetsch’ Pound claimed that ‘[p]oetry is a composition of words set to music … poetry withers and “dries out” when it leaves music, or at least an imagined music, too far behind it’. The image of poetry “drying out” suggests music is the bodily fluid of poetry; something entirely essential that animates it. The essence that Pound is trying to take from music is abstract and he struggles to explain it with a metaphor, the insufficiency of which is indicated by the quotation marks. It is inadequate because, rhythm aside, there is something else that Pound feels music gives to poetry that he cannot express.

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174 Pound, ‘Vers Libre and Arnold Dolmetsch’, *The Egoist*, July 1917; reprinted in *Literary Essays*, 437. Pound first sought to incorporate musicality in his poetry with *vers libre* (free verse), through which he hoped to achieve musical rhythms. His interest in the technique was intimately connected to his study of music, particularly Arnold Dolmetsch’s book *The Interpretation of the Music of the XVIIth and XVIIIth Centuries*, on which Pound wrote two pieces for *The Egoist* in 1917. In Dolmetsch’s citations of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century authors, Pound found ‘proof’ of ‘the recognition of vers libre in music – and this during the “classical period”’. Dolmetsch refers to a time when notated music did not include bar lines which, for Pound, enforce a regular metre and limit the level of musical interpretation and individual expression that can be achieved. Pound considered bar lines in music a restriction similar to iambic pentameter in poetry, and looked back to music to theorise and inform his use of *vers libre*. Dolmetsch’s musical history offered Pound a methodology for incorporating music into poetry, yet the reference point is an old one. Daniel Katz’s comment about Arnaut Daniel’s influence on Pound is also true of *vers libre*: it is ‘one of the most important of the typically if counterintuitively archaic sources’ on which Pound relied to ‘make it new’. While the engagement with traditions from the past is self-evident in Pound’s study of Daniel and Dolmetsch, it is not so immediately clear in Pound’s writing about music’s unique communicative capacity. Daniel Katz, ‘Ezra Pound’s Provincial Provence: Arnaut Daniel, Gavin Douglas, and the Vulgar Tongue’, *Modern Language Quarterly* 73, 2 (June 2012): 177.

175 This is perhaps particularly apt, since rhythm is established in the performance of both poetry and music – rhythm (a repeated pattern of sounds organised by duration and/or stress) is the feature that translates most easily between the two, and also that which describes the temporal succession of sounds or movement.
The undefinable musical element to poetry described in ‘Vers Libre and Arnold Doltmestch’ is distinctly at odds with the other poetic principles Pound had developed just a little earlier in his career. Pound was committed to the Imagist and Vorticist movements for most of his time in London, where he lived between 1908 and 1920. The first Imagist anthology, *Des Imagistes* (1914), which included poetry by James Joyce, W.B. Yeats, Richard Aldington, H.D. and William Carlos Williams, aimed to break with Romantic and Victorian poetry (which they associated with over-use of adjectives, abstraction and emphasis on the ‘metaphysical’) and re-focus on direct communication. Laying out his then poetic principles in 1912, Pound stipulated:

1. Direct treatment of the “thing” either subjective or objective.  
2. To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation.  
3. As regarding rhythm: to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome.

The first two conditions are for representing the object, but the third seems to stand alone: Pound doesn’t specify what relation composing in the sequence of the musical phrase bears to what is being described. This is because the relationship of music to the ‘thing’ in poetry is abstract. Pound explains that *vers libre* is for ‘when the “thing” builds up a rhythm more beautiful than a set of metres, or more real, more a part of the emotion of the “thing”, more germane, intimate’. The musical aspect of *vers libre* is specifically for use in cases of extraordinary aesthetic beauty, but also to communicate abstract emotions or moments of particular intimacy.

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179 Ibid.
Pound wished to break with traditions, yet the way he refers to music in his early writing—particularly in his introduction to his own translations of Cavalcanti’s poems (1910)—reveals a set of aesthetic and musical approaches that are far from new. Pound drew heavily on *fin-de-siècle* French symbolism, and was also indebted to the nineteenth-century aesthetics of Wagner and Mallarmé. Seeing this enables us to recast his later break with these ideas as part of his drive to modernise his aesthetic approach, for which he moves towards the empirical sciences. Stanley Coffman and Vincent Sherry have shown that claims about the musical essences of poetry made by Verlaine and Mallarmé were a significant influence on Imagism. Pound’s description of the ideal poetry as the ‘perfect rhythm joined to the perfect word’ echoes Mallarmé’s ‘Crisis in Poetry’ (1896):

> Our present task, precisely (now that the great literary rhythms I spoke of are being broken up and scattered in a series of distinct and almost orchestrated shiverings), is to find a way of transposing the symphony to the Book: in short, to regain our rightful due. For, undeniably, the true source of Music must not be the elemental sound of brasses, strings, or wood winds, but the intellectual and written word in all its glory – Music of the perfect fullness and clarity, the totality of universal relationships.

Music must be put back into writing for Mallarmé, yet he also locates the ‘true’ source of music in the written word, proposing an interdependent relationship that Pound also subscribes to when he decides ‘[t]he perception of the intellect is given in the word, that of the emotions in the cadence’.

Both writers stress the need for a verbal narrative and an emotive musical aspect to art, and Pound’s poetic project is to achieve

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the ideal combination of these opposing concepts. Pound struggles with how to explain the musical aspect of poetry music, often resorting to metaphor as he does in ‘Vers Libre and Arnold Dolmetsch’, but this is a struggle that Mallarmé’s symbolism has also encountered.

In his early writing, Pound is considering philosophical questions about how to create the perfect work of art by combining rationality (through language) with the abstract (through musical expression). ¹⁸⁴ His search for the ‘perfect rhythm joined to the perfect word’¹⁸⁵ recalls Wagner’s Total Work of Art (Gesamtkunstkwerk), achieved through the ideal union of music and drama in which, for Wagner, ‘each separate branch of art is at hand in its own utmost fullness’. ¹⁸⁶ Yet to create the perfect work of art, direct communication must be united with the musical and abstract, and for Pound these elements are completely opposed – as we have seen when he claims the ‘intellect’ is available in the word, the ‘emotion’ in music. ¹⁸⁷ Pound affiliates language with sense and order, prizing clarity and precision, but he also acknowledges that there is something else that he wishes to bring to his poetry – an emotive, chaotic or ‘tonal’ element, which he tries to ground in music. The search for essences that can be seen in Pound’s preoccupation with the ‘perfect’ combination of words and music is a recurrent and often problematic theme in his thought.

¹⁸⁴ David Roberts traces the concept of the total work of art through Western thought, beginning with Rousseau and moving through to Hegel before arriving at Wagner, arguing that ‘Wagner's own theory and practice made the idea of the total work of art a screen on which were projected the most varied visions of aesthetic synthesis … [from] the theory and practice of the union of the arts in the theatre from fin-de-siècle symbolism through to Artaud’s theatre of cruelty in the 1930s’. David Roberts, The Total Work of Art in European Modernism (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), 5. For Rousseau’s discussion of music and race, and the ‘degeneration of music’, see also Jean-Jacques Rousseau, On the Origin of Language, trans. John H. Moran. (1852; New York: Frederick Ungar, 1966), 51, 58, 68–70.


Pound’s interest in the opposition between the rational and the abstract persists into his later writing, and he continues to consider music the way to communicate the emotive and non-lexical. In *Guide to Kulchur* (1938), he claims that an increase in ‘narrative sense’ (which seems to mean for Pound the linguistic communication of rational ideas) has led to a decrease in the musical, emotive aspect of poetry: ‘A gain in narrative *sense* from 1600 to 1900, but the *tones* that went out of English verse?’ (*GK* 294, emphasis added).\(^{188}\) Pound observed a lack of musicality in contemporary writing that he thought was profoundly connected to social life. He looked back to troubadour poets Arnaut Daniel and Guido Cavalcanti as part of a lost era of poetic brilliance, and considered Daniel the greatest poet of all time because he achieved the ‘perfect’ union of music and poetry.\(^{189}\) While Pound lauds the fact that for ‘two centuries of Provencal life devoted a good deal of energy to *motz el son*, to the union of words and music’, the move away from a ‘musical’ kind of writing is indicative of the ailing health of society: aesthetics and politics are fundamentally linked (*GK* 60).

For Pound the absence of musicality in modern writing reflected a problem with society: ‘the one thing you shd. not do’, he says, ‘is to suppose that when something is wrong with the arts, it is wrong with the arts ONLY. When a given hormone defects, it will defect throughout the whole system’ (*GK* 60). The biological analogy gives the judgement about what is ‘defective’ a veneer of factuality or impartiality, but the scientific terminology is a way of advancing a personal opinion, and his language


\(^{189}\) Ezra Pound, *The Spirit of Romance* (1910; New York: New Directions, 1968), 22: Pound claims that ‘In the forms of Arnaut Daniel’s canzoni, I find a corresponding excellence, seeing that they satisfy not only the modern ear, gluttonous of rhyme, but also the ear trained to Roman and Hellenic music’.
implies distinct and clearly identifiable categories of good and bad.¹⁹⁰ It is from this straightforwardness and rigidity of thought that Pound’s anti-Semitism¹⁹¹ derives, which disregards human complexity and individual differences by making generalisations based on race: anti-Semitic judgements are related to his overarching desires to arrive at absolute conclusions and find essences. This is also at the heart of his musical theories, showing how a simplifying mode of thought that is problematic in a political and human context is also present in his aesthetic judgements.

It is significant, even if it is not inevitable, that in the 1930s Pound finds a compatible mode of thought in the proponents of fascism.¹⁹² Pound’s conviction that art and society are connected is an example of the ‘rendering politics aesthetic’¹⁹³ that Walter Benjamin associated with F.T. Marinetti. Pound was well acquainted with Marinetti¹⁹⁴ who appears in Canto 72 as a ghost promoting violent fascism (75/426–427, 433–34).

¹⁹⁵ According to Benjamin, fascism:

> attempts to organise the newly created proletarian masses without affecting the property structure which the masses strive to eliminate. Fascism sees its

¹⁹⁰ Today, it is genetics, not hormones, which are understood to produce defectiveness or physical advantage. The biological reference might prompt a contemporary reader to recall discourses of purity and racial contamination that were to become some of the powerful forces behind arguments of fascist politicians in 1930s Germany. I return to these issues later in the chapter when discussing Pound’s simplifying and reductive thought in ‘absolute rhythm’ and ‘Great Bass’.


¹⁹² In a 1934 letter to Joyce, Pound makes the exaggerated claim that there are few revolutionaries besides himself and Mussolini as passionate about the Italian fascist regime: there is ‘too much future’, he says, ‘and nobody but me and Muss/ [Mussolini] and half a dozen others to attend to it’. Ezra Pound, Pound/Joyce (London: Faber, 1967), 234.


¹⁹⁴ For Marinetti’s influence on Pound’s poetry and radio broadcasts, see Timothy Campbell, Wireless Writing in the Age of Marconi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 97–132.

salvation in giving these masses not their right, but instead a chance to express themselves. The masses have a right to change property relations; Fascism seeks to give them an expression while preserving property. The logical result of Fascism is the introduction of aesthetics into political life.¹⁹⁶

In other words, fascism allows the expression of dissent without fundamentally altering the social structure, because it addresses only financial surfaces: money rather than labour and production. This reliance on simplicity and surfaces means that race, for example, can be treated only as the expression of difference, instead of as a socially, economically and geographically constructed variable of a common humanity.

In Pound’s musical theories we can see that a reliance on surface appearances and rejection of multiple ideas is present in his thought much earlier than his documented involvement with fascist politics. Throughout his career, Pound remains invested in certainties and absolutes. His Imagist principles articulate his desire to take language closer to ‘reality’, to that which it describes. It is significant that Pound sees ‘reality’ as something that exists entirely independently, which can be accessed and communicated, rather than something that is always mediated by language and perception. Writing later in Guide to Kulchur, he says, ‘I mean or imply that certain truth exists. Certain colours exist in nature though great painters have striven vainly, and though the colour film is not yet perfected. Truth is not untrue’d by reason of our failure to fix it on paper’ (GK 295). Pound is interested in the singular truth of an object, and throughout his writing he has sense of surety that there is a world-outside, or thing-in-itself that can be correctly apprehended and represented. Both of his musical theories can be read as part of his search for essences.

In his musical theories Pound attempts to explain music thoroughly through mathematics, and reduce it to something manageable on linguistic terms. The theory of ‘absolute rhythm’ is in the first part of Antheil and the Treatise on Harmony (ATH). It is a way of explaining in mathematical terms why rhythm is music’s fundamental component. Pound begins explaining that music is ‘pure rhythm’ by arguing that ‘TIME’ is more important to harmony than anyone has previously noticed – an idea that he bases on some knowledge of sound frequencies:

The element most grossly emitted from treatises on harmony up to the present is the element of TIME. The question of the time-interval that must elapse between one sound and another if the two sounds are to produce a pleasing consonance or an interesting relation, has been avoided. (ATH 9)

Pound argues that because sound ‘consists of vibrations’ (ATH 23) which happen over intervals of time, rhythm is of central importance. He suggests that percussion should be used as part of a harmony: ‘Your beat can be used as a third or fourth or Nth note in the harmony’ (ATH 27).

The theory is also an attempt to arrive at one law that governs the spatial (tonal) and temporal (rhythmic) elements of music, by contending that a particular ‘time-interval’ should be considered as a way of deciding how to organise musical pitch. To return briefly to Pound’s writing from 1910, he claimed that ‘[t]he perception of the intellect is given in the word, that of the emotions in the cadence. It is only then, in perfect rhythm joined to the perfect word that the two-fold vision can be recorded’. Here he switches between describing what poetry should take from music as tone (or

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198 Pound, Translations, 23.
cadence) and rhythm. ‘Absolute rhythm’ reduces music to one component - an essence which can then be harnessed, and used in poetry.

Pound’s emphasis on time sits in the context of the modernist preoccupation with it. Pound strives to modernise his thought by moving away from the aesthetics of French symbolism, towards science and maths. Bryony Randall has explored the changed relationship with time in daily life after industrialisation in modernist writing,199 while Mary Ann Gillies and Michael Whitworth have investigated how modernist writers engaging with time drew on the philosophy of Henri Bergson, and Einstein’s scientific advances that replaced Newtonian time with Einsteinian space-time respectively.200 Pound’s interest in finding a rule that joins the spatial and temporal elements of music shows him to be enmeshed in discussions about the relationship between time and space. He frames his theory as scientific by claiming The Treatise will perform an incredible service to music through mathematics, but his engagement with science and maths is both minimal and vague. He asserts his ideas without fully explaining them or providing evidence for his assumptions. A particular chord progression, he says, is ‘probably perfectly sound. I mean from the point of view of mathematics’ (ATH 15, my emphasis), but the mathematical evidence is not given, and the example seems to display gaps in his knowledge instead of supporting his ideas.201 Without explaining what he means by ‘the mathematics of these relations’, Pound declares:

201 For Margaret Fisher, Pound exhibits a ‘breezy dismissal of the need to explain the mathematics behind the theory…An alternative perspective is that Pound maintained a taciturnity bordering on
If I can only get the mathematics of these relations so complicated that composers will become discouraged; give up trying to compose by half-remembered rules and really listen to sound, I shall have performed no inconsiderable service to music. (ATH 29)

Even though Pound is referring to things that exist in the world independently of him – the relationships between notes or frequencies, presumably – the language he uses sounds like he is creating this complex relationship, so that it is Pound’s authority (as well as his self-professed intelligence and superiority over others) that remains at the forefront of his writing. The Treatise, as Erin E. Templeton acknowledges, is ‘difficult even for musicians to understand’ due to the ‘abstract and fanciful’ nature of Pound’s claims.202

The theory of ‘absolute rhythm’ is not a viable or practical theory, but a particular way of thinking about music that gives primary importance to the observation that vibrations produce sound, and disregarding other related physical and cultural factors. What we experience as sounds and refer to as ‘sound waves’ are variations in the pressure of the air around us, caused by an instrument or object vibrating and disturbing the air molecules around it. Sound consists of vibrations at different frequencies. For example, A4 is 440Hz, and A3 (one octave lower) is 220Hz.203 Hertz is a measurement of the frequency of vibrations, so an A4 is the sound of 440 vibrations per second. As Dmitri Tymoczko explains, sound waves are ‘small

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203 For an A4, the note referred to is A, and the number designates the particular pitch relative to the sound frequency, i.e. 440Hz. In music, pitches are referred to not through their frequencies, i.e. 440Hz, but by the names A, B, C# and so on.
fluctuations in air pressure, akin to changes in barometric pressure. These fluctuations are heard as having a definite pitch when they repeat themselves (at least approximately) after some period of time.\textsuperscript{204} The ear hears these sound waves, not individually since there are too many per second, but as a particular pitch. The sounds that we hear as musical notes are thus produced by vibrating objects which create fluctuations in air pressure, meaning that sound is comprised of vibration, pressure, the movement of molecules and is also dependent upon the receipt of those vibrations by the body.

For Pound, what is interesting is not that these vibrations and fluctuations in air pressure are heard as sound, but rather that there are multiple vibrations per second. His observations in the \textit{Treatise} are not wrong, but Pound draws extreme and unsupportable conclusions from them without giving full explanations or evidence. To say that music is ‘pure rhythm’ is an oversimplification which disregards elements of musical acoustics such as movement and pressure, and all the different objects (materials, structures, and shapes) required to produce different qualities of sound, the variety of which is clear from an orchestra, for example. Further, rhythm is a way of describing the frequency of the movement of those changes in pressure, or a way of measuring them, but the idea of rhythm is culturally constructed and mediated, it is not an essential or primary form in itself.

Most significantly, Pound addresses all sound, and not music specifically, meaning he neglects the complex cultural components in play whereby music is differentiated

from sound. When he discusses music as ‘pure rhythm’, he does not differentiate it from sound more broadly, such as speech, or what one might consider ‘mere noise’. This negates his argument that it is music specifically that poetry should look to for unique qualities. Since Pound attributes a special significance to music, equating music with all sound does not work on Pound’s own terms.

Daniel Albright argues that with the publication of the *Treatise on Harmony* Pound began to move away from a *vers libre* approach to music in poetry and instead to prefer “hard bits” of rhythm. For Josh Epstein this shift is due to Pound’s friendship with the self-styled ‘bad boy’ of contemporary music, George Antheil, who composed the *Ballet Méchanique* and collaborated with Pound on his operatic setting of François Villon’s *Testament*. Yet this was not just a straightforward change of approach resulting from Antheil’s influence. During the 1920s, Pound continues to say that musical writing has an enhanced level of meaning that is unachievable by words alone, and it is not just rhythmic either: musical writing is ‘wherein the words are charged, over and above their plain meaning, with some musical property, which directs the

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bearing or trend of that meaning’. Pound’s ‘absolute rhythm’ and ‘Great Bass’ should be understood as part of Pound’s (unsuccessful) strategy to manage music’s indefinable qualities with the specificity he considers necessary.

Pound also attempts to differentiate himself from the music theorists of his time, asserting his difference from his contemporaries in the same way that he wished to distance himself from association with the poetry of the previous century. He praises Franco of Cologne’s thirteenth-century innovations in musical notation, but he is critical of his contemporaries, such as Arnold Schoenberg, and Joseph Corfe’s nineteenth-century *Thorough Bass Simplified (ATH 11–12)*. Margaret Fisher notes that Pound had a ‘distaste’ for ‘popular composition manuals’ such as those of Ernst Friederich Richter, which Fisher suggests could be due to Richter’s popularity: the 25th English edition of *Manual of Harmony* was published in 1912, and Richter’s books were ‘brief and to the point’ (not unlike Pound’s short *Treatise*). Pound lauds the achievements of writers, musicians and artists of centuries ago, but the more recent are dismissed as Pound strives to carve out a particular position for himself.

The *Treatise* is part of Pound’s attempt to effect a break with traditions, and it views music in thoroughly empirical terms rather than in relation to the sublime. Pound attempts to affiliate himself with science and maths instead of discourses of musical sublimity, and he asserts his difference from his contemporary treatises on music theory. Pound’s 1920 poem *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* is credited with demonstrating

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208 Pound, ‘How to Read’, in *Literary Essays*, 25. T.S. Eliot’s footnote on page 15 gives the original date of this article’s publication in the *New York Herald* as 1927 or ‘28.

Pound’s self-conscious attempt to modernise his thought and aesthetic approach, beginning with the death of the ‘old’ Ezra to make way for the new. The poem also points forward to ‘absolute rhythm’ and ‘Great Bass’, where Pound considers how one could be in key with a time by attempting to arrive at one rule governing pitch frequency and time. He does this through mathematics and empiricism, however, rather than referring to notions of the musical ‘sublime’ as associated with its emotive capacity:

For three years, out of key with his time,  
He strove to resuscitate the dead art  
Of poetry; to maintain “the sublime”  
In the old sense. Wrong from the start—

The poem encourages the ‘he’ of the opening to be read as Pound’s earlier self by titling the section with Pound’s own initials: “E.P. Ode Pour L’Election De Son Sepulchre”. The previous Pound, interested in “the sublime” / In the old sense’ is dead, while the ‘the obscure reveries / Of the inward gaze’ are out of date, paving the way for a change in approach and methodology – moving away from aestheticism and its interest in the sublime – exemplified in the Treatise. That he is ‘out of key with his time’ suggests that the ‘dead’ poet’s approach was wrong for the moment in which he lived, stressing the need for change. In another sense, however, since there is no necessarily correct key for a particular time signature, it suggests confusion and the impossibility of ever being correct. In ‘Great Bass’ Pound attempts to explain how time and pitch are connected, and though he strives for clarity and logic he does not achieve this because the theories are neither accurate nor justified enough to be useful.

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While in ‘absolute rhythm’ time (and rhythm) had merely been neglected, in ‘Great Bass’ time provides the substance for an absolute ordering system: a ‘main base’ for all musical composition. Pound’s vague and allusive style, however, does not make it clear how this works:

Certain sounds we accept as “pitch”, we say that a certain note is do, re, mi, or B flat in the treble scale, meaning that it has a certain frequency of vibration. Below the lowest note synthesized by the ear and “heard” there are slower vibrations. The ratio between these frequencies and those written to be executed by instruments is OBVIOUS in mathematics. The whole question of tempo, and of a main base in all musical structure resides in use of these frequencies. (GK 73)

Pound’s other argument that more consideration ought to be given to frequencies that are not audible to the human is explained less cryptically in the earlier ‘Machine Art’ (1927–30) where he tries to clarify parts of the Treatise: ‘I tried to point out in my brochure on Antheil that harmony as studied, the history of the scale, etc. had hitherto dealt with frequencies from 8 or 16 to the second, up to 36,000 per second’.211 The ‘main base’, therefore, should be a frequency related to the lowest note, but lower than the human ear can hear.

Later in Guide to Kulchur, Pound claims that every piece should have the same tempo to match (in a fashion) the frequency of its ‘lowest note’:

The 60, 72 or 84, or 120 is a BASS, or basis. It is the bottom note of the harmony. If the ear isn’t true in its sense of this time-division the whole playing is bound to be molten, and doughy … Failing to hit the proper ‘Great Bass’, the deficient musician fumbles about OFF the gt. bass key as a poor singer fumbles about a little flat or a 1/4 tone too high. (GK 233)

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According to Pound, the lowest note of a piece of music should have a frequency that can function as a metronome mark. He also explains this more clearly in ‘Machine Art,’ when he says: ‘Instead of a key of C major, you will start with a related “Great Bass” key, you will take, say, 256 to the minute instead of to the second as your “tonic”’ (MA 74). 256 Hz is the frequency of a middle C, and frequencies are measured in cycles per second, meaning that for 256 per minute, the frequency of the note below human hearing would be arrived at by dividing by 60 to find the cycles per second. This comes to 4.2666. However, if we could hear it, this would be a pitch of C#, and this frequency is no longer related to the lowest note, it’s a little more than a half tone sharp – something that Pound is clearly against, as we can see from the analogy with the singer who should not be even ‘1/4 tone too high’. Additionally, the existence of a ‘Great Bass’ is reliant on there being a ‘bottom note of the harmony’ to begin with, which is in turn reliant on the existing rules of functional harmony. Since the ‘Great Bass’ does not replace the harmonic structure of the piece, the ‘256 to the minute’ does not function ‘Instead of a key of C Major’.

To arrive at Pound’s ‘main base’ while keeping frequencies related to the lowest note (making the theory more coherent in its own terms) we could continue to divide a frequency by 2 in order to get the frequencies we are unable to hear. For an A1 (110Hz) we could divide 110 by 2 repeatedly, to get 55, 27.5, 13.75, 6.875, 3.475, 1.7375, 0.86875, 0.434375, 0.2171875, 0.10859375, 0.054296875, 0.0271484375, 0.01357421875.

Daniel Albright also suggested a way of applying the ‘Great Bass’ theory that is based around dividing the lowest note by two, but he offers it as an explanation rather than an alternative, perhaps because he was not aware (since he does not refer to it) of Pound’s other explanation in ‘Machine Art’. Albright says: ‘Eventually the concert A can be divided into something measured not in cycles per second, but in cycles per minute; and then it becomes a rhythm, a ticktick on a metronome, not a sound’. Albright also notes that ‘Karlheinz Stockhausen devised a similar analysis of the relation of pitch to rhythm while composing Gruppen [1958]’. Daniel Albright, Untwisting the Serpent: Modernism in Music, Literature, and Other Arts. London: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 163.
1.71875 and so on. Which of these numbers should then be used as the ‘main base’ is not identified by Pound, but in reality attempting to use any as a metronome mark would be difficult. 13.75 could be used by playing to 137.5 BPM, or we could then multiply the smallest, 1.71875 by 60 to get 103.125 BPM. A ‘Great Bass’ of 137.5 or 103.125 beats per minute would be extremely difficult to achieve.

The theory is a way of arriving at what Stephen J. Adams calls a ‘Pythagorean music of the spheres’ – a fundamental law or ordering system for music. Pound gestures to his indebtedness to Pythagorean observations about musical sounds and their relationship to ratios in the earlier Treatise when he says, ‘music as the ancient philosophers say, arises from number’ (ATH 24) but as usual in his sparingly explained theories, gives no more information. ‘Great Bass’ is not dissimilar (although considerably less nuanced and exploratory) than Karlheinz Stockhausen’s theory about the relationship between time and pitch in his 1959 article ‘…How time passes…’ where he argues that writing a musical pitch is ‘giving form to time proportions’.

The technical detail and specificity with which Stockhausen explains his ideas is very different from Pound’s reductive and totalising explanations, as are his conclusions and the way he communicates his ideas are also at odds with Pound’s approach. Stockhausen explains what ‘further possibilities’ for musical composition his ideas allow, and while he is indeed concerned with ways of making connections, as Robin Maconie puts it, ‘between the vibrations of the atoms to the primal oscillation


214 For a full explanation of the Pythagorean explanation of the relevance of perfect ratios to musical octaves, see the Introduction and my discussion of The Corner That Held Them in Chapter Three, where I give a thorough account of this.

of the entire universe’, he does not claim to have unlocked any universal secrets about
how poor or great art can be measured, as Pound does.216

‘Great Bass’ is not a practical theory. It is more significant as a marker of how keen
Pound is to find a way of measuring ‘good’ music or musicians. To do this he
constructs a rule so that the pitch frequency and tempo of a ‘good’ composition can be
connected in a clearly observable and supposedly rational way. Pound makes
assertions to master the idea of music and show his control of the topic: it is ‘the
deficient musician’ who does not play music according to Pound’s ‘rule’ (GK 234).
His method of connecting the two seeks to master and universalise, because it reduces
music to something manageable and ‘logical’ – although as we have seen the theory
is not logical, it is wrong. In doing so he simplifies the cultural and physical
complexity of the acoustic phenomenon he is discussing.

This denies difference and variety in its attempts to bring all within traditional norms,
and according to Frankfurt School theorists this is a central problem with post-
Enlightenment rationality. Adorno’s methodology and writing is a strategy to avoid
reductive modes of thought by contemplating the remainder left over from concepts
that are understood through normalising or universalising means. Faced with the
eradication of difference,217 Adorno focuses on the contradictions and inconsistencies

216 Ibid., 31. Robin Maconie, Other Planets: The Music of Karlheinz Stockhausen (Maryland:
Scarecrow Press, 2005), 145.
217 David Jeneman discusses Adorno’s concern with the standardisation of human experience in
relation to Paul Felix Lazarsfeld’s sociological ‘administrative research’ into US radio. Giving
only minimal categories for responses to radio shows, such as ‘like’ or ‘dislike’, schematises
aesthetic sense and silences individual subjective responses. For Adorno, Jeneman says, ‘this
willingness of the social sciences … to “liquidate” its subjects, deriving “fixed” elements to a
graph, was tantamount to a type of subject-murder’. David Jeneman, Adorno in America (London:
that are papered over in a normalising society, and does so by abandoning closed types of systematic investigation. *Minima Moralia*, for example, rebels against the standardisation of commodities and mass-produced culture, standing ‘[i]n face of the totalitarian unison with which the eradication of difference is proclaimed as a purpose in itself’.218 The ‘disconnected and non-binding character of the book’s form, [and] the renunciation of explicit theoretical cohesion’ are techniques used to resist conceptual wholeness and instead embrace contradiction and fragmentation.219 In ‘absolute rhythm’ and ‘Great Bass’ Pound does away with difference by universalising rhythm as the only component of music, eradicating diversity and multiplicity to achieve his goals and avoid ambiguous conclusions.

Pound’s theories are closed investigations because they are intended to fulfil a predetermined objective, and he disregards aspects of music that do not help him fulfil his objectives. He emphasises the importance of poetry to the modern world, seeing anyone who does not agree with him as stupid:

> It is not intelligent to ignore that in Greece and in Provence the poetry attained its highest rhythmic and metrical brilliance at times when the arts of verse and music were most closely knit together, when each thing done by the poet had some definite musical urge or necessity bound up within it.220

Rhythm makes poetry essential: it is, he says, ‘perhaps the most primal of all things known to us. It is *basic* in poetry and music mutually’.221 By describing rhythm a basic element of poetry, and rhythm as something primal to ‘us’, Pound is able to argue for poetry’s fundamental importance to humanity.222

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218 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 18. Pound also developed his own critique of modern capitalism, which I discuss later in relation to the *Cantos*.
219 Ibid.
222 Pound was not alone in literary circles in emphasising the significance of rhythm: the modernist magazine *Rhythmus* ran intermittently from January 1923 until June 1924, and published Zukofsky,
Pound attempts to find ‘certain truth’ through the sciences, putting his faith in future scientific development and mathematical logic to thoroughly understand how rhythm works:

When we know more of overtones we will see that the tempo of every masterpiece is absolute, and is exactly set by some further law of rhythmic accord. Whence it should be possible to show that any given rhythm implies about it a complete musical form – fugue, sonata, I cannot say what form, but a form, perfect, complete. Ergo, the rhythm set in a line of poetry connotes its symphony, which, had we a little more skill, we could score for orchestra.223

Pound refers to an unidentified ‘further law of rhythmic accord’ to justify his own ideas about what constitutes ‘good’ and ‘bad’ art: it is ‘the tempo of every masterpiece’ which ‘is absolute, and is exactly set by some further law of rhythmic accord’.224 ‘Masterpieces,’ or ‘great’ works of art can thus be distinguished from poor or average ones by adherence to a law based in empirical reality that Pound has ‘discovered’ but which is not yet provable. Combined with his belief that ‘certain truth exists’, this allows Pound to make self-serving judgements about who is a deficient musician, and who has composed a masterpiece, and these judgements are not confined to aesthetics but are also clearly visible in his political judgements.

Pound’s description of rhythm as ‘primal’ reproduces elements of scientific discourses that seek to classify, explain, and allocate levels of importance to different phenomena. His preoccupation with rhythm is also another way of affiliating himself with

William Carlos Williams and H.D., among many others, and Pound’s relationships with all three of these writers make it probable that he would have been aware of the publication. The title of the magazine could have been taken from Hans Richter’s 1921 abstract film ‘Rhythmus 21’, or it could also have been a reference a further publication, Harold W. Gammans’s ‘Rhythmus and the Writer’, published in The Writers’ Monthly in 1919. See Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker, The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines: Volume II: North America (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 330; Harold W. Gammans’s ‘Rhythmus and the Writer’ is also the preface to his book Common Men and Women (Boston: The Four Seas Company, 1917).

223 Pound, Translations, 24.
224 Ibid. Emphasis added.
narratives of modernity, newness, science and progress. Scientific and anthropological discourses about rhythm had been gaining prominence throughout the nineteenth century. For social Darwinist Herbert Spencer, rhythms originated in the workings of the human body and fit neatly into two categories (primary and secondary) that combine to form a general truth. According to William Martin, ‘Spencer traces the rhythms of music and poetry to the alternating phases of tension and relaxation [in] the human body, thereby reducing the origin of art to periodic processes occurring in nature’. This general truth (rhythm), related to a comprehensible whole (species) suggests a unity or totality; disparate things bound together by ‘rhythms’.

Pound’s primitivism is a way of validating his own ideas about what constitutes good and bad art, and it is framed in troubling racial terms as a way of identifying inferior and superior races in society. Pound demonstrates what Michael Bell calls ‘the nostalgia for a pre-civilised condition’ that is contained within discourses of primitivism that Pound engages to justify the enduring significance of the artist. In his discussion of Henri Gaudier-Brzeska’s sculpture he makes claims about the ‘primal’ nature of his art:

225 According to Spencer, ‘Perhaps nowhere are the illustrations of rhythm so numerous and manifest as among the phenomena of life … Primary rhythms of the organic actions are compounded with secondary ones of longer duration … Aggregates of living creatures illustrate the general truth in other ways. If each species of organism be regarded as a whole, it displays two kinds of rhythm’. Herbert Spencer, First Principles (London: Williams & Norgate, 1880), 261–262.


227 As Martin notes, in cases where scientific discourse is used to explain artistic phenomena, ‘the rhythmic forms of modernist poetry, prose and drama became a literary expression of the periodic movements already occurring in the body’. Martin, Joyce and the Science of Rhythm, 1. Also, as Michael Bell notes, ‘Despite its scholarly and scientific claims, the anthropology available to the generalisation of Conrad, Eliot, Joyce, Lawrence, Pound, and Yeats was still pre-scientific and based on premises that would be dismissed by the later discipline of social anthropology’. Michael Bell, ‘Primitivism: Modernism as Anthropology,’ in The Oxford Handbook of Modernisms, ed. Peter Brooker, Andrzej Gasiorek, Deborah Longworth and Andrew Thacker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 354.

228 Bell, ‘Primitivism: Modernism as Anthropology’, 353.
we turn back, we artists, to the powers of the air, to the djinns who were our allies aforetime, to the spirits of our ancestors. It is by them that we have ruled and shall rule, and by their connivance that we shall mount again into our hierarchy…Modern civilisations has bred a race with brains like those of rabbits and we who are the heirs of the witch-doctor and the voodoo, we artists who have been so long the despised are about to take over control.229

These notions of primitivism, degeneration and eugenics were not unique to Pound, and have been explored in the work of modernists such as Woolf, Eliot and Yeats by Donald J. Childs.230 Primitivism provided ‘a whole new aesthetic category for European connoisseurs’, following European exploration and colonisation, according to Elazar Barkan and Ronald Bush, while the violence of colonialism, Imperialism and its aftermath later ‘underlined the fundamental instability of easy distinctions between the “savage” and the “civilised”’.231 Barkan and Bush continue to say that ‘primitivism denotes an Occidental construction, a set of representations whose “reality” is purely Western’.232 In other words, it diminishes the value of other cultural forms by placing them within a linear narrative of modernisation and progress, of which the Western world is leading the pack and able to refer ‘backwards’ to the primitive.233


232 Barkan and Bush, Prehistories of the Future, 1.

233 Bush sympathetically notes that primitivism also contained more potentially positive ideas, as it ‘recognized the need to allow for the spontaneous or “natural” in man,’ and the early twentieth century was a moment during which ‘primitive art was seen for the first time not as simply unskilled art but as expression of the power and energy in the archaic mind’. Bush, The Genesis of Ezra Pound’s Cantos, 88.
Pound’s attempt to explain music empirically as rhythm tries to clarify and simplify the complexities he finds in it. He says this much in *Guide to Kulchur*, showing the longevity of his interest in music as a rational ordering system: ‘The function of music is to present an example of order, or a less muddied congeries and proportion than we have yet about us in daily life’ (*GK* 255). The way Pound engages with music is the product of his anxiety about art’s ability to accurately represent the world, when the world and daily concepts are in fact sites of unsettling obscurity. Pound’s interests in music and rhythm for poetry is part of an attempt to make a series of absolute claims about what music specifically is, which music is good, why poetry is important, and why his poetic technique is the most valuable.

What Pound does to music when he reduces it down to rhythm is a particular kind of violence. It denies difference and contradiction; it makes music into rhythm and makes the product of human artistic endeavour rhythm. It closes down the possibility of it being otherwise, it declines to have further conversations in which the possibility of it being otherwise is broached. Pound’s self-taught philosophy is one of synthesis, but it is one that denies the authority, even the existence, of the other. It places the authority where it chooses, and refuses to tolerate anything that contradicts it. And since these syntheses are unstable, always threatening to reverse or collapse in on themselves, Pound cannot interrogate the thought that leads to them in too much depth.

An absolute claim allows no variance: it denies difference. For Herbert Marcuse, this is a recurrent trend of post-industrial thought:

The protest against the vague, obscure, metaphysical character of such universals, the insistence of familiar concreteness and protective security of common and scientific sense still reveal something of that primordial anxiety which guided the recorded origins of philosophic thought in its evolution from
religion to mythology, and from mythology to logic … Particular things (entities) and events only appear in (and even as) a cluster and continuum of relationships, as incidents and parts in a general configuration from which they are inseparable; they cannot appear in any other way without losing their identity.\textsuperscript{234}

In other words, Marcuse says that an anxiety about abstraction, embodied in the inability to fully grasp or explain the nature of fundamental concepts, is what has propelled philosophers. When Pound finds rhythm to be all that music is comprised of, music duly loses its identity as something distinct from or which consists only partly of rhythm. In this instance he falls into the trap Marcuse identifies: desiring a solid resolution to its vague, metaphysical character, Pound does away with a variety of phenomena that elsewhere one might successfully argue comprise music and turns it into something concrete and manageable.

The shortfalls of Pound’s claims can be seen in the vague and often allusive nature of his writing, and the numerous points where his thought goes no further, refusing to penetrate any more. As Adorno puts it in a criticism that is not of Pound specifically, but can be used to critique his reductive and totalising thought processes:

\begin{quote}
Instead of thinking out the inadequacies of the absolute claim, and thus qualifying his judgement more proficiently, the paranoiac insists on the unchanging element. Instead of going further by penetrating into the heart of the matter, the entire process of thought serves the hopeless purpose of particularized judgement.\textsuperscript{235}
\end{quote}

In Pound’s case, this occurs when he does not fully explain his musical theories, when he points to that which is ‘OBVIOUS’ without evidencing his claim, or his assertion that ‘some further law’ as yet unidentified will prove his theories.

\textsuperscript{234} Herbert Marcuse, \textit{One Dimensional Man} (1964; Abingdon: Routledge, 2003), 211.
The shift in Pound’s thought towards considering music as something that can be rationally and empirically explained is not simple or one-way, however. In 1928, four years after the publication of the *Treatise*, but ten years before the publication of ‘Great Bass’ in *Guide to Kulchur*, Pound still shows that he is committed to the idea of music as something which cannot be explained as ‘pure rhythm’. Music, he says, is ‘a force tending often to lull, or distract the reader from the exact sense of the language. It is poetry on the borders of music and music is perhaps the bridge between consciousness and the unthinking sentient or even insentient universe’. This appeal to music as distinct from the rational sits in opposition to the controlling mathematical and empirical tactics used to explain it in ‘absolute rhythm’ and ‘Great Bass’. Here, musical writing is that which lulls the reader into an aesthetic trance, in which they are unable to use rationality to make sense of the effects.

In other texts too, Pound remains interested in music as an abstract and non-mimetic art form, claiming that one should:

- think of music as a definite entity in itself; that is to say, as a composition of sound; not merely *an expression of* a nightingale, or of a melancholy young man with a bellyache.
- There is nothing against considering music as the *expression* of x, y, z, grandeur, the Shakespearean megalaciousness of Beethoven, etc. I mean there is nothing against it, except that it may prevent a man’s ever coming up against the hard fact, or understanding what music is made out of. (*MA* 72–3)

Pound begins by asserting that music ought to be understood as a non-referential art, and that to relate it to objects in the world is not to properly appreciate it. At the same time, he goes some way towards acknowledging that music sometimes does create meaning by referring to things in the world, or can be likened to the song of a bird or

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236 Pound, ‘How to Read’, in *Literary Essays*, 26. T.S. Eliot’s footnote on page 15 gives the original date of this article’s publication in the *New York Herald* as 1927 or ’28.
particular emotions and pains, such as a ‘melancholy young man with a bellyache’.
Yet he refuses to locate the essence of music in the phenomenon that it may appear to
refer to, claiming that it is a definite entity in itself, not reliant on the material world
of external things.

From here, however, he takes a different turn, rooting the essence of music in the ‘hard
fact’ of what music is made out of. In this piece of writing we can see the
contradictions created by Pound’s desire to explain music materially, and his
competing notion of it as an abstract phenomenon. The ‘hard fact’ is anything but,
since it reveals itself, not as rhythm, the material production of the sound or
frequencies that we might expect after the musical theories, but as the expression of
an abstract genius:

To understand the not-clay, not-stone, not-bronze that the musician uses to
express himself.

“I made it out of a mouthful of air,” Yeats boasts of a poem in The Wind
Among the Reeds.

I made it deciding when a man should scrape a cat gut, and how long,
and how taught the piece of cat gut should be when he scrapes it.

The miracle of a Bach sonata is in the knowledge, and the justness of
his decision.

The dignity of music obviously does not lie in the “material sonore”; it
is not in the bull’s hide, or the cat-gut, or the composed brass of the
Sarusophone. (MA 73)

Catgut is the dried, twisted intestines of sheep or horses that have been used for
stringed instruments, and Pound refers to the basic mechanics and raw materials of
instruments to make an emotional argument that places the significance of music, or
the fundamental root of ‘what music is made out of’ in the ‘knowledge’ and ‘decision’
of the artistic genius, rather than in its material production. As such, the rules of
‘absolute rhythm’ and ‘Great Bass’ represent a way for Pound to attribute genius to
those artists he considers great – to give a law that governs the production of
masterpieces. It is even better for Pound, in this case, that the rules in ‘absolute rhythm’ and ‘Great Bass’ cannot be verified or disproved due to the cryptic nature of his prose: the vagueness and allusiveness of Pound’s writing on music acts as a barrier to thorough investigation and refutation, while giving him an apparently solid method for verifying the genius of artistic works.  

**Music in the Cantos**

I have argued so far that Pound’s writing on music in ‘absolute rhythm’ and ‘Great Bass’ shares similarities with his simplifying political thought. By reading music in the *Cantos* with an awareness of these reductive tendencies, we can see where those ideas appear in the poetry, and where the poetry contrasts with this kind of thought. To show this, I will focus on key Cantos where music is prominent, after a brief discussion of how the *Cantos* has been approached so far.

Work on Pound usually separates discussions of his aesthetics and politics by choosing either biographical or literary topics. Marjorie Perloff’s detailed, New Critical, close reading of a selection of poems discuses nothing about Pound’s life — a strategy commonly taken when writing about Pound. Failing to consider a writer in

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237 Pound’s irascible tone when referring to Yeats’s ‘boast’ is inexplicable considering the authoritative attitude Pound takes himself. Pound’s authoritative tone shows his self-assuredness and his lack of self-awareness, and these characteristics explain his ability to make claims to truths that are diverse as they are unsupported.

238 Early accounts of Pound were polarised, either excusing him on the grounds of artistic greatness, or straightforwardly condemning him. Saxe Commins from Random House rejected Pound’s work, saying he would ‘refuse to publish any fascist’, while Conrad Aiken separated his politics and poetry, saying ‘He was a poet, and perhaps a great one, long before he became a Fascist, he is still that poet, and one of the great creative influences of our time’. Charles Norman, *The Case of Ezra Pound* (New York: Bodley Press, 1948), 61.


240 Leon Surette’s books become progressively more interested in Pound’s politics, while the analysis of the poetry becomes more marginal. Surette’s *A Light from Eleusis: a study of Ezra Pound’s Cantos* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979) mentions Pound’s involvement in fascism only
their social, cultural and historical context is to risk treating the text as an aesthetic object that is somehow removed from the social and material conditions in which it was produced. This separation persists in Brad Bucknell’s recent, and otherwise excellent, account of Pound’s musical writing, compositions, and poetry. Bucknell opens with an acknowledgement of Pound’s ‘incoherent anti-Semitism’ which, he says, makes him a ‘less than amenable figure to today’s critical atmosphere’, but he does not return to the issue.\footnote{Bucknell, \textit{Literary Modernism and Musical Aesthetics}, 51.} This also sounds worryingly as though anti-Semitism is not necessarily objectionable, but merely out of fashion in a changing ‘critical atmosphere’.\footnote{The matter of Pound’s racial prejudice is not returned to aside from a suggestion that Pound may have considered anti-Semitism ‘necessary’. Fascism and its potential significance for Poundian aesthetics is not part of the chapter, although Bucknell concludes that ‘there is no way around Pound. It is Pound through whom we must see the elements of the text as significant’. If this is the case – if there is no way around Pound the man, for whom there is incontrovertible evidence for his Fascism and anti-Semitism – then arguably the political ideologies that Pound the individual evidently held ought to have more significance in the chapter. Ibid., 115, 120.}

My approach builds on recent scholarship that discusses Pound’s politics and aesthetics together. Since the 1980s critics have taken more nuanced approaches, not drawing so definite a distinction between Pound the artist and poet, and Pound the briefly and is centrally a textual study; \textit{The Birth of Modernism: Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, W.B. Yeats and the Occult} (Quebec: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1994) engages with the issue of Pound’s fascism more directly but also apologetically: he argues that ‘we ought not to find modernism guilty simply on grounds of association [with fascism]’ (75). Sutrette’s \textit{Pound in Purgatory: From Economic Radicalism to Anti-Semitism} (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999) is an analysis of Pound’s politics and economic views, occasionally supplemented by mentions of the \textit{Cantos}, and \textit{Dreams of a Totalitarian Utopia: Literary Modernism and Politics} is again a largely biographical and cultural study (Quebec: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2011). Philip Furia ‘refrain[s] from adding [his] own observations on the lyrical brilliance’ and focuses on the ‘documentary bulk’ of the \textit{Cantos}. Philip Furia, \textit{Pound’s Cantos Declassified} (London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1984), ix, 3. Clark Emery largely avoids the subject, but when he does broach it he says that Pound ‘praised Fascism and criticized Jews … However, save for isolated passages, his presumed Fascism has no bearing on the poem. It would not be necessary to discuss it at all had not so much been made of it on the journalistic level that it stands as a lion in the path distracting many readers from the proper object of study, Pound’s poem’. Clark Emery, in \textit{Ideas into Action: A study of Pound’s Cantos} (Coral Gables, Florida: University of Miami Press, 1987), 56–7 (emphasis added).
fascist sympathiser. Lawrence Rainey and Robert Casillo have analysed Pound’s fascism and poetry as part of a process from which much can be learned.\textsuperscript{243} This is partly due to the inclusion of Cantos 72 and 73 in the full collection for the first time in 1987, along with Pound’s own English translation of Canto 72 in editions after its publication in the 1993 \textit{Paris Review}.\textsuperscript{244} For Patricia Cockram, these Cantos are fascist propaganda, ‘composed expressly to promote the Fascist cause’, and they represent an ‘ethical and aesthetic collapse’.\textsuperscript{245} Robert Casillo argues that the omission of these poems was a strategy taken by the critical establishment to protect the \textit{Cantos} from charges of fascism,\textsuperscript{246} which is made difficult by these poems. Canto 73 glorifies violence towards Allied troops through the story of a girl who martyred herself to kill soldiers as she ‘led some Canadians / into a field of mines,’ and contains anti-Semitic sentiments in describing who is responsible for social problems: ‘Liar, Jew and glutton / have squeezed the people dry’.\textsuperscript{247}

Pound’s fascism should not be excused or ignored on the basis that he produced a body of work that many consider great. It was, at least in the 1930s and 1940s, a significant aspect of his thought and manifested itself in his aesthetic judgements and poetic composition. And yet, as Paul Morrison points out, ‘Pound’s fascism and anti-Semitism have their origins in a profound and potentially revolutionary dissatisfaction


\textsuperscript{244} See \textit{The Cantos of Ezra Pound}, 425–441. Pound did not provide an English translation of Canto 73. See n.245.


with the liberal settlement; the anticapitalist, antibourgeois fervour that motivates both need not have assumed the reactionary form it did.\textsuperscript{248} This is not merely an apology that seeks to preserve some semblance of good intention in Pound’s motivations. It identifies that fascism, however misdirected, often has its roots in a deep and justifiable discontentment – the same discontentment that can produce revolutionary, rather than reactionary thought.\textsuperscript{249}

There are parts of the \textit{Cantos} that would not be out of place in Marxist or socialist discourses, such as this extract of Canto 32, which recounts and rearranges extracts of letters by John Adams (who is obtaining information about the American Revolution 1768–1783\textsuperscript{250}) and Thomas Jefferson:

\begin{quote}
... deem it necessary to keep them down by hard labour, poverty, ignorance, and to take from them, as from bees, so much of their earnings as that unremitting labour shall be necessary to obtain a sufficient surplus barely to sustain a scant life. And these earnings they apply to maintain their privileged orders in splendour and idleness (32/158)
\end{quote}

These lines are adapted from Jefferson’s 1823 letter to associate justice of the Supreme Court William Johnson, where he describes the tactics of the Monarchist party during the early years of the American Republic.\textsuperscript{251} The conditions with which Pound is


\textsuperscript{249} Pound’s interest in occultism, to which he was introduced to by the musician and pianist Katherine Ruth Heyman, shows an interest in radical counter-cultures and dissatisfaction with the status quo, and in fascism he was to find a mode of thought that allowed him to draw solid conclusions about the complex problems produced by an uneven capitalist society. See Helen Carr, \textit{The Verse Revolutionaries} (London: Random House, 2009), 28–9.

\textsuperscript{250} See David Ten Eyck, \textit{Ezra Pound’s Adams Cantos}, 18.

deeply unhappy, and for which he strives to find resolutions, are the same conditions that motivated extremely radical, but entirely non-fascist texts. The themes here – the exploitation of labour, the enforced poverty of the working class, the ruling class’s lifestyle of ‘splendour and idleness’ – are also present in radical, notably socialist literature such as Robert Tressell’s *The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropists* (1914) and Walter Greenwood’s *Love on the Dole* (1933), the second of which is from the same decade as Canto 32 which was published in 1937. Pound’s desire to find certainties and simple resolutions comes out of this dissatisfaction, and is visible in the reductive approach to music discussed in this chapter. It also makes its way, obliquely and not unilaterally, into parts of the *Cantos* – such as Canto 75 – while in other parts a different way of thinking is apparent.

**Canto 75**

In the *Pisan Cantos* Pound reframes his interest in absolutes and essences as primarily aesthetic. This moves away from the political and economic focus of the Italian and history cantos. In Canto 75 Pound brings together people and texts to indicate mutually influenced ‘art’, emphasised by the repetition of the syllable ‘art’ at the end of the third and beginning of the fourth lines. It features a musical score – Gerhart Münch’s twentieth-century violin version of Clément Janequin’s sixteenth-century *Le Chant des Oiseaux* – with only seven lines of verse to show the recurrence of artistic genius through the perfect work of art (see fig. 2).
LXXV

Out of Phlegethon!
out of Phlegethon,
Gerhart

art thou come forth out of Phlegethon?

with Buxtehude and Klages in your satchel, with the
Ständebuch of Sachs in yr/ luggage

—not of one bird but of many

Figure 2. Canto 75, The Cantos of Ezra Pound.
The verses imagine Münch appearing out of Phlegethon, one of five rivers of the underworld according to Greek mythology, carrying a satchel and luggage filled with people who have influenced the musical score with which we are presented. The first is composer and organist Dieterich Buxtehude, whose baroque style influenced Bach. Ludwig Klages was a philosopher and psychologist who specialised in handwriting analysis, and the Ständebuch book of trades was contributed to by Hans Sachs, a Meistersinger of Nuremburg on whom Wagner also drew. In addition to the men of genius and significance that Münch brings in his luggage, the melody itself has a history of appropriation by genius. Although Janequin first composed the piece, Pound sees the melody originating in the troubadours, who influenced Janequin’s interest in the accurate representation of natural sounds. All these influences, he argues, can be found in Münch’s violin line: ‘By listening to the violin alone’, Pound says, ‘we reach back to a period at least three centuries prior to Janequin, who was born towards 1475 and was published in the sixteenth century’.

Pound values the Janequin score for its mimetic nature. This appears to contradict his claim in ‘Machine Art’ that music should not be a representation of the nightingale (MA 72): ‘[i]n music there is representation of the sole matter wherein music can be “literally” representative, namely sound. Thus the violinist reading Janequin’s music transposed said: a lot of birds, not one bird alone’ (GK 152–3). Münch’s violin part, however, is not merely mimetic for Pound – it is the thing that it describes or imitates.

The difference between a poor imitation and the thing itself is a judgement Pound is confident he can make, and his language, as it so often does, betrays his preoccupation with perfection and absolutes, with exactitude and clarity, which prompts him to make definite and often reductive statements: ‘I think,’ he said, ‘Janequin inherited from the troubadours the fine clear cut representation of natural sound, the exactitude of birds and flowers’.\(^{256}\) Pound is always in search of direct presentation, or the thing-in-itself, and because he believes he can identify it he is able to have complete confidence in his own aesthetic – and political – judgements.

For Pound, the true representation of the birds is a recurring presence in the musical score and it has transcended culture, politics, time and space:

Clément Janequin wrote a chorus, with words for the singers of the different parts of the chorus. These words would have no literary or poetic value if you took the music away but when Francesco da Milano reduced it for the lute the birds were still in the music. And when Munch transcribed it for modern instruments the birds were still there. They ARE still in the violin parts.\(^ {257}\)

By including the score, Pound is placing himself in a string of artists who are keeping the essence of the birdsong alive in artworks. As he claims in *Guide to Kulchur* when discussing the genesis of Janequin’s score, ‘One of the rights of the masterwork is the right of rebirth and recurrence’ (GK 250). His attribution of excellence and genius to the composers who have handled the score is thus an avenue for validating his own work as another masterpiece, by including within it this musical masterpiece.

The *Pisan Cantos* were written after the Second World War, during Pound’s incarceration in an open-air training camp near Pisa, where he remained for two years

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under indictment for treason before being found mentally unfit to stand trial and moved to St Elizabeth’s hospital, where he remained until his release in 1958. He was awarded the Bollingen prize for the *Pisan Cantos* in 1949, and the judges were forced to construct a defence of the award given to an indicted and self-confessed fascist: according to Ronald Bush, they ‘fell back on formalist criteria of poetic value and helped to forge a mandarin, politically conservative “New Criticism” that would dominate the next two decades of literary discourse’. Lines of penance and defiance have been recognised in the *Pisan Cantos*, but Canto 75 is especially sparse in its use of language and uses music to emphasise its aesthetic focus.

Examining the contents of Münch’s satchel, however, shows the limitations of attempts to claim artistic transcendence and separation from politics. Ludwig Klages wrote a 1944 tract on rhythm and was a philosopher of handwriting analysis, expression and graphology, but he was also an anti-Semite whose philosophy has been analysed as influential ‘pre-Nazi rhetoric’ in its essentialising and totalitarian approach to politics and ideology. Michael Golston has identified that ‘As early as 1900, [258] See Ira B. Nadel, ‘The Lives of Pound’, in *Ezra Pound in Context*, ed. Ira B. Nadel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 162–64; Benjamin Friedlander, ‘Radio Broadcasts’, in *Ezra Pound in Context*, 115–124; Charlotte Hemenway Taylor, ‘Poetry, Accountability and Forgiveness: Ezra Pound and the *Pisan Cantos*,’ *South Central Review* 27, 3 (2010): 104; Ronald Bush, ‘Modernism, Fascism, and the Composition of Ezra Pound’s *Pisan Cantos*’, *Modernism/Modernity* 2, 3 (1995): 69–87. [259] Bush, ‘Modernism, Fascism and the Composition of Ezra Pound’s *Pisan Cantos*’, 69. [260] Penitence has been identified in the lines ‘Pull down thy vanity / Thou art a beaten dog beneath the hail, / A swollen magpie in a fitful sun, / Half black half white / Nor knowst’ou wing from tail / Pull down thy vanity / How mean thy hates / Fostered in falsity, / Pull down thy vanity’ (81/541) but these sit uneasily beside “non casco in ginochion” (or “I will not fall on my knees”) which occurs twice (74/447, 77/493). [261] Ludwig Klages, *Rhythmen und Runen* (Leipzig: Johann Ambrosius Barth, 1944). Werner Wolff claimed that ‘Rhythm has been considered as the main problem of graphic expression and Ludwig Klages put it into the center of his graphological system’. Werner Wolff, *Diagrams of the Unconscious, Handwriting and Personality in Measurement, Experiment and Analysis* (New York: Grune and Stratton, 1948), 69. [262] Lebovic, *The Philosophy of Life and Death*, 6.
Klages foregrounds issues of rhythm, race, pulse and blood in his writing’, claiming that the rhythms of handwriting can tell him something essential and racial about an individual: ‘he formulates the body as a rhythmical phenomenon deeply implicated in physiological, biological, cultural, and cosmic rhythms’. We have seen the importance Pound placed on rhythm, and he too connected issues of rhythm to biology and race, claiming that composers of Bach’s era ‘thought of music as travelling rhythm going through points of barriers of pitch and pitch combinations. They had this concept in their blood, as the oriental has his raga and his tala’. Pound sets up an essential difference between the ‘oriental’ and the Western musician, so that his interest in the supposedly apolitical aesthetic reveals itself as an assertion of the genius of a particular, Western European tradition that is based on biological differences.

Pound’s ideas and interests, some of which were thus racist, are referred to in his verse. Comparable discourses of fundamental biological difference were central to Nazi concepts of ‘race hygiene’ and racial purity through which they ‘justified’ the Holocaust. While allegiance to Axis instead of Allied forces during the Second World War was treasonous, the anti-Semitism made possible through commitment to essential biological differences is part of this reductive and problematic mode of thought that believes in the ascendency of a particular race. However, the form of the poetry is often at odds with the simplifying structure of thought we find referred indirectly in this poem and directly in his writing on music. This can be seen by reading

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263 Michael Golston, Rhythm and Race in Modernist Poetry and Science: Pound, Yeats, Williams, and Modern Sciences of Rhythm (Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2013), 118.
music in the *Cantos* to find further contrasts between Pound’s totalising theories and the poetry.

**Uneven multiplicity in the *Cantos***

The ideas about music that Pound puts forward in ‘absolute rhythm’ and ‘Great Bass’ do not appear in the poetry. The form of the *Cantos* can be seen as accelerating and intensifying the idea that an author is never fully in control of their meanings by drawing attention to the ways that texts can be adapted and recycled. By appropriating letters, languages and mythologies in the *Cantos*, and re-framing them within his own text, Pound changes the context and delivery of this material, drawing attention away from essences, towards the cultural mediation of ideas.

The multiplicity of languages, voices, historical and literary documents and events in the *Cantos* makes it very difficult to grasp as a totality. W.B. Yeats said of the then-existent *Cantos* in 1935, ‘I discover at present merely exquisite or grotesque fragments’. 266 This fragmentation and multiplicity is distinctly at odds with the universalising thought processes that dominate the writing on music that I have discussed so far. While I do not wish to read the poems through Pound’s intentions, he articulates a desire for opacity which is useful for thinking about the *Cantos*: the text is not straightforwardly didactic, like the musical theories, but is complicated by competing narratives, re-presentations and personas. In a letter Pound said that ‘Perhaps as the poem goes on I will be able to make various things clearer’: he invariably has goals in mind as we have seen, and there are particular ‘things’ that he

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wishes to communicate. Yet he also acknowledges that some ‘things’ are not clear. Pound wanted a ‘profonder didacticism’\footnote{Ezra Pound, \textit{The Selected Letters of Ezra Pound: 1907–1941}, ed. D.D. Paige (London: Faber, 1951), 180.} in his poetry: a more opaque text that requires more work from the reader:

Like dark wine in the shadows.
“Wind between the sea and the mountains”
The tree-spheres half dark against sea
Half clear against sunset, \hspace{1em} (21/99)

The theme here is opacity and lack of clarity, and the form of the lines accentuates this: an unknown speaker seems to interject into the descriptions with “Wind between the sea and the mountains.” Yet there is continuity in what is described by the two speakers which links the different voices. Both voices describe kinds of shift: the liminal spaces that could be wine or shadow where the two meet; the wind that travels between the sea and mountains, carrying with it water vapour, or warm air; the transition of sunset and the half- visibilities in its half-light. The indentation of the first and last lines bookend the fragment that is held together by the theme of liminality. Yet the use of quotation marks around “Wind between the sea and the mountains” prevents any straightforwardly coherent or continuous narrative that might otherwise be found in the lines – the significance of the presence of difference voices is not clear.

There are moments of clarity and directness in the fragmentary and disparate \textit{Cantos}, such as the celebrated lines from the \textit{Pisan Cantos}:

Under white clouds, cielo di Pisa
Out of all this beauty something must come. \hspace{1em} (84/539)

The attractiveness of these phrases is the result of their pensive and reflective nature: they suggest a search for truth, a sense of wonderment about the meaning of beauty,
and in the context of Pound’s incarceration at Pisa when these lines were written, they suggest penance and contemplation. There is a sense of reaching towards something essential here, searching for an answer or meaning out of ‘all this’ abstract beauty, in which we might find echoes of Pound’s search for the absolute and definable essence of music. Here though, that ‘something’ is left unnamed: there is no claim to have found it, unlike Pound’s declaration that music is ‘pure rhythm’.

The *Cantos* as a whole is not a fascist work because Pound is not in complete control of the meanings in the text and because he makes frequent contradictions that weaken his absolute (and often reductive) claims. Pound’s claims about the musicality of the *Cantos*, and the ways in which it has been compared to music by Dudley Fitts and Louis Zukovsky, show the extent to which agency, mediation and omission must be acknowledged. Pound’s statements about the musicality of the *Cantos* are also contradictory when considered with his other statements about music’s essences and what music has value. Both of these things work against the attribution of any definite or essential meaning – fascist, anti-Semitic, or otherwise – to the poems.

According to W.B. Yeats, in 1928 Pound claimed ‘when the hundredth canto is finished,’ the collection will ‘display a structure like that of a Bach Fugue’. A fugue is a work of imitative counterpoint, which, to put it another way, features lines of

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music that are harmonically interdependent according to the system of functional harmony. Yet in the earlier Treatise Pound is dismissive of functional harmony, seeing it as set of rules that act as a barrier to achieving beautiful musical expression: composers, he says, have ‘rotted their melodies by trying to find schemes which “harmonize” according to a concept of “harmony” in which the tendency to lifelessness was inherent’ (ATH 18–19). While Pound may have approved of some examples of functional harmony and not others, this shows that his definitive assertions about what is good and bad are not fixed, as the style of composition he berates at one moment is also fundamental to the structure he claims to aim for in the Cantos in another moment.

Analyses that have compared the Cantos to music try to make sense of the poems by anchoring them in a musical form, but they are unconvincing. Dudley Fitts compares elements of the poems – particularly repetition – to music, referring back to Pound’s documented assertion about fugue by claiming that the Cantos features harmony and counterpoint. Yet elements of literature like repetition are not unique to the Cantos, nor does repetition point to an unequivocal affinity with music. To treat music as a potential cipher to understanding Pound’s meaning neglects his initial reasons for studying music, which are rooted in the difficulty of rationalising it.

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270 Although ‘absolute rhythm’ and ‘Great Bass’ attempt to ground music in empirical data, they are not unproblematically successful nor do they represent a straightforward progression in Pound’s work that discounts his former approach to music through its claim to transcendence. Further, and as Bucknell points out, while fugue may appear to be a possible analogy insofar as it involves different voices moving in a particular (and in the context of fugal structure, necessary) relationship with each other, ‘the rules regarding such placement must accord, at least in traditional counterpoint, with what amounts to the rules of harmony: the placement of pitches is not arbitrary and is governed by rules exterior to the composer’, and this is not the case with Pound’s text, since it is in Pound’s view only that the relationships between the voices he presents are necessary. Bucknell, Literary Modernism and Musical Aesthetics, 103.
does not contain the kind of coherence\textsuperscript{271} that has been claimed for them by attempting to explain them through a particular musical structure.\textsuperscript{272}

As far as the comparison between voice in music and poetry can be stretched, though, it does tell us something important: just like music, the \textit{Cantos} contain dominant elements. While the use of \textit{vers libre} may ‘free’ the \textit{Cantos} from established poetic forms that use regular metre, it does not produce poetry that is ‘free’ entirely: even in music, there are structures, dominant tones, and omissions, and the \textit{Cantos} is no different in this sense. The act of selecting specific historical material is a choice in which certain information is prioritised, and other possibilities are rejected. As such, there is dominance and significance in Pound’s choices which undermine the notion of ‘freedom’ that \textit{vers libre} and the attempted use of musical form suggests. The use of \textit{vers libre} is itself a choice that produces further inclusions and exclusions: Pound appropriates a musical technique from the early modern period as a model for his poetry. Resetting historical persons and texts in the poems – from the twelfth-century Italian condotierre “Sigismundo” Malatesta to Confucius and the \textit{Odyssey} – brings the past into the present with the form \textit{vers libre}, which is itself brought back into the

\textsuperscript{271} In 1968 Pound claimed that the \textit{Cantos} does not form a coherent statement. He said: ‘the good lines’ in the \textit{Cantos} ‘are pebbles. I have not been able to put them into a cosmos…One tries to give them coherence and … I have not succeeded’. See David Anderson, ‘Breaking the Silence: The Interview of Vanni Ronsisvalle and Pier Pasolini with Ezra Pound in 1968’, \textit{Paideuma} 10, 2 (Autumn 1981), 337.

\textsuperscript{272} The \textit{Cantos} has also been compared to music as an art form that features a multiplicity of different voices. For Louis Zukovsky the \textit{Cantos} demonstrates ‘the music of juxtaposition’ by bringing different voices into close proximity. Louis Zukovsky, ‘The Cantos of Ezra Pound’, \textit{The Criterion} 10, 4 (April 1931): 433. Even then, it is in part the language used that makes this comparison possible, rather than any direct resemblance to music or the way music creates meaning. As I discussed previously in relation to Joyce’s ‘Sirens,’ if one was to call the ‘voices’ in music ‘parts’ the comparison between ‘voice’ in poetry and ‘parts’ in music would not seem so strong as a comparison between ‘voice’ and ‘voice’. Music can feature many voices (or parts) simultaneously, and in the \textit{Cantos} each poem may contain different voices (or narratives), yet although texts can feature multiple voices in close proximity this is not simultaneous like music, and simultaneity is neither music’s hallmark of transcendence nor is it to do with the cohesion of form and content.
present from Dolmetsch’s textual history. While both the content and the form are therefore in dialogue with historical material, they are also both anti-historical in other ways: vers libre is ‘from history’, but it also facilitates the rejection of other historically established poetic conventions. Re-telling the past draws attention to the potential fictionalisation of that re-telling, as well as the mediation of historical events, and this works against the notion that the Cantos makes an absolute statement.

Canto 8 makes particularly apparent the mediation and re-telling of the past, but the fragmentary structure of the opening lines has been read by Marjorie Perloff as eliding the historical and political – an example of how the availability of multiple interpretations has been read by critics in terms of the purely aesthetic. A letter from “Sigismundo” to his brother Giovanni de Medici is given first in Italian, and then translated into English:

Frater tamquam
Et compater carissime: tergo
...hanni de
...dicis
...entia

Equivalent to:
Giohanni of the Medici,
Florence.
Letter received, and in the matter of our Messire Gianozio,
One from him also, sent on in form and with all due dispatch,
Having added your wishes and memoranda. (8/28)

The ‘Equivalent to’ indicates that the next lines are translations of the previous, so that the same information seems to be given in two different ways. Perloff cites this passage as an example of ‘linguistic indeterminacy’, arguing that: ‘The lines, in short, do not convey information; rather, they take certain facts and present them from

273 See, in addition to the examples cited in the following paragraph, Philip Furia, Pound’s Cantos Declassified, 16.
different linguistic perspectives … as if to undercut their historicity … as if Rimini were dissolving into Wall Street’.274 The re-setting of the letter in contemporary English from Italian does provoke a comparison between the related cultures that the languages belong to. The atmosphere of dissolving Perloff notices may come from the broken fragments of italicised Italian that seem to drip down the page, slowed down and accentuated by the ellipses.

Rather than undercutting historicity, the lines make clear the interaction with it, as well as the inherent instability of that act. The agency involved in selection and omission is explicitly acknowledged in the opening to this canto, which begins: ‘These fragments you have shelved (shored)’. An unnamed ‘you’ is identified who has discarded parts of something, also unidentified (8/28).275 Against the background of the Cantos, which selects events and texts to re-tell, these lines could be read as an acknowledgement of events that have been ‘shelved’ by history, and the suggestion that the Cantos will revisit them. The poem announces its complicity in re-claiming material and ideas from the past that have been ‘shelved’ or ‘shored’, as though left behind, and gestures to the choices about inclusion and omission that are always being made in speech, writing and thought. Perloff’s reading of Canto 8 as collapsing historical and political difference does not acknowledging the extent to which the canto is aware of its historical and cultural mediation, and noticing this is valuable because it enables us to see how clear didacticism is undercut by the form of the poem.

274 Perloff, The Poetics of Indeterminacy, 183.
The ‘translation’ of the letter makes clear the mediation and re-telling of the letter’s contents. Presenting the ‘original’ letter partially in fragments, we are able to acknowledge the incomplete nature of the historical account or event when told from a singular perspective or document. The translation is a supplement to the original, which requires that the historicity of the original information is acknowledged. There are then several possibilities contained in the ‘Equivalent to’. We could read this as a useful guide or signpost, informing us that the lines to come are translations of the previous. ‘Equivalent’, though, is not straightforward: it does not mean ‘the same’, but is a measure of similarity between two different things. It acknowledges that a transformation has occurred. In this sense, the word indicates difference, not similarity. The direction ‘Equivalent to’ could also be considered a decoy that detracts from the fact that only the next two lines are translations of the preceding Italian. The fragments ‘…hanni de / …dicis / …entia’ (presumably indicating ‘Giohanni de Medicis, Florentia’ on the back – ‘tergo’ – of the letter) are provided in full modern Italian (‘Giohanni of the Medici, / Florence’). Yet the following lines (‘Letter received…’) although they are framed as a translation, appear for the first time. They are not a translation of any words previously given within this canto. Based on the text we are given the translation promised by the words ‘Equivalent to:’ is barely verifiable as such.

Clear didacticism is undercut by the re-telling and re-presentation of events which makes the information unstable. Acknowledging the text’s instability problematises readings that seek an overarching philosophy or suggested course of action. I am not suggesting that the poem ought to be judged by its fidelity to texts or events it might reference. The structure of the lines contain multiple layers of potential meaning that
can be unearthed by approaching them differently, or considering how the lines might relate to each other: as translation, as unverifiable information masquerading as translation, for example. The use of the past to inform the present is not straightforward. Particular ideas about the past are referenced, which have been produced textually and which are then mediated by Pound’s interpretations. Texts such as the letter are selected, and decisions are made about which elements of those texts to include, which to exclude, and how to include them. A similar process contributed to the formation of the texts he considers, so that the observation about Münch’s score in Canto 75 – ‘not of one bird but of many’ – is applicable to the individuals who have contributed to the Cantos’ composition. The Cantos is inherently unstable and inflected by numerous interpretations before even the reader, along with everything they might bring to it, is considered. This instability and fluidity does not allow the possibility of a straightforward narrative.

Amidst all these competing interpretations and claims, there are some ideas and voices that are more prominent than others. Far from this being a ‘failure’ on Pound’s part in terms of trying to incorporate the extra-linguistic potential of music into his poetry, it is a feature of the poetry just as the dominance of certain sounds, tones and phrases are features of a piece of music. Noticing this prevents one text or one interpretation from ‘dissolving’ into another, to use Perloff’s term, which suggests everything is of equal import and significance – and therefore, arguably of no significance at all. The text contains multiple interpretive possibilities, but these are all necessarily different, and they cannot be equated.

276 For example, it is likely when reading the Cantos that different parts will be latched onto by different individuals, based on the knowledge they have and the parts they understand. This will result in significance or emphasis being distributed differently throughout the poems by different individual readers. In addition, the Cantos is so vast and diverse in subject matter and style that it
Context and the manner in which material is mediated are of particular importance in the *Cantos*, so that the poetry creates meanings in a way that is distinct from the search for immutable truths, which is how Pound attempts to arrive at meanings in his musical theories. According to Perloff, ‘read[ing] the Malatesta Cantos for their thematic interest’ would be so dull that anyone attempting this might ‘hang’ themselves.  

However, in Canto 21, both the form and the content of the poem are important, and they show the importance of contextualisation, as well as a different way of thinking about music than that which comprises the musical theories.

In a move away from the totalising universality Pound attempts when theorising music, Canto 21 shows the significance of culture and context. As much as he asserts the simplicity of its construction and mechanisms in the ‘theoretical’ writing on music, in the *Cantos* music appears inseparable from cultures through re-imagining historical moments. For Jefferson, whose letter seeking musicians is quoted, music is about
tends to read in sections, rather than from cover to cover. One who reads the *Pisan Cantos* may do so without reading ‘A Draft of XXX Cantos’ and so may miss the wider significance of later allusions to “Sigismundo” that refer back to material discussed in depth in the Malatesta Cantos. It could be said that the epic goads its readers into awareness of their limited historical knowledge. We may understand some references, and not others, depending on our historical and cultural situation, our education, and knowledge gained as a result of our personal preferences.  

Perloff takes a very straightforward narrative to the content of the poems: they are about ‘Pound’s hero – the Renaissance ruler as beneficent patron of art’ – and she considers the poems to extol “Sidgismondo” Malatesta’s virtues and the merits of patronage (similar to that which modernists such as Pound, Joyce, and Eliot relied upon). Yet as Lawrence Rainey has noted, Canto 10 and 11 narrate “Sidg’s” downfall, which points to a more complicated narration than many critics have suggested. For Rainey, Perloff’s assumption about Pound’s admiration for “Sidg” allows her to find the value of these poems in entirely the form, at the expense of any analysis of content or historical context: ‘history becomes the impetus for the play of language’. Rainey’s analysis at times sacrifices focus on form in favour of context in his effort to pull Pound studies back from criticism that ‘banish[es] fact and ostracizes history in order to execute the business of “criticism as usual”’. The two approaches need not be mutually exclusive, however: the text does not need to be seen either as something to be decoded with a swathe of archival information, or as an example of the ‘play of language’, devoid of history. Perloff, *The Poetics of Indeterminacy*, 180, 181. Rainey, *Ezra Pound and the Monument of Culture*, 71–2, 81.
social enjoyment. The ability to practice it and play it has a value that is not purely monetary, although it must be acquired monetarily:

“Could you”, wrote Mr Jefferson,
“Find me a gardener
Who can play the French horn?
The bounds of American fortune
Will not admit the indulgence of a domestic band of
Musicians, yet I have thought that a passion for music
Might be reconciled with that economy which we are
Obliged to observe. I retain among my domestic servants
A gardener, a weaver, a cabinet-maker, and a stone-cutter,
To which I would add a vigneron. In a country like yours
(id est Burgundy) where music is cultivated and
Practised by every class of men, I suppose there might
Be found persons of these trades who could perform on
The french horn, clarionet, or hautboy and bassoon, so
That one might have a band of two french horns, two
Clarionets, two hautboys and a bassoon, without enlarging
Their domestic expenses. A certainty of employment for
Half a dozen years
(affatigandose per suo piacer o non)
And at the end of that time, to find them, if they
Choose, a conveyance to their own country, might induce
Them to come here on reasonable wages. (21/97)

There is no emphasis here on the importance of finding essential, immutable rules about music. There is an assertion of its place in daily life and culture. The poem discusses the possibility of aesthetic enjoyment within the economic constraints of a given moment, meaning the possibility of experiencing and enjoying music is socially and culturally contingent.

Tim Redman has shown that it is easy to find evidence of didacticism and draw conclusions from “Mr Jefferson’s” speech. He claims that Canto 21 is one of several that ‘tell of a begrudging economic relation between a government and an individual artist’. 278 The USA is presented as a capital-driven, capital-prioritising country, with

an economy that cannot be reconciled (‘Will not admit the indulgence’) with a love of music. Jefferson’s request acknowledges that music is not financially productive, and he is forced to make it compatible with other economic activities, so that music can be ‘reconciled with that economy which we are / Obliged to observe’ – he is a slave to ‘that economy’ of which Pound is so critical.

However, the context provided by the other material in this poem can change how we read this. The material preceding the citation of the letter and its relationship with previous Cantos shows Jefferson engaging in a form of patronage, which is being compared positively with that of the Malatesta Cantos. The lines before Jefferson’s letter read:

They’d have murdered him,  
And would Cosimo, but he bribed ‘em; 
And they did in Giuliano. E difficile, 
A Firenze difficile viver rico 
Senza aver lo stato. 
“E non avendo stato Piccinino 
“Doveva temerlo qualunque era in statos;” (21/97)\textsuperscript{279}

Placing Jefferson in proximity to Cosimo and the de Medicis – both well-known patrons\textsuperscript{280} – recalls the theme of patronage in Malatesta Cantos. In this context, Jefferson’s desire to employ some musicians on a ‘reasonable wage’ for ‘half a dozen years’ is a comparatively modern form of patronage. The comparison between Jefferson and the de Medicis lends a utopian angle to the contents of Jefferson’s letter. Canto 21 refers to an example of the idealism and generosity of Cosimo de Medici:

“With two ells of red cloth per person 
I will make you”, Cosimo speaking, “as many 
Honest citizens as you desire.” (21/96)

\textsuperscript{279} The Italian lines are given in Carroll F. Terrell’s companion to the poems to read ‘It is difficult, / In Florence it is difficult to live like a rich man / Without having any status. / “And not having any status Piccinino / Had to fear whoever was in high position”. Terrell, 87.
\textsuperscript{280} Terrell notes that Cosimo de Medici was called “Pater Patriae”. Ibid., 85.
Cosimo refers to the ability to make individuals grateful and loyal by providing them with expensively dyed cloth – a sign of status. Cosimo is presented as using his power benevolently, encouraging loyalty among citizens with acts of kindness, not violence or displays of power, and the poem suggests that the creation of a more equal and less divided society will produce positive results, such as honesty. At times, a very different politics than that which we might associate with Pound is visible in the poetry which cannot be seen through New Critical analyses that focus purely on form and aesthetics.

While for Redman, Jefferson sits ‘in sharp contrast to the same relation under the more generous, although often impecunious, patron, Malatesta’ the Malatesta cantos do not idealise a time when patronage of the arts was easier. The Medicis, it seems, struggled to gain power through business, rather than received hereditary status, meaning they have more in common with Jefferson than Redman allows. As Giovanni de Medici is given as saying in the opening of the canto:

“Keep on with the business,
That’s made me,
“And the res publica didn’t.
“When I was broke, and a poor kid,
“They all knew me, all of these cittadini,
“And they all of them cut me dead, della Gloria.” (21/96)

The indented position of ‘That’s made me,’ and the capitalisation of the first word stresses the significance of the business over the res publica: it was ‘the business’ that made him, not his value among the ‘res publica,’ or politics, and the cittadini (citizens) ‘cut him dead’ when he was young, without status and money. Giovanni is thus a man who has made his status out of business, and not politics or status alone. In this context, Jefferson’s obligation ‘to observe’ the economy, and using his position to employ a

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281 Redman, 85.
282 Ibid., 75.
‘domestic band’ suggests he is finding a way around the restrictions placed upon the
enjoyment of the arts by the economy: he is exhibiting business sense in attempting to
employ individuals who can both serve the economy, and his musical desires. Music
exists here in a complex relationship with social and economic conditions, so that in
the *Cantos* can be seen the complex and multifaceted ways music functions and creates
meaning in peoples’ lives. Pound’s assertion that music is ‘pure rhythm’ is not in the
poetry, which shows the economic, social, cultural and personal aspects of the ability
to play, practise, and enjoy music. Music thus escapes the reductive definitions with
which Pound attempts to explain it in ‘absolute rhythm’ and ‘Great Bass’, and asserts
in the poetry its cultural specificity and embeddedness.
Chapter 3

Sylvia Townsend Warner, Music, and Marxist Materialism

Warner’s texts investigate how music’s contradictory claims to transcendence and material production mean that it exists in a complex matrix of economic and social relationships. While Maroula Joannnou contends that Warner ‘permits her characters no sanctuary from the materiality of existence’, I argue that her novels and short stories show the limitations of explaining music in material terms alone.\(^{283}\) Warner’s fiction explores how culture and art are materially grounded, and also the importance of experiencing aesthetic beauty. The most meaningful experience Henry Yellowlees has in *The Corner That Held Them* is hearing a completely new kind of music for the first time, yet the texts from which he sings are purchased by a chaplain instead of food for his leper colony.\(^{284}\) In Warner’s fiction music’s social and economic functions are complicated by, and come into conflict with, the cultural importance of musical transcendence.

Warner joined the Communist Party in 1935.\(^{285}\) By placing her writing in the context of British writing in the 1930s – including the reception of Soviet Marxism by the *Left Review* and Popular Front writers\(^{286}\) – and the Marxist texts to which she would have


\(^{286}\) Left British writers and intellectuals responded to the new Comintern strategy that moved away from isolationism in 1935 and towards building Popular Fronts: Georgi Dimitrov announced, at
had access, I argue that her focus on ideology and the material conditions of existence is informed by her Communist Marxism. Warner was committed to a form of Marxist thought\textsuperscript{287} that saw no distinction between theory and practice. She travelled to Spain twice during the Spanish Civil War: once as a medical auxiliary for the British Red Cross, and again to attend the 1937 International Writers’ Conference.\textsuperscript{288} I explore her political activities in the 1930s using new archival research, including letters and police reports from her MI5 file held at the National Archive.

Despite Warner’s active involvement with the Communist Party, her texts do not easily map onto the Comintern line about how art should promote socialist ideas.\textsuperscript{289}

\textsuperscript{287} Due to the variety of ways Marx has been appropriated and interpreted it has long been impossible to talk of a single Marxism. Raphael Samuel has shown that Marxism as it exists in a particular moment is often inflected by other prominent philosophies and social objectives: the variety of ideas contained within the Marxist thought of particular countries and historical moments alters as it is ‘exposed to dominant modes of thought’, such as the conjunctions of Marxism and Darwinism, Marxism and neo-Kantianism, and alterations in the usage of Marx in the First through to the Third International. For Samuel, additions to Marxist theory such as Lenin’s ‘law of uneven development’ are related to the material conditions of the time, in this example the industrial and social situation of Russia in relation to Europe. Raphael Samuel, ‘British Marxist Historians 1880–1980’, \textit{New Left Review} (May 1980): 21–25.


\textsuperscript{289} The Comintern line, it must be noted, is not a ‘Marxist’ line on literary aesthetics; rather, it suggests how literature can be used to promote and create a socialist society. This is different from, for example, the analysis of literature in Marxist terms (Marxist criticism), or the contemplation of a Marxist aesthetic in literature such as that achieved by Christopher Caudwell, which I discuss
‘Socialist realism’ was endorsed as the recommended strategy for Party writers at the 1934 Soviet Writers’ Congress.290 Andrei Zhdanov emphasised the need for politically motivated writing designed to contribute to the formation of a socialist society: writers should ‘[a]ctively help to remould the mentality of people in the spirit of socialism’ by producing literature that revealed social injustices for a proletarian readership.291 Warner’s writing is more ambitious than this, however, and examines the human complexity of her characters without reducing them to class stereotypes by exploring the unpredictable ways that culture and ideology form an individual’s subjectivity. In her fiction an individual’s consciousness is produced by their wealth and situation in relation to the mode of production at a given moment, but their actions make it difficult in this chapter with The Corner That Held Them. For Caudwell’s Marxist aesthetic, see David Margolies, The Function of Literature (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1969).

290 Socialist realism was not accepted by all writers, who debated its benefits and how to use the method in practice, but in Russia and among Left Review contributors – the official journal of the British section of the Writers’ International – it was agreed that writing should be used to suggest socialist ideologies to a proletarian readership. See for example John Gordon Garrard and Carol Garrard, Inside the Soviet Writers’ Union (New York: Free P, 1990); Maxim Gorky, Soviet Writers’ Congress, 1934: The Debate on Socialist Realism and Modernism in the Soviet Union (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1977); H.G. Scott, ed. Problems of Society Literature: Reports and Speeches at the First Soviet Writers’ Congress (1935; Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1979). For the Left Review and its relationship with the Writers International see Janet Batsleer, Tony Davies, Rebecca O’Rourke, and Chris Weedon, Rewriting English (London: Routledge, 2013), 60. While those outside the Soviet Union could debate these issues, within it there was not this freedom. John Barber tracks the increasing levels of violence used to enforce intellectual and cultural adherence to the Party line. See Barber, ‘The Establishment of Intellectual Orthodoxy in the U.S.S.R., 1928–34’, Past and Present 83 (May 1979): 141–64. According to Julius Hecker, during the 1920s the Soviet Union saw philosophical debate between different currents of thought, and it was still possible to have dialogues about non-Marxist thought. This altered with the establishment of the line on cultural production established during the 1930s. Julius F. Hecker, Moscow Dialogues: Discussions on Red Philosophy (1933; London: Chapman & Hall, 1936).

to generalise about relationships between class and behaviour, and how music (and art more broadly) functions in society to perpetuate or reveal class divisions.

This chapter is structured around three of Warner’s texts that have been chosen to show her enduring interest in examining human complexity and art’s ideological functions by drawing on examples from across her long writing career. I discuss music’s connection with materiality and ideology in her short story, ‘The Music at Long Verney’ (1971), and then consider the social impact of music’s claims to transcendence in two novels, *Mr Fortune’s Maggot* (1927) and *The Corner That Held Them* (1944).[292] Warner’s expert musical knowledge particularly informs *The Corner That Held Them*, which shows her wide and detailed understanding of mathematics, history, musicology and harmony. She developed these skills during her informal education at Harrow, where her father was a teacher, and while working as a professional musicologist between 1917 and 1929. *The Corner That Held Them* demonstrates a complex border area between music as materially grounded, and that which allows access to transcendent ideas and the metaphysical, showing that neither alone is adequate as an explanation of how music functions.

This chapter requires a more grounded approach than the previous two, with more contextual evidence to tease out the historical discourses with which Warner is engaging, and bring forward the complexity and radicalism of her position. By comparing her writing in *The Corner That Held Them* with that of Christopher

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Caudwell, I argue that Warner’s intricate Marxist thought is distinct from that of the *Left Review* in Britain, and the Comintern in the Soviet Union. I do not use Adorno to read Warner’s texts in this chapter, because I am situating her ideas as existing prior to and in tandem with the development of Frankfurt School philosophy. Adorno’s writing, having been considered in pervious chapters, is not required to draw out how Warner is already engaging with the kinds of utopian Marxist ideas already discussed. In this chapter, rather than using Adorno to read Warner, I will show how Warner’s writing focuses on drawing out the complexities of art’s functions in a way that can be compared to Adorno’s thought.

**‘The Music at Long Verney’**

In ‘The Music at Long Verney’ businessman Anthony Simpson thinks he understands how class and culture operate. He assumes a taste for classical music is synonymous with wealth and landownership, but the ways peoples’ tastes are produced are more complicated than he imagines. The story is about social, economic, and cultural change, and begins with landowners Oliver and Sibyl Furnival renting out their manor house and moving to the gamekeeper’s cottage: although they had lived at Long Verney ‘forever,’ ‘the cost of living was going up’ and its upkeep ‘was a drain on their income’ (*MLV* 5, 4). Arriving from London to rent the house, Anthony and his family are of the newly wealthy middle class who have made their money through trade: ‘One of those companies he’s a director of makes weed killer’ (*MLV* 11).

Although Anthony has the money to rent the property, he feels he must have cultural tastes that are socially appropriate for his wealth:

Anthony put on a Monteverdi record. He still hadn’t found the right music for Long Verney. So far, Handel had fitted in best—but Handel fits in anywhere.
A great deal of Chopin must have been played in the house at one time. But what house hadn’t had Chopin played in it? It ought to be something more homegrown: Arne, perhaps. Best of all, maybe, the counterpoint music of the Church of England: Greene, Pelham Humfrey, Battishill. He must find records, and if there were none, commission some. He liked the house well enough to intend on a longer lease, so it would be worthwhile taking a little trouble. Music and finance were his interests. He had an exquisite ear for both. Oliver and Sibyl had a gramophone too, with records of Noel Coward and Duke Ellington. (MLV 10)

Anthony is preoccupied with inhabiting the house as it ‘ought’ to be inhabited and so he ‘fits in’: he does this by trying to find the ‘right’ music, and by ‘fill[ing] the house with ballet dancers, opera singers, photographers and intellectuals’ in a bid to display how cultured he is (MLV 12). During his speculation about what music has been played in the house Anthony considers a wide range of composers, from the Baroque (Handel) to Romantic (Chopin) and British examples beginning with Thomas Arne, a composer for theatre though best known for ‘Rule Britannia’. An inspection of these composers reveals the royal, aristocratic and bourgeois circumstances of music production, showing how producing and accessing culture is linked to the possession of wealth. Handel and Chopin exemplify the success made possible by patronage and connections among high society.

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294 King George I was a patron of Handel, and the royal children were the composer’s pupils in the 1720s. Chopin’s connections among the Polish aristocracy, where he was brought up and educated, enabled him to play in the prestigious Paris salons, although he also earned large parts of his income from concerts attended by the newly wealthy middle classes in France and Vienna. Terence Best notes that Handel held the title of ‘music master’ to the King, and his patrons included the Marquis Ruspoli, Francesco Maria Farnese, Duke of Parma Cardinal Benedetto Pamphili, and ‘on 28 December 1713 … Queen Anne granted him an annual pension of £200, apparently in return for undefined services’. Terence Best, ‘Handel and the Keyboard’, in Handel, ed. Donald Burrows (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 220, 166, 36, 147, 94. Andreas Ballstaedt notes that when Chopin was performing ‘the salon had become a mark of social status whose exclusive character helped distinguish higher ranks within the new money from the lower middle classes i.e. the petite bourgeoisie’ See Andreas Ballstaedt ‘Chopin as salon composer in nineteenth-century German criticism’, in Chopin Studies, ed. John Rink and Jim Samson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 22. Jim Samson notes Chopin’s ‘association with the salon’ and aristocratic society: ‘Chopin played frequently in the salons of the aristocracy’ and ‘[f]rom his earliest days in Warsaw he had been at ease in such circles’. Also, however, Samson notes the changing circumstances of concert-giving and audiences in the nineteenth century, noting that increasingly concerts were being attended by the wealthy middle classes, proving musicians with
By the end of the story, Anthony is trying to recreate the world of late eighteenth-century aristocratic patronage, inviting musicians from London to play in the hall. The music he finally chooses is Haydn, who composed prolifically as the beneficiary of the House of Esterhazy. A wealthy businessman attempting to properly occupy his new stately home by listening to ‘Rule Britannia’ and Haydn is an amusingly pompous image, and his contemplation of a classical (in the broad sense) repertoire is underscored with a final gesture towards his affectation and the extent of his misjudgement: the Furnivals listened to ‘records of Noel Coward and Duke Ellington’.

Ellington and Coward represent new and different cultures to the world that Anthony wishes to recreate and inhabit. Together with the socio-economic changes that prompt the Furnivals to rent out Long Verney, the music alerts us to changes in cultural production and who culture is produced by – no longer only wealthy and well-connected white men, but also black and homosexual men, too. Placing Anthony in this context emphasises the anachronism of his attempted retreat into the eighteenth-century.


Notions of cultural capital – to use a term connected with Pierre Bourdieu, which refers to the material and economic value of cultural knowledge – are invoked and critiqued, since the straightforward connections Anthony makes between music and class are too basic. Anthony associates the house with a certain style of music by assuming those who lived there in the past had tastes that matched the kinds of culture they were financially able to access. Bourdieu does not claim a thoroughly rigid affinity between the possession of cultural capital and class, explaining the variables and problems that prevent a direct correlation, but he does notices broad trends. He identifies ‘the very close relationship linking cultural practices (or the corresponding


298 Owners of estates like Long Verney would have been able to host or attend classical concerts. Access to music for the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century working class, by contrast, would have been limited, particularly in rural areas before radios were affordable. Jonathan Rose notes that ‘[f]or most working people, Sunday School offered the only opportunity for serious musical education’. In the latter half of the nineteenth century there were some ‘free Sunday evening concerts’, but these were primarily in larger cities and towns. Rose uses case studies of individuals and families to show that in the early nineteenth century, having a piano in the house was a luxury for many working class families, and due to the long hours and six-day weeks worked by many people, there was a lack of time, energy and resources available with which to learn to play instruments professionally. He distinguishes between ‘serious’ and ‘non-serious’ musical education, and uses derogatory language (‘banging’) to describe non-skilled piano playing, unwittingly reinforcing the social hierarchies implicated in musical education and consumption: for Rose, serious musical education is that which is paid for (in the form of lessons) or given by the church, showing the way types of musical knowledge are valued according to their economic or institutional function. He identifies that ‘around the turn of the century, there was some kind of family musical activity in 86 per cent of all working class homes’, but these would not have been in the classical tradition, rather comprising ‘Sunday singalongs, playing a violin or accordion, or banging away at a piano or harmonium (with or without lessons)’. Jonathan Rose, The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes (Reading: Cox & Whyman Ltd., 2001), 196–198. Classical music did become more widely available for the new middle classes in the nineteenth century, when according to Jim Samson, ‘concerts broadened their appeal, gathering new audiences from the emerging middle class’. Samson, The Cambridge Companion to Chopin, 16. See also William Weber, Music and the Middle Class: The Social Structure of Concert Life in London, Paris and Vienne (London, 1975), 11.

299 Bourdieu explains that cultural capital can engender social mobility, whilst at the same time ‘the controlled mobility of a limited category of individuals, carefully selected and modified by and for individual ascent, is not incompatible with the permanence of structures, and that it is even capable of contributing to social stability in the only way conceivable in societies based on democratic ideals and thereby may help to perpetuate the structure of class relations’. Bourdieu, ‘Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction’, 71.
opinions) to educational capital (measured by qualifications) and, secondarily, to social origin (measured by father’s occupation’), concluding that ‘differences in cultural capital mark the differences between the classes’.\(^{300}\) In other words, social classes have particular cultural tastes, and the tastes of one generation may correspond to those of the previous generation, if they have a similar economic and social status, and Anthony broadly expects the inhabitants of Long Verney to prefer classical music.

Oliver and Sibyl, however, do not conform to Anthony’s expectations. Their musical preferences are related to their confidence in their own choices because of their social status and isolation at Long Verney: both factors are related to their wealth, but more intricate than the result of economic means alone. The ‘impermeably self-righteous’ (\(MLV\) 11) Furnivals are so established that they do not have the same insecurities as Anthony, and listen to the music they prefer. Even after renting out their house to the Simpsons, they are so confident that when walking in the woods ‘[t]hey had no sense of trespass. Their woods. Their house’ (\(MLV\) 13). Oliver and Sybil do not enjoy the Haydn quartet, and sit ‘waiting for the music to end’ (\(MLV\) 13). Despite imposing on the Simpsons they are ‘[i]mmune to any consideration of awkwardness’, just as they are immune to any social expectations about what music they should enjoy. Oliver is content to admit the ‘[t]he music was far above my head’ (\(MLV\) 17–18), and is completely unaffected by this knowledge, since that which is out of his reach or understanding does not concern him.

A shift away from a focalised narration contributes to the sense of confusion among the group as they listen to the music. In preceding parts of the story, the narration is

\(^{300}\) Ibid., 5, 61.
focalised through particular characters: from the perspective of the Furnivals and the circumstances which lead them to rent out the house, or the Simpsons as they settle in. When they all finally meet, short sentences shifting between the narrative perspectives of the Furnivals, the musicians, and the Simpsons heighten the sense of fragmentation and lack of mutual understanding:

Oliver flicked a glance at Sibyl. The players attacked the allegro vivace. They’re overdoing it, thought Anthony. His evening had been ruined; the joy with which he had listened to the first movement was irreparably past recall. What am I to say, what am I to say? Thought Naomi. (MLV 17).

‘What am I to say?’ sums up the difficulty of communicating the meeting, in which nobody understands each other or is aware of the complex preconceptions they each hold. Anthony misreads Oliver’s reaction to the music because of his assumption about the universal relation between living in a large house and enjoying Haydn. Expecting Oliver to be an expert, Anthony inwardly criticises the performance as ‘overdone’ because of Oliver’s glance, when an allegro vivace is by definition fast and lively, and Oliver has no idea whether the musicians are playing well or not.

By the time Anthony comes along with his ideas about how class and culture operate, the conditions that produced these connections have already altered. Anthony treats classical music as a universal marker of wealth, but this association is based on a historical tradition that is no longer relevant. This is what Raymond Williams describes as a ‘residual’ culture: a value that is ‘lived and practiced on the basis of the residue – cultural as well as social – of some previous social formation’.301 While the economic means required to access music (and the kinds of music available) change, the traditions produced by economic conditions from the past also become reified, so

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that both affect the ways in which individuals’ subjectivities are constructed and contribute to complex layers of experience and attitudes to culture.

‘The Music at Long Verney’ complicates models of a determined base and a determining superstructure by showing the diverse cultural practices that exist at a given moment. This is part of Raymond Williams’s project in *Culture and Materialism*, showing how Warner is exploring very similar issues through literature. Warner shows that the relationships between the superstructure and base are complicated and unpredictable in a way that often goes unrecognised. Music is part of superstructural relations as a cultural practise with a relationship to the economic base. While the base is the ‘real social existence of man’, in Williams’ phrase, or ‘the specific activities of men in real social and economic relationships’, the common understanding of a superstructure has been ‘the reflection, the imitation or the reproduction of the reality of the base in the superstructure in a more or less direct way’, and the story shows that superstructural relations are ‘never in practice either uniform or static’.

Anthony understands that peoples’ access to culture can be determined by their economic means, but he does not understand that those connections are not fixed but continually shifting – even though as an emerging businessman he is an example of how social formations alter. Nor is he aware that basic connections between capital and culture are insufficient to explain peoples’ choices.

302 Williams, *Culture and Materialism*, 44.
303 Ibid., 33, 34, 32.
Anthony’s ideas are not wrong or meaningless, though – they are very meaningful to him, since he believes in the validity of his choices. Ideologies are not simply abstract, imposed thoughts which we would, were this the case, easily be able to disregard. Williams claims that to understand this ‘we have to recognize the alternative meanings and values, the alternative opinions and attitudes, even some alternative senses of the world, which can be accommodated and tolerated within a particular effective and dominant culture’. Anthony believes in the authenticity and inviolable nature of his musical preferences. He thinks he has ‘exquisite’ taste – a word that calls up ideas of connoisseurship and value-judgement. As a result, he does not question his choices or recognise the complex nature of their social construction. This is clear when Anthony asks ‘But what house hadn’t had Chopin played in it?’ which both shows his ignorance and signifies the extent of his interpellation within ideology. The kind of music likely to be played in ‘most’ households is starkly different from that which Anthony imagines or assumes, showing how he constructs his own reality by considering only the musical tastes and habits he assumes wealthy people to have had. The question ‘But what house hadn’t had Chopin played in it?’ is rhetorical: it appears obvious to Anthony, but it is really only the recognition of what he is capable of believing in his particular subject position, showing that he cannot think outside of the world of the wealthy and privileged. In Althusser’s words, Anthony thinks ‘That’s obvious! That’s

Ibid., 44.

right! That’s true!’ when he thinks about Chopin, and his own musical choices, but really these are examples of the extent to which he is constituted by ideology.\footnote{Althusser, \textit{On Ideology}, 46.}

For Anthony, the effect of his interpellation within ideology through notions of upper-class musical taste is only an awkward meeting with his landlords that none of the party are keen to repeat; the story is playful in its humorous but harmless presentation of the effects of interpellation. Warner’s much earlier novel, \textit{Mr Fortune’s Maggot}, shows the impact of being forced to question one’s beliefs. Timothy Fortune’s principles, on which he has based important choices in his life, are revealed to be culturally contingent. The devastating effect this has upon him shows how meaningful and central to an individual’s sense of self their understanding of music can be.

\textbf{Mr Fortune’s Maggot}

In \textit{Mr Fortune’s Maggot} (1927) Timothy is a former bank clerk who becomes a missionary in the South Pacific, and his sense of religious and intellectual superiority comes under pressure and scrutiny as he attempts to convert the islanders. Music promises to be a universal language that can transcend cultural differences, but \textit{Mr Fortune’s Maggot} dismantles notions of music as transcendent of worldly concerns, showing aesthetic judgements to be equally complicit in Timothy’s colonial endeavour as his attempted religious conversions. At the same time, however, Warner shows how significant culture is in forming an individual’s sense of self, and how serious the consequences can be when one is caused to re-evaluate.
Timothy’s colonial mission builds on the history of supposed ‘civilising’ missions among the so-called native ‘savages’ during European exploration of the South Pacific in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-centuries. Rod Edmond notes that by the mid-nineteenth century, ‘western traders and missionaries had done their best, which is now often seen as their worst’, and ‘as the material culture of South Sea islanders was stripped, the missionaries transformed their lifeways. The more heavily an island was colonized, the more demoralized it became’. In a reversal of the historical narrative, Timothy’s mission is a complete failure. The coloniser loses faith when his attempt to give Lueli, his sole ‘convert’, a Western education results in Lueli’s attempted suicide. Gillian Beer has suggested that if *Mr Fortune’s Maggot* had been published ‘fifty years later, it would be read as a post-colonial text’, and it now usually is. Gay Wachman has read the novel biographically in terms of lesbian ‘crosswriting’ and as a (positively) primitivist text because it envisages a simpler, more remote way of living, while Young-Hee Kwon reads the text as a comment on de-masculinisation and the decline of Empire.

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307 Rod Edmond discusses the history of colonialism in the South Pacific, including the significance of religious missionaries in transforming the lives of native populations. While differences between other cultures began to be considered in racial rather than religious terms, and ‘by the eighteenth century, religiously framed colonialism was being replaced by natural history as the basis for constructing otherness’, religious missions continued to have a significant impact in the colonies until the mid-nineteenth century. Rod Edmond, *Representing the South Pacific: Colonial Discourse from Cook to Gauguin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 8–10.

308 Ibid., 9–10.


More recently, Howard J. Booth has shown that there is more at stake in the story than an end of Empire account. For Booth, the novel shows Time – ‘in its Western, colonial sense’ – approaching an end, and Warner’s text recognises that ‘the end of Empire does not only involve a readjustment to life within European borders but a questioning of everything including structures of thought, gendered identities and what life is for’. Music and mathematics are central to Timothy’s structures of thought and his understanding of the world, as they are to Western European rationality. Warner’s novel not only gives a ‘beautifully ironized’ depiction of the colonial enterprise, but through music she shows what is at stake in the failure of the colonial enterprise: the (in)ability to maintain the superiority of Western rationality itself.

Attitudes to music are immediately singled out as a significant marker of cultural difference. Timothy is warned by his Archdeacon that the Fanuans ‘are like children, always singing and dancing, and of course immoral … Singing and dancing! No actual harm in that, of course, and no doubt the climate is responsible’ (MFM 3–4). This implicit connection of an unoppressed musicality and immorality, and the observation that ‘the Raratongan language has no words for chastity or for gratitude’ (MFM 3) is all the information the Archdeacon imparts about the islanders. He repeats ‘singing and dancing’ in disbelief, so that he seems to be trying to convince himself when he says there is ‘no harm’ in such behaviour. The issue of song and dance seems more significant to him than the absence of the word chastity, which he mentions only once and more with interest than incredulity.

312 Howard J. Booth, ‘Colonialism and Time in Mr Fortune’s Maggot’, Literature Compass 11, 12 (December 2014): 750.
313 Edmond, Representing the South Pacific, 265.
The Archdeacon accuses the islanders of being morally ‘light’ (*MFM* 4), yet the ways he and Timothy justify their desires are entirely based on their own interests. Timothy will be a ‘great loss’, the Archdeacon says, and ‘wasted’ in Fanua, but this is only because Mr Fortune is such an excellent book-keeper:

The Archdeacon spoke so sadly that Mr. Fortune, knowing how much he disliked accounts, wondered for a moment if God would prefer him to wait still in St. Fabien. God tries the souls of men in crafty ways, and perhaps the call had been a temptation, a temptation sent to try his humility … But now the horizon was hidden in the evening haze, and Fanua seemed more remote than ever. A little cloud was coming up the heavens, slowly, towards the sunset; as it passed above the place of Fanua it brightened, it shone like a pearl, it caught the rays of sun and glowed with a rosy rim. Mr Fortune took the cloud to be a sign. (*MFM* 4–5)

Timothy can see through the Archdeacon’s feigned concern for him to the real reason he wants him to stay, but he is unaware of the equally self-interested ways he constructs his own reasons to go. He desperately wants to go to Fanua, and thinks of what ‘a beautiful estate’ it would be ‘to live among them and gather their souls as a child gathers daisies in a field’ – something that sounds infinitely preferable to book-keeping (*MFM* 5). He justifies his desires through religion, and like Elijah,\(^{314}\) interprets the cloud as a ‘sign’ by which he is so convinced that he feels ‘Heartened by a novel certainty that is was doing the right thing’ (*MFM* 5).

If Timothy displays a limited awareness of the ways religious ideologies are used by the Archdeacon, he is not as aware of the ways his own thoughts and the music he enjoys are similarly ideologically bound. One of the only luxury items he allows himself to take to Fanua is a harmonium, which he uses in his first of many

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\(^{314}\) Elijah interprets a cloud ‘like a man’s hand’ as a sign from God in 1 Kings, 18.43–44. John the Baptist also sees a cloud as a sign from God: ‘In the daytime he led them with a cloud, and all night long with a fiery light’. Psalms, 78.14. *The Holy Bible, New Revised Standard Version: Containing the Old and New Testaments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
(unsuccessful) religious demonstrations designed to ‘convert’ the islanders. Timothy’s expectation that music played on the harmonium will transcend the language and cultural barriers between him and the Fanuans is immediately shown to be misguided:

> Mr. Fortune sat down to his harmonium and sang and played through a hymn. His back was to the islanders, he could not see how they were taking it. But when, having finished the hymn and added two chords for the Amen, he turned round to announce the collect, he discovered that they had already dispersed. (MFM 15)

The hymn, which to Timothy is part of a sacred tradition – he even forbids ‘whistl[ing] tunes that had any especially sacred associations’ (MFM 71) – is merely dull to the islanders. The two chords added for the Amen are an example of music’s centrality to religious ritual: this is the plagal cadence (the passage from the subdominant to the dominant chords, or chords IV–I) which school children are still taught to recognise today through familiarity because of its use at ‘Amen’.315 The customary hush of the congregation that Timothy expects as he prepares the collect, however, is instead the silence of his congregation’s absence. The contrast between his expectations and the reality shows the entirely different responses that one phenomenon can produce, troubling the notion of any absolute or enduring truth by showing behaviour to be culturally dependent. As his stay on the island continues and as his beliefs are more seriously undermined, the consequences for Timothy become much more serious.

Mr Fortune’s Maggot works against discourses of music as separate from materiality and political doctrines. Technologies were specifically developed and marketed for transporting Western culture and music. Timothy’s music is not a benign offering but

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an assertion of Western values, and a significant element of the colonial enterprise. The harmonium was frequently used in the colonies, being easily transportable and suitable for outdoor use.\(^{316}\) In 1862, a ‘Colonial Pianoforte’ was repeatedly advertised in *The London Review* that was said to be ‘especially adapted for exportation to the Colonies’.\(^{317}\) An 1857 letter from a mission in the South Atlantic island of St. Helena, relaying that the colonisers are ‘anxiously desirous of contributions towards an Harmonium’ for their church, shows how significant the instrument was.\(^{318}\)

Timothy strives for co-operation during his mission and wants to play a duet with Lueli, but his notions of cultural superiority get in the way. He is automatically negative about Lueli’s music. He opposes the different and threatening culture he is presented with, schooling Lueli in Western traditions instead:

As for the duet plan it was not feasible, for the harmonium was tuned to the mean tone temperament and Lueli’s pipe obeyed some unscientific native scale; either alone sounded all right, but in conjunction they were painfully discordant. Finding it impossible to convert Lueli’s pipe, Mr. Fortune next essayed to train his voice to Christian behaviour. (*MFM* 70)

Timothy cannot recognise that the disparity between the way he describes his own tuning system and Lueli’s is not a truth, but the manifestation of his assurance in the validity of Western traditions and the inferiority of his pupil’s. While his own tuning is ‘mean tone temperament’ (a Western tuning method related to the Pythagorean method of assessing intervals which I discuss later in this chapter) Lueli’s is...

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‘unscientific’ and ‘native’. Musical culture becomes merely another aspect of Timothy’s conversion attempts: when he cannot accompany Lueli, he considers this the fault of Lueli’s pipe, abandoning the whole procedure because it cannot be used as a way to enforce his ideas and his culture. It is not Lueli that Timothy struggles to win over, but the pipe itself. Lueli is inquisitive, although Timothy mistakes this for malleability, yet the pipe as the material manifestation of Lueli’s culture cannot be manipulated to fit Timothy’s ideological system. Timothy’s misguided and ignorant attitude to Lueli’s culture is overshadowed by our knowledge that colonisers often destroyed cultural artefacts and people.

Music is a significant example of Timothy’s misdirected confidence in his superiority, because he believes in its universality so much he cannot see that this is culturally specific. Music is central to his very concept of universality: it permeates his language and his thought. When he begins teaching Lueli maths instead of music he still imagines universality in musical terms. He wants to teach Lueli geometry, because he believes he will learn:

accurate thoughts, thoughts in just intonation, coming together like unaccompanied voices coming to a close … Mr Fortune began to think of himself possessing an universal elixir and charm … If only, if only I could teach him to enjoy an abstract notion! If he could once grasp how it all hangs together, and is everlasting and harmonious, he would be saved. (MFM 168, 169, 176)

The common language available in mathematics is couched in musical metaphors, showing that his understanding of universality and the musical are inseparable for Timothy. Conceiving of universality in musical terms, yet having already seen that music is not a universal language, Timothy continues his attempt to impose his idea of a universal language on Lueli, but this is really only the imposition of his own
ideologies. It is in terms of music in particular that Timothy cannot or refuses to see ideology at work, because it is so central to this thought.

Through music Warner shows how far Timothy’s desires, interests and preferences are constructed by his education within Western ideology. Timothy’s Western musical education is restrictive in his new environment and prevents him from being able to appreciate any other forms of music. Yet Lueli has a great capacity for appreciating music: his and Timothy’s respective capacities for musical enjoyment reveal their characters:

To tell the truth, Mr. Fortune was not as much impressed by Lueli’s music as Lueli was by his. His chin even sank further into his chest as he sat, his listening flesh was unmoved, and he never felt the least impulse to howl. Mr. Fortune, in spite of his superior accomplishments, his cultivated taste, and enough grasp of musical theory to be able to transpose any hymn into its nearly related keys, was not so truly musical as Lueli. For instance, he never had the least idea whether Lueli’s tunes were lively or sad. They all seemed alike to him. But Lueli learnt almost immediately to distinguish between a march and a sentimental piece, and as the harmonies grew more and more passionate his chin would lift higher, his mouth would contract, and the shadow of his long eyelashes would shorten up over his cheek (MFM 69)

Lueli’s music is far from a universal language as far as Timothy is concerned, and he is unable to have any emotional, physical or intellectual response to it. He lacks even the insight even to tell which tunes are ‘lively or sad’. Lueli, on the other hand, can respond to Timothy’s music, because his beliefs do not require him to assert and defend the superiority of his own musical culture.

For Nigel Rigby, ‘Timothy’s rigid adherence to a regimented European musical form is part of the symbolic structure of the novel, in which mathematics stands for European rationality’. 319 Warner connects culture with the imperial processes of

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which it was manifestly a part, and encourages us to imagine ways in which Western value systems that claim universality, such as tonality and mathematics, are limited and limiting to thought. The notion of art, and music particularly, as autonomous is taken apart, and since that notion is based on a long history of Western thought – from Pythagoras and mathematics, Christianity, through German Romanticism and its reception in British aestheticism, and even further into modernist literature that claims music as a model for expression – everything that goes with it is also questioned, because it produces individuals who are unable to appreciate or understand difference.

Timothy cannot be balanced or open-minded about Lueli’s music, because to admit that it has value would be to question the validity of all the choices he has made in his life. He conceives of his whole life as leading up to the moment when he achieves his first ‘convert’ on Fanua, thinking ‘He had waited, but after all not for long. The years in the bank, the years at St. Fabien, they did not seem long now’ (MFM 19). Their musical abilities provide ‘a curious study in contrasts’ (MFM 68) for Timothy, in which his own music must come out on top for him to retain his own sense of self. Christianity provides Timothy with a framework for navigating the world and daily life, since he believes his own choices about what is good and bad are verified by God. He imagines with satisfaction how in Christian salvation ‘the chaff is blown away, the true grain lies still and adoring’ (MFM 15) and has no doubt that he is part of the true grain. The metaphor – based on the proclamation of John the Baptist⁴²⁰ – makes palatable a somewhat merciless belief in his judgement: that the righteous will be

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⁴²⁰ Matthew 3.10–12: ‘He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing-fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing-floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.’ See also Luke 3.1–20. *The Holy Bible, New Revised Standard Version: Containing the Old and New Testaments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
easily and unflinchingly separated from the heathens, who will presumably experience horrible eternal damnation. When Timothy, whose beliefs are constructed around simple and unforgiving binaries, is presented with difference such as Lueli’s music, he has no choice but to believe that his own music is better to validate his existing world-view.

Timothy has no choice, if he wishes to preserve his sense of self, but to be invested in believing that his music is necessarily better than the music of the ‘heathens’ he has come to convert. While Timothy is bungling his conversion attempts, the natives, ‘behaved themselves most charmingly, tactfully overlooking his blunders in etiquette, accepting him as their friend, though an unaccountable one’ (MFM 73). Observations in the narration point to the arrogant superiority that blinds Timothy to the truth of the matter – that the islanders are not ‘heathens’ – when she has Timothy note that ‘the boy [Lueli] looked very refined for one who had so recently been a heathen’ (MFM 22).

*Mr Fortune’s Maggot* offers no suggestions for a course of action or an alternative to the ideologies it shows are at work. When Timothy eventually loses faith in the superiority of his own ideas he is completely undone: ‘He did not seem to have an idea left. Everything that was real, everything that was significant, had gone down with the island of Fanua and was lost forever’ (MFM 249). Losing faith in one’s ideologies, in this case, is not progressive, but the loss of everything that is real. It is in these terms that Warner does not offer an alternative to ideology, here or in her later novels: it is enough (or all one can do, perhaps, because to create an alternative within the same available framework is not really an alternative at all) to show the intricacies of how
they work. Music offers a unique space for exploring ideology, since it often claims to be outside of social or economic discourses, but in *Mr Fortune’s Maggot* it is the cornerstone of Timothy’s ideological system, without which he has nothing.

The significance of experiencing aesthetic beauty and interpreting it as transcendent or other-worldly has an impact in Timothy’s lived reality, because the enjoyment of the aesthetic is intimately, imperceptibly connected to his ideologically constituted subjectivity and comes into conflict with other individuals’ competing interpretations of the world. In *The Corner That Held Them* the aesthetic offers a way for individuals to find enjoyment and in which they can transcend material circumstances of poverty, but music also takes part in product exchanges and negotiations: its claim to separation from the material means that although it functions in economic and cultural life, the ways it does so fluctuate and are often unpredictable. *The Corner That Held Them* is also the text in which I argue we find the clearest engagement with specifically Marxist ideas, which I show by reading the text with the *Grundrisse*. I compare and contrast Warner’s writing to British Marxist writers and intellectuals, such as contributors to the *Left Review*. The way that Warner calls into question the universality of Western rationality in *Mr Fortune’s Maggot* prefigures her Communist Marxism and membership of the Communist Party from 1935.

*The Corner That Held Them*

*The Corner That Held Them* documents the life of Oby, an isolated fourteenth-century nunnery, through several generations of occupants. The principal concerns of the novel are historical change and finance: it is ‘entirely taken up with their money

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difficulties’, as Warner said in a 1942 diary entry. Music’s joint claims to social utility and transcendence first appear when a scholar arrives at the Oby nuns’ wicket for alms, and the narrative places the philosophical basis for music’s association with the divine into a practical, human encounter. For the ‘wandering scholar’ music is an example of God’s order and design in the world, but he also uses it in a material exchange, so that it occupies both spaces at the same time:

In 1194 a wandering scholar, very old and shrill, came begging for a meal … he talked to the wicket-nun about the properties of numbers … he explained to them about the Proportion of Diapason, the perfect concord which is at once concord and unity, and showed them how, by placing the bridge of the monochord so as to divide the string into a ratio of one and two, the string will sound the interval of the octave. Thus, he mumbled, was the nature of the Godhead perceptible to Pythagoras, a heathen; for it lies latent in all things. He sat on a bench in the sun, but overhead the wind howled, tormenting the willows along the Hog Trail and clawing the thatch, and the nuns could scarcely hear the demonstration of how the Godhead sounded to Pythagoras. It was really no loss, for his hand, shaking with cold and palsy, had failed to place the bridge correctly, and the diapason of the Trinity was out of tune. (C. 12–13)

The scholar refers to the mystical and holy significance given to ‘perfect’ musical intervals that accord with specific continuities and perfect ratios in mathematics. The Pythagorean diapason is the ‘perfect’ octave, an interval between two notes, one with double or half the other note’s frequency. The mathematical harmonic series
that used today is based on these early observations about music, where it can be noticed that if a string is divided (as the scholar says) ‘into a ratio of one and two, the string will sound the interval of an octave’. This means that particular sounds (or wavelengths) that adhere to each other are produced by the application of mathematical ratios to materials: the application of the ratio 2:1 on a string produces frequencies according to that ratio, which we hear as octaves. For example, if a note has a frequency of 200 Hz, an octave above it will have a frequency of 400 Hz, and the octave below a frequency of 100 Hz: all ratios of 2:1. Mathematical philosophies contemplate the possibilities of the existence of numbers, infinites and immutable facts, so that they often engage questions of ontology and existence – similar metaphysical questions to those contemplated in philosophies of logic not associated with the mathematical. The association of whole numbers with God that the scholar refers to is echoed in the language still used to describe whole numbers, or integers, in mathematics, which are often referred to as ‘natural numbers’.

The relationship between the ratios, sound and ‘the Godhead’ (or Godliness) is reliant on a form of Neoplatonic Idealism which considers the universe to be coherently (or harmoniously!) ordered according to a specific principle or idea, and the logical organisation of phenomena in the natural world is considered proof of the existence of

324 See Daniel D. Bonar, Michael J. Khoury, Jr., Michael Khoury, ed., who explain ‘Indeed, for each integer n the string can vibrate so that n arcs are formed, and the wavelength will be 1/n times the wavelength for the first harmonic. In this way the series of reciprocals relates to harmonics and harmonies’. Real Infinite Series (Mathematical Association of Americas, 2006), 66. See also Ron Larson and Bruce Edwards who note that ‘In music, strings of the same material, diameter, and tension, whose lengths form a harmonic series, produce harmonic tones’. Calculus of a Single Variable, ninth edition (Belmont, CA: Cengage Learning, 2006), 621.


326 Andrew D. Irvine, ed., Philosophy of Mathematics (Oxford: Elsevier, 2009), 11: ‘Start with the natural numbers, the whole numbers, 0, 1, and so on’.
a primary principle, such as a God, or Absolute. The influence of Neoplatonism on early Christianity has been noted by scholars such as Pauliina Reme, who argues that it ‘deeply influenced those Christians who had theoretical, theological or philosophical interests. Indeed, in many places the Neoplatonic approach was the only one available to a student committed to theoretical studies’. 327 For Franchino Gaffuorio, author of among the earliest (1492, 1496, 1518) and most significant treatises on music theory, musical and mathematical proportions were connected specifically with divine questions of universal order. 328 According to Leslie Blausis, ‘Gaffurio’s De harmonia closes with the resonances of musical systems with the virtues, the senses, and the cosmological structure of the world … Hence, the great synthetic project of music theory is…dependent on the sanction of neo-Platonic idealism’.329

Aspects of humanity and daily life that do not fit into perfect mathematical orders are at the forefront of The Corner That Held Them. The mathematics may be ‘perfect,’ but the material conditions that the scholar has to contend with – his hand, the cold, and the instrument – are not. The coherence that is theoretically available in the world

327 Pauliina Reme, Neoplatonism, 2. See also John Findlay, who claims that ‘Neoplatonism at an early point of its development made a most remarkable marriage with Christianity, and Alexandria, Cyrene, Carthage, Rome and other places became centres where theologians arose who used Neoplatonism as the key to Christianity’. John N. Findlay, ‘Neoplatonism and Western Christian Man’, in Neoplatonism and Contemporary Thought: Part Two, ed. R. Baine Harris, (New York: State University of New York Press, 2002), 298.
328 Cristle Collins Judd explains that ‘Among the most important early printed treatises in terms of their influence on the sixteenth century were the writings of Franchino Gaffurio. His three most significant treatises, Theorica musicae (1492), Practica musicae (1496) and De harmonia musicorum instrumentorum opus (1518) … provided a complete study in theoretical and practical music’. Cristle Collins Judd, Reading Renaissance Music Theory: Hearing with the Eyes (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), 17. Gaffurio’s first book Theorica Musice (1492) includes chapters on ‘The mathematical foundations of proportion’ and ‘The derivation of musical interval from proportion’, and his final book, De harmonia (1518) closes with the chapter ‘Mode and the correlation of music with the universal order’. See Leslie Blausius, ‘Mapping the terrain’, in The Cambridge History of Western Music Theory, ed. Thomas Christensen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 31.
329 Leslie Blausius, ‘Mapping the terrain’, 34.
is eclipsed by the weather and the scholar’s elderly body. The existence of God ‘lies latent in all things’, but it is things which frustrate the scholar’s attempt to demonstrate the work of God. The wind ‘howl[s]’ and ‘claw[s] at the thatch’ so that the nuns cannot hear the out-of-tune octave. The idea of a godly, transcendent music is ever-present in the Oby nuns’ holy rituals and the novices’ training. Yet it is also always in the hands of ordinary human beings, and affected by their daily concerns: whether economic, material, or spiritual.

**Warner and musicology**

Warner’s considerable academic knowledge of music and mathematics is discernible in this brief scene, and is an example of the subtle difficulty of her writing. She was an expert in early music and the history of music theory, having contributed to an edition of *The Polyphonic Period Part 1: Method of Musical Art, 330–1400* by H.E. Wooldridge. Her diary records that she was ‘Then home to finish Wooldridge chap iii’, indicating that she had significant responsibility towards editing the book on polyphony.\(^{330}\) It is not widely acknowledged that Warner did this work, since she edited the chapter informally for Percy Carter Buck, her former music teacher and lover, who alone is credited as the editor of the second edition.\(^{331}\) The mathematical explanation of the octave is discussed in chapter 1 of *The Polyphonic Period*, and

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\(^{330}\) Harman, ed., *Diaries*, 35. The chapter for which Warner was responsible was ‘The Materials of Polyphony, continued: Greek Music in the Latin Church’. It discusses ‘early Christian music’ and decides that ‘the similarity between the first Christian music and the Greek contemporary practice was complete as regards the technical basis’, meaning that early Christian music was derived from Greek music and uses many of the same scales as its basis. H.E. Wooldridge, *The Polyphonic Period Part I: Method of Musical Art; 330–1400*, ed. Percy Carter Buck (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1929), 26, 29.

\(^{331}\) Richard Searle notes that Warner appears to have written and revised work on music that Buck was in charge of editing, but this is among the only published acknowledgment of the work Warner undertook. Richard Searle, ‘Sylvia Townsend Warner and Tudor Church Music’, *Journal of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society* (2011): 85. For Warner’s relationship with Buck, see Harman, *Biography*, 24.
reappears in her novel through the scholar’s voice, in dialogue with both its religious significance and complicated by its place in a material exchange.\textsuperscript{332}

Warner began her professional career in 1917 as a musicologist, working on the editorial board preparing the Carnegie-funded editions of \textit{Tudor Church Music}. The fifteenth- and sixteenth-century manuscripts of composers such as Thomas Tallis, William Byrd, Robert White and John Taverner were collected and edited into publishable form.\textsuperscript{333} She studied and worked with eminent figures in musicology and music teaching, by whom she was considered first a prodigy, and then an expert. She developed a thorough theoretical and historical understanding of music studying with Buck at Harrow, where Warner lived with her mother and father, who taught history.\textsuperscript{334} She then studied Tudor notation with Richard Terry, who was editor-in-chief of the \textit{Tudor Church Music} project when it began in 1916. As Lynn Mutti has

\textsuperscript{332} The Pythagorean diapason is explained in Wooldridge’s book: ‘Of the various intervals contained in this scale some appear to have been from the earliest times perceived as consonant and some as dissonant, the ear being the judge; but in the sixth century B.C. Pythagoras discovered, or as some think learned from Egyptian priests, the law which governs them and brings them within the compass of theoretical knowledge. He proclaimed the remarkable fact, of which the proof existed in his famous experiments with stretched strings of different length, that the ratios of the intervals perceives as consonant could all be expressed by the numbers 1,2,3,4. His method of demonstration was afterwards improved and rendered more exact by the invention of the monochord, and his law may now be stated as follows. If a string be divided into two parts by a bridge, in such a manner as to give to consonant sounds when struck, the length of those parts will be in the ratio of two of the four smallest whole numbers. If the bridge be so placed that two-thirds of the string lie to the right and one-third to the left, so that the two lengths are in the ratio 2:1, they produce the interval of the octave, the greater length giving the deeper note.’ \textit{The Polyphonic Period}, 10–11. The ‘diapason’ is mentioned 21 times in \textit{The Polyphonic Period}, either in the main text itself or in the Latin which is translated within the text and given as footnotes (11, 52, 56, 62, 78, 116, 157, 158, 160, 181, 322).

\textsuperscript{333} Harman notes that ‘The composers whose work was finally represented in the ten volumes of \textit{Tudor Church Music} were John Taverner, William Byrd, Orlando Gibbons, Robert White, Thomas Tallis, Thomas Tomkins and three less prolific composers, Hugh Aston, John Marbeck and Osbert Parsley, though the committee were still arguing about inclusions and exclusions as late as 1928’. Harman, \textit{Biography}, 38, 41. See also Oxford University Press Archives CP/ED/001034 (390 items, 1916–1920); CP/ED/001035 (535 items, 1920–1952).

\textsuperscript{334} Harman is uncertain that Warner would have chosen to specialise in music ‘without the encouragement and example of Percy Buck, [who was] more than a match for George Warner [Sylvia’s father], whose close friend he became soon after joining the staff at Harrow in 1901, aged thirty’. Harman, \textit{Biography}, 32.
noted, ‘[i]t says a great deal about Warner’s musical ability that a man as busy and notable as Terry was at this time should consider her a suitable candidate for instruction’. Richard Searle cites Terry praising her ‘first class intellect’, and describing Warner as ‘brilliant’ and ‘genius’, and he also thought highly of her compositions, writing ‘[o]f modern music composed specially for the Cathedral witness the remarkable Dum Traniisset of Miss Townsend Warner’.

Since Warner was a skilled expert, references to music in her literary texts should be approached as extremely well-informed, and thus of great significance. If the musical knowledge required to work on the editorial board for Tudor Church Music was considerable, it was nothing compared to that which she acquired during the twelve years the project ran. By 1928 Warner considered herself equal to Buck on matters of intellect, regardless of his many credentials afforded by the greater opportunities for men in professional institutions: Buck was highly educated and accomplished, becoming Professor of Music at the University of London in 1925, and received a Knighthood for services to music in 1937. Warner wrote in her diary in 1928, referring to her secret romantic relationship with Buck which began in 1913, that she had a ‘niggling conviction that love is impossible between equals. One must have a little condescension or a little awe’.

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338 Harman writes that ‘When the Church Music project began it was expected to last for five years or so … In the event it took five people twelve years to complete’. Harman, Biography, 22, 41.
339 Harman, ed., Diaries, 86.
Warner did the majority of the travelling to cathedrals, libraries and archives where the manuscripts to be edited for *Tudor Church Music* were located, because she was the only member of the editorial team with no family commitments, as well as the only woman.\(^{340}\) The manuscripts were often incomplete and had to be transcribed from Tudor notation so they could be read by contemporary musicians. Warner discusses the importance of the choices she made in detail, describing how an editor ‘must pick his way through a morass where it is very easy to go wrong, and quite impossible to feel sure of going right’.\(^{341}\) Her use of the male pronoun throughout the essay, despite describing her own work, acknowledges the male-dominated workplace and academe. Warner wrote in her diary that she knew she was given the editorial position on *Tudor Church Music* despite there being other candidates ‘with as good or better qualifications’, showing she was aware of the limited employment opportunities for women in fields where men had the opportunity to achieve more qualifications.\(^{342}\) Warner began to write fiction only towards the end of her work on the Church Music project, and her first novel *Lolly Willowes* is about the limitations on women’s lives in the 1920s. The title character, Laura Willowes, who is expected to tolerate a life of servitude and dependency in her elder brother’s household because she does not marry, comments: ‘Women have such imaginations, and lead such dull lives’.\(^{343}\) Warner, thanks in part to *Tudor Church Music*, did not have a dull life.

\(^{340}\) According to Harman, ‘since she [Warner] had no family to be inconvenienced…she did more travelling than the other editors’. Harman, *Biography*, 43.


Religious music and singing of the kind Warner studied is a feature of daily life at Oby, and when the initial ‘batch’ of nuns arrive, the first thing they do in their new home – which they find ‘poorer, smaller, clumsier than they had expected’ – is sing their Te Deum with ‘dubious hearts’ (C 9). This hymn of praise is among the music that Warner worked on for Tudor Church Music: she writes in her diary about collating William Byrd’s Te Deum and Te Matrem, about which her knowledge is so extensive that she is able to make independent judgements about the dates of compositions: ‘Not only is Te Matrem the earlier text, but I believe it is the earlier composition’. Warner was also a proficient composer, and Harman suggests that she intended to study with Arnold Schoenberg, although this was prevented by the outbreak of the First World War. Very little of her music still survives, but Warner writes in her diary about hearing her version of sixteenth-century composer Robert White’s music performed, saying it was ‘entertaining to hear my added cantus part careering about that roof…Hearing my version, done for them, incorporating both 4 and 8 pt versions absolutely clinched my conviction that the 4 pt is an adaptation’. Warner claims the version, which was in the fifth volume of Tudor Church Music, as her own, acknowledging the high level of control and judgement she had in her editorial work. But she also says it was ‘done for them’ (the singers) indicating that her work was not just an academic or archival study, but primarily for those who would perform and hear the music. Her commitment to aesthetic enjoyment of music is present in The Corner That Held Them, but it is refracted through a Marxist materialism. Yet Warner is equally committed to showing the complexity of music as a material as well as aesthetic object.

345 Harman, Biography, 26.
Marxism and The Corner That Held Them

Warner claims that she began The Corner That Held Them ‘on the purest Marxian principles, because I was convinced that if you were going to give an accurate picture of the monastic life, you’d have to put in all their finances’.347 Warner’s Marxism sits within the context of the increasing popularity of Marxist ideas among British left intellectuals in the 1930s.348 As Richard Overy explains, ‘the notion that capitalism was in a state of physical, possibly fatal decay became embedded in popular perception of the economic system’.349 Warner was well-connected with the Marxist literary community in the 1930s and had access to a number of texts by Marx, the influence of which – as well as the complex ways she handles related ideas about culture, labour, economics and art – can be seen in The Corner That Held Them.

During the 1930s interest in Marxism responded to Britain’s economic problems and the ascendancy of political fascism in Germany and Italy, and British intellectual Marxists partially took their lead from Soviet Russia and the political Marxism of Lenin and the Bolshevik Russian Revolution.350 The spread of fascism in Europe also

349 Overy, The Morbid Age, 53.
350 Mark Bevir notes that ‘by the early twentieth century, Britain was home to a range of Marxist groups’ and his book goes on to answer the question ‘How was British socialism made in the late nineteenth century?’ Mark Bevir, The Making of British Socialism (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011), 9. I say ‘partially took their lead from Soviet Russia’ because there were left intellectuals in Britain who had engaged with Marxist ideas prior to the 1930s. H. Kendall Rogers discusses debates by members of the British Fabian Society about Marxism, particularly in 1896 and 1897. H. Kendall Rogers, ‘British Politics’, in Before the Revisionist Controversy (RLE Marxism): Katsky, Bernstein, and the meaning of Marxism, 1895–1898 (London: Routledge, 2015), 113–169. The writings of Lenin that were available include Development of Capitalism in Russia (1899); Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism (1916) and State and Revolution (1917) which are all in his Collected Works, ed. Alexander Trachtenberg, trans. Joshua Kunitz and
prompted the Comintern’s change of strategy in 1935: it became more inclusive, encouraging the formation of ‘Popular Fronts’ outside the USSR in which Communists could operate, and the Popular Front in Britain was organised in opposition to the Government’s appeasement policy towards Nazi Germany.\textsuperscript{351} Ben Harker notes that in Britain, ‘the Popular Front turn ushered in a well-documented rapprochement between Communists, intellectuals and the broader national culture’.\textsuperscript{352} \textit{Left Review} was set up as ‘the organ of the Writers’ International’ (the intellectual branch of Comintern) in Britain,\textsuperscript{353} and produced literary criticism in response to the ascendency of fascist governments in Europe during 1930s.\textsuperscript{354} The Left Book Club was organised by Victor Gollancz as a way of promoting the Popular Front – a movement in which Warner and Ackland were deeply involved, founding their local Readers and Writers Club in affiliation.\textsuperscript{355} The two historical novels Warner wrote in the 1930s – \textit{Summer Will Show} (1936) and \textit{After the Death of Don Juan}


\textsuperscript{353} Janet Batsleer et al. note that ‘It was not until 1934 that a British section of what had by then become the Writers’ International was formed in Britain. The founding of this section was the culmination of a process set in motion by the second International Conference of Proletarian and Revolutionary Writers, held at Charkob in November 1930’. Batsleer et al., \textit{Rewriting English}, 60, 58.

\textsuperscript{354} David Margolies, introduction to \textit{Writing the Revolution: Cultural Criticism from ‘Left Review’}, ed. David Margolies (London: Pluto Press, 1998), 9. For \textit{Left Review} editors and contributors, writing and criticism was an essential part of the attempt to internationalise communism and prevent the spread of fascism. This group of revolutionary British Writers was, according to Margolies, ‘born out of the spirit of the Popular Front – or Peoples’ Front, as it was known in Britain – which had been organised to stop fascism’. Margolies, \textit{Writing the Revolution}, 4. There were debates about how best to write for the proletariat, stop fascism and internationalise Communism, as I will go on to explain in more detail later.

\textsuperscript{355} Harman, \textit{Biography}, 152.
(1938)\textsuperscript{356} – are considered by critics to be political commentaries and anti-fascist texts.\textsuperscript{357}

*The Corner That Held Them* has received much less attention as a Marxist text, but it is this novel that Warner claims she began on ‘Marxian’ principles, showing that Marxist ideas were still highly relevant to Warner after her initial involvement with the Communist Party in the 1930s.\textsuperscript{358} A police report in her MI5 file from 1952 finds it noteworthy that Warner and Ackland ‘do possess some literature appertaining to socialism’.\textsuperscript{359} Although much of Marx was not immediately published in English, there were texts by Marx which Warner could have read. One example is the Preface to *A Contribution to ‘the Critique of Political Economy’* (1859) which contains the following passage:

> In the social production of their means of existence men enter into definite, necessary relations which are independent of their will, productive relationships which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The aggregate of these productive relationships constitutes the economic structure of society, the real basis on which a juridical and political superstructure arises, and to which definite forms of social consciousness correspond. The mode of production of the material means of

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\textsuperscript{357} Janet Montefiore describes *Summer Will Show* and *After the Death of Don Juan* as ‘anti-fascist’ texts, and argues against George Orwell in ‘Outside the Whale’ who sees anti-fascist writing as all inevitably crass. Montefiore, *Men and Women Writers of the 1930s*, 16, 142. Warner herself claimed that *After the Death of Don Juan* is ‘a parable or allegory, or what you will, of the political chemistry of the Spanish War’. See Harman, *Biography*, 175. Barbara Brothers considers *Don Juan* to be a contemporary political allegory that maps eighteenth-century Spain onto 1930s Spain, saying that Warner ‘depicts [in the historical novel] the social and political turmoil that prevented the Spanish republic of 1931 from becoming stable enough to withstand the fascists within and outside Spain’. Barbara Brothers, ‘Writing Against the Grain: Sylvia Townsend Warner and the Spanish Civil War’, in *Women’s Writing in Exile*, ed. Mary Lynn Broe and Angela Ingram (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 353. Chris Hopkins, however, disagrees with the ‘simplification of past and present’ he finds in Brothers’ analysis, arguing instead that ‘The novel makes considerable effort to tell dual histories, in which the two histories remain separate’. Chris Hopkins, *English Fiction in the 1930s* (London: Continuum, 2006), 103–104.

\textsuperscript{358} Harman notes that Warner never resigned from the Party, either ‘formally or informally, though it seems she had not been a paid-up member of the Party … since the beginning of the [Second World] war’. Harman, *Biography*, 253.

\textsuperscript{359} Letter to Superintendent D. Blakeman from Dorset Constabulary, 10\textsuperscript{th} December 1952 (London, 2006), KV/2/2338, National Archive.
existence conditions the whole process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, it is their social existence that determines their consciousness.360

This statement by Marx could be an indicator of what the ‘purest Marxian principles’, as Warner puts it, on which she began the novel may be. ‘This classic statement’, says Margolies, also ‘served fruitfully as the basis for much Marxist literary criticism’ produced in the 1930s and published in Left Review.361 Warner had many contacts among Communist and left intellectuals through the Party, as well as at the Left Book Club and Left Review.362 Combined with the texts by Marx variously available to

361 The publication was a pioneer of Marxist criticism in the 1930s, with Margolies noting that ‘there was not yet any Marxist literary criticism in English – they were creating it’. Margolies, Writing the Revolution, 1, 4. Margolies’ point about a new ‘movement’ of Marxist, specifically literary criticism notwithstanding, he neglects to mention late nineteenth-century Marx inflected critical writings by William Morris, for example, Signs of Change (London: Longmans, 1896). There were also other genres of text available which dealt directly with Marxist ideas, although not in the form of literary criticism, such as J.A. Hobson’s Imperialism (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1902). The connection between societal problems produced by capitalism and war was to become central to the ideology of Writers’ International members and other intellectual members of the Communist Party during the 1930s. Overy explains that this book ‘gave a firm intellectual foundation to the connection between capitalism and war’, and notes the presence of ‘war-mania’ during the 1930s and the focus on the effects of capital in society as a contributing or as the main factor. Overy, The Morbid Age, 188–89, 184. ‘War-mania’ can be identified in the form of books such as that of Tom Wintringham, The Coming World War (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1935), and the military intellectual Basil Liddel Hart, who wrote in 1932 that war is a product ‘of a diseased civilisation’. Basil Liddel Hart, Thoughts on War (London: Faber, 1944), 10. There were BBC radio broadcasts in November and December 1934 titled ‘The Causes of War’, and Overy comments that ‘The idea that imperialist capitalism caused war percolated into the stock of standard ideas in Britain in the 1930s, particularly but not exclusively among those on the left’. Overy, The Morbid Age, 184, 190.
362 She had close links with the Left Review and its editors, and according to Harman was ‘frequently in contact with Edgell Rickword’ – a founder member whom she visited at the magazine’s headquarters in 1937 – ‘and full of suggestions [for the magazine and the Party] on which she hoped he might act’. Harman, Biography, 172. Tom Wintringham too was close friend to Warner in the 1930s; a prominent Party member and another editor of Left Review, he was responsible for her active involvement in the Spanish Civil War in 1936, requesting that she and Ackland travel to Barcelona to work for a Red Cross unit. Warner met Wintringham in May 1935, and over the summer he and his wife Kitty were regular visitors to Warner and Ackland’s home in Chaldon, Dorest. See Harman, Biography, 141, 144, 153. Warner would have been aware of ideas such as those in Wintringham’s book, The Coming World War (1935) cites Marx’s Capital when explaining how capitalism – markets, rates of profit, monopolies, competition, poverty “caused by plenty,” tariffs, class power – was producing an environment in which war was inevitable. Specifically, Wintringham cites the preface to the second edition of Capital. Wintringham, The Coming World War, 12.
her, she should be considered extremely well-connected and up to date with the intellectual Marxist community.

The ways in which the material focus of *The Corner That Held Them* is Marxist can be analysed by considering the processes of exchange and distribution in the novel alongside ‘The General Relation of Production to Distribution, Exchange, Consumption’ from the *Grundrisse*. This was among the first drafts, written between 1857 and 1859, of material that would become *Capital*, but a partial English translation did not appear until 1904, with a full one appearing only in 1971. The passage I quote below was unavailable to Warner, so I am not claiming she was directly influenced by this work. It is, however, particularly succinct and direct in its explication of production, so it is useful for a necessarily brief exploration of how *The Corner That Held Them* is informed by Marxist ideas about production and exchange:

> Production yields goods adapted to our needs; distribution distributes them according to social laws; exchange distributes further what has already been distributed, according to individual wants; finally, in consumption, the product drops out of the social movement, becoming the direct object of the individual want which it serves and satisfies in use.

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365 Ernst Theodor Mohl writes that ‘The publication of Marx’s 1857–9 manuscript began in Germany, on the pages of *Die Neue Zeit* [The New Times], with two partial publications by Karl Kautsky: the “Introduction” (Marx 1903) and “Carey and Bastai” (Marx 1904)’. Ernst Theodor Mohl, ‘Germany, Austria and Switzerland’, in *Karl Marx’s Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy 150 Years Later*, ed. Marcello Musto (London: Routledge, 2008), 189.

366 The *Handbook of Marxism* that she would have had access to indicates that ‘*Capital* was the completion of the detailed analysis of capitalism which Marx had already begun in his earlier works, especially *The Critique of Political Economy*’. Burns, ed., *A Handbook of Marxism*, 373.

367 Although here Marx begins with production, moves through distribution and exchange, and ends with consumption, elsewhere he explains the absence of clear beginning and end points to
Marx further clarifies different manifestations of distribution by explaining that ‘before distribution means distribution of products, it is, first, a distribution of the means of production’ which in a pre-industrial society is primarily the land: ‘No production [is] possible without an instrument of production, even if that instrument is only the land’.368 This organisation of production and distribution is explained as integral to the setup of Oby. When Brian de Retteville founds the nunnery in commemoration of his dead wife Alianor, he distributes the means of production (in this case, land and property) to the nuns: ‘the site chosen was a manor called Oby’ and ‘All Alianor’s fortune he gave to its endowment, and made a will leaving it half his own property’ (C 6). Brian also has to provide the nuns with the means to acquire some items by exchange, because they are not directly available from the land or they extra require labour: he must provide timber annually from elsewhere on his estate, plus the labour to cover its transportation, as well as money with which they can purchase wine (C 8). Marx’s opening to his essay on production – ‘To begin with, the question under discussion is material production’ – is equally apt as an assessment of the questions Warner’s text immediately raises. The novel begins with the distribution of land at a stage of social development where the ruling class is the landowning class, who decides how the means of production and the products themselves are distributed. In Marx’s words, this is a ‘given stage of social development’ where ‘bourgeois relations’ are substituted, ‘in an underhand way, as immutable natural laws of

368 Ibid., 30, 19. The sentence continues: ‘and secondly, which is another determination of the same relationship, it is a distribution of the members of the society among the various kinds of production’. I have not included this in the main text to retain clarity and directness, because it is indicated as a further explanation of ‘the same relation’.
society’. Any ‘natural laws’ that might have existed have been overtaken by the law of landownership.

Brian initially thinks that distributing the land is enough — ‘There was land, and water, and a population of serfs, not many but enough; there were buildings and outbuildings, a fish-pond, an excellent dovecot. What more could women, holy women, desire?’ (C 8) — but these basic items are not sufficient:

Negotiations with the house in France who was to supply his first batch of nuns enlarged his notions of what holy women desire. The abbess, a notable woman of business, sent him a long list of requirements … a good relic; books for the altar and for account-keeping; the complete furniture for the convent priest’s chamber over the gate-house and the tolls of a bridge over the Nene to pay for his upkeep and salary; a litter; tin porringer with lids to them; and a ring for the prioress. (C 8)

Brian’s notions of ‘what holy women desire’ are considerably enlarged to include objects of tradition and status: the furniture for the priest, and a ring for the prioress. The line between material necessities and cultural requirements is shown to be blurred here, as is any line between culture and religion. *The Corner That Held Them* explores the financial, spiritual, and cultural requirements of the Oby nunnery, so that capital and exchange are shown to be connected with religion. The material manifestations of cultural traditions that have become linked to religious practises, such as the prioress’s ring and the priest’s furniture, appear as necessary as food and shelter by being listed among them. It is in the appreciation of the complex materiality of culture, and

369 Ibid., 20.
370 For my necessarily brief consideration of religion I only intend to show how Warner shows ‘spiritual’ practices to exist in relation to economic and material culture. Warner would have had access to some texts in which Marx discussed religion, such as *Capital* (see n.362), but not the comprehensive collections that are available now, so considering how she navigates Marx’s specific arguments about religion cannot be part of this chapter. However, Warner’s presentation of religion in *The Corner That Held Them* does share some parallels with Marx’s engagement, so there are aspects which are useful to note. For Marx, religion in society was logical and a necessary part of social development, albeit something that functioned in place of the ability to map and understand the material forces governing existence, and as a way of directing ‘spiritual’ energies
cultural institutions such as religion, that Warner’s writing departs from much Marxist writing in the 1930s.

Returning to the scene between the nuns and the scholar, this too is premised upon the distribution of products and their exchange. The nuns receive nothing physical in return for the food they give to the poor, but the musical entertainment has value because they are isolated at Oby. This makes the encounter function more like an exchange. The nuns constantly bicker and feud, subjecting each other to physical and psychological abuse. Their arguments become so severe that Dame Lilias considers her best option is permanent solitary confinement as an anchoress, and the novel ends with Dame Sibilla leaving Oby in secret because she can no longer stand to live with her arch-enemy (C 398–99). The nuns relish the opportunity for encounters with others: when giving alms at the wicket ‘the novices chattered at the wicket like a troop of birds’, and ‘Dame Susanna, herself relishing a little gossip, enjoyed politeness as part of the performance’ (C 108). The novice’s enjoyment and Dame Susanna’s desire to extract gossip shows forms of exchange other than that of material necessities occurring at the wicket. That music is a form of repayment is visible in the scholar’s attempt to adequately repay and entertain the nuns, shifting the function of music from

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something that Warner too shows by highlighting (for the reader) the relationship between material culture and religion that is invisible to the characters, and showing the centrality of religion to individuals’ (albeit alienated) sense of themselves and their place in the world during the twelfth century. According to Marx, religion serves during ‘the stage in which his spiritual energies are given a religious definition as powers independent of himself’ so that it has a relationship to understanding the material structure of the world and functions in ‘spiritual’ or non-material, life. Marx, Capital, trans. David Fernbach (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1976), 990. Marx’s view of religion is often considered to be mainly negative, since he described it as the ‘opium of the people’, but he also sees it as having a positive aspect, or active moral agency: religion, he said, can play an important role in articulating suffering, and it not simply a tool used for oppression: ‘religious suffering is at one and the same time the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world and the soul of soulless conditions’. Karl Marx, Critique of Hegel’s ‘Philosophy of Right’, trans. Joseph O’Malley (1970; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 131.
the demonstration of divine order in the world through the ‘diapason,’ to entertainment when the first attempt fails to please: by ‘brushing the crumbs out of his beard and plucking a sprig of wormwood to stick behind his ear, he sang a lovesong to entertain the ladies’ (C 13).

It is not only material goods and necessities that have value in Warner’s fiction, but also cultural goods and knowledge. In other words, Warner explores the value of art and human relationships in society. ‘Production’, according to Marx, ‘not only supplies the want with a material, but supplied the material with a want … The want for it which consumption experiences is created by its perception of the product’. It is here, in questions of perception and desire, that an individual’s capacity for aesthetic enjoyment plays a role: ‘The object of art, as well as any other product, creates an artistic public, appreciative of beauty’.371 In The Corner That Held Them, this is not just extreme beauty of philosophical significance: the nuns are more appreciative of the love song the scholar sings than the diapason, because it had ‘a pretty, catchy tune: for some days every nun and novice was humming it’ (C 13). Music is valuable here, but as entertainment and diversion. Its functions in this instance are all benign. Aesthetics are, however, to become more important later in the novel when the nuns’ bailiff, Henry Yellowlees, experiences a completely new type of music that does have a profound effect, and in which case the social and aesthetic significance of art is augmented.

The Corner That Held Them investigates the complexities of product relations by showing that music can take part in many aspects of life, inhabiting different social

371 Marx, Grundrisse, 25–6
spaces and performing different functions: it can be entertainment, and it has a relationship with religious ideologies. The place of music in religious ideas is inferred through the scholar’s musical demonstration of the octave, the philosophical explanation of which has been appropriated by religious discourses to ‘prove’ that the world is ordered by a higher, rational power. Warner’s characters experience feelings of alienation and unreality, showing the need for ordering schemes, and the utopian potential of art: Henry Yellowlees wonders ‘whether Sir Ralph’s madness or the materialism of the nuns was furthest from real life. Yet what was real life? Not his own life assuredly’ (C 281). Henry’s feelings of alienation are, for Marx, what makes religion and illusions necessary and possible. 372 While it is unlikely that Warner had access to Marx’s Critique of Hegel’s ‘Philosophy of Right’, it is worth quoting. It illuminates how Warner writes about the reasons Henry searches for meaning in the world due to feelings of alienation:

Religion is, indeed, the self-consciousness and self-esteem of man who has either not yet won through to himself, or has already lost himself again…To call on them to give up their illusions about their condition is to call on them to give up a condition that requires illusions. 373

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372 Marx’s famous statement declaring religion the ‘opium’ of the people contains an awareness of the significance of such ideas for how individuals understand their lives and their place in the world, which through religion can be attributed to a higher, more intelligent entity. Yet Marx also looks forward to a utopian future in which religion – which is an illusory way of explaining the ‘meaning’ of individuals’ existence by ascribing power and agency to a deity in place of the (also often invisible) forces of material production – will no longer be necessary. Warner takes part in this discussion by showing how music functions to support the notion of a higher power or order in the world. Marx says: ‘The foundation of irreligious criticism is: Man makes religion, religion does not make man. Religion is, indeed, the self-consciousness and self-esteem of man who has either not yet won through to himself, or has already lost himself again. But man is no abstract being squatting outside the world. Man is the world of man – state, society. This state and this society produce religion, which is an inverted consciousness of the world, because they are an inverted world. Religion is the general theory of this world, its encyclopaedic compendium, its logic in popular form, its spiritual point d’honneur, its enthusiasm, its moral sanction, its solemn complement, and its universal basis of consolation and justification. It is the fantastic realization of the human essence since the human essence has not acquired any true reality. The struggle against religion is, therefore, indirectly the struggle against that world whose spiritual aroma is religion … To call on them to give up their illusions about their condition is to call on them to give up a condition that requires illusions. The criticism of religion is, therefore, in embryo, the criticism of that vale of tears of which religion is the halo.’ Marx, Critique of Hegel’s ‘Philosophy of Right’, 131–2.

373 Ibid., 131.
Through music Warner refers to the ways in which art becomes necessary for a particular society’s organisation by referring to its philosophical significance: music has meaning because it provides a tangible (or hearable, at least) example of immutable natural laws through which humanity’s relationship with the universe – through a system of divine order and design – can be comprehended, and through which the arrangement of social relations can be understood. Within this ideological construction music also functions within a system of exchange that is premised upon landownership and social laws that are entirely removed from any ‘natural laws’.

Yet music is not merely a way of supporting ideology. The coherence between mathematics and sound that the scholar describes is remarkable. It is this ‘remarkability’ which can be used effectively harnessed to support religious ideology, because it appears to have meaning in and of itself. *The Corner That Held Them* shows that the function of art is not singular by packing music’s social, economic, entertainment and ideological functions into one scene, and also demonstrates that a literary work can present and debate art’s functions.

**Warner’s departure from the Comintern line**

Warner’s methods of demonstrating complexity and contradictions in the superstructure do not easily map onto the Comintern line, established at the 1934 Soviet Writer’s Congress and adopted by Popular Front writers, about how art should promote socialist ideas. Among British Communist Party members, Writers’ International members and *Left Review* contributors there was consensus that criticism and writing should be for political intervention and awakening class-consciousness. Warner’s novels are committed to revealing the ideological workings of Western
cultural forces and the different ways these interact with economics to support an existing social order, and this is distinct from the political writers of Soviet Russia and many British Marxists in the 1930s, for whom criticism became a form of intervention to achieve a specific and definite change. Although British left-wing writing in the 1930s was varied in its methods and its aims, writers debated the best ways to create novels and criticism with a political motive that retained artistic value. David Margolies notes that ‘there was no uniformity’ or agreement visible in *Left Review* about how to advance socialist goals through writing, only that they should be advanced. In 1937 poet and Communist Party member Charles Madge wrote that ‘[i]f the novelist has any function in our age, it is to delineate the relationship of an individual to his class, on the basis of scientific materialism’. Montagu Slater, meanwhile, declared that ‘the strongest argument for Writers International is that it can bring writers into touch with life. (“Life” in this context equals the class struggle)’. Both writers place emphasis on bringing the individual into a relationship with the contemporary political environment: it is the particular class struggle of the moment that should be engaged with.

British Marxist fiction of the 1930s that responded to the Party line has gained a reputation as, in the words of Janet Montefiore, ‘either boringly naturalistic slices of

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374 Ralph Fox claimed, in terms akin to those given by Andrei Zhdanov opening the 1934 Writer’s Congress (quoted in the introduction to this chapter), that ‘it is not the author’s business to preach, but to give a real, historical picture of life’, by which he means to confront reality through art in order to bring about revolutionary change: ‘A revolutionary writer is a party writer’. Ralph Fox, *The Novel and the People* (1937; New York: International Publishers, 1944), 137. Fox does not take a narrow view of politics, however, but also historicises human development, saying ‘Man and his development is the centre of Marxist philosophy’, and that a human is always ‘a man with a social history, and an individual, a man with a personal history’. Ralph Fox, *The Novel and the People*, 32, 34.


proletarian life, or else even more boring glorifications of grain silos in Kiev’. According to Valentine Cunningham these ideas about how cultural production should advance Socialist ideas ‘helped to smash up modernism especially in the novel, thus pushing the novel back beyond Henry James into the arms of bourgeois naturalism’. Janet Montefiore and Andy Croft have defended writers from charges of naturalism by commenting on the varied ways realism was employed by writers in the 1930s. Montefiore also points out that the Congress of Soviet Writers’ decision ‘only directly affected Party writers’ – although in theory, this would include Warner as an active and engaged member of the Party.

New, original archival research into Warner’s MI5 file, held at the National Archive, shows that she was known to MI5 as a Communist intellectual, and was under surveillance between 1935 and 1955. Her letters were intercepted and her home was watched by local police, who reported back to the intelligence services. Her MI5 file contains copies of letters she sent and received, including to and from Left Review editors, and details of donations she collected for the Communist Party’s Spanish Fund at the outbreak of the Civil War. MI5 were kept informed of intimate specifics about Warner and Ackland’s ‘habits’, such as their living arrangements, the number of visitors to their house, where they travelled to, and the make and registration of two cars they owned. Little action was taken because of Warner’s surveillance.

378 Montefiore, Men and Women Writers of the 1930s, 139. Andy Croft, Red Letter Days: British Fiction in the 1930s (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), 5.
379 Cunningham, British Writers of the Thirties, 299.
381 Montefiore, 145.
383 Correspondence between Dorset Constabulary and Colonel Sir Vernon Kell of MI5 about Warner and Ackland began in January 1935, when Chief Constable Major Yates obtained a detailed report of their addresses since 1930; a description of Ackland’s appearance and their ‘M.G.
although she was denied a certificate of employment for lecturing to British troops in 1943 due to anxieties about ‘information she may gather for “the Cause” in the process of her lecturing tours’.\(^{384}\) The MI5 file offers a limited and rather distorted insight into Warner and Ackland’s life, and is more useful for showing the British government’s anxieties about ‘Marxists’ even after the 1930s.\(^{385}\)

Despite the evidence which points to her continuing commitment to Communism, even after the Second World War and with the start of the Cold War,\(^{386}\) Warner’s

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\(^{384}\) Minute 91, 4\(^{\text{th}}\) January 1943: see also 88–97, 10\(^{\text{th}}\) December 1942 – 2\(^{\text{nd}}\) February 1943, KV/2/2338, National Archive. Maroula Joannou notes that in the 1940s Warner lectured to the Worker’s Educational Association and taught adult education classes for the Labour party, which is presumably how her name would have come up as a lecturer for British troops. Maroula Joannou, “‘Our Time’: Sylvia Townsend Warner, Virginia Woolf and the 1940s”, \textit{Literature Compass} 11, 12 (December 2014): 734.

\(^{385}\) Whilst Claire Cullerton shows that information collected by the FBI in the USA about ‘Marxist’ intellectuals was used aggressively, James Smith notes that in the UK MI5’s activity and data collection ‘rarely resulted in direct forms of censorship’. James Smith, \textit{British Writers and MI5 Surveillance, 1930–1960} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), xiv. Cullerton explains that the FBI, however, ‘worked to discredit writers editors and publishers; to harass and beleaguer them; to incriminate them; and to limit their access to publication, their nomination for awards and prizes, and their opportunities to present their work in public arenas, all at precisely the time when literary modernism was gaining strength and strengthening its morale’. Claire A. Cullerton, \textit{Joyce and the G-Men: J. Edgar Hoover’s Manipulation of Modernism} (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 183–184.

\(^{386}\) Warner’s commitment to Communist ideas can be seen in her diary entries. In 1942 she wrote ‘I knew the defence of the USSR was the defence of my deepest concerns; and I know it still,’ and she continued to support Stalin throughout the early 1950s, although biographer Claire Harman notes that exactly ‘what she knew of him [Stalin] is impossible to ascertain.’ Harman, ed., \textit{Diaries}, 113. Harman, \textit{Biography}, 242. Although it is not known exactly what information about Soviet atrocities under Stalin would have been available to Warner during her lifetime, she remained a Communist throughout the 1956 Politburo denunciations and the news of Stalin’s purges became public. Harman, \textit{Biography}, 264. Her support does appear to waver in October 1961: ‘I have spent most of the day twiddling over Christmas presents … Meanwhile, USSR has loosed off its 50
writing does not fit the Comintern model: her texts do not straightforwardly work to reveal clear class divisions, but considers the full complexity of the way culture works in relation to economics and ideology.\(^{387}\) The assumptions Anthony makes about class, wealth and cultural knowledge in ‘The Music at Long Verney’ are wrong because they are too basic. Equally, The Corner That Held Them is not a novel that straightforwardly incites proletarian individuals to a contemporary awareness of their class position, because it does not take contemporary class issues as its subject. Warner’s texts cannot be said to be carrying out the Comintern line about ‘actively help[ing] to remold consciousness’ in the way this was often interpreted: her novels do not offer a call-to-arms, and cannot be easily, directly equated with a contemporary political situation.\(^{388}\) The Corner That Held Them also contains a more complex presentation of the function of art, because peoples’ aesthetic experiences in the text

megaton bomb; and Stalin is to be removed from the Lenin tomb. I wish neither decision had been made. I remember that snatch of voice I heard twenty years ago, when he was addressing the October revolution meeting. It was so substantial and calm … Then, at any rate, he was neither mad nor bad’. Although Warner expresses disappointment at the removal of Stalin’s body from the tomb, her statement that twenty years ago ‘he was neither mad nor bad’ suggests that his reputation is now so tarnished that she is beginning to be disillusioned. Yet this is combined with a yearning for a time when he was ‘neither’, which suggests a wish to be ignorant of his wrongdoings, rather than accept them. Harman, ed., Diaries, 277.

\(^{387}\) Another way in which Warner deviates from the model is that she is not ostensibly writing for the proletariat, especially when she writes for the New Yorker. Questions of readership and reception for Warner’s fiction, which was popular at the time but now relatively unknown (at least compared to male writers from the same period) are an important topic, but not one that I am able to cover here. Gaye Tuchman and Nina Fortin began work that speaks to the issue of women writers being made invisible in the process of canonisation, which mainly happens to male authors. This is in the context of Victorian novelists, but Warner’s case (and other female ‘modernist’ writers) can be considered a continuation of this practice. See ‘Edging women out: some suggestions about the structure of opportunities and the Victorian novel’, Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society 6, 2 (1980): 308–25. See also Elaine Showalter, ‘Women Writers and the Double Standard’, in Women in Sexist Society: Studies in Power and Powerlessness, ed. Vivian Gornick and Barbara K. Moran (New York: Basic Books, 1971), 452–79.

\(^{388}\) Yet this is distinct, as I have indicated, from the question of whether or not Warner’s novels incorporate Marxist ideas and concepts: Soviet Russia’s and Popular Front writers are only particular types of appropriation of Marxist ideas, which exist in a complex and varied history of Marxist ideas in Britain, Russia and throughout Europe.
are too varied to allow the possibility that it is – or could easily be used – simply as a vessel for particular political ideas.\textsuperscript{389}

While in the 1970s Perry Anderson argued that there was no useful British Marxist criticism prior to the 1960s,\textsuperscript{390} for Francis Mulhern the main exception to this was Christopher Caudwell, who was for a time occluded from being considered in a tradition of complex and nuanced British Marxist writing – not unlike Warner, whose complex Marxist aesthetic has still not been fully appreciated.\textsuperscript{391} More recently Stan Smith and Christopher Pawling have argued that in Caudwell’s writing there is a complexity of Marxist thought that Terry Eagleton and Anderson in the mid-seventies were invested in claiming was missing from early British Marxism.\textsuperscript{392} Pawling sees in

\textsuperscript{389} Warner’s non-fiction writing from the 1930s does suggest that there may have clear a connection for her between contemporary workers’ conditions and those she wrote about in The Corner That Held Them. Writing in the Daily Worker in 1935, an article by Warner states that farmers are ‘Squeezed by combines, rents, tithes, taxes, tariffs, on stock-food, fines and fees’: these are comparable issues to those faced by the serfs in The Corner That Held Them. Sylvia Townsend Warner, ‘The Government and the Farmers’, Daily Worker, 2\textsuperscript{nd} December 1935 (London, 2006) KV2/2337, National Archive.


\textsuperscript{391} For Mulhern, ‘Hostile commentators cite him as the epitome of all that was inept in this movement [1930s Marxism], and many Marxists in the English-speaking world continue to remember him with respect and to attend to his arguments.’ Francis Mulhern, ‘The Marxist Aesthetics of Christopher Caudwell,’ New Left Review I, 85 (May–June 1974): 37.

\textsuperscript{392} Eagleton wrote ‘Who is the major English Marxist critic? Christopher Caudwell, hélas…For though Caudwell is the major forebear – “major”, at least in the sheer undaunted ambitiousness for his project – it is equally true that there is little, except negatively, to be learnt from him…Insulated from much of Europe, intellectually isolated even within his own society, permeated by Stalinism and idealism, bereft of a “theory of superstructures”, Caudwell nonetheless persevered in the historically hopeless task of producing from these unpropitious conditions a fully-fledged Marxist aesthetics. His work bears all the scars of that self-contradictory enterprise: speculative and erratic, studded with random insights, punctuated by hectic forays into and out of
Caudwell’s writing a concern ‘to foster an intelligent debate about literary theory and aesthetics, rather than just promoting a “politics through literature” version of literary criticism’, gesturing to vulgar 1930s Marxist writers for whom aesthetic production was merely a diversion if it was not a didactic engagement with the contemporary class struggle.\(^{393}\) According to Smith, too, in Caudwell’s writing there is ‘a rationale for art as something more than a vehicle of ideology’, which is absent from much British Marxist writing of the 1930s.\(^{394}\)

In contrast to many Popular Front writers, for Caudwell and for Warner the significance of art is in the way it constructs realities through which we understand the world – something that I have shown is at the heart of *Mr Fortune’s Maggot*, and ‘The Music at Long Verney’. Art, Caudwell says, exhibits a ‘reality which though secondary is yet higher and more complex’, and it is ‘only by means of this illusion can be brought into a reality which would not otherwise exist’.\(^{395}\) For Caudwell, ‘[t]he alien territories and strewn with hair raising theoretical vulgarities’. Terry Eagleton, ‘Criticism and Politics: The Work of Raymond Williams’, *New Left Review* I, 95 (January–February 1976); reprinted in *Criticism and Ideology* (London: Verso, 1978), 21. Raymond Williams also initially dismissed Caudwell, saying that he was ‘not even specific enough to be wrong’ in *Culture and Society 1780–1950* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), 277. Both Williams and Eagleton have since revised their opinions. See Terry Eagleton and Drew Milne, ed. *Marxist Literary Theory: A Reader* (London: Blackwell, 1996), 10. John Higgins discusses the changes in Williams’s evaluation of Caudwell in *Raymond Williams: Literature, Marxism and Cultural Materialism* (London: Routledge, 1999), 100–24.

\(^{393}\) Christopher Pawling, ‘Revisiting the Thirties in the Twenty–First Century: the Radical Aesthetics of West, Caudwell, and Eagleton’, in *And in Our Time: Vision, Revision, and British Writing of the 1930s*, ed. Anthony Shuttleworth (London: Associated University Presses, 2003), 50. See also Christopher Pawling, *Christopher Caudwell: Towards a Dialectical Theory of Literature* (London: Macmillan, 1989), 163, where he argues that Caudwell’s theorisation of the novel should be given ‘a permanent place in the canon of Marxist literary criticism’. Leonard Jackson is also an advocate of Caudwell’s writing, saying: ‘In terms of the depth of the philosophical problems that he was prepared to tackle … and in terms of his ability to integrate these into a single coherent theoretical structure within the framework of a modified dialectical materialism, far the greatest British literary theorist was Christopher Caudwell’. Leonard Jackson, *The Dematerialisation of Karl Marx* (London: Longman, 1994), 127–8.

\(^{394}\) Smith, ‘Balancing Accounts: Caudwell, Eagleton and English Marxism’, 78.

value of art to society is that by it an emotional adaptation is possible’. Warner’s writing too contains a conviction about the importance of emotional experience through the artwork: a new style of music, *Ars nova*, offers a new reality in *The Corner That Held Them*, because it makes ‘a new man of Henry Yellowlees’ (C 277). Henry is awakened to a new sense of himself through the music which has a utopian effect: his ideas about what is possible in the world are broadened by the effect of hearing this completely new music. To show how this thought prefigures the equally complex Marxism of Adorno, we can consider these points in relation to *Aesthetic Theory*. For Adorno, too, art does not exist as a copy of the world, but as an ‘apparition’ through which our knowledge of the world can be altered: ‘Artworks are images as apparition, as appearance, and not as a copy. If through the demythologization of the world consciousness freed itself from the ancient shudder, that shudder is permanently reproduced in the historical antagonism of subject and object’. Artworks are distinct from reality, though they exist in relation to it. Through artworks historically constituted mythologies and ways of understanding the world can be challenged, and different realities can be imagined. Caudwell and Warner’s writing also contains these utopian ideas about the potential of art.

Although Warner’s writing is committed to showing the positive potential of art, she does not present art as purely positive. Like Caudwell’s, her writing is not a vehicle to promote a particular ideology. It shows the range of ways art and culture can function and be received by different individuals. During an overnight stop at leper-house in Esselby on a journey to collect money owed to the Oby nuns, the resident chaplain

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invites Henry to pass the time by singing some songs. Music, in this instance, is experienced in two distinct ways: for the chaplain and the visiting bailiff Henry Yeolloweles, however, the music is beautiful beyond anything they have experienced before, and they are deeply affected by it; for the lepers the purchase of music books is an extravagance that prevents them from eating. Further, music both cements and overcomes social divisions in this instance, showing that there is not an obvious or predictable relationship between the base and a superstructure, because the effect of music’s aesthetic beauty on individuals combined with its participation in economic life means that it fulfils a variety of functions.

To Henry and the chaplain the music is ‘perfect’ and they are ‘enraptured’ (C 260) when they sing the two-part Triste loysir together. Henry finds that ‘where the chaplain’s voice twittered in high florations above his tolling longs, he could hardly contain himself for excitement’ (C 261). The music even seems to promise to transcend social boundaries when the chaplain invites one of his lepers – John, who ‘has an extremely fine voice and is a skilled singer’ – to sing a piece for three voices with them. ‘He and I often sing together’, the chaplain explains; ‘To him, too, a third would be a godsend’ (C 261). When the three sing together, Henry feels that:

If Triste loysir had seemed a foretaste of paradise, the Kyrie was paradise itself. This was how the blessed might sing, singing in a duple measure that ran as nimbly on its four feet as a weasel running through a meadow … And as paradise is made for man, the music seemed made for man’s singing; not for edification, or the working out of an argument, or the display of skill, but only for ease and pleasure, as in paradise where the abolition of sin begets a pagan carelessness (C 262)

The music seems to be apart from the material world, part of a paradise and a realm above the human faculties of ‘argument’ and ‘skill’. The beauty of the music causes Henry to ‘lay awake’ most of the night, and puts his mind ‘in rapture’ – he is made so
thoroughly happy by it that the next day he rides off ‘singing and whistling’ (C 262, 263).

This music was completely and radically new in fourteenth-century England. The chaplain explains that ‘most of the things in this book are in the Ars nova style. This Kyrie by Machault, for instance…’ (C 261). Originating in France, Ars nova (meaning ‘new technique,’ but also commonly thought of as ‘new art’) refers to the new style of music developed between 1310 and 1375 by composers and poets such as Guillaume de Machault (or Machaut, 1300–1377), who is the composer of the chaplain’s Kyrie.\textsuperscript{398} Ars nova was produced during a time of rapid change in musical styles and notation: it was both rhythmically and harmonically innovative, incorporating two or more polyphonic and rhythmically diverse vocal parts, as Henry notices – a development made possible by new systems of musical notation that allowed these complex forms to be written down.\textsuperscript{399} The chaplain has acquired these music books from France, presumably at great expense and very quickly, since this part of the novel happens between 1374 and 1377 (C 239). The three singers are acutely affected by the music, and the chaplain remarks, ‘I tell you, there has never been such music in the world before’ (C 262).


\textsuperscript{399} Nicolas Bell notes that ‘the development of the motet in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries was a matter that came to be dominated by the fine details of rhythmic nuance. This was made possible by the mensural system of notation, and was also propelled by it. More than ever before in the history of music, there was a direct link between musical practice and music theory treatises’. Bell, ‘Signs of Change’, 363.
John the leper’s ability to sing with them, however, only goes so far in undoing the social division created by his poverty and illness: the promise of transcending social boundaries is not fulfilled. Although the music provides them all with considerable personal enjoyment as they sing together, John stands apart, singing ‘by rote’ away from the music books (C 262). The separation between the singers is reflected in the structure of the music: the beautiful new harmonies and rhythms are reliant on a new degree of difference between each vocal part, compared with the earlier plainchant style on which Ars nova is an elaboration. Their mutual delight in the sound of the music is reliant on their separate parts, in other words a degree of difference and separation, so that in the structure of the music lies the truth that they cannot fully transcend the boundaries of their social positions. The practice of singing even reinforces the division between John and the others in clear, spatial terms: ‘He stationed himself at the further end of the room; it was clear that he knew his place as a dog does’ (C 261). Despite noticing this, Henry continues to see socially transcendent capacity in the music: he thinks ‘how many an hour these two must have spent together … perhaps they bent over the same music-book, their love of music overcoming the barrier between life and death-in-life’ (C 262). Henry imagines the music to have a more positive social function than it does in reality, so that he can justify his own enjoyment of it.

Yet the music is a ‘taste’ of ‘paradise’ for Henry (C 262). In other words, the music enables the singers to imagine a better world, but it does not change the material conditions in which they exist. The ability to experience the music is reliant on the

400 Bell explains that Ars nova was ‘a vocal piece for two, three or four different voice-parts, based on a portion of plainchant’. Ibid.
material copies of the score. The musical ‘transcendence’ that enables them to imagine a paradise is transmitted through material conditions, and it is unable to surpass or alter those conditions (in this case). Music, the possibilities it enables them to imagine, and material conditions of existence, all exist in complex relation to each other.

Warner’s text explores a similar question to that which Caudwell tries to answer in *Studies in a Dying Culture*: ‘What is of importance to art, Marxism and society is the question: *What social function is art playing?*’ Caudwell, who had no association with the intellectual branch of the Communist Party, represents quite a different kind of Marxist writing to that available in the *Left Review*. While the magazine debated the best way to create writing that fulfilled a social purpose, Caudwell considered the function of art more broadly, outside the specific class struggle of the moment. It is in this sense that I compare his Marxist thought with Warner’s. Warner retains a space for the significance of the transcendent and the complexity of art’s functions that shares common ground with Caudwell’s ideas in *Illusion and Reality*, in which he draws a comparison between tools used for production and poetry:

> The tool adapts the hand to a new function, without changing the inherited shape of the hands of humanity. The poem adapts the heart to a new purpose, without changing the eternal desires of men’s hearts … poetry describes and expresses not so much the grain in its concreteness, the harvest in its factual essence which it helps to realise and which are the conditions for its own existence – but the emotional, social and collective complex which is that tribe’s relation to the harvest.

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402 Caudwell did not have any contact with the *Left Review* and had no desire to associate himself with the intellectual branch of the Communist Party, as Margolies, informed by Caudwell’s brother T. Stanhope Sprigg, notes. Caudwell was killed in 1937 while fighting in the Spanish Civil War with the International Brigades of the Communist Party. See Margolies, *The Function of Literature*, 17–18.
403 Although *Illusion and Reality* is a study of poetry, rather than music, ‘art’, ‘literature’, and ‘poetry’ are often used interchangeably in Caudwell’s work, so that his subject of aesthetics is not restricted to poetry. See also Francis Mulhern, ‘The Marxist Aesthetics of Christopher Caudwell’, n.10.
Art, for Caudwell, has a relationship to the economic base but is concerned with the ‘emotional, social and collective complex’ spheres of existence. E.P. Thompson has argued that Caudwell’s work ‘may be read as a polemic against mechanical materialism … masquerading as Marxism’, continuing that ‘In Illusion and Reality he is “making out a case” for the part played by the arts in the generation and organisation of spiritual energies’. 405 Both Warner and Caudwell retain a space for a human degree of complexity and emotion, whilst also exploring the material basis for the production of art.

The conviction about the affective power of art to positively impact an individual’s life, and not just to awaken class consciousness, means that Warner’s writing also shares some common ground with D.H. Lawrence, for whom one must be ‘able to feel the impact of a work of art in all its complexity and force’. 406 While Warner’s writing holds an important place for the emotional and affective potential of art, she does not go as far as Lawrence, who once claimed that a work of art should be judged ‘by its effect on our sincere and vital emotion, and nothing else’. 407 Warner’s text explores the full complexity of this question by oscillating between showing music’s economic basis and functions, its social divisiveness and inclusiveness, and showing that it can be an extravagance and appear to offer transcendence at the same time. We are reminded that the comradeship it produces is limited by John’s illness and social norms, because he is always referred to as ‘the leper’ – the chaplain was the only person to call him by his name.

407 Ibid.
Music is not simply the transcendent art form that Henry experiences, nor does it fulfil only positive social functions. In *The Corner That Held Them*, *Ars nova* has the explosive potential of art that Adorno describes in *Aesthetic Theory*: ‘Artworks not only produce *imaginaires* as something that endures. They become artworks just as much through the destruction of their own *imagerie*; for this reason art is profoundly akin to explosion’.\(^{408}\) *Ars nova* offers Henry the means by which to imagine a new kind of beauty and a better world, but it also creates chaos and destruction. The chaplain’s love of music and his spending on books cements the social division and disadvantage the lepers already experience because of their illness. He is brutally murdered. The group who incite the violence call themselves the ‘Twelve Apostles’ and say they are ‘going about to right the poor,’ but ‘[i]t was the lepers who killed him, they had hated him for a long time. The others only shouted and destroyed’ (*C* 273).

Seen thus from another perspective, music becomes part of a visible and tangible social injustice. Even John, who enjoys singing, admits ‘it is true, there was often nothing to eat’ (*C* 273), while Henry notices that ‘if the food given to a guest were so bad the food given to the lepers must be worse’ (*C* 262). The murder is particularly violent:

> They set on us while we were singing. We were singing, we did not hear them come. They had armed themselves, some with sticks, some with bones. They struck him down and beat him, and one of them thrust a bone into his mouth and down his gullet, and worked it to and fro till his gullet split and the blood ran out. The others set fire to the roof, and then they all went away. (*C* 272)

The sound of the music prevents them from hearing the approaching revolt, while the allure of the music has caused the chaplain to neglect the needs of the lepers and provoked their anger. It produces a gruesome and violent rebellion on the part of the

\(^{408}\) Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 111.
body that is used for singing. Even if the lepers are wrong about the reason for their lack of food, the chaplain’s concentration on the aesthetic when people are going hungry shows how art can appear a frivolous luxury when there are real material needs to be met. No sides are taken in this story: the chaplain may have been a foolish aesthete, but the rebellion is not particularly well-organised or useful to the lepers. They burn the music books, which could be sold for food, and then wander off, apparently without anywhere to go.

Yet this does not entirely undo the music’s utopian potential: despite this horrible murder, Henry is still so overwhelmed by *Ars nova* that he achieves a sense of comradeship with John because of their experience singing together. Henry improves John’s material existence by helping him. When the leper house has been burned down, the chaplain is dead and John is destitute, Henry ‘threw to the leper what food he had’ and took him to Killdew where ‘he would be well cared for’ (*C* 274). Henry is transformed by the music, from someone whom has limited and practical aspirations – looking into ‘a future in which he would clear up the nun’s tangle at Oby’ (*C* 242) as an improvement on his limited lot – to a person who is willing to help the disadvantaged and able to articulate a rapturous experience of music that improves his quality of life despite his poverty. This is a reflection of Warner’s own experience: writing later about her life working on *Tudor Church Music* in 1918, living on her small salary in London, Warner wrote about the significance of her enjoyment of her musical work against her relative poverty, showing that in her own life music played
a supporting economic role, but also sustaining spiritual role, saying: ‘From time to time I felt hungry, and in winter I often felt cold. But I never felt poor’.

*The Corner That Held Them* shows that music was something that informed Warner’s novels long after she had given up musicology in her professional life. Music’s role in Warner’s life as her means of income and subsistence is reflected in *The Corner That Held Them*, where it is implicated in religious rituals but also connected to the economic concerns and lives of her characters; and as the importance she placed on editing for *Tudor Church Music* and hearing music performed shows, she is equally aware of the importance and positive potential of aesthetic experience, and the opportunity to learn more about humanity that the study of art offers. Warner’s work on *Tudor Church Music* paid her a stipend of £150 per year, or £3 a week – a relatively small salary for skilled work, but it enabled her to take a flat in London independently when she was twenty-five.

Editing, she said, ‘is a laborious occupation, and there is not much money in it’. Yet Warner was completely committed to it: she described editing as ‘a form of trusteeship’ through which one’s only concern is to ‘restore and elucidate the true presentation of a dead man’s thought’, and remarked that ‘the standard of editorial good faith is laudably upheld – even by me’.

Warner’s skill was due to her sensitivity to the manuscripts as well as her thorough knowledge.

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410 Richard Overy writes that ‘In the inter-war years an average worker might take home between £2 and £3 a week in wages. Journalists and writers might make £10 to £15 a week. The wealthier middle and upper-middle classes, if they had also inherited wealth, might have an annual income of anything over £1000’. Overy, *The Morbid Age*, xv. Harman notes that Warner had an income of ‘£150 from Carnegie and the allowance of £100, Sylvia’s annual income came to £160 after the rent had been paid’. Warner’s father had died in 1915, and her relations with her mother were poor. She was asked to join the committee by Sir W. H. Hadow, although Harman suggests that Buck, who also sat on the committee, may have been involved in placing her there. Harman, *Biography*, 40.
412 Ibid., 151.
‘Whoever works at collating MSS.’, she wrote, ‘soon comes to feel that each MS. has a sort of personality’. Buck once said that the best musicologists ‘combines historical aptitude with a love of music’, and that Sylvia was just such a person.

Warner’s texts explore the complexities of the different ways music can function in extraordinary depth, but that is not to say that other Writers’ International members and British Marxist writers did not. The question of how to balance a political message with writing that does not resort to generalisations and oversimplifications was a principal discussion topic among Marxist writers in the 1930s. Reviewing Upton Sinclair’s novel *Mammonart* in *Left Review*, Edgell Rickword notes that:

> What bourgeois education teaches us to call the best art is, I am prepared to agree, what has proved the most successful propaganda [for exemplifying] the ideology of the ruling class. That is the main contention of *Mammonart* and it can be supported by many examples, but it does not exhaust the functions and achievements of art.

Rickword criticises *Mammonart* for failing to consider the broader ‘functions and achievements’ of art – beyond its central political point that art can support ideologies that contribute to class division. Raymond Williams later criticised 1930s Marxism for working with a notion of base and superstructure that he considered too simple:

> Marxism, as then commonly understood, was weak in just the decisive area where practical criticism was strong: in its capacity to give precise and detailed and reasonably adequate accounts of actual consciousness: not just a scheme or a generalization but actual works, full of rich and significant and specific experience. And the reason for the corresponding weakness in Marxism is not difficult to find: it lay in the received formula of base and superstructure, which in ordinary hands converted very quickly to an interpretation of superstructure as simple reflection, representation, ideological expression – simplicities which just will not survive any prolonged experience of actual works. It was the theory and practice of reductionism – the specific human experiences and acts of creation converted so quickly and mechanically into classifications which always found their ultimate reality and significance elsewhere – which

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413 Ibid., 162.
in practice left the field open to anybody who could give an account of art which in its closeness and intensity at all corresponded to the real human dimension in which works of art are made and valued.  

This is not a criticism that could be made of Warner's writing, which explores the functions, achievements and limitations of art beyond the surface of divisions and injustices. Warner is not content with showing that the uneven distribution of the means of production exists, that this produces social inequality, or that there is a determined base and a determining superstructure: her novels go much further than this, by showing the cultural and ideological mechanisms that keep individuals in place, or which sometimes provoke dissent.

Warner places great emphasis on the role of art in improving peoples’ quality of life and their relationships with each other. That is not to say, however, that relationships between individuals who have different levels of material comfort, or experience injustices, are not present in the novel. The injustices suffered by the poorest peasants in the feudal society are though smaller episodes in the novel’s broader historical setting, which ranges from the nunnery’s foundation in the twelfth century up to 1382. One such instance is the reluctance and resulting bitterness of the Oby people when the nuns solicit extra labour from them to build a spire. The Oby serfs resent the nuns for building ‘the new spire with money which should have been spent in repairing houses and supplying ointment for plague sores’:

Straightening up from their toil in the field the labourers would see the stonework, white as bleached linen, new as nothing else about the place was new. To cart those stones they had been obliged to spend their days and the strength of their oxen tugging loads across the heath. All for nothing, all for display and vanity! If the prioress must spend her money away from the manor

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416 Williams, *Culture and Materialism*, 21–2.
417 Brian de Retteville dies in 1170, which means we can place the foundation of the nunnery slightly before this, in the mid-1100s (C 6).
let her buy some relic, something that would cure agues or avert cattle murrain or help a childing woman. (C 65–66).

Human relationships are importantly affected in the novel’s historical moment by the way labour is used and divided: workers are exploited at the whim of the nunnery, which diverts money and labour to the spire at the cost of the serf’s wellbeing. As Montagu Slater puts it in another Left Review article about what ‘good’ Socialist literature achieves: ‘Literature concerns human relationships. Capitalism destroyed these in their primitive forms, substituting money or commodity relationships’. This is something that Warner’s novel shows happening, but there are many of these moments throughout the novel, so that the text shows a recurring historical process, rather than an isolated, modern case which can be utilised to a particular contemporary political end. This passage seems to refer to the opening to D.H. Lawrence’s The Rainbow, but with some significant alterations: ‘Whenever one of the Brangwens in the fields lifted his head from his work, he saw the church-tower at Ilkeston in the empty sky. So that as he turned again to the horizontal land, he was aware of something standing above him and beyond him in the distance’. Lawrence’s Brangwen men see some deeper significance to life symbolised by the church tower, but for the serfs in The Corner That Held Them the church spire is evidence of their labour, and the diversion of resources from more worthwhile causes. As Vike Martina Plock and Alex Murray have noted, in Warner’s fiction ‘the material conditions under which people live, work, struggle, and die are considered more important than the romantic abstraction of particular rural geographies’.

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418 Montagu Slater, Left Review I, 4:129; reprinted in Margolies, Writing the Revolution, 33.
Yet Warner is concerned with abstractions, because in her texts the value of art is not just its ability to awaken people to social injustices in order to re-organise society and equally distribute the material requirements of daily life. Art has a function in and of itself, because when people experience it and it adds value to their lives, and is able to enlarge their notions of what it is possible to want. For Montagu Slater, the “”Life” that writers should introduce the proletariat to ‘equals the class struggle’. Here, life is nothing but the struggle for equality on material terms, to achieve the necessities of life. In *The Corner That Held Them*, however, music offers something distinct from (although not a substitute for) improving the material circumstances of life:

Henry and the leper sat on the grass, the leper sitting a dozen paces away, but near enough to prompt Henry in the bass part of *Triste loysir* until he could sing it steadily enough for the tenor part to be added. They sang it three times through, and if in the beginning Henry remembered the chaplain, from whose stinking body the chill of evening had now swept off the flies, by the third repetition nothing remained but the delight of the two voices answering and according (C 274)

Music does not negate or undo social divisions, but offers a kind of comradeship between Henry and John, and a degree of solace from worldly horrors. Since music is also the reason for the chaplain’s murder, it is not presented as benign: it is necessarily a part of material life which is characterised by inequality and varied levels of wealth and deprivation.

What Warner’s text suggests can be compared to Adorno’s explication of art’s utopian potential in *Aesthetic Theory*. ‘That art stands as a reminder of what does not exist, prompts rage’. Art does not transcend materiality, and in contrast with the conditions in which people must live, it can provoke anger – even murder, in *The

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Corner That Held Them. The existence of Ars nova and the comradeship it creates between the singers acts as a reminder for the rest of the lepers of the beauty and comradeship they lack, and will never have, provoking their murderous rage. But the other side of this is offering the means by which to imagine, for Henry, a better life: ‘as in paradise, where the certainty of Christ’s countenance frees men’s souls from the obligations of Christian behaviour, the creaking counterpoint of God’s law and man’s obedience’ (C 262). The new life that Henry is able to imagine transcends even the limitations placed on the world by religious practices and norms, as it would be in heaven where one knows what is right and what God’s purpose is.

Warner’s texts explore the full complexity of how art can function and what it can mean, because, as Henry realises after his experience at Esselby with the chaplain and the leper colony, the same phenomenon can mean different things to individuals inhabiting a variety of subject positions: ‘each one of us lives in his microcosm, the solidity of this world is a mere game of mirrors, there can be no absolute existence for what is apprehended differently by all’ (C 276). Music in Warner’s texts is a complex arena where beauty, economics, and the interpretations of different individuals meet, and Henry recognises with amazement that there can simultaneously be ‘Such music, and such squalor!’ (C 264).

Due to Warner’s professional expertise and musical training, the way she presents music in her novels should be approached as well thought out, informed and significant. Her conclusion during her 1919 lecture on sixteenth-century music should also be applied to her attitude to music in her fiction:

I do not put forward this surmise … in the flippancy of despair, as one who can find no more reasonable explanation. I offer as a serious contribution to
the philosophy of music [which] … throughout its development has reflected the mingled traditionalism and improvidence of man – man, who has never yet put in a new boot-lace till the old one was broken in two places.\footnote{Sylvia Townsend Warner, ‘The Point of Perfection in XVI Century Notation’, \textit{The Proceedings of the Musical Association} 11 (February 1919), 67.}

Timothy’s inability to recognise the construction of his concept of rationality and universality for which music is foundational is his undoing in \textit{Mr Fortune’s Maggot}, and thus Warner suggests that a new way of thinking about music is required. She offers a new model by acknowledging the cultural significance of its claims to transcendence and the way it affects peoples’ lives as well as its material construction. Music, in Warner’s fiction, is a marker of humanity’s relationship with itself, its traditions and its aspirations. It can inspire humane actions but also has the potential to provoke violence when one’s beliefs or material existence are threatened, and this is a strong, purposive statement by Warner about the full complexity of the squalor and splendour of human existence, and the excellent and terrible powers of art, which are rooted not only in its connections with the material world, but in its power to surprise, inspire emotion, and enrich lived experience.
Conclusion

Although this thesis has not been directly about gender or canonisation, the importance of these issues will, I hope, have emerged from what has been discussed. Next to Joyce and Pound, Warner is now comparatively unknown. This is despite her having written seven novels, five books of verse, twelve collections of short stories, a critical biography of T.H. White, a translation of Proust’s *Contre Sainte-Beauve*, having more than one hundred and fifty stories published in the *New Yorker*, and her editorial work on *Tudor Church Music*. Being a Communist, a woman, and a lesbian clearly has not endeared Warner to the critical establishment, and her writing is relatively under-read and under-analysed. Warner was more qualified, more intelligent, more widely published, almost certainly more widely read by a greater demographic of people during her life, more successful in achieving financial independence as a writer while maintaining her artistic integrity, and she is less celebrated.

By contrasting Joyce’s and Pound’s indebtedness to aesthetic traditions with Warner’s critical evaluation of the same traditions, I have shown that Warner explores ways of dealing with the problems posed by ‘high’ modernist innovation. Warner’s texts show that the artwork still has the potential to communicate and contemplate complex, utopian ideas through narratives that do not have to be formally radical in a ‘high’ modernist style, but which analyse ideology, the function of the artwork, and social interaction. Warner’s texts are new, and do offer a ‘modernist’ newness, although not that traditionally recognised or accepted as such. Warner’s writing critically handles concepts of musical transcendence, aesthetic autonomy and universality, and explores the value and limitations of these concepts in human life and social interactions. Although comparably neglected, Warner’s writing – with that of Caudwell – is part of
a British literary tradition that has been all but written out of literary history by critics who wished to claim there was no useful British Marxist writing prior to the 1960s. That Warner’s (and Caudwell’s) writing can be productively compared with the complex philosophical thought of the Frankfurt School, which Tyrus Miller and others find ‘particularly adapted to enrich our understanding of the twentieth-century modernist’ artwork, means that her writing is in its own way as complex and valuable as that of Joyce and Pound.

To re-evaluate and re-historicise the work of the high modernists, I have explored where critics have been unwilling to see Joyce and Pound as engaging with traditions in order to celebrate them as radical and new. I have tried to tease out the particular way the ‘high’ modernists handled their artistic inheritance, obscuring their historicity by claiming to get beyond historicisation. Malcolm Bradbury argues that difficulties conceptualising modernism and post-modernism as that which is at the forefront of and beyond the modern began when modernism ‘took on meaning towards the end of the period, and above all after it, when we began to historicize what (since so much of the modern movement perceived itself as “new” and ahistorical) was never meant to be historicized at all’. By analysing how Joyce and Pound portray music, we can see that their work is not above or beyond historical change, but works in relation to historically inscribed subjectivities and ideas even in their form, through which they attempt this departure from tradition.

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The reappraisal of canonical modernists offered in this thesis ties into new approaches to modernism since the 1990s. During the Cold War, modernist art was held up as proof of the superior creativity enabled by the greater intellectual freedom afforded in the West, with perhaps the most obvious example being the use of abstract expressionism as propaganda. In line with post-Cold War reappraisals of modernism, it is neither accurate nor necessary to see modernism as entirely radical or ahistorical. The end of the Cold War, as Bradbury notes, has led us to ‘reconsider the nature of traditions and cultures, the bases of personal and collective identity, the value of our institutions, our long-term social direction and prospects’.

Leo Bersani’s *The Culture of Redemption*, for example, began to reassess modernism to reveal the ways in which critics have been invested in achieving affirmations of the positive values we have been accustomed to consider inherent in texts such as *Ulysses*. Pound received a literary award whilst under charges of treason, despite being a fascist and anti-Semite. Joyce and Pound’s work is valuable, but not only as a radical break with tradition. Their engagement with music occurs during a critical moment when concepts of its transcendence are coming into conflict with ideas about its material grounding. Now that ‘high’ modernism can be de-mythologised, establishing the complexity of Warner’s work is essential to think about other ways that writing can be new and ‘modern’.

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426 For a useful exploration of the ways theoretical approaches to modernist art have changed since the 1990s, see Andrew John Miller, ‘Fables of progression: Modernism, modernity, narrative’, in *Modernism and Theory: A Critical Debate*, ed. Stephen Ross (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), 176–189.


428 Bradbury, ‘What was Post-Modernism? The Arts in and after the Cold War’, 774.

Music in these authors’ texts is not just about responses to aesthetic beauty and tradition, or about replacing old ways of thinking about art as autonomous with new ways of thinking about it as materially grounded. It is through music that debates about art’s relationship to society, and the validity of Western philosophical concepts of the aesthetic, are considered. These ideas are intimately related to the ideological formation of the European subject. Luéli’s music in *Mr Fortune’s Maggot* is a challenge to Timothy’s Western notions of universality, and music takes part in the chain of events that shakes Timothy’s faith in the superiority of his Western concepts and thus his intricately ideologically constructed subjectivity. While critical musicology and sociology seek to ‘free’ us from notions of musical sublimity, the texts analysed in this thesis remind us that without the cultural and historical precedent of music as aesthetically pure and autonomous, the initially radical imperative to socially ground music would not be possible. The effect of discourses of divine, universal music on individuals, societies, cultures and experiences is precisely what makes it such a rich area for social study, because it is due to music’s supposedly autonomous nature that its ideological content is not immediately apparent, and therefore so often overlooked. Modernism – and critical musicology – without notions of musical sublimity to work with and against would collapse in the same way that Timothy does at the end of *Mr Fortune’s Maggot*: when he leaves Luéli, and no longer believes in God or the superiority of Western music and culture, ‘Everything that was real, everything that was significant, had gone down with the island of Fanua and was lost forever’ (*MFM* 249).
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