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# The Joycean Musical Narratives in *Ulysses*

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**Abstract**

The current research aims at analyzing the Joycean musical narratives particularly in *Ulysses* and to a lesser degree in *Finnegans Wake.* The novels show that a narrative is a sort of musical performance that implies the fusion of form and content. It is a common observation that both literary texts are nonsensical and kaleidoscopic narratives; however, the musical narratives make sense by virtue of the overlapping rules of syntax and vocabulary that are related to the fusion of form and content. The Joycean kaleidoscopic 'Sirens' is rendered in a dialogic form of writing that calls attention to the physicality of the text: its texture, sound, shape and colour. Kaleidoscopic narratives can be defined as an incongruous heap of narrative, stylistic and linguistic fragments that create an illuminating meaning. The momentum of meaning is delayed as the text falls apart, returning to narrative and linguistic debris. In the spaces between these fragments, a movement of another sort arises: not production but seduction. The audible pleasure of 'Sirens' implies that Joyce was favouring the emotional impact of writing over the structural conventions focused upon by critics. Sound is not merely a supplement to the narrative but one of the primary means by which Joyce intended his writing to be understood. *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* are a kaleidoscopic web of narratives, discourses, voices and styles that opposes representational art. Both illustrate the core feature of modernist literature as dynamic and intense.

**Keywords:** Kaleidoscopic text, Musicality, Seduction, Sound, Representational Art, Modernist Literature.

## Introduction

The current article approaches the Joycean musical narratives in *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake.* Firstly, the dominant onomatopoetic narratives can best be defined as an incongruous heap of narrative, stylistic and linguistic fragments that create an illuminating meaning. The momentum of meaning is delayed as the text falls apart, returning to narrative and linguistic debris. The onomatopoetic narrative undermines conventional modes of discourse by concentrating on linguistic instability and in particular on the dialogic nature of language. The significance of such onomatopoetic narratives is that they transform the novel into a movement through its onomatopoeic narratives, voices and discourses. *Finnegans Wake* shows itself as a sort of musical performance that implies the fusion of form and content. It has sense by virtue of the overlapping rules of syntax and vocabulary that are related to the fusion of form and content. Nonsense undermines conventional modes of discourse by concentrating on linguistic instability and in particular on the dialogic nature of language. It eschews meaning in favour of a dynamic form in which meanings are constructed. In the spaces between these fragments, a movement of another sort arises: not production but seduction. Joyce's onomatopoetic novel is a palimpsest of styles, discourses and

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narratives. These interwoven texts are "portals of discovery" (Joyce, 1998, 243) through which readers pursue a heterogeneous journey of discovery propelled by a joyful desire to reach a pleasant experience.

This article claims that reading the Joycean onomatopoetic texts implies a hedonistic pleasure that pursues aesthetic rather than moral or didactic ends. What goes unnoticed is that the auditory narratives are not a subversion of the text, as narrativity concerns itself with a desire that extends in unpredictable ways. Stephen reflects that, "the artist is a priest of eternal imagination, transmuting the daily bread of experience into the radiant body of ever living life" (Joyce, 1998, 221).The religious act embedded in the experience of literature and its spirituality can only be found in literature and art.

The article addresses the major criticism of the kaleidescopic narrative as a sterile exercise in literary virtuosity. The subjectivity of the cultic styles and narratives evoked adverse criticism from reviewers. Ezra Pound admitted that he could "make nothing of it [the *Wake*] whatever" (Pound, 1967: 228) and T. S. Eliot asserted that due to Joyce's failing eyesight, the *Wake* is "an auditory imagination abnormally sharpened at the expense of the visual" (Eliot, 1975:288) The article applies the word 'onomatopoetic narrative' to something which purports to have a dynamic meaning. Thus, our exploration of the dynamics of the Joycean onomatopoetic narrative is a serious one that opposes the negative definition of absurdity as a literary genre devoid of meaning and significance. Therefore, the onomatopoetic narrative is a product of a sophisticated literary culture rather than an archaic style produced by dreams and madness. It is an aesthetic style for coping with the conditions of a complex world by constituting an aesthetic realm and making a different kind of art.

## Joycean Onomatopoetic Narratives

'Sirens' shows itself as a sort of musical performance that implies the fusion of form and content. It eschews meaning in favour of a dynamic form in which meanings are constructed. Musicality directs focus not towards meaning but towards its power to produce hedonistic reactions in the reader. The hedonistic effect of the Joycean onomatopoetic narrative is enhanced by rendering 'the onomatopoeic narratives' that infuse form and content. The phonetic narrative exploits the sounds and rhythms of language. In 'Sirens,' when Bloom hears the jingling car outside, his mind is triggered to consider the affair between his wife and Boylan. This jingling affects the narrative of the chapter which echoes the sounds of jingling, "Jingle, Tink, Smack, Twang, Tap" (Joyce, 1998, 260, 262, 265, 276 and 280). Joyce informs his readers, "It is all so simple. If anyone does not understand a passage, all he need do is to read it aloud" and he described his art as "verbivocovisual presentment" (Joyce, 1975, 65 and 341), implying that he intends to counterpoint word and language. Fragmented representation is part of the dynamic polyphony of Joyce's novels. In *Stephen Hero*, words "lost all instantaneous meaning and became wonderful vocables" (Joyce, 1965, 36). Joyce describes Anna Livia's letter, "it is told in sounds in utter that, in signs so adds to, in universal, in polygluttural, in each auxiliary neutral idiom, sordomutics, florilingual, sheltafocal, flayflutter, a con's cubane, a pro's tutute, strassarab, ereperse and anthongueathall" (Joyce, 1975, 117).Random occurrences of sound reveal that language is a playful device. This manipulative drive exceeds the limits of language in 'Cyclops' where words and stories

exchange and become deceptive. The exchangeable language of 'Cyclops' demonstrates that words cannot be ascribed to a single speaker. 'Cyclops' explores the excess of drinkers in Barney Kiernan's pub and the textual excess of proliferating narrators, long catalogues, absurd diction and incongruous description of banal activities. Simultaneously, the two voices of the unnamed narrator and the "I" narrator recount the action. The "I" narrator interrupts the narration of the nameless narrator with an inconsistent description of events. Michael White argues that parody in this episode mocks the tradition of realistic narration:

> The numerous Homeric parallels are quite often tantamount to a parody of the Greek text especially in the second narrative (for example Bloom's "knockdown cigar," the numerous incoherent lists or the biscuit-box affair) while the whole second narrative is one continuous parody of the first. The very English language itself suffers varied and constant parody, both in the hands of Nameless and in the second narrative. Both narratives can in turn be seen as a parody of the nineteenth century realist narration. (White, 1982, 190)

What is pleasurable in onomatopoeia is the harmonious relationship between the phonetic and semantic signs as the phonetic properties point to the semantic content. Related to onomatopoeia are the weird or absurd headings in 'Aeolus', which act as visual devices for manipulating the traditional narrative form. They are the new voicing in the novel and according to Karen Lawrence, they are "the voice of the press" (Lawrence, 1981, 62) that discards narrative authority. Lawrence states that headings "introduce a kind of language into the novel that inhibits the dual movement upon which the writing and reading of the traditional novel and early chapters are based, the movement back to a creating consciousness an 'origin' and the movement back to life-the 'original'" (Lawrence, 1981, 21). Furthermore, Lawrence observes that in 'Aeolus,' onomatopoeia undermines the transparency of language and calls attention to the textuality of the text. The chapter, in Lawrence's words, is "a whimsical pun of form and content" (Lawrence, 1981, 58). Set in a newspaper office, the narrative conveys the movement of typographical machinery and the headings manifest the influence of newspapers on the literary text. Machines are alive and speak and Joyce makes it clear that language does not represent what a human speaks but it can be ascribed to human sounds. Thus, the process of authoring loses its privileged status because the headline implies an anonymous authorship. The headline speaks by itself, without origin and without an author.

Joyce in *Ulysses* replicates the daily sounds of Dublin in June 16, 1904 in its onomatopoeic language. 'Cyclops' with its vivid bar gossip and heated discussions reveals Joyce's ear for Dublin street-idiom. From *Dubliners* to the *Wake*, Joyce's artistic inspiration came from the ordinariness of Dublin city life as the foundation of his extraordinary linguistic creativity. Katie Wales argues that slang is notorious for "its ephemerality, so that many hundreds of Joyce's recorded usages are difficult for the modern reader to appreciate without the aid of Partridge's *Dictionary of Historical Slang*" (Wales, 1992, 21). The fascination of slang is that it is often impossible to trace the etymological origin of the words. Joyce is aware that English was the language of their oppressor and Gaelic was their own language by inheritance. Daniel Schwarz affirms that, "Joyce turned for inspiration and stimulation both to the middle class of the

impersonal and indifferent urban culture and to the classless culture of music halls, circuses, and street and arcade performers" (Schwartz, 1994, 5). Therefore, Joyce's excellence comes from how he was able to integrate popular culture into literature and was able to permeate the elite literature and effect changes that opened literature to the masses. The bawdy 'Circe' and lascivious 'Penelope' brought words and thoughts into literature that readers had never read or imagined before.

Joyce's dialogic writing resulted in an innovative approach to literature at a time when music became an art that transcended referential meaning. Joyce applies non-linear writing and its intricate associations with music to construct a polyphonic narrative where the interior expression is a space of public discourse. Music calls for innovation in writing, given its non-linguistic power of expression and its transcendental structure that goes beyond the rationality of language. It implies the same dynamics of narrative by demonstrating that the value of words is not determined by precise meanings but through the interplay of associations and their appearances on paper.

Music has a profound presence in Joyce's work. 'Sirens' takes music as its subject and style. Joyce claimed that he wrote this episode in the form of a *fuga per canonem* that enlarged narration by adapting it to musical rules and the power of association. In his conversation with Frank Budgen, Joyce explained that writing his novel was like composing music. When asked how chords could be incorporated in writing, Joyce replied, "A man might eat kidneys in one chapter, suffer from a kidney disease in another and one of his friends could be kicked in the kidney in another chapter" (quoted in Ellmann, 1959, 436). *Ulysses* can be compared to a symphony as each of the eighteen episodes has its own compositional style and is written with a knowledge of musical effect and structure. The numerous musical references throughout *Ulysses* and the *Wake* play a central role in advancing the narrative and enhancing the effectiveness and expressiveness of the technique of stream of consciousness. The first episode at the Martello Tower has all the turbulent energy of a Beethoven opening movement, the city scenes give off the sounds of an anarchic quartet and the brothel scenes are charged with the sounds of unconscious desire. This leads to the point that the language of *Ulysses* is music in itself. Musicality reveals Joyce's belief in the certainty of the senses including the sense of hearing. Anthony Burgess states that Joyce and Gerard Hopkins attempted to bring literature closer to music. Burgess said that "*Ulysses* is like *Paradise Lost* an auditory work and the sounds carry the sense" (Burgess, 1965, 177). Mikhail Bakhtin states that the music of the novel depends on multiple voices, "the novel as a whole is a phenomenon multiform in style and variform in speech and voice…with different linguistic levels" (Bakhtin, 1981, 261).*Ulysses* with its numerous voices concretises this idea by capturing the heterogeneous daily sounds of Dublin. Plot and style are no longer separate from one another, as all aspects of the prose including the sound of language are integral to the meaning and readers can depict many fragments of information that went into the composition of *Ulysses*.Valery Larbaud describes Joyce's notes:

> It [*Ulysses*] is a genuine example of the art of mosaic. I have seen the drafts. They are entirely composed of abbreviated phrases underlined in various-coloured pencil. These are annotated and intended to recall to the author complete phrases; and the pencil-marks indicate according such episode. It makes one think of the boxes of little coloured cubes of the mosaic workers.

(Quoted in Litz, 1961, 12)

Many episodes were changed to include new information that came to Joyce as he was writing later episodes:

> Last night I thought of an Entr'acte for *Ulysses* in middle of book after 9th episode "Scylla and Charybdis." Short with absolutely no relation to what precedes or follows like a pause in the action of a play. It would have to be balanced by a mautine (very short) before the opening and a nocturne (also very short) after the end. What? I agree about the explanation of syphills. I always thought the etymology was synphilais (together with loving, connected with it) but a man named Bradly says the other. Moly could also be absinthe the cerebral impotentising (??) drink of chastity. Damn Homer, *Ulysses,* Bloom and all the rest (Joyce in Ellmann, 1959: 149)

Fragmented representation is part of the dynamic polyphony of Joyce's novels. In *Stephen Hero*, words "lost all instantaneous meaning and became wonderful vocables" (Joyce, 1965, 36). Joyce describes Anna Livia's letter, "it is told in sounds in utter that, in signs so adds to, in universal, in polygluttural, in each auxiliary neutral idiom, sordomutics, florilingual, sheltafocal, flayflutter, a con's cubane, a pro's tutute, strassarab, ereperse and anthongueathall" (Joyce, 1975, 117).Random occurrences of sound reveal that language is a playful device. This manipulative drive exceeds the limits of language in 'Cyclops' where words and stories exchange and become deceptive. The exchangeable language of 'Cyclops' demonstrates that words cannot be ascribed to a single speaker.

Joyce's word play is audible and thus pleasurable when read aloud. During lunch hour, readers listen to the sound of eating as the main form of communication, "gurgling soup down his gullet," "Gristle: gums: no teeth to chewchewchewit" and "Gulp, Grub. Gulp. Gobstuff"(Joyce, 1998, 138- 139). The auditory language is based on Bloom's conclusion regarding the futility of language, "Useless words" (Joyce, 1998, 134). The auditory language is important to the stream of consciousness technique that heighten the reader's sense of pleasure. Sound abounds in Molly's inner monologue that is shaped by the sounds of the trains, church bells and her jingling bed, "frseeeeeeeefronnnng," and "sweeeeetheres that train faraway" (Joyce, 1998, 621- 628). The sounds, therefore, enter the consciousness of the reader with emotional force.

The audible pleasure of 'Sirens' implies that Joyce was favouring the emotional impact of writing over the structural conventions focused upon by critics. Sound is not merely a supplement to the narrative but one of the primary means by which Joyce intended his novel to be understood. Roland Barthes's *The Pleasure of the Text* demonstrates the pleasure of reading such onomatopoetic narratives against literary and linguistic conventions. According to Barthes, "once the text is perceived in terms of writing … bliss appears" (Barthes, 1975, 37). 'Sirens' in *Ulysses* belongs to a category that Ronald Barthes defined as the writeable, where the text makes referential reading impossible. Barthes complains that, "it seems that writers have never written: by a strange lacuna, they are only read" (Barthes, 1975, 37). Julia Kristeva also highlighted the significance of the reader in understanding oral and written literature, politics, culture and nature. Kristeva declared, "the speaking being is a strange fold between them all, where inner drives interject with language, sexuality with language, sexuality plays with thought, where body and culture

meet" (quoted in McAfee, 2004, 1). The speaking subject is always in a state of crisis as this "is a permanent state of functioning" (Kristeva, 1985, 37). According to Kristeva this form of crisis is not anarchist in a negative sense, as anarchy generates creative possibilities. *Finnegans Wake* as a text invites readers to behave like writers and join in the pleasurable act of composing a narrative. By devising his own text, the reader can defer the authorial meaning. The intertextual web of narrative in *Finnegans Wake* is not smooth and continuous; rather it finds its way through discontinuities, breaks, gaps, silence, the unexpected and the ambivalent. The main components of Joyce's nonsense novel include quotations, epigraphs, myths, riddles, nursery rhymes, fairy tales, folk songs, children's games, collections of music and traces of texts and voices. Shem provides a catalogue of them, "twisted quills, painful digests, magnifying wineglasses, solid objects cast at goblins, once current puns, quashed quotatoes, messes of mottage, unquestionable issue papers, seedy ejaculations, limerick damns, crocodile tears, spilt ink, blashematory spits, stale shesnuts" (Joyce, 1975: 183) Such a dynamic web of parataxis demonstrates that each position is susceptible to turning into something else. Joyce calls the *Wake*, "an impassable tissue of improbable liyers!" (Joyce, 1975:192) The possibility that narrative is always quotation and that language repeats itself is highlighted in the *Wake*, "Shem was a sham and a low sham and his lowness creeped out first via foodstuff" (Joyce, 1975: 170) Joyce did not begin the *Wake* with a fully conceived project; rather he used whatever was at hand as his materials. His method in creating the *Wake* is exemplified by ALP gathering goods into her basket and distributing them not according to design but as they come to hand. The *Wake* consists of "unaltered and familiar pieces of junk, borrowed or stolen from the smithies of others' (Joyce, 1975: 19) Such interplay enriches the novel form as the interwoven narratives involve a reduction of the old text and its extension in a new form. The text implies a shift from the content to the production of meaning. The reader revels in the pleasure of the text, making associations and establishing relations with other texts. In the *Wake*, "A voice beyond the world was calling" (Joyce, 1975: 167) Language is an utterance that overflows the boundaries of the sign and implies jouissance. Derek Attridge argues that:

> In order to appreciate the *Wake*'s reader-friendliness…one had to abandon two assumptions about the act of reading which frequently exist side by side: "that reading is an act of mastery," and that "reading is a passive experience. Instead, we have to play along with the *Wake*, realizing that the reader is affected by the text at the same time that the text is affected by the reader. (Attridge, 1990, 10)

Joyce acknowledges that his readers "are lost in the bush, boy?... you most shouts out: Bethicket me for a stump of a beech if I have the poultriest notion what the farest he all means" (Joyce, 1975, 112). Jouissance stems from the exploitation of sounds, rhythms and secondary meanings that speak in disparate voices. Stephen is interested in "the rhythmic rise and fall of words... the contemplation of an inner world of individual emotions mirrored perfectly in a lucid supple periodic prose," (Joyce, 1998, 166-67). In the *Wake*, "A voice beyond the world was calling" (Joyce, 1975, 167). Language is an utterance that overflows the boundaries of the sign and implies jouissance.

'Sirens' displays a seduction generated by the lyrics of songs. Words owe much to their suggestive power of evoking colours, sounds, ideas and emotions. Kenneth Burke calls this "onomatopoeic correspondence between form and theme" (quoted in Litz, 1961, 52). The sonority of language is accompanied by bodily gestures and movements. References to the body offer Joyce a comic flair according to John Slack who associates these comic inclinations with Bakhtin's lower body humour and grotesque realism that deal with sex, digestion, elimination and physiological functions. Grotesque realism diminishes the high and ideal into the sphere of the body. Releasing the non-rational forces, the reader conveys the articulation of the body not of signification. Joyce celebrates *Ulysses* as an epic of the human body to stress the interrelation between language and body, "my book is the epic of the human body... In my book the body lives in and moves through space and is the home of a full human personality. The words I write are adapted to express first one of its functions then another. In 'Lestrygonians,' the stomach dominates and the rhythm of the episode is that of the peristaltic movement" (quoted in Yee, 1997,21). The instinctual value escapes conventional coding and moves in all directions. Joyce pays attention to the bodily limbs, apertures and mouths in his description of the Circean body, "(his jaws chattering, capers to and fro, goggling his eyes, squeaking, kangaroohopping with outstretched clutching arms, then all at once thrusts his lipless face through the fork of his thighs) II vient! C'est moi! L'homme qui rit! L'homme primigene! (he whirls round and round with dervish howls)" (Joyce,1998,413). Stephen informs Lynch that gestures communicate ideas through bodily movements, "gesture …a universal language" (Joyce, 1998, 353). Gestures upstage words but never eliminate meaning as meaning is deferred. Joyce was influenced by Marcel Jousse, who observed that "the mouth followed the mechanisms of the body" and by "Richard Paget, who in *Babel, or The Past, Present and Future of Human Speech* speculates that the gestural articulation of sound is the etymological basis for oral language" (Bollettieri et al., 1992, 85). Joyce's use of the gestural theory of human speech is evident in the *Wake*, "learned to speak from hand to mouth" (Joyce, 1975, 130) and in *Ulysses* "shut your eyes and open your mouth" (Joyce, 1998, 66).

Derek Attridge parallels the rhythmical aspect of English with bodily movements and poetic forms. He refutes the assumption that musicality takes language away from reality by arguing that Joyce conveys the reality of emotions. This is an elevation of voice for its rhythmical inflections and the play between the phoneme and graphemes, "told in sounds in utter that, in signs so odds to, in universal, in polygluttral, in each auxiliary neutral idiom... and anythongueathall" (Joyce, 1975, 117): "in the buginning is the woid, in the muddle is the sounddance and thereinofter you're in the unbewised again, vundvulsyvolsy" (Joyce, 1975, 378). Joyce, therefore, summarizes in his own words the joy of literature and its spiritual nature.

## Conclusion

To sum up, Joyce's musical narrative produces multiple readings of the novel and transfers the text into a mosaic of quotations, allusions and references. Text is no more 'a concept' but 'a process' to be approached through the process of writing. Defining the text in the normal sense of the word would put an end to this process, filtering out all its other voices and potentialities. What I suggested is that open-endedness orients the novel towards new dimensions. In this view, the Joycean novel articulates a polyphonic voice that responds to a world of voices rather than being a vehicle that reflects an existing reality. This dynamism takes the novel away from being a representation of reality into creating reality itself. Moreover, Joyce's dynamic narrative is an entelechic construction moving towards the unactualised by virtue of its kinetic process of destabilisation that throws the linear status of the novel into doubt. The aim of the polyphonic narratives and styles is to tease out the non adaptive aspects of language and thought and to release the power of the trivial and the repressed through an active pursuit of difference and the power of coincidence to forge new connections, not domination. Joyce, therefore, remains a leading figure of the modern novel for readers to explore the intricacies of his writings.

# روايات جويس الموسيقية في *(يوليسيس)*

**رجاء الخليلي**
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**الملخص**

يسعى البحث إلى تحليل النزعة الموسيقية التي تظهر في روايات جيمس جويس في روايتي*(سهر فنجان)* و*(عوليس)* إذ تظهر الروايتان السرد على أنه نوع من الأداء الموسيقي الذي يعتمد على اندماج الشكل والمحتوى.

من الملاحظات الشائعة أن كلا النصين الأدبيين عبارة عن روايات غير منطقية وغير متجانسة، ومع ذلك ، فإن السرد الموسيقي يعطي معنى من خلال تراكيب الجمل والمفردات الذي يساعد على انصهار الشكل والمحتوى.

تُقدّم "صفارات الإنذار" على أنها شكل من أشكال الحوار الذي يلفت الانتباه إلى جسدية النص: قوامه وصوته وشكله ولونه، ويمكن تعريف الروايات غير المتجانسة بأنها مجموعة غير متناغمة من التناثر السردي والأسلوبية واللغوية التي تخلق معنىً، إذ إنه إن تأخر زخم المعنى يأتي عندما ينهار النص ، ويعود إلى الحطام السردي واللغوي ليكمل الفراغات بين هذه الشظايا النثرية، وعندها تنشأ حركة من نوع آخر: ليس الإنتاج ولكن الإغواء، وتعني المتعة المسموعة لـ "صفارات الإنذار"، إذ إن جويس كان يحبذ التأثير العاطفي للكتابة على الهيكلية التي يركز عليها النقاد، فالصوت ليس مجرد مكمل للسرد، ولكنه واحد من الوسائل الأساسيّة التي قصد بها جويس فهم كتاباته. فالرواية غيرالمتجانسة عبارة عن شبكة من الروايات التي تتحدى السرد. فروايتا *(سهر فنجان)* و*(عوليس)* توضحان السمة الأساسية للأدب الحديث الذي يتميز بالديناميكية وغزارة المعنى.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** النص المتلون، الموسيقى، الإغراء، الصوت، الفن التمثيلي، الأدب الحديث.

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