

“Wandering Rocks” and “Sirens”

The Breakdown of Narrative

In a letter to John Quinn, Joyce pointed out that “Scylla and Charybdis” was the ninth chapter of eighteen, the last chapter of the book’s first half.¹ Indeed, this division has more than numerical significance, for both “Lestrygonians” and “Scylla and Charybdis” concern themselves primarily with developing our knowledge of the two main characters, the kind of novelistic enterprise paramount in the first six chapters. After the strange intrusive headings in “Aeolus,” the return to the narrative mode in these chapters restores a comforting novelistic convention. Although rhetorical play continues in both chapters, and even some typographical play in “Scylla and Charybdis,” it is not until “Wandering Rocks” and “Sirens” that we witness the breakdown of the initial style and a departure from the novelistic form of the book’s first half. “Lestrygonians” and “Scylla and Charybdis,” then, are less relevant to our discussion of style than the succeeding chapters.

However, before proceeding to “Wandering Rocks” and “Sirens,” I would like to comment briefly on a specific aspect of the literary self-consciousness in “Scylla and Charybdis,” namely, Stephen’s public display of his theory on Shakespeare. In its own way, Stephen’s verbal fancywork is as showy and attention-getting as the headings of “Aeolus,” and, with his literary theory, as with the headings, the book can be said to turn back on itself to comment on its own creation. Like the headings, which call into question the idea of the origin of the writing, Stephen’s theory deals with the relationship between creating consciousness and creation. The important distinction, however, is that the primary vehicle for the literary criticism in “Scylla and Charybdis” is character rather than narrative, and the comment on origins is given a naturalistic, dramatic context. The showmanship primarily attaches to Stephen: “Speech, speech. But act. Act speech. They mock to try you. Act. Be acted upon” (*U* 9:78–79). Stephen directs himself during his

WHO’S AFRAID OF JAMES JOYCE?

Karen R. Lawrence

FOREWORD BY SEBASTIAN D. G. KNOWLES, SERIES EDITOR

Copyright 2010 by Karen R. Lawrence
Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper. This book is printed on Glaidletter
Nature Book, a paper certified under the standards of the Forestry Stewardship Council
(FSC). It is a recycled stock that contains 30 percent post-consumer waste and is acid free.
All rights reserved.

15 14 13 12 11 10 6 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Lawrence, Karen, 1949—

Who's afraid of James Joyce? / Karen R. Lawrence ; foreword by Sebastian D. G. Knowles,

series editor.

p. cm.—(The Florida James Joyce series)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-8130-3477-5 (acid-free paper)

1. Joyce, James, 1882-1941—Criticism and interpretation. I. Title.

PR6019 D9Z6935 2010

823'.912—dc22

2009051042

The University Press of Florida is the scholarly publishing agency for the State University
System of Florida, comprising Florida A&M University, Florida Atlantic University, Florida

University Press of Florida

Gainesville · Tallahassee · Tampa · Boca Raton

Pensacola · Orlando · Miami · Jacksonville · Ft. Myers · Sarasota

way to parody and his craftiness will be transferred to the craft of the writing.

"Wandering Rocks"

From the highly charged psychological dramas of Stephen Dedalus and William Shakespeare in "Scylla and Charybdis," we move to the dispassionate, almost deadpan narration in "Wandering Rocks." Jackson Cope has called the narration of this chapter "meticulous," and observes that the "drastic shift in stylistic technique" in "Sirens" is "all the more marked for coming upon the heels of the meticulous narration of 'Wandering Rocks.'"⁵ But the simplicity of the narrative is deceptive and its "meticulousness" excessive. Although the familiar techniques of narration in the book's first half continue—interior monologue, free indirect discourse, dialogue, and the initial style of third-person narration—something strange happens nonetheless.

Like Gradgrind, the narrative spews forth a compendium of facts. Streets are named, the characters' courses are charted; the chapter ostentatiously creates that "complete picture" of Dublin from which the city itself could be reconstructed. But a seeming paradox arises from the way in which this is accomplished. While establishing the sense of fact in the text, the "meticulous" documentation suggests the strangeness of reality. Reality is "de-familiarized," to borrow a phrase from the Russian formalists, a process due to the type of narrative mind in the chapter. This narrative mind exhibits what I would call a "lateral" or paratactic imagination: it catalogues facts without synthesizing them. It documents the events that occur but fails to give the causal, logical, or even temporal connections between them. The discontinuity of the sections of "Wandering Rocks" is the most obvious example of this lack of synthesis. The temporal connections between the events presented in successive sections are deliberately obscured. For example, successive sections often refer to events occurring simultaneously, but there is no reference to this simultaneity in the text.⁶ Indeed, within a single section, strange juxtapositions occur. For example, the narrator documents Father Conmee's movement along Mounjoy square east and then suddenly interpolates a description of the movements of Mr Denis J. Maginni, professor of dancing—movements that occur presumably at the same time but in a different place (*U* 10.40–41, 53–55). Even within a

strategic, experimental performance. Even the greater rhetorical play in the third-person narration seems closely linked to Stephen's theatricality. As Robert Kellogg has noted, much of the verbal play in the narrative seems to be an extension of Stephen's "powerfully patterned imagination."² This relationship between the theatrics in the narrative and the theatrics of the character is more exaggerated than, but still in keeping with, the kind of "borrowing" between character and narrative seen in the earlier chapters.

Stephen's critical premise—that the writer reveals his psychological obsessions in disguised and multiple forms in his work—can be applied to Stephen's literary theory itself, for his elaborate reading of Shakespeare is, of course, an expression of his own feelings about paternity, betrayal, and the relationship between the artist and his work. The basic image of the artist fathering himself is a comfort to a young writer who scorns his natural parents and thinks of himself as "made not begotten" (*U* 3.45). Aside from the light it sheds on Stephen, however, the literary theory has important implications for *Ulysses* as a whole. One could relate Stephen's theory to the revelation of Joyce's own psychological obsessions in *Ulysses*, as Mark Schechner does in his book *Joyce in Nighttown: A Psychoanalytic Inquiry into "Ulysses"*.³ For our purposes, however, a more relevant application of the theory is to Joyce's deliberate use of rhetoric and style to reveal and disguise himself in his work. In its broadest implications, Stephen's theory represents more than a straight biographical approach to literature: it recognizes the subtle, intricate relationship between the artist's self-exposure and disguise in his work. One is reminded of Stanislaus's comment that Joyce's style is such that he seems to confess "in a foreign language."⁴ As Stephen shows with Shakespeare, the consciousness of the artist is fractured in his work; it can be dispersed, however, not only among multiple characters but among multiple styles as well. In a sense, Joyce reveals himself in the rhetorical masks of the second half of *Ulysses* as well as in the "signature style" of the early chapters, and, paradoxically, it is in the gestures of imitation and disguise that we come to recognize him.

In later chapters of *Ulysses*, self-referential literary criticism is conveyed largely by rhetorical display in the narrative rather than by the verbal grandstanding of the characters. In fact, Stephen's literary pyrotechnics pale next to the book's showpiece of literary criticism, "Oxen of the Sun." Once again in *Ulysses*, we find that what begins on the level of character reemerges on the level of narration later on. It is in "Oxen" that Stephen's parable will give

sentence, two actions are associated whose connection is arbitrary by the standards of novel writing, for they have no connection besides the mere coincidence in time (and a whimsical connection between the types of movements described): "Corny Kelleher sped a silent jet of hayjuice arching from his mouth while a generous white arm from a window in Eccles Street flung forth a coin" (*U* 10.221–23).

Time and space are the unifiers in the universe of the chapter: the characters moving through Dublin are related by *coincidence* in time and *proximity* in space. Instead of plot as conspiracy (as reflected in Stephen's theory on Shakespeare), or at least as motivated drama, we find the characters' actions plotted according to the coordinates of time and space. The apparently arbitrary and accidental connections between events and people in "Wandering Rocks" deepen the skepticism about any absolute idea of order introduced in "Aeolus."

But if the narrative confounds our expectations of plot by connecting two events arbitrarily, it also fails to acknowledge certain connections when they do occur. The narrator mentions a "onelegged sailor" in section one of the chapter ("A onelegged sailor, swinging himself onward by lazy jerks of his crutches, growled some notes" [*U* 10.7–8]) and again in section three ("A onelegged sailor crutched himself round MacConnell's corner, skirting Raibattoti's icecream car, and jerked himself up Eccles Street" [*U* 10.228–29]). The repetition is strange because there is no acknowledgment in the narrative that the sailor is the *same* one in both descriptions. The narrative inability to progress from the indefinite to the definite article illustrates a strange failing in the "narrative memory." A crucial component of the development of narrative is precisely this ability to synthesize knowledge while accumulating it. In the previous example, the kind of conceptualization and logical subordination of events that one would expect in narrative discourse is again strangely absent.

This absence of connective fiber is reflected in other curious examples of verbal repetition. The following piece of dialogue appears at two different points in the narrative (with the only difference being the addition of a comma after the word "answered" in the second variation): "—Hello, Simon, Father Crowley said. How are things?" (*U* 10.740, 881) "—Hello Bob, old man, Mr Dedalus answered, stopping" (*U* 10.741, 882). Similarly, in a phrase in the initial style of third-person narration, we are told that "the young woman abruptly bent and with slow care detached from her light

skirt a clinging twig" (*U* 10.201–2), and later in the same chapter this phrase is repeated with slight modification: "The young woman with slow care detached from her light skirt a clinging twig" (*U* 10.440–41). Although the two narrative descriptions document the same event, there is no awareness of this congruence in the narrative.

This verbatim repetition imparts a curiously mechanical quality to the narrative, as if a writing machine, rather than a human imagination, produced it. As in the previous description, the minor characters in the novel are tagged with characteristic descriptions or epithets. This mechanical system of classification has an important effect upon characterization in the novel. Whereas the repetition of phrases from a character's interior monologue helped establish the density of the character's inner life, the repetition of phrases in "Wandering Rocks" signals an odd reversal. The phrases are no longer subordinate to a sense of character; rather, the minor characters are reduced to the status of phrases. The existence of the "young woman" seems to be totally contingent upon the particular phrase that identifies her, as if she and her linguistic tag were identical. Similarly, "Marie Kendall, charming soubrette," and "Mr Denis Maginni, professor of dancing, &c." are comically inseparable from their advertisements. It is as if these linguistic labels exhausted the potential of the characters, as if Thom's Dublin Dictionary were equated with the real life of Dublin. Sentences that would normally refer us to the world of external reality begin to seem like cross-references in a textbook. As in "Aeolus," the process of inventory emphasizes the artifice of the writing.

Thus, masses of facts accumulate in the text with either arbitrary conceptual links or no links provided by the lateral imagination of the narrative. This strange cataloguing activity is reflected in the syntax of the prose itself. Sometimes the prose is paratactic and choppy ("Father Conmee perceived her perfume in the car. He perceived also that the awkward man at the other side of her was sitting on the edge of the seat" [*U* 10.128–30]). However, one of the most interesting stylistic phenomena in the chapter is the threading together of "facts" in long, winding sentences (either grammatically paratactic or hypotactic), such as the following:

Lawyers of the past, haughty, pleading, beheld pass from the consolidated taxing office to Nisi Prius court Richie Goulding carrying the costbag of Goulding, Collis and Ward and heard rustling from the

admiralty division of king's bench to the court of appeal an elderly female with false teeth smiling incredulously and a black silk skirt of great amplitude. (*U* 10.470-75)

and

An elderly female, no more young, left the building of the courts of chancery, king's bench, exchequer and common pleas, having heard in the lord chancellor's court the case in lunacy of Potterton, in the admiralty division the summons, exparte motion, of the owners of the Lady Cairns versus the owners of the barque Mona, in the court of appeal reservation of judgment in the case of Harvey versus the Ocean Accident and Guarantee Corporation. (*U* 10.625-31)

Although formally connected, the clauses and phrases of the sentences often bear arbitrary and irrelevant conceptual connections to one another. Here are Jamesian sentences sorely lacking the interpretive intelligence to wrestle with subtle connections and relationships. In these particular examples, the lengthy clauses are initiated by the similar phrases "having heard" and "and heard." A Pandora's box opens up in the narration: not only are the activities and thoughts of the characters illustrious objects in the narrative catalogue but so too are the immediate past experiences of the characters, even if they have been documented previously in the narration. The narrative could then presumably continue to catalogue and recatalogue these experiences ad infinitum.

In fact, from that which was *actually heard* by the characters, the narrative passes to the *hearsay* meticulously documented in the last section of the chapter: "On Northumberland and Landsdowne roads His Excellency acknowledged punctually salutes from rare male walkers, the salute of two small schoolboys at the garden gate of the house *said to have been admired* by the late queen when visiting the Irish capital with her husband, the prince consort, in 1849" (*U* 10.1277-81; my italics). And the documentation of what might have happened is complemented in the last section by the documentation of what failed to happen: the viceregal carriages pass "unsaluted," John Henry Menton holds "a fat gold hunter watch not looked at in his fat left hand not feeling it," and Mr Denis J. Maginni walks "unobserved." The mushrooming sentences comically undermine any sense of *telos* in the writing. As in a comic cartoon, the plot of the novel seems to grow uncontrollably; everything seems potentially related to, indeed

contaminated by, everything else (a kind of contamination that reaches epidemic proportions in "Ithaca"). Instead of Aristotle's definition of plot as an imitation of an action, this narrative gives us plot as infinite potentiality. For in documenting what doesn't happen in the chapter, Joyce plays with the categories of potentiality: the sentences of the chapter present a story in which boy doesn't meet girl nor fall in love nor get married ("Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard/Are sweeter . . ."). The limitations imposed upon novel writing by the exigencies of plot making are ignored, and the reader's expectation of the functional relevance of narrative details is undermined. In "Wandering Rocks," the text includes the possibilities of writing usually "ousted" by any particular linear movement of plot. This is the aesthetic transvaluation of Stephen's interest in "Nestor" in the "ousted possibilities" of history.⁷ Plot is the novelistic counterpart of history; especially in "Aeolus," "Wandering Rocks," and "Ithaca," Joyce investigates the possibilities that are ousted by conventional novelistic plot.

But the grammatical counterpart of plot is syntax, and in revealing the infinite potentiality of the plot, the narrative also reveals the infinite expansibility of the sentence. The sentences parody the arbitrary structure of prose writing. The narrators attempt to catalogue all the action of the chapter is comically outpaced by the possibilities that present themselves as potential members in the catalogue. The sentences themselves huff and puff in a futile attempt to say all that can be said. The taciturnity of the initial style is replaced by the over-eager attempt to include everything. Roland Barthes' analysis of Flaubert's sentences is comically illustrated in "Wandering Rocks":

La phrase est un objet, en elle une finitude fascine . . . mais en même temps par le mécanisme . . . de l'expansion, toute phrase est insaturable, on ne dispose d'aucune raison structurelle de l'arrêter ici plutôt que là . . . Elle est comme l'arrêt gratuit d'une liberté infinie. [The sentence is an object in which finitude entrances . . . but at the same time by a mechanism . . . of expansion, every sentence is insaturable; there is no structural reason to stop here rather than there. . . . It is like the arbitrary limit to an infinite freedom.]⁸

If the headlines of "Aeolus" revealed the potentially limitless number of sentences about Dublin, the sentences of "Wandering Rocks" reveal the potentially infinite expansibility of the sentence itself. Conversely, they reveal the gratuitousness of any chosen terminus for the sentence, a gratuitous-

of narration and the willful arbitrariness of the writing in "Sirens" are first seen in "Aeolus" and extended in "Wandering Rocks." In addition, the linguistic games in the overture are anticipated in the games of notation found in "Calypso" ("Mkgnao . . . Mrkgnao! the cat cried") and in "Aeolus" ("The door of Rutledge's office whispered: ee: cree"). And, finally, the variations played on the phrases of the overture in the narrative of "Sirens" illustrate a kind of rhetorical exercise which becomes increasingly obvious in later chapters that do not have music as their "art." The text as a *verbal composition* supersedes the text as an imitation of a musical composition.

The relationship of music and writing can be most fruitfully regarded not as an airtight analogy but as a kind of experimental premise in the chapter. The critical question then becomes, How does Joyce play on this relationship, that is, what happens to the text when this experiment is conducted? In a sense, the "Sirens" chapter is Joyce's experimental and, I think, parodic answer to Walter Pater, the tutelary genius of the chapter, who said that all art constantly aspires to the condition of music. The chapter shows us how language is and is not music—it plays a number of variations on this basic idea. In the process, the text displays its artifice, its status as a verbal composition. The experimental premise of the chapter thus liberates the stylistic behavior of the text. Joyce's experiments with the relationship between language and music issue in particular kinds of verbal antics that, in turn, have important implications for the reading of the text.

The overture attempts to reproduce literal music as well as formally to imitate its structure, for the overture is largely an encoded transcription of sound: it gives us the sounds of a voice, a piano, a garter snap, a laugh, applause. In "Sirens," Joyce turns the novel over to sound, that is, he writes a chapter that focuses on the "music" of Dublin—on its literal music (there is music played throughout the chapter), on its dialogue, and on its noises. In his games of notation in the overture, Joyce plays with the idea of reducing sound, verbal and nonverbal, to its written equivalent. For example, the phrase "Will lift your tschink with tschunk" reproduces a toast—both the words of the toast ("will lift your glass with us") and the sound of clinking glasses ("tschink with tschunk"). Perhaps the most famous example of sound reduced to its written equivalent is the representation of flatulence at the end of the chapter ("Ppprrffrrppffff").

In the overture, Joyce exploits the distance between the printed word and the sound it represents. In *The Stoic Comedians*, Hugh Kenner has observed of Joyce's games of notation in *Ulysses* that "there is something mechanical,

ness also found in the narrative of "Eumaeus." The syntax of a sentence progressively limits the potential choices of that sentence—its beginning limits the possibilities of its end. However, in the sentences of "Wandering Rocks," Joyce plays against this expectation of narrowing possibilities and ultimate closure, as successive clauses follow each other exhaustively in the prose.

In "Wandering Rocks," the book continues the exploration of its own choices begun in "Aeolus." It prepares for the investigation of potentiality in later chapters: "Circe" (the psychic potentiality of the characters); "Sirens," "Oxen of the Sun," and "Eumaeus" (stylistic and syntactic potentiality); and "Ithaca" (the potentiality of the plot). It is interesting that all of the examples I have cited from "Wandering Rocks" that illustrate an interest in the categories of potentiality were *added* to the chapter after its publication in *The Little Review*.⁹ Joyce interpolated these passages into the text while he was working on the later chapters of the book. Despite the chapter's apparent simplicity, it thus anticipates the bizarre narrative activity of the chapters to come.

"Sirens"

In the "overture" of the "Sirens" chapter, *Ulysses* abandons even the pretense of being a traditional novel. Here conventional units of narration are fractured: short lines of non sequitur replace the paragraph, and splintered phrases replace the sentence. In turning the page from the lengthy paragraphs that conclude "Wandering Rocks," the reader comes upon a kind of shorthand or code in which Joyce seems to be playing linguistic games of notation. In the overture, the reader is offered an incomplete and abbreviated transcription of reality.

I have used the term "overture" as a convenient label for the opening section of the chapter because it does function as a musical overture, introducing the phrases and themes that are "orchestrated" in the narrative. However, the analogy between music and language does not, to my mind, supply the *raison d'être* of this strange section, as critics have suggested in discussing the "art" of the chapter. For example, Stanley Sultan contends that the "justification" for the section is that it "imitates an operatic overture."¹⁰ But to see the chapter merely as an imitation of a musical form is to ignore how the stylistic antics in "Sirens" are anticipated in previous chapters and continued in subsequent chapters. The breakdown of the logic

ing, this exposure of structure makes us aware of the text as a constructed system.¹³

Like "Aeolus," "Sirens" is a chapter that emphasizes the artifice of the text—the drama of the writing usurps the dramatic action. But the most interesting experiments in this chapter are the more local, verbal games played in the sentences of the narrative. A kind of breakdown of the style occurs that mirrors the anatomy of structure, for the narrative norm from the preceding chapters seems to be dissected and reassembled like a Tinker toy. Phrases are repeated, rearranged, slightly distorted. Statements in the serious, literate, precise prose of the narrative norm suffer the indignities of constant revision—they are pulled apart and examined, their literacy and assertiveness collapsing under the scrutiny. As in "Aeolus," we are drawn in "Sirens" to the surface of the language: in "Sirens," however, the play of the language almost seems to interrupt the telling of the story.

Recognizable examples of the narrative norm can be found in "Sirens," serving their characteristic function of documentation. For example, "Miss Douce's brave eyes, unregarded, turned from the crossblind, smitten by sunlight" (*U* 11.460–61) is identifiably in the initial style of the book. The precision and formality of its diction, its slight syntactic and semantic dislocations (that is, the awkward separation of the adjective "unregarded" and the figure "brave eyes"), and the obvious attention to sound are hallmarks of the initial style. However, rather surprisingly, an entire paragraph seems to "mushroom" out of this statement:

Miss Douce's brave eyes, unregarded, turned from the crossblind, smitten by sunlight. Gone. Pensive (who knows?), smitten (the smiting light), she lowered the dropblind with a sliding cord. She drew down pensive (why did he go so quick when I?) about her bronze over the bar where bald stood by sister gold, in exquisite contrast, contrast in exquisite nonexquisite, slow cool dim seagreen sliding depth of shadow, *eau de Nil*. (*U* 11.460–65)

The succeeding sentences in the paragraph combine interior monologue with continued third-person narration, a juxtaposition that occurs in other chapters. But what is strange about the page is that the first narrative statement is immediately rewritten and explored: it gives birth to an exuberant narrative excursus. The initial sentence generates its own qualifications that are, in turn, repeated and qualified at an accelerating pace. The second sentence (omitting the word "Gone") explores the implicit pun in the first

Joyce never lets us forget, about all reductions of speech to arrangements of twenty-six letters."¹⁴ It seems to me that in "Sirens" there is a special poignancy to the gap between sound and written language: Joyce shows us in the chapter that no matter how hard the writing may try to capture the living music of Dublin, the text, like all texts, is silent. A crucial component of the chapter's irony is its revelation of the way in which writing is *not* music. One can say that the relationship between the transcriptions in the overture and real sound is like the relationship between a musical score and music. Like the musical symbols of a score, the signs of the overture remind us of what is lost in the transcription of sound.

As a kind of musical score, the chapter lays bare its inner workings. The overture in particular exposes the chapter's structure and composition by offering a "breakdown" of the narrative system into its constituent elements. Like a musical overture, the first section of "Sirens" offers an encapsulated version of the narrative. It provides a kind of table of contents, a chronological catalogue of what we can expect to find. The "contents" of the chapter are, as I have mentioned, the sounds of Dublin out of which the text will be constructed. In the overture, we are shown the elements before they are woven into a comprehensive semantic system. They are neither classified in narrative categories (like direct dialogue or third-person narration) nor developed into dramatic symbols (like "jingle jingle jaunted jingling," which becomes a symbol for Boylan's car, and then for Boylan, and then for the cuckolding of Leopold Bloom). It is as if Ibsen reduced Nora's door slam to the status of mere noise.

Behind their meaning as acoustic transcriptions, however, the lines of the overture are themselves words on a page: the overture breaks down the contents of the chapter even further into the autonomous words and phrases that constitute the chapter. In confronting the almost meaningless overture, we are reminded that the literary text is comprised not of characters, nor plots, nor philosophies, but words.¹⁵ In this way, the overture calls attention to the writer's tools: ultimately, we are meant to marvel at the creation of a story out of such basic ingredients. Again, there is a reminder of the text as a rhetorical exercise, a narrative fiat. "Sirens" provides a more self-conscious beginning to the narrative than any other chapter, for in the overture, the chapter ritualizes its intention to begin. Explicitly announcing its own end with the word "*Done*," the overture provides an introduction to the narrative proper with the word "Begin!" Because a novel tends to hide the laws of its composition so that we concentrate on what it is say-

(Miss Douce is both smitten with love for Boylan and struck by the harsh light of the sun). Similarly, the third sentence begins to repeat and expand on the second, when, quite inexplicably, it fixates on producing variations of itself and begins to rearrange the phrase "inexquisite contrast." This narrative exuberance is made more comic because it is itself based on a distorted echo of both a comment by Miss Kennedy ("Exquisite contrast," *U* 11.68) and a narrative comment about her and Miss Douce ("Ladylike in exquisite contrast," *U* 11.106). The phrase "in exquisite" becomes "inexquisite"; through some rather deaf-eared transcribing, the phrase becomes its opposite.

Thus, in the midst of the narrative, language circles back on itself, as if, by some strange compulsion, three steps backward must accompany any one step forward.¹⁴ As in the preceding example, the narrative excursus sometimes involves an inaccurate repetition of a phrase already uttered. Simon Dedalus asks Miss Douce for some whiskey and she replies, "With the greatest alacrity." Suddenly, however, the phrase is repeated in the narrative in slightly altered form: "With the greatest alacrity" is transformed into "with grace of alacrity," and an entire passage is spawned from this distortion:

With grace of alacrity towards the mirror gilt Cantrell and Cochrane's she turned herself. With grace she tapped a measure of gold whisky from her crystal keg. Forth from the skirt of his coat Mr Dedalus brought pouch and pipe. Alacrity she served. (*U* 11.214–17)

Here the sounds of phrases are repeated while their sense is ignored. As in the child's game of telephone, the original statement is lost in the translation, but the writing seems not to notice. (Instead of the absolute pitch we might expect to find in the chapter about music, we find much less than perfect hearing. At times we seem to be in the same unfortunate predicament as Bald deaf Pat who "seehears lipspeech" [*U* 11.10]¹⁵)

This deaf-eared transcribing places the emphasis on the phonetic rather than the semantic characteristics of words. An interest in the sounds of words begins to dominate the writing. Throughout the narrative, we find rhetorical figures of sound, such as rhyme, assonance, alliteration, elision—sentences like "lightward, gliding, mild, she smiled on Boylan." If we have seen the language of "Sirens" imitate literal sounds, we also see it here as itself a form of arranged sound. Aural associations guide the movement of the sentences: "Encore, enclap, said, cried, clapped all" (*U* 11.757–58). A per-

sonal pronoun metamorphoses into a laugh right before our eyes (or ears, as the case may be). "Pat is a waiter who waits while you wait. Hee hee hee hee" (*U* 11.916). In experimenting with language as patterned sound, Joyce liberates all kinds of aural associations and combinations. The rhetorical schemes and aural poetry of the initial style are now exaggerated into bizarre verbal behavior—sounds migrate within a sentence, as in the example "Mr Bloom reached Essex bridge. Yes, Mr Bloom crossed Bridge of Yessex" (*U* 11.228–29).¹⁶

As the chapter experiments with the sounds of words, the machinery of narration begins to creak and groan. Joyce deliberately sabotages the devices of narration used so effectively in the early chapters of the novel. The third-person narration becomes deliberately awkward: the writing has a comical, gestural component, as if a drunken clowning were enacted by the language itself. The moment the narration attempts to walk a straight line, it begins to wobble. A confident narrative statement such as "From the saloon a call came, long in dying" suddenly gives way to the awkward strains of "that was a tuningfork the tuner had that he forgot that he now struck. A call again. That he now poised that it now throbbled" (*U* 11.313–15). An excess of labor is needed for the simplest narrative functions (the reader is reminded of the comic style first glimpsed in "Telemachus"). With the punctiliousness and defensiveness of a drunk trying to prove he can still speak coherently, the narrative must labor to communicate even the simplest ideas: "He, Mr Bloom, listened while he, Richie Goulding, told him, Mr Bloom, of the night he, Richie, heard him, Si Dedalus, sing 'Twas rank and fame in his, Ned Lambert's house" (*U* 11.816–17). Indirect discourse becomes increasingly indirect and awkward: "First gentleman told Mina that was so. She asked him was that so. And second tankard told her so. That that was so" (*U* 11.816–17). Narrative statements documenting external reality are misplaced, as if the narrative were a broken record telling us something we have already heard and no longer need to know: "Blazes Boylan's smart tan shoes creaked on the barfloor, said before" (*U* 11.761). (Boylan, we have been told already, has left the bar and is on his way to Molly's.)

In "Sirens," the book examines its own resources and plays with the kind of language it has once taken seriously. The third-person narration in the early chapters seems to have outlived its usefulness, and, indeed, it disappears after the "Sirens" chapter (as I said previously, I will discuss its brief reappearance in "Nausicaa"). The serious, literate documentation of reality becomes in "Sirens" almost an illiterate verbal gesture ("Bald deaf Pat

brought quite flat pad ink" [U 11.847]). And the lyrical strand of the initial style associated with Stephen Dedalus turns into a verbal fiasco of excessive alliteration. In the following passage (a description of Simon Dedalus singing an aria), Joyce gives us his most parodic interpretation of Pater's observation that all art aspires to the condition of music:

It soared, a bird, it held its flight, a swift pure cry, soar silver orb it leaped serene, speeding, sustained, to come, don't spin it out too long long breath he breath long life, soaring high, high resplendent, aflame, crowned, high in the effulgence symbolistic, high, of the ethereal bosom, high, of the high vast irradiation everywhere all soaring all around about the all, the endlessnessness. (U 11.745–50)

In this passage, Joyce invokes the spirit of Walter Pater, plagiarizes Dan Dawson in "Aeolus" (see Dawson's speech in U 7.327–28), and parodies the lyrical flights to which both he and Stephen Dedalus have sometimes been prone (see the epiphany on the beach in *A Portrait* and the lyrical descriptions in "Telemachus"—"Woodshadows floated silently by through the morning peace from the stairhead seaward where he gazed [. . .] White breast of the dim sea [. . .] Wavewhite wedded words shimmering on the dim tide" [U 1.242–47]). In *Ulysses on the Liffey*, Richard Ellmann suggests that this passage parodies the sentimentality of the characters listening to the music,¹⁷ but it seems too tame to go beyond parody of character to a parody of lyricism and all pretensions to fine writing, even the book's own. The book borrows from the high-flown oratory of a character mocked in a previous chapter: excess infiltrates the writing.

In "Sirens," the play of rhetorical figures first seen in "Aeolus" leads to a more insistent verbal tinkering with the prose. If the verbal play and the headlines in "Aeolus" diverted us from the action in the micro-narrative, in "Sirens" the surface of the prose is even more absorbing, at times even obstructionist. In its self-delighted preening, the narration almost seems to ignore what is happening in the plot.¹⁸ The play of the language is, in fact, a kind of linguistic diversion from the main event of the day, which occurs offstage: Molly's adultery with Boylan. For while the writing amuses itself with linguistic games, while the characters, including Bloom, amuse themselves with music, Boylan amuses himself with Molly. To put it another way, the reader is absorbed by the verbal surface of the prose just as Bloom momentarily escapes his loneliness, specifically his thoughts of his wife's adultery, by listening to music. The writing, like the music for the charac-

ters, is a form of play that substitutes pleasure for pain. The rhetorical play in part derives from the "gap" between reality and language: if language is basically defective as an instrument for transcribing the sounds and experiences of life, it still makes an exceptional Tinker toy. If it can never really aspire to the condition of music for fear of becoming ridiculous, its patterns of sound can generate interesting distortions of sense. The knowledge of the "gap" between reality and language leads, then, to a sense of liberation as well as loss.

And yet, paradoxically, the deliberately oblique treatment of the action functions as a strategy for capturing the pain being repressed. The avoidance makes us aware of the pain, just as Bloom's sudden reminder of Molly's meeting with Boylan (occasioned by the coincidence of his watch stopping at four-thirty) hits him with greater force because he has tried to forget it. An example of this oblique treatment is the sentence "Bloom looped, unlooped, noded, disnoded" (U 11.704). Twisting language in a verbal imitation of Bloom's game with an elastic band, the writing expresses Bloom's pain not by direct statement but in the rhythms of the prose. The prose bides its time, Bloom bides his time; both gestures make us aware of what is not confronted, either verbally in the narration or mentally by Bloom. Another example of this oblique treatment of emotion is the following: "Under the sandwichbell lay on a bier of bread one last, one lonely, last sardine of summer. Bloom alone" (U 11.1220–21). In this example, the avoidance comes in the form of metaphoric substitution. In "Sirens," our sense of the emotional as well as the empirical reality is stubbornly maintained throughout the verbal machinations of the prose.