

“I have met you too late”: James Joyce, W.B. Yeats and the Making of *Chamber Music*

Wim Van Mierlo

In Memory of Zack R. Bowen

*Chamber Music* is nowadays mostly relegated to the margins of James Joyce’s canon in a way not dissimilar to the early poetry of W.B. Yeats in *Poems* (1895) and *The Wind among the Reeds* (1899). One of the reasons, surely, is because both Yeats and Joyce partially disowned their early work. Yeats gutted his earliest volumes of poetry when he assembled *Poems*, stating that the ones he retained were the only verse from his youth he wished to preserve (*Poems*, v). Joyce, when he was seeing *Chamber Music* through the press three or four years after the collection’s inception, and after it had been turned down by at least three publishers, at once renounced and embraced the book. As he wrote to his brother Stanislaus in October 1906, he felt it was too much the work of his younger self:

The reason that I dislike *Chamber Music* as a title is that it is too complacent. I should prefer a title which to a certain extent repudiated the book, without altogether disparaging it. [...] I went through the entire book of verses mentally on receipt of Symons’ letter and they nearly all seemed to me poor and trivial: some phrases and lines pleased me and no more. (*Letters II*, 182)

Somewhat later, in February 1907, he wrote again to Stanislaus: "I don't like the book but wish it were published and be damned to it. However, it is a young man's book. I felt like that. It is not a book of love-verses at all, I perceive. But some of them are pretty

enough to be put to music" (*Letters II*, 219) The renunciation seems extraordinary. By now he had got used to the idea of being a prose writer rather than a poet, but the desire to see his writing in print was greater than his aversion to the immature work. At the time, he was of course also enacting a repudiation of his own self in the creation of his mock-heroic double in *Stephen Hero*, the writing of which at this stage was more than half finished.

Yet a crucial difference in the reception of Yeats's and Joyce's early work is that Yeats's early poems have retained a popular readership. Even as Yeats was moving towards his mature styles, he kept *Poems* (which included the ever-popular, much-anthologized "The Lake Isle of Innisfree") in print until 1927; in academic criticism the youthful work is at least seen as part of the poet's development, antiquated but illustrative of the poet's early preoccupation with folklore and mysticism. Joyce's verse, by contrast, is found both aesthetically and ideologically displeasing: it neither fits with the great Modernist tradition, nor does it reflect any obvious Irish nationalist concerns.<sup>1</sup>

On this matter I will undertake a correction to literary history. *Chamber Music*, though it might not be to the liking of all readers, has its own integrity and aesthetic aims, and

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<sup>1</sup> For the most part, critical commentary on *Chamber Music* is lukewarm or negative, even among the editors of Joyce's poetry. A. Walton Litz names them as merely "rehearsals for the great works" and as "preparing the way for [...] the major themes" (*PSW* iv and 4). Other critics have taken Bloom's thought, "Chamber music. Could make a pun on that" (*U* 11.979-80), literally and read *Chamber Music* as an extensive *double-entendre*; somehow I cannot imagine that Joyce intended the lines "My love goes slowly, bending to | Her shadow on the grass" (*CM* VII) as a girl stooping down to wee, as Elisabeth Sheffield suggests (42). Some valuable and appreciative treatments of *Chamber Music* can be found in the work of Myra Russel, who explores in depth the musical aspects of the poems, and in Jeffrey Simons' exploration into the poems' prosody and technique. In particular, Simons successfully demolishes the common view of *Chamber Music* as being merely "loose verse" (Scholes and Kain, 5).

its genesis as well as the context against which it appeared could do much to help us reach a better understanding of the intrinsic and historical meaning of Joyce's earliest writing. As such, my main purpose is to take it out of the context of High Modernism, which it preceded by a good number of years, and insert it more properly in the time the poetry came into being—the period roughly between 1901 and 1907—and the places that had an impact on its production: Dublin and London. Such an aim immediately invites a consideration of the knotty question of influence, which has often been considered but never satisfactorily answered. *Chamber Music* is full of echoes and allusions, but on closer inspection none are very specific or tangible, not even that of the early Yeats, whose alleged effect on Joyce has often been noted.

The figure of Yeats, nevertheless, looms fairly large in the history of *Chamber Music*, not only in the personal relationship between the younger man and the older poet, but also in the aesthetic affinities between them. Again, some disentangling of facts is needed here, as (in particular) Joyce's biographers and critics have almost consistently depicted Joyce and Yeats as antinomial. I want to show that the two were not each other's opposites; in temperament and religious background they were different, and perhaps also in aesthetic priorities, but in their views on the artist's role in reinvigorating the cultural life of the nation one can find a fair deal of agreement, as well as in certain artistic principles to which both adhered. Joyce, who like Yeats, did not feel that art should be subservient to politics, was in that respect a willing participant in the Revival—at least until he left for the Continent. Even then, his interest in the Irish Revival did not quite cease, though he began framing an alternative view of the roots of

Irish identity in essays like “Ireland, Island of Saints and Sages” and “Ireland at the Bar”. These alternative views of Irish nationalism developed through *Ulysses* and culminated in *Finnegans Wake*, his most Irish book of all. But it is back to *Chamber Music*, and to some ancillary materials that Joyce was gathering in an unpublished notebook around the time of its composition, where the origins of these views can be traced. That notebook, the Early Commonplace Notebook now held at the National Library of Ireland (NLI 36,639/2/a), will prove an important document in instigating a reassessment of the beginnings of Joyce’s career as a writer. It is from this notebook that Herbert Gorman in the 1930s transcribed Joyce’s famous notations on Aristotle and Aquinas for his biography. Since coming to light a few years ago, that notebook now also holds vital clues for Joyce’s influences, not only in respect of Stephen Dedalus’s philosophical and aesthetic beliefs but also for comprehending *Chamber Music* as a work of literature and its connection with Yeats’s theories about speaking to the psaltery.

## I – Influences

A cursory review of literary criticism on *Chamber Music* yields quite a substantial list of influences, echoes and allusions:

The Song of Solomon; Dante, Boccaccio; the Troubadours, the Elizabethans, the Jacobean; Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, John Dowland, John Wilmot, Robert Herrick, Richard Lovelace, Francis Thompson, George Herbert, Henry Vaughan; the Romantics; Byron, Shelley, Blake, Thomas Moore, James Clarence Mangan;

the 1890s; Verlaine, Rossetti, Tennyson, Matthew Arnold, Arthur Symons, Ernest Dowson; the Irish folk song, the Revival; George Russell and (last but definitely not least) W.B. Yeats

The sheer range of identifications makes clear that intertextuality in *Chamber Music* is a strange phenomenon indeed. Or are they not actually all influences? Influence is of course notoriously difficult to ascertain and measure, but in poetry there are two methods that help us resolve the question of echo or allusion: distinct verbal collocations and perceived similarity in rhythm and cadence. (A third method, demonstrating the existence of parallel themes, I will deal with cursorily.)

Though not a foolproof test, Google Books and other e-texts can help one some way towards identifying verbal collocations, the idea being that if an echo exists somewhere it can be identified through the presence of paired words in two texts by different authors. I have tried this with random samples from Joyce's collection, without noteworthy success. One can find a reasonable number of echoes across a variety of poets from a variety of periods, but very little that strikes one as being deliberate (even unconscious) and systematic borrowings. These are some examples: "O you unquiet heart" (*CM* XXIV) resembles Alfred Lord Tennyson's "But, for the unquiet heart and brain" (*In Memoriam*, V, 5), but no other phrase from Joyce's poem resonates in Tennyson; moreover, there are resemblances in other poets too, notably Shelley's "Her head on my unquiet heart reposing" (*The Revolt of Islam*, XXV), Matthew Arnold's "O Sohrab, an unquiet heart is thine!" (*Sohrab and Rustum*) and Yeats's "O unquiet heart, |

Why do you praise another, praising her" ("The Old Age of Queen Maeve", *Yeats's Poems*, 113). "They cleave the gloom of dreams, a blinding flame" (*CM XXXVI*) could be a borrowing from Lear's words in "You nimble lightnings, dart you blinding flames | Into her scornful eyes! Infect her beauty" (*King Lear*, Act II, Scene 4). "All day I hear the noise of waters | Making moan" (*CM XXXV*) sounds like Chaucer's "And solitarie he was and evere alone, | And waillynge al the nyght, makynge his mone" ("Knight's Tale", ll.1365-66) and "as mete he were alone | In place horrible making ay his mone" (*Troilus and Criseyde*, V, 249-50). But Joyce turns his speaker's moaning into a personification of the dull complaint of waters' waves, in a way that we also find in "She hears the sea-birds screech, | And the breakers on the beach | Making moan, making moan", from "The Face against the Pane", a poem by the American nineteenth-century poet T.B. Aldrich that was frequently included in popular anthologies and elocution guides; Aldrich' screeching sea-birds also echo Joyce's line, "Sad as the sea-bird is" (*CM XXXV*). Indeed, the possible sources for *Chamber Music* are not always as elevated as Shakespeare, Shelley or Tennyson; many of his phrases resonate also through poetry of a more popular kind. A line from the opening poem, "Where | The willows meet" (*CM I*), for example, appears in Eliza Cook's "To the Spirit of Song"—"Where the fitful breeze and the willows meet"—with which it shares its image of a musician playing on the river banks. Joyce's stargazer, "At that hour when all things have repose | O lonely watcher of the skies (*CM III*), recurs equally in Keats's "'Then felt I like some watcher in the skies" ("On First Looking into Chapman's Homer") as it does in P.J. Bailey's "sojourns | In untranscended light, that I might learn | From thee, the lonely watcher of the skies"

(*Festus, a Poem*). Of course, there are parallels with Yeats too: “Play on, invisible harps, unto Love” (*CM III*) echoes *The Land of Heart’s Desire*, “And a faint music blowing in the wind, | Invisible pipes giving her feet the tune” (*Collected Plays* 67); “Winds of May, that dance on the sea, | Dancing a ring-around in glee” (*CM IX*) echoes “The Fiddler of Dooney”, “Folk dance like a wave of the sea” (*Yeats’s Poems*, 109 ); “The odorous winds are weaving | A music of sighs” (*CM XIV*) echoes “The Lover Asks Forgiveness Because of His Many Moods”, “And trouble with a sigh for all things longing for rest | The odorous twilight there” (*Yeats’s Poems*, 101).

More examples can be found, but these should suffice to make a point that should by now be obvious: none of the echoes I have listed are to be taken as actual instances of influence. Not all poets and poems cited belong to Joyce’s sphere of interest, and even where the parallel seems particularly close—as with Aldrich’s “The Face against the Pane”—it is unlikely that Joyce had actually encountered them in his reading. The phrases, rather, and also the imagery, are so generic that they do not belong to the vocabulary of any individual poem, but to a stock repertory of poetic diction. Joyce’s verse, in other words, might be interesting for what it does *not* betray: any obvious influence.

Where many early commentators seemed all-too preoccupied with influence, Ezra Pound tried to reverse that trend and put Joyce’s poetry in a category all its own: “The wording is Elizabethan, the metres at times suggesting Herrick, but in no case have I been able to find a poem which is not in some way Joyce’s own, even though he would

seem, and that most markedly, to shun apparent originality” (Pound, quoted in Deming, I, 168). Pound, clearly on the defensive here, was carving out a niche that in 1918 was also a belated justification for his inclusion of Joyce’s verse, noteworthy for its “profoundly emotional” quality and “strength and fibrousness of sound”, in *Des Imagistes* (1914) (quoted in Deming, I, 168-69).<sup>2</sup> But Pound’s disclaimer that Joyce was apparently shunning originality was not itself disingenuous, nor was it an attempt to obfuscate near-plagiarism; rather it goes to the heart of Joyce’s diction. The problem is not that Joyce’s verse is too colored, but that it is “colorless” (A.C.H., 100), as one reviewer of the American edition of *Chamber Music* put it:

[I]n a single poem one sometimes finds several distinct threads of reminiscence which one may not be able to trace all at once, an occurrence which proves disturbing as failure to remember a name or a word. Of course for some people this does not detract from a poem—it seems rather to add a certain classic flavor to it; but unless this tendency is offset by something very positive of the author’s own, it is, I think, likely to prove annoying. (A.C.H., 99).

The reaction is not unlike some readers’ discomfort with Joyce’s use of pastiche in his later writings, when they criticize the “mythic” sections in “Cyclops”, the history of styles in “Oxen of the Sun” and the rich allusive texture of *Finnegans Wake* as being too facile. Randy Malamud, however, carefully sums up the situation when he states that

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<sup>2</sup> The occasion was an essay which Pound published in *The Future* (May 1918) to mark the appearance of the American edition of *A Portrait of the Artist as Young Man*. The essay was reprinted in *Instigations* (1920).



“the poetry presents copious and fairly obvious) appropriations of traditions: conventionally recycled images of the most common symbol in the most common kind of poetry” (Malamud, 96).

There is another aspect which adds to the sense of tradition, but detracts from the notion that Joyce is only vaguely appropriating poetic styles, and that is that the vocabulary in *Chamber Music* has a certain richness which, though it might be a tad artificial, looks forward to the way Joyce mastered language in the later work. While for the most part the poems are cast in simple language, there is a noticeable sprinkling of polysyllabic words which primarily seem to be of Elizabethan origin. Words like “disconsolate” (CM IV), “visitant” (CM IV), “plenilune” (CM XII), “welladay” (CM IX) all have their earliest occurrence in Spenser, Jonson, and other poets of the period, while words like “unzone” (CM XI) “enaisled” (CM XX) “unconsortable” (CM XXI), “conjurable” (CM XXVI), and “raimented” (CM XXIX) are all derivations with an antiquarian ring to them. The poems, therefore, are modulated in their language towards a classical period in English literature.

Towards the middle of his life, Joyce told Stefan Zweig that he wanted to be above all language: “I cannot express myself in English without enclosing myself in a tradition” (Zweig, 275). Enclosing himself in a tradition was what Joyce at different moments in his life repudiated and endorsed; the scene in *A Portrait* in which Stephen discusses the word “tundish” with the Dean of Studies functions as an emblem for how the Irish live in a language that is not entirely theirs. Yet Stephen lets his mind wander back to “the age

of Dowland and Byrd and Nash" (P 233), the way Joyce looked boldly towards his Elizabethan models in *Chamber Music*. What Stephen does not contemplate, in this apparent inconsistency, but Joyce does, is how the Irish have adapted the language of the colonizer to create their own distinct idiom and a variant of English. Joyce treats Elizabethan literature very differently from a poet like Seamus Heaney, for instance, for whom the Anglicization that followed the establishment of the Munster plantation in the sixteenth century led to cultural dispossession. For Joyce, rather, as archaic Elizabethan words (like "tundish") have gone out of usage in British English, they can be appropriated to become part of a Hiberno-English vernacular that is neither British nor nativist Irish. Such appropriation is also referenced by Yeats when he, in an aside in an early essay from 1898 on Irish folk beliefs, characterizes the West of Ireland speech as "the partly Elizabethan speech of Galway" (UP II, 95). This same principle Joyce will later put to work in the language of *Finnegans Wake*, in which puns and foreign languages are complemented by a vast stock of English vocabulary that is at times obsolete, at times regional.

The polysyllabic words in *Chamber Music*, furthermore, have an unusual effect on the rhythm and cadence of Joyce's verse. Rhythm and cadence are, as I have said, another good indication of influence. Yet here too Joyce's verse stands beyond comparison. Through alternating monosyllabic and polysyllabic words Joyce generally creates unusual, halting rhythms which mostly avoid the patterns of regular meter, and as such, the lyrics stand out as unique. On occasion, Joyce's verse stays close to a more conventional rhythm, as in "I would in that sweet bosom be" (CM VI). Even though the

strong, masculine rhymes can hardly be missed—they emphasize the lover’s insistence, his almost frantic, anxious pleading for his love to be requited—the meter is on the whole an iambic tetrameter, as we find it also in Robert Herrick’s “A Meditation of his Mistress”: “You are a tulip seen to day, | But (Dearest) of so short a stay” (Herrick, 78). Apart from having the same meter, Herrick’s poem too uses mostly masculine endings, and it shares the image of the “rude wind” with Joyce. Ezra Pound was therefore correct in hinting at Herrick’s meter in his essay from 1918, but Joyce’s meters show far more variation than most Elizabethan and traditional poetry. As he plays with word length, he also plays with alternating line lengths and greatly varies the number of stresses in a line. The differences with Yeats’s poetry are also apparent.

Where critics have seen similarities with Yeats’s rhythms, it is not always clear whether they were primarily guided by rhythm, or by poetic diction, imagery or just the general mood of the poem.<sup>3</sup> Still, it is possible to find points of contact. Probably the most widely accepted instance of a Yeatsian resonance is the likening of “I hear an army charging” (XXXVI) to Yeats’s “Michael Robartes Bids his Beloved be at Peace” from *The Wind among the Reeds* (Yeats’s *Poems*, 96). There are obvious echoes in the rhythm and the imagery, with some near-precise verbal collocations in the opening lines, particularly between l.2 in Joyce (“And the thunder of horses plunging, foam about their knees”) and l. 8 in Yeats (“The Horses of Disaster plunge in the heavy clay”), as well as a

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<sup>3</sup> For Patrick Colm Hogan, for instance, certain “lines, cadences, stanzas repeatedly echo Yeats’s early lyrics”, and he connects *CM* I, XIX, XXXII and XXXIII with “Ephemera”, *CM* XX with “The Lake Isle of Innisfree” and *CM* XXXI with “Down by the Sally Gardens” (Hogan, 53). He also cites Kenner, who compares *CM* XXI to “To His Heart, Bidding it Have no Fear” (*Dublin’s Joyce*, 40-41).

shared apostrophe of the beloved to his heart (“My heart, have you no wisdom thus to despair? | My love, my love, my love, why have you left me alone?” and “Beloved, let your eyes half close, and your heart beat | Over my heart”). But also thematically the poems are alike. Both poems depart from an auditory vision that vexes the speaker in his sleep, his restlessness, if not downright despair, caused by his desire for the absent beloved.

The symbolism of the two poems, however, is different. The nightmare and metaphorical agony of Joyce’s speaker is real enough: “I moan in sleep when I hear afar their whirling laughter”). His anguish—“[c]langing, clanging upon the heart as upon an anvil”—is a direct translation in poetic language of the heart-ache he suffers. The “tumult” in Yeats poem, rather, is more directly apocalyptic in tone, which makes the lover’s agony at once more interesting and more abstract; the charging horses are “Shadowy Horses” and “Horses of Disaster”, the capitals indicating some abstract principle or symbol rather than a frightful dream. In Yeats’s mythological conception, the horses are the horses of Mananaan MacLir, the sea god who reigned over the afterlife. But where, as in Joyce, the lover summons the horses in the dream, the lover in Yeats controls the horses, for even though their violence is heaped upon him in his nightmare, it is the violence of his “endless Desire” that unleashes them.

We observe similar differences also in the formal constitution of the poems. While there are rhythmic echoes, on closer inspection the prosodic differences are substantial. As with “I would in that sweet bosom be”, Joyce’s poem is more irregular: his half-

rhymed ABAB stanza (land | knees | stand | charioteers) contrasts with Yeats's regular ABBA rhyme scheme; and his alternating five- and seven-foot lines, with only a faint trace of an iambic meter, contrasts with Yeats's iambic hexameter, with a caesura in the middle, as we can see from comparing the following scansions:

- x - x - x - | - x x - x

I HEAR the Shadowy Horses, their long manes a-shake,

- x x - - x - | - x x - x

Their hoofs heavy with tumult, their eyes glimmering white;

- x - x - x - | x - x - x

The North unfolds above them clinging, creeping night,

Note, though, that at first Joyce's opening picks up on Yeats's cadence at least in the first half:

- x - x - x - - x - x

I HEAR an army charging upon the land,

- - x - - x - x - x - x - x

And the thunder of horses plunging, foam about their knees :

x - x - x x - - x - x

Arrogant, in black armour, behind them stand,

Despite noticeable similarities, Joyce and Yeats's poetic styles, when scrutinized this closely, are fairly divergent. I do not simply want to conclude from this that Joyce had no affinity with Yeats's poetry, for he clearly had. Throughout his life, Joyce returned to such of Yeats's lyrics as "Down by the Salley Gardens" and the famous songs included in *The Countess Cathleen*, "Impetuous Heart" and "Who Goes with Fergus". In the next section I want to explore some of the underlying factors that demonstrate this affinity, particularly with respect to Joyce's and Yeats's interests in music, chanting and the "song" as a lyric genre. In many respects, Yeats's prosodic mastery outdoes Joyce's; his skilful manipulation of traditional meters and poetic forms are subversive, yet they largely stay within the limits of convention (see Vendler *passim*): the structure of "Michael Robartes Bids his Beloved be at Peace" hints at the sonnet, for example, but does not fully conform to its characteristics. But then, Yeats, despite a penchant in his early, as well as later, poetry to name his poems "songs", remained pretty much a poet, while Joyce, perhaps with his own early ambitions as a singer in mind, created his verse in the first place as songs, and hoped that some day they would be put to music by "someone that knows old English music such as I like" (*Letters II* 219). With either poet, their diverse intents affected their aesthetics and the lyrical quality of their verse in important ways.

## II –Encounters

To understand better the poetic affinities between Yeats and Joyce one must return to biography (the argument might be circuitous but not the logic) for a crucial re-assessment of the relationship between the two writers to redress the widespread misconception that their background and artistic aims are poles apart. That Yeats belonged to the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy, and therefore to an altogether different class, was a fact that would not be easily lost on the Catholic Joyce. But that does not mean it clouded his appreciation of Yeats's work. On the contrary, he expressed his admiration for Yeats's writing at various stages of his life and was able in later life to recite from memory many of the poems from the early period.

On the whole, it seems that literary history has conflated Joyce's alleged disapproval of Yeats with his disapproval of the Irish Literary Revival as a whole. Richard Ellmann in particular chose not to correct Gorman's contention that Joyce only "belonged completely to himself" (Gorman 1949, 281); in fact, he strengthened that view, and in doing so bypassed the significance (and existence) of Joyce's early Irish reception, leaving readers blind to the nature of Joyce's relationship with Irish letters and the Irish Revival. So here too there is room for revision. Although Joyce was happy for the view that he opposed the Revival to be his legacy, the historical reality is more intricate than that. Joyce was frequently openly critical of the Revival and showed impatience with its obsession for recovering folklore beliefs and peasant traditions; in its stead he

celebrated an urban—and more urbane—culture, which looked towards Continental literary traditions (Ibsen, not being among the least) as well as the abstruse, but Catholic aesthetic philosophy of Aristotle and Aquinas. In the minds of many commentators, therefore, Joyce rejected the Revival’s devotion “to an essential national identity” and superseded it with “exile, alienation and dislocation”, with either an artistic disengagement or enlightened, modern nationalism that had, it is implied, far more integrity than anything the Revival stood for or had produced (Nolan, 24). Yeats, in this logic, was a poet who feared modernity and whose legacy of Irish cultural nationalism was “constrictive”, while Joyce liberated himself and his country from parochialism, and resisted cultural binaries and all sorts of discursive hegemonies (Nolan, 16, 23).<sup>4</sup> Such critical rhetoric, I feel, is rather exaggerated, reductive, but also a-historical.

It is perhaps an obvious point to make, but the Revival was not simply a naïve, inward-looking affair. Rather as Joyce knew, and as Yeats understood as no other, it was a broad church of often dissenting and conflicting voices, which had room for a “modern”, even an “international”, perspective as well, as Europe and European culture were not excluded at all from the Irish project of cultural emancipation (as was indeed the case with other nationalist movements across the Continent). As Len Platt has correctly pointed out, Irish nationalism and revivalism are two different things (Platt, 7); the

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<sup>4</sup> Emer Nolan at first appears to object to the antithetical view of Joyce and Yeats in her introduction to *James Joyce and Nationalism*, (13), but in Chapter 1, “Joyce and the Irish Revival”, she unabashedly reinforces it, with Joyce always “subverting”, while Yeats is “distinctly divorced from the social realities signified by nationalist ideology” (24). It is clear that for Nolan Yeats, as a member of a Protestant minority élite, belongs to the wrong tribe and thus ought not to be taken seriously.



interstices between the revivalism and nationalism are complex, were often at the time uneasy and have not been fairly represented since. The fault lines inevitably ran along denominational lines, as Catholic opinion accused the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy of adulterating the true Irish nationalist idealism, while the Revivalists rebarbatively reacted against narrow-minded interference from the Catholic corner, but while controversy tends to play itself out along entrenched principles, they mostly arise out of specific issues, such as the alleged heresy in *The Countess Cathleen* or the sleight against Irish women in *The Playboy of the Western World*. At the time, Dublin was, in John Eglinton's words, "a centre of vigorous potentialities" (quoted in Scholes and Kain, 198) in which Joyce was a willing participant. While Joyce spoke out against, on the one hand, a certain insularity in the aesthetics of the Revival and its heralding of folklore and peasantry and, on the other, the parochial politics of Catholic Ireland, he did not stand apart from the broader movement of cultural nationalism whose ideals he shared. Yeats was a driving force behind this movement, and it is certainly not warranted to lump him together with the predominantly conservative voices in Ireland at the time.

Kevin Barry quite rightly observes that Joyce's critical writings did not exist in an intellectual or critical vacuum, but emerged within lively debates and controversies about Irish national culture. In particular, Joyce's ideas about nationalism had much in common with organs such as *Bealtaine*, edited by Yeats, and *Dana: An Irish Magazine of Independent Thought*, the journal founded by John Eglinton and Fred Ryan to which Joyce submitted his prose sketch "A Portrait of the Artist" (Barry, xxviii-xxx), and this context gives occasion for reevaluating Joyce's responses. Eglinton, as a Protestant,

objected to the exclusivist definition of Irish national identity of the Catholic majority. He rejected Joyce's sketch because, to his mind, it was "incomprehensible" (quoted in Scholes and Kain, 200), not because it was too *avant-garde* for *Dana's* editorial policy.<sup>5</sup> Barry argues that Joyce would not have submitted it to *Dana* if he had not thought the magazine was suitable. (They did accept one of his poems—"My love is in a light attire" [CM VII]—which appeared in August 1904 under the title "Song".) Some of Joyce's critical writing then, too, is less damning of the Revival than it is usually perceived to be. Joyce's review of Lady Gregory's *Poets and Dreamers* for the *Daily Express* (1903) was quite frank in its condemnation of the book's ethos. Calling it "The Soul of Ireland", Joyce particularly objected to the way Lady Gregory presented not "heroic youth" but the dull re-telling of Irish folklore and legend by the old peasants in a manner "almost fabulous in its sorrow and senility"; he criticized the dull picturesque representation, but not Irish myth itself, nor the poems of the Irish bard Raftery, and compared *Poets and Dreams* unfavourably to the "delicate scepticism" in Yeats's "happiest book", *The Celtic Twilight* (OCPW 74-75). Although Joyce was aware of the severity of his criticism, he still intended shortly after the review had been published (as he informed his mother) "to write to Lady Gregory one of these days" (*Letters* II, 380), which suggests quite a different sentiment than Mulligan's rebuke in *Ulysses*: "O you inquisitional drunken jewjesuit! She gets you a job on the paper and then you go and slate her drivell to Jaysus. Couldn't you do the Yeats touch" (U 9.1159-61).

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<sup>5</sup> According to Stanislaus Joyce, the essay was rejected because of its sexual overtones; to Joyce because it was too much about himself (JJ 147).

“The Day of the Rabblement”, too, although taken to be Joyce’s fiercest anti-Revival piece, is reasonably moderate in its appraisal. As an intervention in the debate on the remit of the national theatre in Ireland, it certainly makes a strong point for integrating the theatre in a wider European culture, which was also very much Yeats’s position, but it also shows how Joyce was not fully *au fait* with the actual issues at hand. He almost missed the point. Ellmann alleges that on learning that the Irish Literary Theatre would, for its next productions would put on only Irish plays, Joyce indignantly sat down to write his essay, the well-known gist of which is a complaint about a missed opportunity for Dublin and an accusation against the Theatre’s directors for pandering to popular taste (*JJ* 88). He did not give credit to the fact that Yeats had on a number of previous occasions likened the development of a national theatre to that in Scandinavia, where people (as he wrote in “The Irish Literary Theatre, 1900”) “understand that a right understanding of life and of destiny is more important than amusement” (*UP* II, 199). In 1899, not long before the staging of *The Countess Kathleen*, he had similarly described the Norwegian theatre, identifying Ibsen’s important role in it, as at once literary, popular and nationalist. Still, as far as the aims of the Irish theatre were concerned, he announced (at least for now) that all plays would be on Irish subjects, but emphasized that the plays would in the first instance appeal to the “imaginative minority” (*UP* II, 163). This concern with an “imaginative minority” does not sound like giving into the rabble. Joyce, however, simply wanted non-Irish plays, and simply accused George Moore and Edward Martyn, who had been champions of Ibsen and Wagner respectively, of selling out. But whereas he could lambast Moore and Martyn for being unoriginal

writers, his respect for Yeats put him in a more difficult spot: he appreciated his work and he knew from Yeats's writing that the Irish Literary Theatre had been the "champion of progress" and had "proclaimed war on commercialism" (*OCPW* 50), and as a result gave him some back-handed compliments. He regarded it "unsafe" to say "at present" whether Yeats "has or has not genius" and called his belief in fairies all but ridiculous, while at the same time he praised Yeats's abilities in *The Wind among the Reeds* and *The Tables of the Law*, "a story which one of the great Russians might have written" (*OPCW* 51).<sup>6</sup> But to ensure that his argument made sense, he had to admit Yeats had been complicit in the choice for the October programme at the Gaiety Theatre and therefore scorned his "treacherous instinct of adaptability". What Joyce did not know, however, is that in the run-up to the premiere of *Diarmuid and Grania*, which had already caused many arguments between Moore and Yeats, Moore had advocated Church censorship for the Irish theatre as a protective measure against "the unintelligent and ignorant censorship of the public" (quoted in *CL III*, 118n). The statement smacked of the incident surrounding *The Countess Kathleen* in 1899, which had attracted ecclesiastical censure largely through Moore and Martyn's doing. Yeats responded publicly to Moore stating in the same newspaper that he would rather resign from the Irish Literary Theatre than accept Church censorship. The real rabble, to Yeats's mind, were not the masses who wanted sentimental plays, but those who jumped on the bandwagon putting religion before art. His view that "literature is the principal

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<sup>6</sup> Joyce's "at present" might be damning, but also guarded. While in 1901, Yeats's *Poems* had brought him some acclaim, and the *Countess Kathleen* and his work for the Irish Literary Theatre notoriety, he had not yet written any of the work for which he is today mostly remembered.

voice of the conscience” has its own morality which independent from the “special moralities of clergymen and churches” must have made Joyce feel that he had been vindicated in writing his pamphlet, even though the nature of his attack was in fact slightly disingenuous.

Whatever the intent behind “The Day of the Rabblement”, its impact in Dublin at the time was, it seems, limited. His contemporaries had either forgiven him for his outburst or the essay had had only a very limited audience.<sup>7</sup> Its opinions, however, probably spread through Dublin by word of mouth, as Joyce had made sure it got distributed to the newspapers; a notice of it appeared in the *United Irishman* (see *OCPW* 295n).

According to Eglinton, however, “[n]obody had a quarrel with [Dublin’s] Dante” (quoted in Scholes and Kain, 202); certainly AE had not taken umbrage as he reported to Yeats that Moore had found an article of his (presumably “The Day of the Rabblement”) “preposterously clever” (Russell, 43). So when Yeats first encountered Joyce, he received him in the spirit of cooperation as one who could be useful to the movement.

The account of Yeats’s first meeting with Joyce is a familiar story. Ellmann relates the circumstances of that encounter in a café in November 1902 as one in which kindness was rebuffed with egotism. Before parting company with Yeats, Joyce asked how old he was; when Yeats told the younger man his age (though fudging it by a year), Joyce replied: “I thought as much. I have met you too late. You are too old” (*JJ* 103). That the conversation probably did not quite happen the way Ellmann reports is not what

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<sup>7</sup> It had in any case a limited circulation. Only 85 copies were printed of the pamphlet that he published privately on 21 October 1901 with Francis Skeffington; one copy was hand-delivered on Joyce’s instruction by his brother Stanislaus to Ely Place, George Moore’s rooms in Dublin.

matters most. Though it is not immediately apparent, Ellmann actually uses Yeats's version of the meeting, as the poet had remembered and recorded it some time after the facts.<sup>8</sup> Ellmann, however, also circulated a different account of the meeting, which this time quotes Joyce as having said: "You are too old for me *to help you*" (Ellmann, *Eminent Domain*, 37, my italics), whereby Ellmann turned Joyce's egotism into plain arrogance, and attributed Joyce's riposte without further reference to Dublin "rumor".<sup>9</sup> Whatever the truth about Dublin garrulousness, the idea that Joyce was settling a score with old Yeats and backward Dublin "stuck" with readers. Yet the portrayal of Joyce incapable of deference seems unjustified. When the anecdote resurfaced in the obituaries after Joyce's death Thomas McGreevy wrote in to the *Times Literary Supplement* saying that he had frequently heard the story from AE, but had never believed him; when he had had occasion to ask Yeats and Joyce about it, they both denied it, Joyce adding that he had had "nothing but kindness" for the older poet when he was young (McGreevy, "James Joyce", 43). Yeats, for his part, never alluded to the arrogance that others seemed to find in Joyce. When Joyce spent the day with Yeats in London while *en route* to Paris in December 1902, Yeats was struck by the young man's

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<sup>8</sup> There is, however, an obfuscation of this fact on Ellmann's part. One needs to follow a trail of footnotes through several publications to arrive at the eventual non-citation of Ellmann's source. For the words quoted in *James Joyce*, Ellmann first cites his own *The Identity of Yeats* (p. 89) for reference, which in turn refers the reader to "Joyce and Yeats", an article in the *Kenyon Review* from 1950 (p. 626), which at last cites an "unpublished essay" by Yeats. The essay is not identified further, though Ellmann did provide a full transcription of the text. R.F. Foster cites it as an unpublished typescript called "The Younger Generation" (*Life I*, 276). Ellmann's *Kenyon Review* article, furthermore, quotes the original version of the incident as well as the version he later printed in *Eminent Domain*.

<sup>9</sup> Another version of this was published by Padraic Colum in the *New York Times*, in which Joyce was said to have riposted: "You are too old for me to influence you" (Colum, "With James Joyce", 52, my italics).

affability; unlike he had expected, Joyce had not come knocking at his door with all his “old Ibsenian fury” (*CL III*, 268). On his return to Dublin for Christmas, just a few weeks later, Joyce again spent the morning with Yeats in London, and told him that he had decided to give up medicine for literature. This time Yeats played Bloom to Joyce’s Stephen: Yeats reported to Lady Gregory that Joyce had said some absurd things, and had scolded him for it, but on the whole they were on good terms with each other.

What transpires from Yeats’s testimony is the importance he attached to his meeting with Joyce. Rather than indicating Joyce’s brazenness, it betrays Yeats’s vanity. Indeed, if Yeats misled Joyce about his age, saying he was a year younger than he was, he obviously felt he did not want to alienate this precocious, self-assured young writer.

Yeats’s response, in other words, betrays more than just his self-consciousness about his age (albeit he was only 37) and status. The sense one gets is that he wants to encourage the young Joyce, to bring him into the fold of the “movement”, but his worry is that he might be perceived as being out-of-date, beyond use. By presenting himself as younger than he was, he betrayed his anxiousness (and anxiety) to influence, his eagerness to appear on the same level, to show almost that he belonged to the same generation as Joyce, so that the younger man would not lose interest in what he had to say.

What had led to the meeting was a letter of introduction from AE in August 1902:

I want you very much to meet a young fellow named Joyce whom I wrote to Lady Gregory about half jestingly. He is an extremely clever boy who belongs to your cla[ss] more than to mine and more still to himself. But he has all the intellectual

equipment, culture and education which all our other clever friends here lack. And I think writes amazingly well in prose though I believe he also writes verse and is engaged in writing a comedy which he expects will occupy him five years or thereabouts as he writes slowly. Moore who saw an article of this boy's says it is preposterously clever. Anyhow I think you would find this youth of 21 with his assurance and self-confidence rather interesting. He is I think certainly more promising than Magee. (Russell, 43)<sup>10</sup>

That the essay Moore read was "preposterously clever" might have had as much to do with Joyce's reputation for Aristotelian rhetoric as with the fact that Joyce was quite perceptive about Moore's work. Still, one must assume that Moore (if it is indeed "The Day of the Rabblement" that he had told AE about) chose to overlook some of Joyce's harsher criticisms. What is clear, though, is that AE was ready to recommend Joyce to Yeats in recognition of the promise he showed—an indication that talent was more important to the literary movement they were trying to build than orthodoxy.

AE's statement that "this clever boy" might belong to Yeats's "class" sounds perhaps peculiar, though presumably he meant intellectual class, not social class or tribe. Yeats certainly had no qualms about acting on AE's recommendation. So a meeting was arranged in Dublin in November. That meeting, as Ellmann suggests, did not take place in a Dublin café, but in the Nassau hotel in 16-20 South Frederick Street where Yeats was staying on 2 or 3 November. Yeats had invited Joyce to dine with him, Lady Gregory and Yeats senior (*Letters I*, 15; *Yeats, CL II*, 242). The establishment, a "[t]emperance

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<sup>10</sup> Denson transcribes "clan", but see Foster, *Life I*, 275.



and Family Hostelry”, neat and moderately priced, that compared favourably with similar establishments in Dublin [Wakeman, 417; see also Yeats, *CL II*, 386], had become an unofficial base of operations for the Revival. It had been Maud Gonne’s preferred lodging whenever she was in Dublin since the 1880s, and Yeats, too, had been in the habit of staying there when on business from London. Though no account of the dinner exists, Yeats may have told the young writer about his row with George Moore over the writing of *Where There is Nothing*, which had just appeared in the *United Irishman* about a week before and which had already been criticized by a Jesuit priest (Yeats, *CL II*, 244); the topic of conversation might also have shifted to Yeats’s article on “The Freedom of the Theatre”, which had appeared in the next issue of the paper on 1 November, in which Yeats argued against the moral majority in Dublin, that “zealous class who write and read, the *Freeman’s Journal*, and the *Independent* and the *Irish Times*” and who pronounce against the morality of certain plays. But for Yeats, the artist was instead unshackled by general opinion, and he defended a theatre that was without mundane responsibility: “Drama describes the adventures of men’s souls among the thoughts that are most interesting to the dramatist, and, therefore, probably most interesting to his time” (*UP II*, 298). It is hard to imagine that this statement would not have had any resonance with James Joyce. The moral independence of the artist would become ingrained in Joyce’s early fiction, from his intention, with *Dubliners*, to write “a chapter of the moral history of my country” (*Letters II*, 134) to the forging of “the uncreated conscience of his race” (*P* 253).

Whatever happened, an invitation was extended either then or shortly after for Joyce to attend another meeting at the Nassau hotel, which Padraic Colum, who was also present, said was “one of Lady Gregory’s evening parties” (Colum, *Our Friend*, 10).<sup>11</sup> It was in fact a celebratory gathering of the Irish National Dramatic Company. As Yeats and Gregory reported to John Quinn on the 8<sup>th</sup>, they had just “had a busy fortnight” (Yeats, *CL II*, 344) which included the performances for the Samhain Festival (28 October to 1 November), with stagings of plays by AE, James Cousins, P.T. MacGinley and W.B. Yeats at the Antient Concert Rooms (see O’Ceallaigh Ritschel, 12-13), and members of the company were discussing “possible plays, possible productions” over tea or sherry (Sullivan, 343). In an unpublished version of his memoir, Colum described Joyce, and Oliver St. John Gogarty who was with him, as being rather “aloof from the rest of this company” (Sullivan, 343), but so was Colum himself apparently, who had been introduced to Yeats just a few months earlier. The purpose of the gathering was to attract new writers for the theatre; Colum, who had by then written a few plays which had not yet been staged, was to join the Company’s reading committee in February and his *The Saxon Shillin’* was put on for a three-night’s run in May 1903. It might have been around this time (though the dating is not precise) that Lady Gregory asked Joyce whether he would like to “write something for our little theatre” (O’Ceallaigh Ritschel, 16; quoted in Sullivan, 343).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> According to Eglinton, Joyce crashed the party and snubbed Lady Gregory “with his air of half-timid effrontery” (quoted in Scholes and Kain, 201).

<sup>12</sup> A much reduced, vaguer version of the meeting at the Nassau hotel appears in Colum, *Our Friend*, 10-12. It is also mentioned briefly in his *New York Times* article (“With James Joyce”, 52).

In the wake of this evening, Yeats and Joyce began corresponding about Joyce's work. After reading the poems that Joyce had sent him, Yeats wrote back sympathetically: "The work which you have actually done is very remarkable for a man of your age who has lived away from the vital intellectual centres. Your technique in verse is very much better than the technique of any young Dublin man I have met during my time. It might have been the work of a young man who had lived in an Oxford literary set" (*CL III*, 249). But Yeats also warned Joyce that he must allow himself time to mature. The praise is genuine, the criticism candid. That he remarked on the Oxonian quality of Joyce's verse probably meant that Yeats found it a little studied, contrived, a criticism often lodged against the poetry that appeared a few years later in *Chamber Music*. Joyce, of course, intentionally strove to write a kind of lyric with a specific rhetorical effect, but judging from what survives in manuscripts, the early lyrics do not yet have the consistency, musicality or the broader range of voice in *Chamber Music*.

Come out to where youth is met  
 Under the moon, beside the sea,  
 And leave your weapon and your net,  
 Your loom and your embroidery. (*PSW* 94)

Whether Yeats saw this very poem is not known. In some respect, though, Joyce might even have been pleased that Yeats noted he was not sounding the "*Celtic note*" (unlike what Little Chandler hopes for in "A Little Cloud"). Only rarely does the verse betray—

and this largely holds for *Chamber Music* as well—that its author is Irish. But did Yeats make him out to be too English? One month later, after Joyce had sent him another short lyric which Yeats found “charming” in its rhythm but “a little thin” in subject matter, the poet again emphasized that it was good work, but nonetheless the work “of a young man who is practising his instrument”; the earlier poems, he added, had had “more subject, more magical phrases, more passion” (18 December 1902, *CL III*, 282).

His opinion of Joyce’s work was not to wane: more than ten years later when arranging a stipend for Joyce from the Royal Literary Fund he praised, with equal measure, *Dubliners* and *Chamber Music*, and twice singled out “I Hear an Army Charging” (*CM XXXVI*) for its particular merit, calling it “a technical & emotional masterpiece” (*sic*, 29 July [1915], *CL Intelix* 2734).

### III – Affinities

The language that Yeats uses in his criticism of Joyce’s poems reflects the language of his defence of poetry. Literary value and patriotism were two things he kept separate, though he also hoped that Irish poets would seek their subject matter in Irish folklore and myth, not just to find inspiration but to discover there “new methods of expressing our selves” (*CL I*, 119). In poetry he searched for “copious streams of beauty”, as he wrote to Katharine Tynan, praising her along with the older William Allingham and Samuel Ferguson for having done “the largest quantity of fine work” (*CL I*, 450-51); calling her a successor to these poets from a previous generation, Yeats opined she and

others like AE and Lionel Johnson stood out for their “deliberate art” and their “preoccupation with spiritual passions and memories” (Yeats, *Book of Irish Verse*, xxviii). Poetry is not driven by ideas, but by passion. And passion was for him a particularly Irish trait to be used in the struggle against dull, English rationalism and the deadening middle-class mind (see *Life I*, 53). Joyce, too, at a moment when he was engrossed in *Stephen Hero* talked about “individual passion as the motive power of everything—art and philosophy included” (*Letters II*, 81).

The affinity between Joyce and Yeats, in other words, has a reasonable grounding in their conceptions of art and artist. One of the reasons why literary history has not previously understood that affinity is because its views on Joyce’s aesthetics have been filtered through Joyce’s (and Stephen’s) theory of the epiphany and its correlative in the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas—*integritas*, *consonantia* and *claritas*. The absence of a visible connection between Joyce’s poetry—and with Stephen’s villanelle in *Portrait* and the vampire poem in the “Proteus” chapter of *Ulysses*—and the theory has often been noted, however, and thus an aesthetic framework for *Chamber Music* appears as good as non-existent. Yet perhaps not a framework but at least a sphere of influence can be reconstructed through an interest that Joyce shared with Yeats in the musical qualities of poetic rhythm, which as I have shown are essential ingredients in Joyce’s and Yeats’s poetic style.

Unlike for most of the later work, no documentary evidence exists that reveals Joyce’s composition methods for *Chamber Music* and the verse that preceded it. All of the

extant manuscripts are fair copies which show no trace of development. Joyce's fiction, however, provides an account of the moment of inspiration when Stephen writes his vampire poem on Sandymount Strand, which may give us some clue about Joyce's methods in composing his lyrics.<sup>13</sup> Stephen's composition of the vampire poem in "Proteus" happens almost imperceptibly; the moment itself is protean, almost imperceptible, a bit like Shelley's fading coal. "He comes, pale vampire, through storm his eyes, his bat sails bloodying the sea, mouth to her mouth's kiss" (*U* 3.397-98). The words are not differentiated from the rest of Stephen's interior monologue; they are wrapped up in Stephen's ruminations on the moon, sea and tide, on fertility, sleep and death, and the reader does not quite know they are part of an emerging poem, until he encounters them again complete, and revised, in a later chapter:

*On swift sail flaming*

*From storm and south*

*He comes, pale vampire,*

*Mouth to my mouth. (U 7.522-25)*

Stephen himself suddenly realizes that his train of thought has given way to inspiration, and he knows he must stop the flow before the words escape him: "Here. Put a pin in that chap, will you?"; he must pin them down on paper: "My tablets" (*U* 3.399). But he knows he does not have any paper, because after twice reminding himself he has again

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<sup>13</sup> Using the fiction to interpret the biography is normally not methodologically sound (though an all-too frequent practice). I feel strengthened, however, by the fact that the process Joyce describes in "Proteus" is one that is similar in many respects to the writing practices of real-life poets as they are gleaned from their manuscripts.

forgotten to take book request slips from the desk at the National Library. His mind quickly returning to the emergent poem, he tries to compose the poem in his head, weighing off meaning and rhythm against each other: "Mouth to her kiss. No. Must be two of em. Glue em well. Mouth to her mouth's kiss" (*U* 3.399-400). As he thinks this, the narrator's voice takes over and describes Stephen's silent mouthing of the poem to himself: "His lips lipped and mouthed fleshless lips of air: mouth to her moomb. Oomb, allwombing tomb. His mouth moulded issuing breath, unspeached: ooeeehah: roar of cataractic planets, globed, blazing, roaring wayawayawayawayaway" (*U* 3.401-403). This physical exercise during which Stephen moulds the sounds as the words flow through his mind is again interrupted by the need for paper, at which point he decides to tear off the bottom of Deasy's letter to the press which he had obtained that morning on the foot and mouth disease and begins the scribble down the text using a rock for surface.

As Stephen finishes writing ("ending" [*U* 3.408]), his interior stream of reflections resumes, so it seems, and his mind turns to "delta of Cassiopeia", an allusion to Shakespeare seeing his own initial in the night sky when returning home from Ann Hathaway's cottage. The allusion to the constellation and the image of the stars shining bright in the darkness that precedes it is prompted by the question: "Why not endless till the farthest star?" (*U* 3.409-10). But what prompts the question? The narrator's "ending" just before it, obviously, but that is not a word in Stephen's mind, unless "endless" and "the farthest star" are, too, part of the poem. Which would make sense, for it links with the "roar of cataractic planets" and the near-synonyms that suggests the

flying “away” of the planets through the universe. These too then are words belonging to the poem—perhaps not all literally; perhaps there is an associative mind-game that Joyce plays between character and narrator, but it seems an attractive proposition to argue that the composition of Stephen’s poem did not end on the line “mouth to her mouth’s kiss”. The same then can be said of the sentence “Endless, would it be mine, form of my form?” (*U* 3.414), whose genitive structure echoes the poem’s “mouth to her mouth”, as well as of “Our souls, shamed by our sins, cling to us yet more, a woman to her lover clinging, the more the more” (*U* 3. 421-23), rhymed words which point back to the rapturous embrace of the vampire and his lover. And why not of “She trusts me, her hand gentle, the longlashed eyes” (*U* 3.424)? Who is this but the woman in the poem? The “poem” as we find it in “Aeolus”, in other words, only gives us the first quatrain, where in fact composition—if not on paper, at least in Stephen’s mind—continues much further in the text, perhaps all the way to “Touch me. Soft eyes. Soft soft soft hand. I am lonely here. O, touch me soon, now” (*U* 3. 433-36), after which he crams the note and pencil back into his pocket.

Stephen’s method of voicelessly “mouthing” his poem into existence is reminiscent of the way Yeats used to intone his lines while rhythmically beating the rhythm with his arm during composition, a habit that Ezra Pound famously mocked in *The Cantos* (see *Canto LXXXIII*). Joyce is not likely to have known about this. Nonetheless, Joyce alludes in “Proteus” to Yeats’s ideas about speaking verse. As Stephen’s reflections shift from Berkeley’s imponderables of the senses to reading the sings of printed words, he wonders: “Who ever anywhere will read these written words”. The reading he has in



mind, however, is not a silent reading, but a recitation, bearing in mind perhaps what AE had said about literature being “but recorded speech” (Yeats, *Explorations*, 95):

“Somewhere to someone in your flutiest voice” (*U* 3.414-16). The sing-songy voice of Stephen’s imagined reader brings to mind Yeats’s method of chanting, which Joyce first experienced, and was impressed by, when he attended the performance of *The Countess Kathleen* on 8 May 1899 at the Antient Concert Rooms, where the two songs, “Impetuous Heart” and “Who Goes with Fergus”, that Yeats had specially added to the play were recited by Florence Farr and Anna Mathers accompanied on a small harp (Schuchard, 35-36, 39).

In the years that followed, Yeats, with the help of the actress Florence Farr, expanded their experiment and began trying out various instruments— the harp, the organ, the piano—but they had been consistently dissatisfied by the “two competing tunes” that they produced, i.e., the tune of the instrument and the tune and rhythm of the verse (*Essays and Introductions*, 16). They wanted instead an instrument that remained subservient to the verse (see Schuchard, 52-53). In February 1901, following an illustrated lecture at Clifford’s Inn in Fleet Street on the 26<sup>th</sup>, Arthur Dolmetsch offered to help them. He first tried a number of stringed instruments, before (in keeping with Yeats’s symbolic efforts) designing his famed psaltery, first one with 12 strings (one for each note in Farr’s voice) and then a design with 26 strings to cover better the full range of her speaking voice. The instrument was made out of satinwood, with inlaid strips of ivory over the bars, fine steel and twisted brass for the strings, and carved in the body of the sound box was a Yeatsian rose (Schuchard, 56).

On 15 May of the same year Yeats gave again at Clifford's Inn the first of several lectures on "Speaking to the Psalter" that would lead to his famous essay in *ideas of Good and Evil*. William Archer, writing in the *Morning Leader*, summarized the main points as follows:

[F]irst, that poetry ought to be recited in such a way as [to] throw into relief its metrical structure; and, second, that the musician ought not to be allowed to smother it, so to speak, in melody, perverting its natural phrasing and accent. A third point was emphasised by Mr. Dolmetsch: namely that the system of 'speaking through music' (known in Germany as melodrame) led to horrible dissonances and was wholly inartistic. (quoted in Schuchard, 61).

The main point for Yeats was that in recitation a poem should be chanted, not sung, as this would better bring out the musical notes of the natural voice.<sup>14</sup> (For this reason, also, he did not like to work with professional singers, whom he felt tended to slip back into song. ) Unlike singing, chanting involved the fixing of the pitch, but still allowed for sufficient variety in modulation, but the crux was that he believed that his method chanting corresponded to the ancient method of the Greek chorus from which the Irish bards derived their singing. His main aim was to re-introduce the art of verse speaking in the theatre.

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<sup>14</sup> Yeats had been pleased to learn about an experiment conducted by Thomas MacDonagh, who discovered that tone-deaf poets compose their song through chanting rather than through song. Yeats, famously tone-deaf, recognized his own method of composition in this (Schuchard, 84-86).

When and where precisely Joyce learned about Yeats's theories is not known. He certainly did not attend Yeats's first lecture at Clifford's Inn, but he may well have read the reports on the lecture—or on any of the other lectures that Yeats's delivered during those early years—in the press; or he may have come across the printed version of "Speaking to the Psalter" in Henry Newbolt's *Monthly Review* (May 1902). He shows an affinity, though, with Yeats's theories, when he has Stephen Dedalus hold forth on the notion of there being a rhythmical gesture, "an art of gesture" which does not express emphasis but rhythm (*SH* 184). Yeats, furthermore, liked the way Joyce had read his own poems to him, which undoubtedly added to his sense of what the younger poet could achieve, but also indicated that Joyce shared his rhythmical sensibilities. Gogarty remembered how Joyce, when reciting John Dowland's "Weep no more, sad fountains", would "caress the end line of the last stanza" (quoted in Scholes and Kain, 215). Colum describes him as reading his own poems with "deliberateness and precision" in a voice that was "naturally beautiful" and "that had been cultivated for singing", the effect "more personal" than AE's and Yeats's chanting (Colum, *Our Friend*, 22); elsewhere he spoke of Joyce singing his lyrics ("With James Joyce", 52). While C.P. Curran quite categorically stated that Joyce chanted his favourite Yeats lyrics, "Who Goes with Fergus" and "Impetuous Heart", as well as another poem "Had I the Heavens' Embroidered Cloths", "in the manner of Florence Farr" (Curran, 41). At the basis of the practice lies a principle. Joyce, like Yeats, emphasized the lyric modulation of poetry, defining it (according to Colum) as "[t]he simple liberation of a rhythm" (*Our Friend*, 23),

or, as he has Stephen Dedalus argue: “Verse to be read according to its rhythm should be read according to the stresses” (*SH* 25).

Joyce, as is well known, contacted Arnold Dolmetsch in June 1904 to inquire about purchasing a lute, a whim which came to nothing. Dolmetsch informed him that such an instrument would be difficult to play and also quite expensive, which was sufficient to put him off. One need not assume that Joyce heard of Dolmetsch, who was an authority on early music, through Yeats, but it is a clear sign of how Joyce’s interest in “old music such as I like” (*Letters II* 219) intersects with Yeats’s musical experiments. Joyce’s reading from the period shows he was exploring certain aspects of musical history. In the “Commonplace notebook”, the same notebook begun in 1903-04 in which he recorded his notes on Aristotle, he wrote down a short list with the names of two musical societies, the Percy Society and the Musical Antiquarian Society, and a number of titles of books on musical history (see Crispi). The aims of the Percy Society, active between 1840 and 1852, were the compilation and publication of early English poetry, ballads and songs and popular music from the Middle Ages; the Musical Antiquarian Society, active between 1846 and 1848, promoted the rediscovery of work by English Elizabethan composers. The books he refers to are Sir John Hawkins’ *A General History of the Science and Practice of Music* (1776) and Charles Burney’s *A General History of Music, from the earliest ages to the present period* (1776), the earliest, though quite distinct histories of music in English, and Henry Davey’s *History of English Music* (1895); also listed are John Wilby, an English madrigal composer (1574-1638), whose *Works* had been published in two volumes by James Turle and G.W. Budd for the Musical

Antiquarian Society in 1841 and 1846; and Edward F. Rimbault's *Bibliotheca Madrigaliana: A Bibliographical Account of the Musical and Poetical Works published in England during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (1847), whose purpose it was to bring together an exhaustive list of publications from "a period when 'part-singing' was in its zenith" (Rimbault, v).

Joyce's researches in Rimbault are particularly telling (he particularly cites pp. 11 and 28, where Rimbault lists *The First Set* (1598) and *Second set of Madrigales* published by John Wilbye), as the madrigal, typically vocal music accompanied on the viol or the lute, is generally considered to be the earliest form of chamber music. The influence of this interest on the development of Stephen is noticeable, but small. In *A Portrait* Stephen is said to turn his attention from the "spectral words of Aristotle or Aquinas" to the "dainty songs of the Elizabethans" whenever he was "weary" of his search for definitions of "the essence of beauty" in their writing. In doing so, he would imagine himself standing, "in the vesture of a doubting monk", under a window listening to the "grave and mocking music of lutenists" (P 176). The grotesque, but serious nature of the music is not a characteristic of their lowliness; it is as once light-hearted and beautiful, its playful harmonies and multiple voices unusual to a classical taste, but in essence executed with great skill (see Fellowes, 144, 209). In *Ulysses*, Stephen speaks passionately—though his talk is half lost on old Bloom—about "the lutenist Dowland" and how "he was contemplating purchasing [a lute] from Mr Arnold Dolmetsch" (U 16.1763-65).

More immediately relevant is Joyce's poetry, where we find among the early verse his own madrigal-style lyric using traditional music and pastoral merriment for its theme:

Come out to where the youth is met  
 Under the moon, beside the sea,  
 And leave your weapon and your net,  
 Your loom and your embroidery.  
 Bring back the pleasantness of days  
 And crystal moonlight on the shore.  
 In old times on the ivory floor.

The weapons and the looms are mute  
 And feet are hurrying by the sea.  
 I hear the viol and the flute,  
 The sackbut and the psaltery. (*PSW* 94)

Another poem, of a slightly earlier date of which only a fragment survives, touches similarly on the musical theme, though here the lulling sounds of the instruments metaphorically match the poet's state of mind:

Like viol strings  
     Through the wane  
 Of the pale year  
 Lulleth me here

With its strain.  
 My soul is faint  
 At the bell's plaint,  
 Ringing deep;  
 I think upon (*JJA* 1:2)

Particularly “Come out to where youth is met” is reminiscent of Yeats, though it is not warranted to assume that Joyce makes a direct allusion to Yeats’s famous instrument. What the poem suggests, however, is a convergence of interests in reviving traditional forms of the lyric and recitation through the genre of the pastoral.

To Joyce, traditional music was as important as Aristotle’s aesthetics and Aquinas’ writings on beauty. The *Commonplace Notebook* provides plenty of evidence and rich pickings to support this view, for the notes on aesthetics that for a long time have been available through Herbert Gorman’s biography now appear alongside a substantial and varied set of other notes, sources and quotations,<sup>15</sup> which (apart from the materials already mentioned) include Ben Jonson, W.B. Yeats, Edmund Gosse (from “Guenevere”, a poem in *On Viol and Flute* (1973), which opens “When the opening nights were hot | (Peach and apple and apricot”),<sup>16</sup> Thomas Percy’s *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, a number of further titles of books on ancient Greek music and Arabic music, next to books on aesthetics and on Aristotle’s poetics, and a transcription of an unidentified

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<sup>15</sup> For details, see Crispi, who reminds us that Gorman, who obviously had had access to this notebook, described some of its contents. See in particular Gorman, 89-90, 94-96.

<sup>16</sup> Crispi incorrectly identifies Gosse’s collection as the 1890 edition published by Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co. in London. “Guenevere”, however, appears in the 1873 edition published by Henry S. King & Co. in London, which has different contents.

Persian poem, with musical notation and two different scansion labels “Rhythm of the Verse” and “Rhythm of the Music”. One significant page in the notebook is where Joyce placed Jonson side by side with Aristotle; a song by Jonson beginning “I was not wearier where I lay” (which is also quoted by Stephen in *A Portrait* [P 176]) is followed by a string of quotations or paraphrases from Aristotle’s “Psychology”.<sup>17</sup> Gorman speculates that Joyce’s reading of Ben Jonson alongside of Aristotle was mostly part of an eccentric intellectual curiosity, and that he may have been attracted by the playwright’s “toughness” and “Aristotelian exactness” in the way he developed characterization and motivation or by the lyrics that are such an important ingredient in the plays (Gorman, 94). While this is true, it is also clear that Joyce was considering developing an aesthetic theory that was modelled on lyrical, musical and rhythmical effects. As he notes in the Commonplace Notebook:

Rhythm seems to be the first or <necessary> formal relation of part to part in any whole or of a whole to its part or parts, or of any part to the whole of which it is a part..... Parts constitute a whole so far as they have a common end.  
(NLI 36,639/2/a, f.[12v]; Gorman, 98; *OCPW* 103)

Rhythm, in other words, is what ties a poem (but possibly also, when considered more abstractly a drama or a novel) together and creates an aesthetic unity. However, as Joyce turned from poetry to writing prose, the dramatic elements of Aristotle’s poetics become more crucial to him.

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<sup>17</sup> Joyce’s source, as originally identified by Jacques Aubert, is J. Barthémély-Saint-Hilaire’s French translation of Aristotle’s *De Anima: Psychologie d’Aristote. Traité de l’âme* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique Ladrangé, 1846). See Crispi.



#### IV-- Traditions

For Joyce, the musicality of *Chamber Music* was thus more important than any purely “literary” intent. The lyrical quality of the old music, and the lyrical effect of Joyce’s own poetry, as well as those of Jonson, the Elizabethan and Jacobean lyric or the early Yeats where Joyce found the roots of his own lyrics, were to him part of the verbal tradition of the well-tuned word, half-way in between poetry and music—a tradition which also included the (Irish) ballad tradition.

One final question remains and that is to what tradition *Chamber Music* belongs. It is decidedly not a Modernist work, but that does not mean it is not “modern” according to the standards and practices of the time. The fine balance between originality and imitation is one of the volume’s deliberate effects, and as such fits in with plenty of contemporary poetry that, as it moved away from the nineteenth century, became conscious of past literary traditions and strove to engage with these traditions to reinvigorate modern poetry.

Could *Chamber Music* also be called Irish?<sup>18</sup> This might be another matter altogether. In any case, with both Pound and Yeats as champions, Joyce’s poetry was being pulled in two directions and, in its material book form, *Chamber Music* too is sufficiently ambiguous: it is neither completely Irish, nor totally English. Thomas Kettle, reviewing for the *Freeman’s Journal*, noted the absence in *Chamber Music* of any allusion to “folklore, folk dialect, or even the national feeling” (quoted in Deming, I, 37), which

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<sup>18</sup> Among Joyce’s academic critics, the question does not seem to arise; only Garratt hesitatingly places *Chamber Music* within the Irish Literary Movement (Garratt, 84-85).

many perceived to be the core ingredients of Revivalist writing. Yet although the volume's avoids explicit Celtic motifs, its association with Irish poetry was never concealed. Arthur Symons, who brokered publication with Elkin Mathews on Yeats's instigation, played down the Irish connection. He applauded *Chamber Music* as "a book which cannot fail to attract notice from everyone capable of knowing poetry when he sees it" and praised it as being "of the most genuine lyric quality of a any new work I have read for many years", but he made sure to emphasize that, despite receiving support from Yeats, Joyce was "*not* in the Celtic Movement" (letter from 9 October 1906, quoted in Deming, I, 36). Symons obviously knew about "The Day of the Rabblement", but it is unlikely that his knowledge of Joyce's alleged attack, now six years in the past, was first hand.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, Symons had distanced himself from the predominantly "Celtic" flavour of the Rhymers' Club, of which he had been a member; as editor of Philip Massinger and *A Pageant of Elizabethan Poetry* (1906), he also had an interest in the Renaissance, and undoubtedly found Joyce's verse, "almost Elizabethan in their freshness" (quoted in Deming, I, 36), more interesting than any echo of the Celtic Twilight. Nevertheless, that he thought it germane to mention to the publisher that Joyce was not of the movement is significant in itself. Over the years Mathews had built up a reputation as a publisher supporting the Revival (now as well as since the days

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<sup>19</sup> Symons's surprise that Yeats admires Joyce, while the young poet openly attacked the Revival speaks more clearly from the complete letter when Deming's ellipsis are filled in: "He is *not* in the Celtic Movement, and though Yeats admits his ability he is rather against him because Joyce has attacked the movement. Oddly enough it is to him that Yeats refers in the preface to 'The Tables of the Law' in that very series!" (Symons, 183). Yeats in his preface to *The Tables of the Law and the Adoration of the Magi* (1904) mentions that he had met a young man in Dublin who liked this book more than anything else he had published.

with his partner John Lane), not in the least for having published Yeats's *The Wind among the Reeds* and Synge's *The Shadow of the Glen and Riders to the Sea* (1905), but also work by Alfred Perceval Graves, Katharine Tynan and others.<sup>20</sup>

Symons' plug was a careful one, simultaneously associating and distancing Joyce from the Revival, for he knew he was playing on Mathews' double strength as a publisher of poetry and a publisher of Irish poetry. Mathews had cornered a niche market by putting out cheap poetry books—cheap both in production cost and retail price (1 shilling)—in two different series, the Garland Series and the Vigo Cabinet. He had done so in response to there being a slender market for poetry books. Other commercial publishers managed to make small returns by charging higher prices (usually 5 shillings), but higher prices meant a smaller number of buyers, and a smaller number of buyers meant that publishers would invest only in established poets with a safe return. By reducing costs and offering his books cheaply to the public, Mathews circumvented a difficult the market and attracted a wider range of poets. Additionally, he was able to take advantage of the fact also that there were only few Dublin publishers (see Nelson, 32-35, 184-88).

*Chamber Music*, which appeared in a green cloth binding and gilt lettering priced at 1s 3d, nicely fitted in with Mathews list, which included such titles as R. W. Dixon's *Songs and Odes* (1896) and John Masefield's *Ballads* (1902), W.W. Gibson's *Urlyn the Harper*,

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<sup>20</sup> Symons' anonymous review of *Chamber Music* in *The Nation* repeats his disassociation of Joyce from the Revival: "I advise everyone who cares for poetry to buy *Chamber Music*, by James Joyce a young Irishman who is in no Irish movement, literary or national, and has not even anything obviously Celtic in his manner" (quoted in Deming, I, 38).

*and Other Song* (1902), John Todhunter's *Sounds and Sweet Airs* (1905), and several others titles that not only represent a light lyrical mode (which covered all of Mathews' list) but explicitly relates the lyric genre to music, as Joyce did. The Irishman Todhunter, for example, who was a member of the Rhymers' Club with Yeats, described his collection in a manner reminiscent of *Chamber Music*: "These poems are not meant to be paraphrases in verse of the music that suggested them. They are merely a record of a listener's moods, phantasies inspired by the emotional spirit of each composition" (Todhunter, 5). Joyce's poems were not paraphrases either, but they were inspired, not by classical compositions, but by a sense of "old music such as I like".

Elkin Mathews understood the genre very well and did his best to highlight the musical elements. He proposed to publish *Chamber Music* in the "Pott 8vo" format, the smallest of the octavo sizes (about 15cm tall), a dainty format that allows the reader easily to carry the book about: "Pott 8vo. is a very pretty size. If you know the Golden Treasury series you will be able to judge the size at once" (quoted in Nelson, 116). Mathews design, in other words, not only implied a "look" but also an audience: F.T. Palgrave's *Golden Treasury of the Best Songs and Lyrical Poems in the English Language* (first published in 1861) catered to a Victorian, genteel audience and was rather prescriptive in its aesthetics.<sup>21</sup> As it happened, *Chamber Music* appeared in a slightly larger format, and in boards, with an ornamental title page depicting decorated pillars, draped with musical scores, and an "open pianner", as Joyce called it, which was actually a clavichord

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<sup>21</sup> A fifth volume covering "contemporary" poetry was added by Laurence Binyon to the four-volume set as late as 1926. The volume now included Alice Meynell, John Masefield, Robert Bridges and W.B. Yeats, among others, but still no Eliot or Pound.

(*Letters II* 219). The classical look of the design enhanced by all possible means the musical context. And with publishers' foresight his contract with Joyce stipulated that the musical rights would be split equally between author and publisher.

When the volume was in production, however, Mathews, going against Symons, placed an advance notice of *Chamber Music* in the *Book Monthly*, relating how the book had come to him. In this account, he explicitly linked Joyce with Yeats (Nelson, 118), no doubt a strategy motivated by commerce, but also by affinity, It was a strategy that did not remain entirely unnoticed. Padraic Colum writes that the poems belonged more to "a young man's musician's" world than they did to the imagination of a poet, and their Elizabethan and Jacobean influence was unmistakable; he records Joyce as explaining that the "full-blooded gaiety" of the Elizabethan songs contrasts sharply with the "mournfulness of Irish melodies", yet Colum maintains that it is impossible to say the poems are totally without a trace of Irish influence (Colum, *Our Friend*, 83-84). In the very least, a select number of poems had a particularly Irish afterlife, when some of them were during Joyce's lifetime included in various Irish anthologies.<sup>22</sup>

#### V – Expressions

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<sup>22</sup> Alfred Perceval Graves included "Strings in the Earth and Air" (CM I) in *The Book of Irish Poetry* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, n.d.) under the rubric "Spiritual and Philosophical Poetry"; *The Dublin Book of Irish Verse, 1728-1909*, edited by John Cooke (Dublin: Hodges, Figgis & Co.; London: Henry Frowde, Oxford University Press, 1909) reprinted "Strings in the Earth and Air" (CM I), "Bid adieu, adieu, adieu" (CM XI) and "What counsel has the hooded moon" (CM XII); "At that Hour when all Things Have Repose" (CM III) appeared in Katharine Tynan's popular *The Wild Harp: A Selection from Irish Poetry* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1913), and also in *A Golden Treasury of Irish Verse*, edited by Lennox Robinson (London: Macmillan, 1925).

Such afterlife is certainly due to the integrity of the poetry. That literary history through the processes of canonization has thought otherwise is largely the result of an accident, which is called Modernism. The simplicity of form, however, is not something that Joyce relinquished in his prose writing. The Epiphanies most clearly form a transition between the lyric ideals of *Chamber Music* and the symbolical effectiveness of the prose in *Dubliners* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, neither of which is devoid of lyricism. The emotional charge that lies at the basis of the Epiphanies and the artist's need to capture the moment effectively in language remains the essential ingredient of Joyce's oeuvre, and comes to the fore again most explicitly in *Pomes Penyeach*. Joyce's return to a pure lyric form in the late 1920s has been seen as a contradiction, going against his development towards ever more sophisticated forms of writing, coming as it did when *Work in Progress* was in full swing. However, simplicity of form very much remains at the heart of *Finnegans Wake*, and also of *Ulysses*, despite the technical *bravura* of these works.

Joyce's repudiation of his early volume of poems was also a repudiation of an old stance, or at least the inauguration of a new stance. In the same letter to Stanislaus from February 1907 in which he called *Chamber Music* "a young man's book", he also wrote:

I have certain ideas I would like to give form to: not as a doctrine but as the continuation of the expression of myself which I now see I began in *Chamber Music*. These ideas or instincts or intuitions or impulses may be purely personal. I

have no wish to codify myself as anarchist or socialist or reactionary. (*Letters II*, 217).

What “expression of himself” there is in *Chamber Music* is perhaps a mystery; it seems difficult to match with the idea that it was a “young man’s book” as well as with what he said two years later about the female figure in his poems to Nora: that she was not created from experience, but from his reading, “a girl fashioned into a curious grave beauty by the culture of generations before her” (*Letters II*, 237). Perhaps he was still at this time trying to see himself as a Yeatsian poet. The expression of personality—or as Joyce had written about James Clarence Mangan, “the presence of an imaginative personality reflecting the light of imaginative beauty” (*OCPW* 57)—was very much a Yeatsian notion, for whom “the nobleness of the arts” lies in the “perfection of personality” (*E&I* 255). Nonetheless, the self-expression that he was foreboding in his letter was perhaps also a self-discovery that would lead from autobiography to auto-creation—the formation of the smithy of his soul. *Stephen Hero*, said to be half-finished in March 1906, was now moving towards its turning point; on 8 September 1907 he told Stanislaus he was going to begin rewriting it as soon as he had finished “The Dead”.

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