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Musical Epiphanies in Joyce's *Dubliners*

"Jim should have stuck to music  
instead of bothering with writing"  
Nora Barnacle<sup>1</sup>

Joyce's wife Nora could not have suggested such a thing if her husband hadn't been a proficient musician. His childhood had been imbued with music, his father being a tenor who took part in amateur performances whilst his mother sang and played the piano as did young James during his school life. Joyce's interest continued during university when he also started composing music himself, performing, and assiduously attending music halls and theatres. Later, during his stay in Italy, while writing *Dubliners*, he also took singing lessons and did not exclude the possibility of becoming a professional singer<sup>2</sup>. Many of his own musical experiences appear in his short stories as memories of particular events – as in *A Mother* – or, mostly, in the form of specific references to actual songs, and crucial moments in *Dubliners* are frequently accompanied or triggered off by music of some kind. Frequency and complexity of musical allusions increase in Joyce's later writing – we need only to mention the *Sirens* episode in *Ulysses* or the often inextricable combination of language and music in *Finnegans Wake* which contains roughly three or four times as many musical allusions than the rest of Joyce's works put together<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in R. Ellman, *James Joyce*, New York and London, Oxford University Press, 1977 [1959], p. 174.

<sup>2</sup> Most biographical information is taken from Ellman, but see also R. Haas, »Music in *Dubliners*«, *Colby Quarterly*, Volume 28, no.1, March 1992, pp. 19-33, cf. pp. 20-23.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Z. Bowen, *Musical Allusions in the Works of James Joyce*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1974, p. 3. This book, together with M. Hodgart and M. Worthington, *Song in the Works of James Joyce*, Philadelphia, Columbia Univer-

Compared to Joyce's mature novels the role of music in *Dubliners* has attracted less critical attention, at times limited to the simple inventory of the texts of the songs which appear in the stories, others instead, such as in the work by Robert Haas, identifying the different functions which musical allusions take on in the individual tales. Some critics have also concentrated on single narratives highlighting the significance of music and musicality for the overall effect as David Mosley for *The Dead* or Bettina Knapp for *Eveline*<sup>4</sup>. There is no doubt that music finds its way into this collection of short stories in diverse ways and that each story may be seen as self-contained and autonomous. But, as generations of critics have pointed out, there is a 'unity' in *Dubliners*<sup>5</sup>: recurring themes, images, indeed songs, characters who appear in the earlier stories who seem to reappear as the collection moves on – as Joyce said himself – from childhood to adolescence to mature life<sup>6</sup>, and in the same way musical allusions can be seen to evolve, intensify, reappear as variations of previous occurrences, reaching a final, complex apotheosis in *The Dead*.

Musical elements appear in every form: from street singing and playing, to music hall performances, theatre and opera, reminiscing of a lost musical past, background melodies. Bowen speaks of a collection where «music becomes increasingly significant both structurally and thematically»<sup>7</sup> and Haas, more specifically, sees it acting on three planes: in the definition of the real world in which the characters move, acting as a framework to their lives, in moving the characters beyond their daily lives into a world of romance,

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sity Press, 1959, remain the more comprehensive studies of Joyce's use of music.

<sup>4</sup> See D. Mosley, «Music and Language in Joyce's «The Dead»», *Analectica Husserliana*, XLI, 1994, pp. 191-9, B. Knapp, «Eveline», *An Auditory Experience*, *Etudes Irlandaises*, N. 10, Nouvelle Serie, 1985, pp. 67-76.

<sup>5</sup> See for instance the seminal essay by B. Ghiselin, «The Unity of *Dubliners*», *A Quarterly of New Literature*, XVI, Summer 1956, pp. 75-88.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Letter to Stanislaus Joyce, September 1905, in *Dubliners and A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Casebook Series, edited by M. Beja, London, Macmillan, 1979, p. 37.

<sup>7</sup> Z. Bowen, p. 11.

and finally in allowing characters to reveal themselves<sup>8</sup>. But, as Allan Hepburn notes, «Music also figures in *Dubliners* as a substitute for theories of language or as a surplus of meaning that lies beyond language»<sup>9</sup>. We might add that this «surplus of meaning» may also be the result of the intrinsic self-reflexivity of music as opposed to the referentiality of language<sup>10</sup> which can provoke in listeners and performers unexpected and inexpressible effects. The fifteen epiphanies, as the author defined them, which make up *Dubliners*, contain minor or major references to some kind of musical element; a choice is made here proposing one of the many possible threads linking one tale to the other.

The third of the childhood sequence *Araby*, recalls a song in its very title, *I'll sing Thee Songs of Araby* based on the romantic epic by Thomas Moore, Irish poet and composer (Gabriel Conroy, in the final story wonders about quoting him in his musings concerning his after dinner speech) with music by Frederick Clay and words by W. G. Willis. Though an Araby bazaar actually took place in Dublin in May 1894 and it is very likely that it is this which gave rise to the story, nevertheless Joyce knew the song and was to use it in *Finnegans Wake*. The first musical reference then lies in the unmentioned lyrics of the song which display a courtly love motif – the same motif which is central to the story. The song opens:

I'll sing thee songs of Araby  
And tales of fair Cashmere  
Wild tales to cheat thee of a sigh  
Or charm thee to a tear.

The imagery and the tone of the song are in line with Joyce's narrative where the young protagonist, infatuated with the sister of his friend Mangon (a name recalling the Irish romantic poet James

<sup>8</sup> Cf. R. Haas, pp. 19-20.

<sup>9</sup> A. Hepburn, *Noise, Music, Voice*, *Dubliners*, in S. Knowles (ed.), *Bronze by Gold, The Music of Joyce*, New York and London, Garland Publishing Inc., 1999, pp. 189-212, p. 190.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. D. Mosley, p. 199.

Clarence Mangan whom Joyce admired and who was interested in the mythic qualities of the Middle East) hears from her of the oriental sounding bazaar and promises to go and bring her back a present. The exotic name conjures up images of mystery and fascination, much like the dream of Persia for the boy in the first story, *The Sisters*, but when he actually gets there he is met with squalor and disappointment and in his final epiphany his «eyes burned with anguish and anger»<sup>11</sup>. Musical allusions appear here rather slight, beginning with what we may call the cryptic reference in the title, but, like a short sequence of notes which appear timidly towards the beginning of a symphony only to acquire their full potential in the *fnale*, we are given a few fleeting suggestions, such as the boy's reference to a coachman shaking «music from the buckled harness» (p. 21) conveying, as Haas notes, latent romance on dull reality<sup>12</sup>, we hear street singers singing ballads concerning the troubles of Ireland which for the boy «converged in a single sensation of life» (p. 22) and it is through his own singing in the gloomy rooms of his uncle and aunt's house that, according to Hepburn, he «liberate(s) himself from the competing demands of romance and family [...] to sort out conflicting emotions for which he has no words, or to conquer unnamable fears [...] Music ambiguously promises a realm of freedom or liberation»<sup>13</sup>; «ambiguously» though, just as the magical sounding Araby which promised adventure but ended up in disenchantment.

The main image adopted by the boy to describe his infatuation is a musical one:

I did not know whether I would ever speak to her or not or, if I spoke to her, how I could tell her of my confused adoration. But my body was like a harp and her words and gestures were like fingers running upon the wires. (p. 22)

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<sup>11</sup> J. Joyce, *Dubliners*, Norton Critical Edition, New York and London, 2006, p. 26. All quotations are from this edition and will henceforth be indicated in the text.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. R. Haas, p. 25.

<sup>13</sup> A. Hepburn, p. 192.

As a harp, the boy sees himself as something passive, to be acted upon, to be played so that only a musician can make him come to life, almost as a representation in the boy's mind of a fate beyond his control. As we know the final epiphany is one of recognition of futility and frustration – as with most *Dubliners* – and the boy's dreams cave in against the frivolousness of the talk and the atmosphere of the fair. Though still scanty, the musical suggestions point to the mere illusion of deliverance and romance and the story ends with the isolation of the young protagonist in darkness and silence, an ending which will become all too familiar to Joyce's characters. Hepburn observes: «the boy at the end of *Araby* intuits that sounds deceive him» – and links this conclusion with another tale – «whereas Mr Duffy in the later story exempts himself from sound in order to remain in self-imposed isolation. In both stories, music figures a misunderstanding between a male and a female character»<sup>14</sup>. Apparently modeled on Joyce's brother Stanislaus<sup>15</sup>, but exhibiting traits of James himself – his looks, his attempted translations of Hauptmann, his job in the bank – the protagonist of *A Painful Case*, James Duffy, lives an obsessively structured, almost monastic life, compulsively following rigid routines, «at a little distance from his body» and «abhorred anything which betokened physical or mental disorder» (p. 90)<sup>16</sup>. Only music appears to provide him with some contact with the outside world, as he spends some evenings appreciating his landlady's piano playing and admits his liking for Mozart which leads him to frequent operas or concerts. It is at one of these concerts that he meets Mrs Sinico (a name he significantly borrowed from his own Italian singing teacher in Trieste) whose husband is away at sea and whose daughter gives music lessons. The two engage in a pla-

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<sup>14</sup> A. Hepburn, p. 194.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. R. Ellman, p. 138.

<sup>16</sup> Much has been made of the character of Duffy, from complex psychological analyses of his manias and phobias to interpretations of him as a repressed homosexual, as in the interesting article «The Open Closet in *Dubliners*: James Duffy's Painful Case», by Roberta Jackson, in *James Joyce Journal* 37, 1/2, Fall 1999/Winter 2000, pp. 83-97. Clearly all this goes beyond the purpose of this paper.

tonic but intense relationship, attending musical performances together or simply walking and talking and it is precisely music which intensifies their union: «the dark discreet room, their isolation, the music that still vibrated in their ears united them» (p. 93) and for the first time his cold, mental life seems to give way to emotion. But on the first attempt at modest physical contact – Mrs Sinico pressing his hand against her cheek – Duffy interrupts the relationship, feeling he has been profoundly misunderstood. Four years later he reads in the paper that she has died, knocked down by a train and learns – to his disgust – that she had picked up a drinking habit: «He saw the squalid tract of her vice, miserable and malodorous. His soul's companion!» (p. 97), and yet recognizes his own responsibility<sup>17</sup>.

Concerts were seen as «dissipations» by Duffy because of the rigid demands he makes on himself and yet he is forced to acknowledge that they strengthen the bond with the woman, he «treats music as an Apollonian abstraction removed from the body» whereas Mrs Sinico «treats music as an opportunity for conversation and communion, if not physical touch»<sup>18</sup>. This opposition sinks into the rhetoric of the characters where the narrator gives the woman a circular, musical prose in contrast to the descriptions of the saturnine Duffy<sup>19</sup>. That music which has acted as a catalyst to the relationship fades into noises and sounds in Duffy's final epiphany. On realizing she has now become a memory he recognizes, in terms that remind us of the protagonist of *The Dead*, that «his life would be lonely too, until he, too, died, ceased to exist, became a memory, if anyone remembered him» (p. 98). Walking in the park he initially seems to hear her voice and twice defines himself as «an outcast from life's feast»(p. 98); the imaginary sound of her voice melts into the drone of the passing train which to him reiterates in a repeated, pounding beat, the syllables of her name. If the end of the relationship is also in some way the end of music (he had stopped attending the

<sup>17</sup> «Poor Mrs. Sinico» is remembered in the pages of *Ulysses*.

<sup>18</sup> A. Hepburn, p. 195.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. J. W. Weaver, *Joyce's Music and Noise*, Gainesville, University Press of Florida, 1998, p. 19.

concerts after breaking off the relationship for fear of meeting her), traces of it remain, turning into rhythmic noise, but slowly even that disappears and her voice no longer touches his ear. Alone and silent, he too, acknowledges his isolation.

Music, as we said, seemed the only solace for Duffy, but he considered it a dissipation, something which indirectly led to physical contact and he is forced to repudiate it: «music thus counterbalances the actions of the story, not as a condition for art to aspire to as the fulfillment of human passion, but, paradoxically, as the negation of that passion»<sup>20</sup>. Once again musical allusions appear to offer an escape and a route to self realization, but finally only contribute to making the acknowledgment of its impossibility the more painful. In the final scene, the passing train and its sound combine in «one image, music, death and the final departure of earthly happiness»<sup>21</sup>. The use of death as a musical epiphany, for Weaver, «connects *A Painful Case* with *The Dead* and prepares for Gabriel's aloneness as well»<sup>22</sup>. Weaver, like others, believes that Duffy is a younger version of Conroy, or, more precisely, a «bachelor form of Gabriel Conroy»<sup>23</sup> corroborating the hypothesis of a continuity within *Dubliners* where characters can be traced in their evolution. As previously mentioned I find the assumption of «returning characters» justified in a possible reading of this text and possibly substantiated even through examination of musical allusions. Bowen, for instance, affirms that the similarities between Eveline, in the eponymous story, and Maria in *Clay*, do not necessarily imply that Maria is Eveline thirty or forty years later but that the parallels cannot be ignored and are emphasized by the common connection to the operetta with music by the Irish composer Michael Balfe, *The Bohemian Girl*. In his view «all the action is taking place at the same time [...] and all the frustrations and epiphanies are really about the same thing»<sup>24</sup>. *The Dead*, of course,

<sup>20</sup> A. Hepburn, p. 196.

<sup>21</sup> R. Haas, p. 27

<sup>22</sup> J. W. Weaver, p. 21.

<sup>23</sup> J. W. Weaver, p. 19.

<sup>24</sup> Z. Bowen, pp. 11-12.

ties together many themes seen in previous stories and undoubtedly Gabriel Conroy displays traits and anxieties manifested by Duffy – especially towards the end – though seeing him merely as a married version of the protagonist of *A Painful Case* may not do justice to his more multifaceted personality.

Just as *The Dead* represents the culmination and synthesis of *Dubliners*, so the use of music and musical citations are most pervasive, incorporating and enlarging upon motifs hinted at in previous tales with multiple variations, much like a *grand finale* played in a symphony orchestra. The title itself, as in the case of *Araby*, echoes a song once again by Thomas Moore, *O, Ye Dead*, a favourite of Joyce's which he asked his brother Stanislaus to send to him whilst living in Trieste in 1905<sup>25</sup> and the tone and words of which return in the story such as a dialogue between the living and the dead – the latter called «shadows» – or the introduction of the theme of the cold and the snow. From the very title then to the final epiphany – itself unleashed by a song – every page of this short narrative reverberates with some kind of music<sup>26</sup>.

The Morkan sisters and their niece who host the party, sing, teach singing, play and teach musical instruments and the event itself brims over with dances and performances of piano pieces and songs. As the male protagonist makes his entry with his glasses on to protect his delicate eyes and his continental galoshes to shelter him from the snow, piano music is playing and Gabriel receives one of the many rebukes he will receive during the course of the evening, all from women. He fails to find the right tone with Lily, the housemaid, who lets him in and «still discomposed by the girl's bitter and sudden retort» (p. 155) rehearses the customary speech he will recite at the dinner table. Gabriel's fear of inadequacy is made clear from the start «his whole speech was a mistake from first to last, an utter failure» (p. 155), he ruminates as the waltzing music finishes. There

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. R. Ellman, p. 253.

<sup>26</sup> This was particularly evident in the faithful rendering of the story in the 1987 film by John Huston, *The Dead*.



is hardly a moment's silence: dances played by one of the guests, Mrs. Daly, quadrilles, lancers, display pieces. Music functions as entertainment and at the same emphasis is laid on its commercial aspect, the hostesses make money from it; symbolically the «closed square piano served also as a sideboard for viands» (p. 158). One of the guests, Mr. Bartell D'Arcy is a tenor about whom all Dublin is raving: it is he who will initiate the long discussion with the other visitors on the merits of singers of the present and of the past and it is he who will finally consent to singing at the end, reawakening Gabriel's wife Gretta's memories, transforming her mood and determining her husband's realization. Though we are told that Gabriel's mother had no musical talent, Gabriel claims he likes music, but one with melody, in fact he finds the piano piece played by Mary Jane, the younger niece in the Morkan household, «difficult» and beyond possible appreciation on the part of the audience. Old Aunt Julia also performs, with a strong clear voice, in spite of her age, and is greeted with much praise and encouragement. If old Julia displays the soul of the artist, this follows the general thesis: «the contrast between Mary Jane and Aunt Julia shown in their music is, of course, part of the central theme of the story, the overwhelming greatness of the dead past»<sup>27</sup>. The song she sings is *Arrayed for the Bridal*, based on the opera *I Puritani* by Bellini and requires a soprano voice of great virtuosity; though admired by the listeners for Gabriel – as he later declares – it reveals impending death:

[...] he had caught that haggard look upon her face for a moment when she was singing *Arrayed for the Bridal*. Soon perhaps he would be sitting in that same drawing room, dressed in black, his silk hat on his knees. The blinds would be drawn down and aunt Kate would be sitting beside him, crying and blowing her nose and telling him how Julia had died. (p. 193)

Like Duffy, Conroy is an «outcast from life's feast», a sensation accentuated by his reaction to this musical performance. Even when taking part in the lancers dance, he finds himself coupled with the

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<sup>27</sup> R. Haas, p. 30.

nationalist Molly Ivors who admonishes him for his contributions to the pro-British newspaper *Daily Express*. Gabriel blushes, is confused and once again incapable of finding the right tone to justify his modest apolitical book reviews. Her invitation to visit the west of Ireland as opposed to the continent for his holidays provokes his strong reaction «I am sick of my own country, sick of it» (p. 165). Whilst the singing and dancing progress Gabriel finds himself in remote corners, embrasures of windows, secluded and separated, wishing to escape. In running over his speech he remembers a phrase he had written in his review on Browning: «one feels that one is listening to a thoughttormented music» (p. 167) which he transforms, when he comes to giving that speech, into «we are living in a skeptical and, if I may use the phrase, a thoughttormented age» (p. 177). That «thoughttormented» music may be seen to reemerge, changed once more, in Gabriel's words as «distant music» when trying to give a title to his idealized, imagined, vision of a painting depicting his wife listening to music towards the end, but this idealization will return to being more than «thoughttormenting» when he hears Gretta's story.

The animated talk about opera during the dinner takes place without Gabriel's intervention. Precise references to singers and musical compositions of the past are compared to present ones with Mr. Browne – a symbol here of Irish tradition – boldly declaring the absolute superiority of the older generations over the new ones and Mr. Bartell D'Arcy claiming that – at least on the continent – tenors such as Caruso surely equal their predecessors. Within the conversation Joyce, through Mr. Browne, inserts a reference to the song *Let Me Like a Soldier Fall*, an aria in William Vincent Wallace's *Mari-tana* in which Don Caesar is given the opportunity to die gloriously, like a soldier. The unmentioned lyrics of the song go:

Yes! Let me like a soldier fall  
 Upon some open plain,  
 The breast expanding for the ball.  
 To blot out every stain.

Apart from being part of the general death metaphor – as is the

further mention of *Lucrezia Borgia* – the words clearly point to the glorification of chivalrous death, like the death of Michael Furey who will be resurrected in the memory of Gretta and died with honour, a young man who indeed «like a soldier fell» and will provoke envy in the mind of Gabriel: «better pass boldly into that other world, in the full glory of some passion, than fade and wither dismally with age» (p. 194).

Gabriel eats quietly whilst this exchange is taking place, breaking his silence only to deliver his constructed, dissembled speech praising the «three Graces», hostesses of the party. The second part of the story closes with the loud, traditional post-commendation song «For they are jolly gay fellows» in which the entire assemblage takes part; after the *crescendo* of musical allusions this serves as the final chorus after which the sound lowers, the music diminishes, acquiring a more somber and sober tone and the third part of the story opens with only a vague strumming of the piano in the background. As the guests leave, in apparent good spirits Gabriel tells the story of Johnny, his grandfather's horse which, being used to walking in circles to drive a mill, adopts the same conduct on the occasion of an official military review by stopping at a statue and proceeding to walk round and round it meaninglessly and repetitively embarrassing its owner. Gabriel's imitation of this pointless circular movement amuses his audience whilst he fails to see its ironic resemblance to his own state – he will realize his own painful condition only moments later.

From the darkness he gazes up and recognizes a woman's figure, his wife, listening to something; the music is gentler, «few chords struck on the piano, and a few notes of a man's voice singing» (p. 182). It is here that he imagines she is a symbol of something and that if he were a painter he would call the picture he sees «distant music». He identifies the Irish tonality and the uncertainty of the singer, the tenor Bartell D'Arcy, but the piano and the singing stop abruptly and there will be no more music but only the sound of the snow tapping on the window panes, the nearly imperceptible

sound of falling molten wax from the candles and the pounding of Gabriel's heart. Gretta who had had a relatively marginal role in the story – referred to mostly as «Gabriel's wife – now occupies the centre of the stage and the centre of Gabriel's mind. The song has affected her, «there was colour in her cheeks and [...] her eyes were shining» and, by watching her, has had an effect on him, «a sudden tide of joy went leaping out of his heart» (p. 184). The song as we know is *The Lass of Aughrim*, an old ballad possibly of Scottish origin, which tells of an old village in the west of Ireland where a young girl, seduced and abandoned by a lord, tries to get admittance into his home with a baby in her arms. The biographical significance of this song for James Joyce is well known – he had learned it from his wife Nora who came from Galway<sup>28</sup>. The abandoned girl in the song who pleads admission in the rain clearly anticipates the scene of the sick Michael Furey singing to Gretta during their youth, and we learn that Michael Furey himself had sung that very song to her. Music at this point serves as an emblem of romance both for Gabriel and for Michael's love for Gretta<sup>29</sup>, a love that is doomed since the young boy dies and the older Gabriel realizes he is incapable of true passion. But before this realization Gabriel's desire is rekindled by the image of his wife, becoming almost irresistible lust; he wishes to forget «the years of their dull existence and remember only their moments of ecstasy» describing «the first touch of her body» as «musical and strange» (p. 189). On reaching the hotel, after leaving the party, however, he is faced with the last and cruelest rebuff: in the ghostly light from the street lamp blandly illuminating their room Gretta confesses her youthful relationship with the young Michael, a boy with a good voice who was going to study music, but who had died «for her» by singing *The Lass of Aughrim* to her under the rain in spite of his ill health. In Gabriel Conroy's much quoted last epiphany he becomes aware of his own incapacity to feel such love

<sup>28</sup> The references to Joyce's own biography in *The Dead* are well documented, including the incident with the dead Michael Furey who recalls Nora's dead lover Michael Bodkin. See R. Ellman, pp. 152-163.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. R. Haas, p. 32.

and of the slow passage of all the living into the world of the dead.

Gabriel has proved to have little insight into music yet his memorable final considerations hovering between free indirect discourse and interior monologue display a kind of conflation between music and language. With the accompaniment of the falling snow flakes he concludes:

His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end upon all the living and the dead. (p. 194)

producing the extensively commented upon last sentence of the story, and of *Dubliners*, with the alliterative 's' resonance, the chiasmus, the rhythm, producing sounds which «exhibit a relation to one another which seems extraneous to the meaning of the terms themselves»<sup>30</sup>, poetical, it has been said, or musical.

Music, eclectically used in *The Dead*, has served in this final recognition, once again initially as a promise, as an awakening, as a catalyst for an imaginary and hoped for change in trajectory, but as in the case of the boy in *Araby* and of Duffy, but more so, we may add, it has brought about nothing other than the confirmation of man's solitude and finitude. Gabriel realizes that the time has come for him to set out on his journey westward – a journey generally associated with death and a course in direct opposition to the real or imaginary journeys eastwards proposed in the earlier stories as flights towards hope and freedom. Music has awakened memory for Gretta (another Irishman, Oscar Wilde was to say that music is «the art most nigh to tears and memory»<sup>31</sup>) who acts as an intermediary between music and Gabriel for whom it still remains distant. Conroy is a man of words and the difference between husband and wife can be seen, as Mosley notes, as «an allegory of the semantic disparity between language and music» one referential the other self-reflexive, as we noted in the beginning, which in turn could be extended to a

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<sup>30</sup> D. Mosley, p. 198.

<sup>31</sup> Oscar Wilde, *The Burden of Itys*, (1881).

«disparity between experience and emotion» representing, according to the critic, the true subject of Gabriel's final thoughts acknowledging his inability to escape his logocentrism and gain «access to Gretta's realm of musicality, self-reflexivity and emotion»<sup>32</sup>.

This must not lead to thinking that the use of music made by Joyce can be reduced to a simple gendered issue, and though both Mrs. Sinico and Gretta in these last two stories display a profounder and more comprehensive receptiveness when confronted with musical experience compared to their male counterparts, the function of music in *Dubliners* goes far beyond a mere distinction between male and female response. Joyce, as mentioned before, was a music connoisseur, intrigued by and convinced of its power<sup>33</sup> and his employment of musical allusions in this collection embraces a number of divers ambits. The choice of these three stories as well as providing a possible continuity among the male characters, also suggests a build up of musical references which tie in with the title of this volume «Hate for Music?», where hate is intended also as recognition of music's immense power. In the introduction we read the words of Tolstoy claiming that music promises and deceives without ever reaching a conclusion; he had also famously asserted that it was «the shorthand of emotion» and we have seen it acting in these stories as an essential catalyst for the turning point of the tales which, nevertheless, leaves the protagonists in an existential void: they do not hate music as such, but being an integral part of their lives it acts within them and brings into full light inadequacy and defeat, the hemiplegia mentioned by Joyce which lies at the heart of Dublin and its inhabitants. If music never «concludes» as Tolstoy said, so these stories in many ways resist closure and resist univocal interpretations to the point of having also been perceived as examples of a proto-postmodern sensibility<sup>34</sup>. The dilapidated characters,

<sup>32</sup> Cf. D. Mosley, p. 199.

<sup>33</sup> He sang to his mother as he had done to his brother George as they lay dying, Ellman reports (p. 141).

<sup>34</sup> For an interpretation of Joyce as «postmodernist» see for instance: K. J. H. Dettmar, *The Illicit Joyce of Postmodernism. Reading against the Grain*, Wisconsin,

though described with «scrupulous meanness» as Joyce intended<sup>35</sup>, fit in with the decentered and destructured subjects which will inhabit postmodernist fiction, where fragmentation and eclecticism abound and – much like the suddenly «interrupted» music in the final part of *The Dead* – most stories seem interrupted rather than reaching a «conclusive» ending, whether consolatory or not. Nonetheless, however we choose to interpret or classify this collection of short stories, music, thematically or structurally, is never fortuitous or peripheral but knowingly and, indeed, scrupulously, incorporated in the texture of the narrative.