

Joyce's Noises

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Molly Bloom is lying restlessly in bed, her head next to her husband's feet, counting the days until she will next be with her lover, Blazes Boylan: "Thursday Friday one Saturday two Sunday three O Lord I cant wait till Monday" (Joyce, *U* 18.594-95).¹ The next item we see on the page—one can hardly call it a word—is a bizarre string of letters: "frseeeeeeeefronnnng" (*U* 18.596). All in lower case, it begins the fourth of the so-called sentences of the final episode of *Ulysses*. Its challenge to our reading of the episode is multiple: it is unpronounceable, at least according to the norms of the English language; it is meaningless; and it is hardly conceivable as part of Molly's thought processes in the way that everything in the chapter up to this point has been. Joyce does not leave us mystified for long, however: the verbalized thoughts that follow this strange irruption explain what it is doing here: "train somewhere whistling the strength those engines have in them like big giants" (*U* 18.596-97). Distant train whistles may more usually evoke associations of travel, separation, nostalgia, or longing, but Molly's response is clearly colored by her active desire for the man she has just called, with obvious relish, a "savage brute" (*U* 18.594).

Are we to take this series of letters as representing the actual sound of a train whistle—perhaps on two notes, higher then lower—as it penetrates the bedroom of 7 Eccles Street? (The train is too distant, I think, for the double tone to be a product of the Doppler effect.) Would it be legitimate for an audio version of the book to substitute for the reader's voice at this point a recording of the real sound? Surely not: although one could argue that the succession of *e*'s and the subsequent *o* do mimic the higher and lower notes of the whistle, and that the prolonged nasal of the second syllable imitates a change in timbre in the second note, Joyce's choice of letters can hardly be said to aim at exact representation. The spelling is connected in some way with Molly's own perception of the sound. Is this how she would write it down if she felt the need to do so? (As I've argued elsewhere, there are many suggestions in the episode that the apparent flow of uncontrolled thoughts is constantly mediated by the constraints and characteristics of writing).² This supposition is strengthened by the sudden change of tack in

¹ All references to Joyce's *Ulysses* (abbreviated as *U*) will be in the standard form of episode and line number(s); see Joyce 1986.

² See Attridge 1988:ch. 8, espec. 97-105.

Molly's ruminations: ". . . like big giants and the water rolling all over and out of them all sides like the end of Loves old sweeetsonnnng" (*U* 18.596-98).

Given the obvious association between the imagined steam locomotive and Boylan's thrusting masculinity, we may well misread "like the end of . . ."; then, as so often in "Penelope," we have to correct our interpretation, as we realize that the comparison Molly is making is between the sound of the train whistle and one of the songs she'll be performing on the forthcoming concert tour with Boylan (and has probably been singing to him earlier). (Molly herself, of course, is in no doubt about what is like what; it's only the reader who may find a grosser meaning in "end." The result of Joyce's removal of punctuation in this episode is not, as is often thought, a more accurate rendition of mental processes, but a game of constant guessing and reassessment that has little to do with Molly's subjectivity.) The "onnnng" of the train whistle, it turns out, is there less as an attempt at mimesis than as an indication of the already forming connection with the "onnnng" of the song. (That the word of the song in question is "song" is, of course, another Joycean joke.) The implied downward change in pitch in the move from *e* to *o* is what links this sound in Molly's aural imagination to the singing of "sweet song."

The strength of the association between sound and song is made clear when the train whistle penetrates Molly's thoughts a second time. She is recalling some of her youthful experiences with the opposite sex when her reminiscences are interrupted by the same sequence of letters—now with even more *e*'s (no fewer than twenty) and an upper case *F* at the start (perhaps the train is closer?):

Frseeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeefrong that train again weeping tone once in the dear deaead days
beyondre call close my eyes breath my lips forward kiss sad look eyes open piano ere oer the
world the mists began I hate that istsbeg comes loves sweet soooooooooong (*U* 18.874-77).

Again, her thoughts move straight from train-whistle to song, with "weeping tone" providing a bridge.

The third and last time Molly hears the train, she once again associates it with "Love's Old Sweet Song," though this time there is a third sound blended with it. Molly has just said to herself: "I feel some wind in me better go easy not wake him up" (*U* 18.903), and she seems to be successful in this endeavor not to disturb Leopold's sleep: "yes hold them like that a bit on my side piano quietly sweeeee theres that train far away pianissimo eeeee one more tsong" (*U* 18.907-08). Here Joyce gives us an extraordinary triple sonic pun: "sweeee" and "eeee" are at once the train in the distance, much quieter now; the farts, released as softly as possible; and the final words of the song (with the "t" of "sweet" postponed so that it becomes the first sound in "tsong," to maximize the musical potential of the vowel). The words "piano" and "pianissimo" apply to all three. Anal references have, in fact, been building up in the passage even before Molly articulates her desire to break wind—perhaps as the unconscious effect of an internal build-up, perhaps another of Joyce's games with the reader—and the connection between singing and farting has already been intimated. For instance, Molly's choice of words to describe her singing of "Love's Old Sweet Song" after the previous train whistle—"Ill let that out full" (*U* 18.878)—already seems suggestive; she then describes her rival singers as

“sparrowfarts” who “know as much as my backside” (*U* 18.879-80). And the song she decides to sing as an encore is “Winds that blow from the south” (*U* 18.899).

Ulysses, like *Finnegans Wake* after it, takes great delight in fusing high and low, the polite and the taboo, the revered and the looked-down-upon. Language, that mark of civilization, proves to be a medium well suited to blurring the distinctions on which civilization is supposed to rest. Train-whistle, fart, concert song: these very different sounds, each with a different set of cultural associations, are hardly compatible with one another; yet Joyce manages to unite them, and to do so without any sense of hierarchy or conflict. At the same time, the representational indeterminacy of the sounds of *language*, its *inadequacy* as a mode of direct imitation, is signaled: these different sounds are, in the end, represented by nothing more than a row of *e*'s.³

In *Peculiar Language* I made a distinction between two types of onomatopoeia, which I called “lexical” and “nonlexical”—not a watertight distinction, to be sure, but one that I think serves a useful purpose (1988:136, 148). In lexical onomatopoeia, the more common variety, the words of the language are deployed in such a way as to suggest a more than usually strong link between the sounds of speech and the non-speech sounds (or other physical features of the world) being represented. In nonlexical onomatopoeia, the rarer form that is the subject of this essay, the letters and sounds of the language are used for a similar purpose, but without the formation of words. Writers have been traditionally free to exploit the fact that in a language with a phonetic alphabet individual letters can represent sounds without conveying meanings, and the usual strict limits placed on neologisms do not apply when no actual lexical items are involved. (One of the best-known examples in literary history is perhaps the earliest: Aristophanes' frogs going “Brekekek koax koax.”) The group of letters representing the first train-whistle is thus a clear example of nonlexical onomatopoeia. “Sweeee,” on the other hand, lies somewhere between the two types, although its use of the lexical potential of the language is unusual in that it's not the *meaning* of the word that is relevant (unless one wants to make an argument about the sweetness of Molly's singing) but rather the fact of its being sung.

I hope I may be allowed to summarize briefly part of the argument about nonlexical onomatopoeia I put forward in *Peculiar Language*. There I focused on the other significant fart in *Ulysses*—Bloom's burgundy-induced release at the end of “Sirens” (an event of which Molly's fart in “Penelope” is a kind of unwitting echo or partner). I listed eight factors that complicate the simple picture of unmediated imitation one might be tempted to apply to nonlexical onomatopoeia, the first four being limits to the *directness* of the link between linguistic and represented sound, and the second four being limits to its *precision* (see 1988:138-47):

- (1) All onomatopoeia relies on the reader's knowledge of the system of language in which the text is written; in the case of nonlexical onomatopoeia, the knowledge required is of the phonological system of the spoken language and the graphological system of the written language. (In *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce would

³ Elsewhere, a row of *e*'s can indicate the dragging of a stick on the ground (*U* 1.629), a creaking door (*U* 7.50; *U* 11.965), and a turning doorhandle (*U* 15.2694). See also Attridge 1988:144 on these *e*'s.

enrich the possibilities of nonlexical onomatopoeia by bringing several languages into play simultaneously.) Even though the sequence “frs” at the beginning of the train-whistle contradicts the phonological norms of English, unpronounceability is as much part of the system as pronounceability; and if Joyce wants us to struggle to produce some sort of noise based on our knowledge of the sounds indicated by each letter, he also wants us to be aware of the limits of this kind of representation.

(2) Very few sequences of letters are without any lexical associations at all. We’ve seen that the “ong” of the train-whistle is linked to the “-ong” of “song,” for example—though it’s noticeable that Joyce avoids the usual phonemic clusters linked in English with whistling and related sounds, notably the letters “wh”—“whisper,” “wheeze,” “whoosh,” “whine,” and so on. Like unpronounceability, the avoidance of conventional associations depends on knowledge of the language’s systematic properties.

(3) There are conventions attached to the notion of onomatopoeia itself: for instance, that repeated letters indicate prolonged sound. A particular convention operating in the train-whistle—or perhaps it’s an extrapolation from other conventions—is that “nnnng” is an extended “ng” sound, rather than an extended “n” sound followed by “ng” (though there is nothing, finally, to stop one from reading it in this way). If we read “deaead” as “d—e—d”, with an extended central monophthong (rather than some complicated diphthong or triphthong) we are aware as we do so that the letter-by-letter spelling suggests something else. Nonlexical onomatopoeia is as much a matter of *interpretation* as any other use of signs or system of notation.

(4) Although we tend to think in terms of sound imitating sound, nonlexical onomatopoeia often has a *visual* component as well. The string of *e*’s we have been discussing hits the eye as anomalous even before we have attempted to read them, and the idea of prolongation is already present to us. It’s perhaps also relevant that the beginnings of the two tones are signaled by letters that poke up above the sequence, and the end by one that drops below it.

(5) Interpretation of nonlexical onomatopoeia is highly context-dependent. As I’ve already noted, the example I began with conveys very little by itself. Given on its own to a group unfamiliar with *Ulysses*, I don’t imagine many people would identify it as a train-whistle. The sense we may have of the vividness of an onomatopoeic representation is seldom a result of the precision of its imitation.

(6) Appreciation of any type of onomatopoeia also presupposes familiarity with the sound itself. Someone who has not heard, directly or in a recording or simulation, the whistle of a train is not going to bring it into being on the basis of Joyce’s string of letters.

(7) The existence of these two preconditions—an identifying context and prior familiarity with the sound—is still not enough to produce exact imitation. The sounds of language are not, after all, widely found outside language. Had Joyce given us Molly’s response to the train whistle without the string of letters, we

would not have had any difficulty in imagining the sound she hears—but of course the interweaving of train-whistle and song, and later fart, would have been impossible.

(8) Finally, the tendency in reading nonlexical onomatopoeia is to produce in the voice an imitation of the sound, rather than a literal reading (literal in the most literal sense) of what is on the page. Its avoidance of recognized lexical items, therefore, acts for many readers as an instruction: make a sound like a train whistle. Recordings of Molly's monologue invariably do the same, often with impressive histrionic inventiveness. The danger of this way of treating nonlexical onomatopoeia is that some of Joyce's subtleties in choosing and arranging letters may be lost in a bravura performance.

Nonlexical onomatopoeia, then, might appear to operate as a puncturing of the mediated, conventional surface of the language by something close to the actual occurrence of an extralinguistic sound, but all the factors I have listed combine to make this a rare event. Joyce, far from trying to escape from the complications that prevent direct imitation of sounds in language, exploited them brilliantly, just as he exploited most of the conventions governing the genre of the novel.

Joyce was slow to develop an interest in the possibilities of nonlexical onomatopoeia. It is not a feature of the scrupulously mean style of *Dubliners*, and I've found only one example in the collection. In "Ivy Day in the Committee Room," Mr. Henchy puts two bottles of stout on the hob, saying "Did you ever see this little trick?" (Joyce 1993a:101). A few minutes later, one of the corks flies out, and Joyce represents the sound by "*Pok!*," with uppercase P, italics, and exclamation mark all working to magnify the dramatic effect—yet at the same time, he makes the drama seem absurd by qualifying the sound with the adjective "apologetic" (a belittling in keeping with the whole story, of course). As an instance of onomatopoeia, this is pretty conventional; Joyce has no interest in playing with the processes of sonic imitation. That this minor sound, and the trick it clinches, should be given such salience in this gathering serves to underline the bankruptness of Dublin party politics at this historical juncture.

A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man also makes very limited use of nonlexical onomatopoeia, but there is a new consciousness of some of the complications involved in its employment. Curiously, the most obvious example in the book is a close relative of the uncorking sound in "Ivy Day," as if Joyce was revisiting this moment with a fuller sense of the device's potential. On the playing fields of Clongowes Wood College, young Stephen hears the sound of balls hitting cricket-bats: "They said: pick, pack, pock, puck: like drops of water in a fountain slowly falling in the brimming bowl" (Joyce 1993b:34). As in the case of Molly's perception of the train-whistle, we get not so much the sound of the bats as the *heard* sound, already transformed in its reception. For Stephen, the bats speak, and it is perhaps his visualization of the words they utter that produces the sequence of recognizable English words "pick," "pack," "pock," and "puck." (The stout bottles, by contrast, say "*Pok*," the spelling of which immediately signals that we are dealing with the representation of a sound, not a word.) It might be possible to make some claims for the meanings evoked by each apparent word in this series, although there is such an array of unrelated associations that no strong semantic pattern

emerges, and it seems justifiable to class this instance as an example of nonlexical onomatopoeia, in which what is important are the plosives with which the items begin and end and the modification in the vowels across the series, rather than the fact that we can find all these strings of letters in an English dictionary.

Familiarity with the sound Stephen hears is undoubtedly helpful here: American readers may have a weaker impression of imitative accuracy in representing the sounds of a cricket match than many British readers. Stephen's own interest in the sounds he hears and the words used to represent sounds—elsewhere he comments on what he takes to be the onomatopoeic quality of “suck” and “kiss”—leads him to relate the cricket-bat noises to water drops. It's a somewhat puzzling association: is Stephen thinking of the slight differences made to the sound by the effect of wind or unevenness in the size of the drops? Joyce will later develop this technique of sequencing vowels; in the “Sirens” episode of *Ulysses*, for instance, Bloom recalls the sound of Molly peeing in a chamber pot, with highly self-conscious onomatopoeic play: “Diddleiddle addleaddle ooddleooddle” (11.984).

It is in *Ulysses* that Joyce allows full rein to his onomatopoeic impulses. The novel is studded with textbook examples of lexical onomatopoeia, and it may seem that these would be the places where his creativity is most evident. After all, the resources of nonlexical onomatopoeia are extremely limited compared to its lexical counterpart, which can draw on all the riches of meaning and emotion embodied in the language. Even though, as I've suggested, lexical associations are often operative in nonlexical onomatopoeia, these can never be anything like as powerful as those of actual words. However, where Joyce is interested in noise—in sounds that suggest neither music nor language—nonlexical onomatopoeia has a distinct advantage. Combinations of letters, and hence of sounds, forbidden by the norms of the language become available to the writer, and new possibilities for mimesis—and for the problematization of mimesis—offer themselves.

The main characters in *Ulysses* all have an interest in onomatopoeia. In Molly's case, as we've seen, it remains unclear how much of the onomatopoeic exorbitance triggered by the train-whistle can be ascribed to her; but it's certainly the case that her experience as a singer has given her a sensitivity to the sounds of words, and that she relates external sounds to the words of the songs she performs. Stephen, the aspiring poet, also has a professional interest in the sounds of words, an interest made especially vivid in the “Proteus” episode. He provides a verbal equivalent for his footsteps on Sandymount strand reminiscent of the cricket bats heard by his younger self in *Portrait*, in this case shifting from lexical to nonlexical onomatopoeia: “Crush, crack, crick, crick” (*U* 3.19).⁴ His memory of the post office door shut in his face in Paris prompts a cartoon sequence involving noisy violence: “Shoot him to bloody bits with a bang shotgun, bits man spattered walls all brass buttons. Bits all khrrrrklak in place clack back” (*U* 3.187-90). And the process of composition—the short gothic stanza that begins to form itself in Stephen's mind in this chapter—is depicted by Joyce as having much to do with sounds and their suggestiveness, and rather less to do with the subtleties of sense and syntax. Joyce uses a mixture of lexical and nonlexical onomatopoeia to convey the creative process:

⁴ The *OED* (Second Edition) doesn't recognize “crick” as an onomatopoeic word, though it does list “crick-crack” as “the representation of a repeated sharp sound.”

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 3.401-04).

This is not necessarily a recommendation of Stephen's method of poetic creation—the poem that results, which we finally get to read in the “Aeolus” episode (U 7.522-25), turns out to be a weak imitation of Douglas Hyde. There can be no doubting Stephen's pleasure in the production of suggestive sound by mouth and breath, however, and it's a pleasure that's not difficult to share. Later, he hears in the incoming tide a “fourworded wavespeech: seesoo, hrss, rsseeiss, ooos” (U 3.456-57). Here Stephen's extravagant attempt to represent different qualities of sound by means of nonlexical onomatopoeia (avoiding traditional water-words) is only a partial success: the reader can imagine a repeated fourfold sequence of watery noises but can hardly read it directly off this sequence of letters. This, I would suggest, is part of the point.

Bloom, too, is interested in the noises made by nonhuman entities: in the newspaper printing works he listens to the presses:

Sllt. The nethermost deck of the first machine jogged forward its flyboard with sllt the first batch of quirefolded papers. Sllt. Almost human the way it sllt to call attention. Doing its level best to speak. That door too sllt creaking, asking to be shut. Everything speaks in its own way. Sllt. (U 7.174-77).

And in “Sirens” he meditates on the distinction between sound as music and as noise:

Sea, wind, leaves, thunder, waters, cows lowing, the cattlemarket, cocks, hens don't crow, snakes hissss. There's music everywhere. Ruttledge's door: ee creaking. No, that's noise. (U 11.963-65)

Both these passages refer back to a sentence near the beginning of “Aeolus”: “The door of Ruttledge's office whispered: ee: cree” (U 7.50). What we probably took there to be the narrator's nonlexical onomatopoeia turns out to have been Bloom's, who, in both these latter passages, completes the word implied earlier, “cree” becoming “creaking.” (Once again, the boundary between lexical and nonlexical is tested.)

But there are far more examples of nonlexical onomatopoeia in *Ulysses* than can be explained by the characters' explicit interest in the device. Among the other noises represented by this means are the following:

pebbles dislodged by a rat: “Rtststr! A rattle of pebbles.... An obese grey rat toddled along the side of the crypt, moving the pebbles” (U 6.970-74).

dental floss twanged on teeth: “He took a reel of dental floss from his waistcoat pocket and, breaking off a piece, twanged it smartly between two and two of his resonant unwashed teeth. ---Bingbang, bangbang” (U 7.371-74).

a yawn: “Davy Byrne smiledyawnednodded all in one:
----Iiiiiichaaaaaach!” (U 8.969-70).

a rap with a doorknocker: “One rapped on a door, one tapped with a knock, did he knock Paul de
Kock with a loud proud knocker with a cock carracarracarra cock. Cockcock” (U 11.986-88).

a fire brigade answering a call: “Pflaap! Pflaap! Blaze on. There she goes. Brigade! ...
Pflaaaap!” (U 14.1569-71).

And at least five types of bell:

a mass bell: “And at the same instant perhaps a priest round the corner is elevating it. Dringdring!
And two streets off another locking it into a pyx. Dringadring!” (U 3.120-22).

church bells: “A creak and a dark whirr in the air high up. The bells of George’s church. They
told the hour: loud dark iron.

Heigho! Heigho!
Heigho! Heigho!
Heigho! Heigho!” (U 4.544-48).

a handbell: “The lacquey lifted his handbell and shook it:
----Barang!” (U 10.649-50).

bicycle bells:

“THE BELLS
Haltyaltyaltyall” (U 15.180-81).

and bells on bracelets:

“THE BRACELETS
Heigho! Heigho!” (U 15.4085-86).

Animal cries may demand this type of onomatopoeia, the most famous one being Bloom’s cat’s
escalating cry: “Mkgnao! . . . Mrkgnao! . . . Mrkrgrnao!” (U 4.16, 25, 32). We also hear a
different sound from the cat: “Gurrhr! she cried, running to lap” (U 4.38). There is a noisy hen
in the “Cyclops” episode:

Ga Ga Gara. Klook Klook Klook. Black Liz is our hen. She lays eggs for us. When she lays her
egg she is so glad. Gara. Klook Klook Klook. Then comes good uncle Leo. He puts his hand
under black Liz and takes her fresh egg. Ga ga ga ga Gara. Klook Klook Klook (U 12.846-49; see
also 15.3710).

In “Circe” the gulls’ cry is rendered as “Kaw kave kankury kake” (*U* 15.686) and the horse’s neigh as “Hohohohohohoh! Hohohohome!” (*U* 15.4878-79).

The use of playtext format in “Circe” allows even objects to speak (as the cricket-bats had in *Portrait*), and they sometimes employ nonlexical forms to do so: examples include the already-mentioned bracelets and bells (*U* 15.181 and 4086); a trouserbutton: “Bip!” (*U* 15.3441); and a pianola: “Baraabum!” (*U* 15.4107). Especially colorful are the flying kisses:

THE KISSES

(*warbling*) Leo! (*twittering*) Icky licky micky sticky for Leo! (*cooing*) Coo coocoo! Yummyyum, Womwom! (*warbling*) Big comebig! Pirouette! Leopopold! (*twittering*) Leeolee! (*warbling*) O Leo! (15.1272-74).

Human characters also produce nonlexical utterances in the book, though in these cases they can be understood to be playing Joycean games themselves, and I shall not discuss them here.⁵ Davy Byrne’s yawn is an exception, as an involuntary human sound on a par with the book’s farts.⁶

It is true that some of these examples can, like Molly’s train-whistle, Stephen’s wavesounds, and Bloom’s creaking door, be understood as reflecting a mental response to a sound rather than the sound itself. It might be Stephen who converts the imagined sound of a massbell to “Dringdring! . . . Dringadring,” and Bloom who hears the sound of St. George’s bells as repeated “Heigho”s.⁷ We can’t be sure whether the “Rtststr!” of the rat’s movement among the pebbles comes to us via Bloom’s perception or not; what is curious is that the cause of the noise—unknown to Bloom when he first hears it—seems to be alluded to in the string of letters themselves. In most cases, however, the noise punctuates the progression of the text without any indication that its conversion into the letters of the English alphabet is the responsibility of a character. The “sllt” of the printing press might seem to be Bloom’s representation at first, but as it interrupts his thoughts at unpredictable intervals it gives the strong impression of coming from outside his mental world.

Joyce follows no consistent rules in constructing his nonlexical interruptions, not even self-determined rules. Sometimes the letters he uses suggest the sound they are meant to convey quite directly: “barang,” for instance, seems to me an apt equivalent for the sound of a handbell rung with a double strike: two syllables with the same vowel to represent the two sounds at the same pitch, beginning with a voiced plosive and ending with a nasal as the sound dies away. (It also of course suggests the conventional onomatopoeia “bang” and contains the word “rang.”)

⁵ For an insightful account of some of the implications of these human sounds in *Ulysses* (as well as non-human sounds), see Connor 1994.

⁶ Another sound that might be involuntary is that which is made when Bella Cohen’s “*sowcunt barks*”: “Fbhracht!” (*U* 15.3489-90). As Connor (1994:136) points out, this is an anomaly in “Circe,” as it is the only place where an object or organ is not presented as a character with its own speech prefix.

⁷ I’ve included “Heigho” among the examples of nonlexical onomatopoeia as it is not given by the *OED* as a word; however, the *OED* does recognize “Heigh-ho,” so it is a marginal case.

“Bip,” to take another example, is probably as good a representation of a snapping button as more familiar sound-words (such as the word “snap” itself).

At times Joyce is happy to use a conventional onomatopoeia, such as “thump” for the printing machines (*U* 7.101), “tink” for the diner’s bell in the Ormond hotel (*U* 11.286), and the frequently repeated “jingle” for the sound of Boylan’s jaunting-car (*U* 11.212)—though the last of these is subject to a number of Joycean variations, including “jinglejaunty” (*U* 11.290), “jing” (*U* 11.457), “jiggedy jingle” (*U* 11.579), and “jingly” (*U* 11.606). Other examples use conventional words as a basis on which to build: the traditional “miaow” of the cat (which Bloom himself uses in addressing his cat [*U* 4.462]) becomes the unpronounceable “Mkgnao!” when uttered by the cat itself (*U* 4.16), with those even more complicated versions following as the animal—presumably—becomes more insistent. There is enough correspondence with the conventional word to allow for a pronunciation not too far removed from the traditional one, but there is also an invitation to the reader to be more inventive in emulating these feline ejaculations. Similarly, the “Klook Klook Klook” of the hen (*U* 12.846) allows us to hear “cluck cluck cluck” but defamiliarizes it by means of the upper case K’s and the double o’s. (Did Joyce know the Australian term “chook” for a domestic fowl?) The same switch of letter, without an impact on pronunciation but with a distinct shift in associations, occurs when the gulls in “Circe” utter not “Caw” with a C but “Kaw” with a K (*U* 15.686).

In many examples, however, convincing imitation of a noise seems to be far from Joyce’s purpose. Often, as in the case of the train-whistle, the reader needs a pointer to the sound being represented. Thus a stage direction specifies the sound made by the nannygoat before it is given to us: “(bleats) Megeggaggegg! Nannannanny!” (*U* 15.3370). The supposedly onomatopoeic sequences of letters by themselves hardly suggest the noise of bleating, and the comic absurdity of two very different sequences of letters for the same sound (the second clearly derived from the name of the animal) is part-and-parcel of “Circe’s” mad playfulness.

In most cases, Joyce can assume that we know the sound already and that there is no point in trying to match the sounds of the language to it. Rather, he takes advantage of the traditional license to invent new collocations of letters when imitating sounds to undertake a creative deformation and reformation of the words of the language. Thus the gong of the tram (perhaps a sound now more familiar to San Franciscans than Dubliners) moves from a conventional onomatopoeic word to a surprising sequence that doesn’t seem sonically accurate but is comically suggestive: “Bang Bang Bla Bak Blud Bugg Bloo” (*U* 15.189). (This is another example of the sequence of varied vowels we have seen before, both in *Portrait* and in *Ulysses*.) There are echoes here, especially in the penultimate “word,” of the “British Beatitudes” listed in the previous episode: “Beer, beef, business, bibles, bulldogs, battleships, buggery and bishops” (*U* 14.1459-60), though at its climax the gong appears to interpolate our hero, just as the fearsome sandstrewer bears down on him.⁸ To take another example, the horse’s neigh has been infected by the last word of the previous speaker—both Bloom and Corny Kelleher end speeches with “home,” and as if in sympathy, or perhaps mockery, the horse twice follows them by emitting its “Hohohohome!” (*U* 15.4879, 4899). Similarly, the gulls’ “kankury kake” (*U* 15.686) reminds us that Bloom has earlier fed them Banbury cakes; Major Tweedy’s “Salute!”

⁸ Connor (1994:107) hears “something like ‘Get back you bloody bugger Bloom.’”

becomes the retriever's "Ute ute ute ute ute ute ute" (*U* 15.4752-54); and the bawd's "coward's blow" mutates into the same retriever's "Wow wow wow" (*U* 15.4763-66).

In some examples, particularly in "Circe," the supposed onomatopoeia is very hard to interpret, even though we are given clues to the sound. Would we realize that the retriever was "barking furiously" with its repeated "ute"s if it weren't given as a stage direction? What kind of bicycle bell goes "Haltyaltyaltyall" (*U* 15.181)? Do quoits on a bed really make a sound anything like "Jigjag. Jigajiga. Jigjag" (*U* 15.1138)—or is what is important the association with the set of sounds already linked to Boylan's assignation with Molly, such as "Jiggedy jingle jaunty jaunty" (*U* 11.579)? The sound emitted by the "Dummymummy"—"Bbbblllllblblblblobschb!"—is as obscure as the object emitting it, a "dummy of Bloom, wrapped in a mummy" (*U* 15.3380-81). It's hard to imagine exactly what noise the gasjet in the brothel makes when it needs adjusting or when struck by Stephen's ashplant, as these are rendered "Pooah! Pfuuuuuuu!" (*U* 15.2280) and "Pwfungg!" (*U* 15.4247). And two examples I find particularly puzzling are the twanging dental floss, which sounds far too loud when rendered as "Bingbang, bangbang" (*U* 7.374), and the fire-brigade's repeated "Pflaap" (*U* 14.1569, 1577, 1589), which I can't connect with any imagined horn or other warning sound.⁹

Here I would like to assert three further points. First, the significance of the device we are considering goes beyond the local pleasures it provides, for Joyce uses many of these examples to link distant parts of the book, capitalizing on their salience and memorability within the dense texture of the writing. We've already seen how Bloom's fart at the close of "Sirens" receives a response in Molly's fart near the end of "Penelope," and how the refrain around the words "jingle," "jaunty," and "jig" not only extends through much of "Sirens" but is recapitulated in "Circe." "Circe," in fact, recycles a number of the earlier examples of nonlexical onomatopoeia, among them the bells of George's church (15.1186; also echoed in the bracelets' "Heigho!" [15.4086]), Davy Byrne's yawn (15.1697), the fire brigade from "Oxen of the Sun" (15.1925), the lacquey's bell (15.3096, 4140), and the clucking of Black Liz (15.3710). The complexly patterned architecture of *Ulysses* is thus built not just out of repetitions of and variations upon words and phrases but out of sonic echoes and refrains. Second, there are, of course, numerous examples in *Ulysses* of the intermediate category that lies between full lexical onomatopoeia and full nonlexical onomatopoeia: the deformation of words to suggest mimetically the sounds or movements to which they refer. Some of our examples lean in this direction, as we have noted. "Sirens" in particular relies on such effects for much of its aural effectiveness; to give one example, the piano's "dark chords" are described as "lugugugubrious" (*U* 11.1005). Often it is an already onomatopoeic word that is developed: for example, this cadenza on the word "clap": "----Bravo! Clapclap. Good man, Simon. Clappyclapclap. Encore! Clapclipclap clap. Sound as a bell. Bravo, Simon! Clapclapclap" (*U* 11.756-58). Third, there are also occasional uses of a perfectly normal word for what seem to be purely onomatopoeic purposes. One example is the moth that flaps against the lightshade in the brothel, going "Pretty pretty pretty pretty pretty pretty petticoats" (*U* 15.2477). Here Joyce seems to be evacuating these words of sense so we can attend to their sounds.

⁹ Jim Norton, in his excellent reading of the complete *Ulysses* (Joyce 2004), speaks the repeated "Pflaap" in a whisper, which I don't think helps.

If we step back to consider Joyce's use of nonlexical onomatopoeia in *Ulysses* as a whole, can we make any generalizations about its relation to wider cultural developments? It is tempting to argue that these eruptions of noise into the textual stream are a reflection (or should I say echo?) of the new sounds of the early twentieth century—the sounds of mechanization, of mechanized war, of automation, of recording instruments themselves. And it is true that Joyce was remarkably alert to new developments in communications media, the references to television in *Finnegans Wake* being the most familiar instance. There's one striking passage in *Ulysses* in which Joyce perfectly exemplifies a claim made by theorists of the cultural shifts produced by the invention of sound recording. Claire MacDonald (2003:2), for instance, notes that with the invention of recording techniques “the separation of voice and body changed our relationship to death.” Bloom is indulging in one of his extended meditations in the “Hades” episode:

Have a gramophone in every grave or keep it in the house. After dinner on a Sunday. Put on poor old greatgrandfather. Kraahraark! Hellohellohello amawfullyglad kraark awfullygladaseeagain hellohello amawf krpthsth. Remind yoU of the voice like the photograph reminds yoU of the face. (*U* 6.962-67).

Joyce not only recognizes the changed relation to death of which MacDonald speaks, but through nonlexical onomatopoeia suggests the technological limitations that can turn pathos into absurdity, mourning into laughter. These limitations are explicitly adverted to when “Circe” returns to the gramophone: “Whorusaleminyournhighhohhhh... (*the disc rasps gratingly against the needle*)” (*U* 15.2211-12).

But in spite of this alertness to technological change, I'm not sure a case can be made that Joyce's exploration of the representation of noise through nonlexical onomatopoeia is a product of the new sounds he was hearing as he wrote or that he remembered from his childhood and youth. For one thing, there would have been a significant difference between the urban sounds of 1904 and those of 1922, whether in Dublin or Paris (or Trieste or Zurich). Emily Thompson, in *The Soundscape of Modernity* (2002:117), emphasizes the change over this period.¹⁰ She notes that “[w]hen Dr. J. H. Girdner catalogued ‘The Plague of City Noises’ in 1896, almost all the noises he listed were traditional sounds: horse-drawn vehicles, peddlers, musicians, animals, and bells. ‘Nearly every kind of city noise,’ he reported, ‘will find its proper place under one of the above headings.’” By 1925 the sound of the city was very different: an article in the *Saturday Review of Literature* mentions “the motor, the elevated, the steel drill, the subway, the airplane.”¹¹ When New Yorkers were polled in 1929 about the noises that they were bothered by, only seven percent mentioned the sounds listed by Girdner in 1896; the ten most disturbing noises were all products of the “machine age.” If, then, Joyce was being true to his memories of 1904, it is perhaps not surprising that most of the examples I've cited have no

¹⁰ See, in particular, Thompson's introduction, “Sound, Modernity, and History” (1-12) and the first part of ch. 4, “Noise and Modern Culture, 1900-1933” (115-20).

¹¹ Thompson (2002:117) is quoting from the *North American Review* of September 1896, p. 300, and the *Saturday Review of Literature* 2, 24 October 1925, p. 1.

particular twentieth-century association: bells of several kinds (and none of them electric); door, doorhandle, and doorknocker; a number of animals; waves, bed quoits, the gasjet, a button. Even the machinery we hear in operation does not appear to be recent in origin: the printing press, the steam locomotive, the tram gong, the fire-engine (whatever its noise is). Although we're very aware in *Ulysses* of the technological achievements of the nineteenth century as they manifest themselves in Dublin in 1904—trams, telephones, gas lighting, that gramophone, and so on—Joyce's noises are drawn from a much wider range of sounds. However, it may well be that the invention of recording itself, in separating sounds from their origins, made it easier for Joyce to indulge in his exuberant aural games.

With very few exceptions, the enjoyment and insight offered by nonlexical onomatopoeia in *Ulysses* are not the product of vivid and precise imitation. Nor has this type of onomatopoeia available to it the intensity of signification produced by *lexical* onomatopoeia—when the reader experiences the words of the language with unusual forcefulness. What Joyce does in the nonlexical arena is to make the inevitable failure of his mimetic sallies a productive resource, revealing the language's own entertaining proclivities and challenging a long tradition of aesthetic practice and theorization based on the idea of imitation. It could be said that nonlexical onomatopoeia has been marginalized in serious literature (it thrives in the comic book genre, of course) because it takes literature's supposed mimetic function *à la lettre* and in so doing exposes its limits. Instead of letting the world break into the text, nonlexical onomatopoeia, in Joyce's hands at least, reminds us, with comic brilliance, that the text produces a world.

Although the instances of nonlexical onomatopoeia in *Ulysses* amount to only a minuscule proportion of the text, I would argue that they played a crucial part in Joyce's creative development. For it must have been in these playful challenges to the normally binding rules governing the construction of the words of the language that Joyce glimpsed a new way of writing. If letters could be strung together with comic effect, if words could be manipulated into new shapes and made to flow into one another, would it not be possible to write a whole book on this basis? There are many ways in which *Ulysses* can be seen to have prepared the ground for its successor, but we should not overlook the significance of Joyce's pleasure in the noises he could make with nothing more to play with than the twenty-six letters of the alphabet.

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