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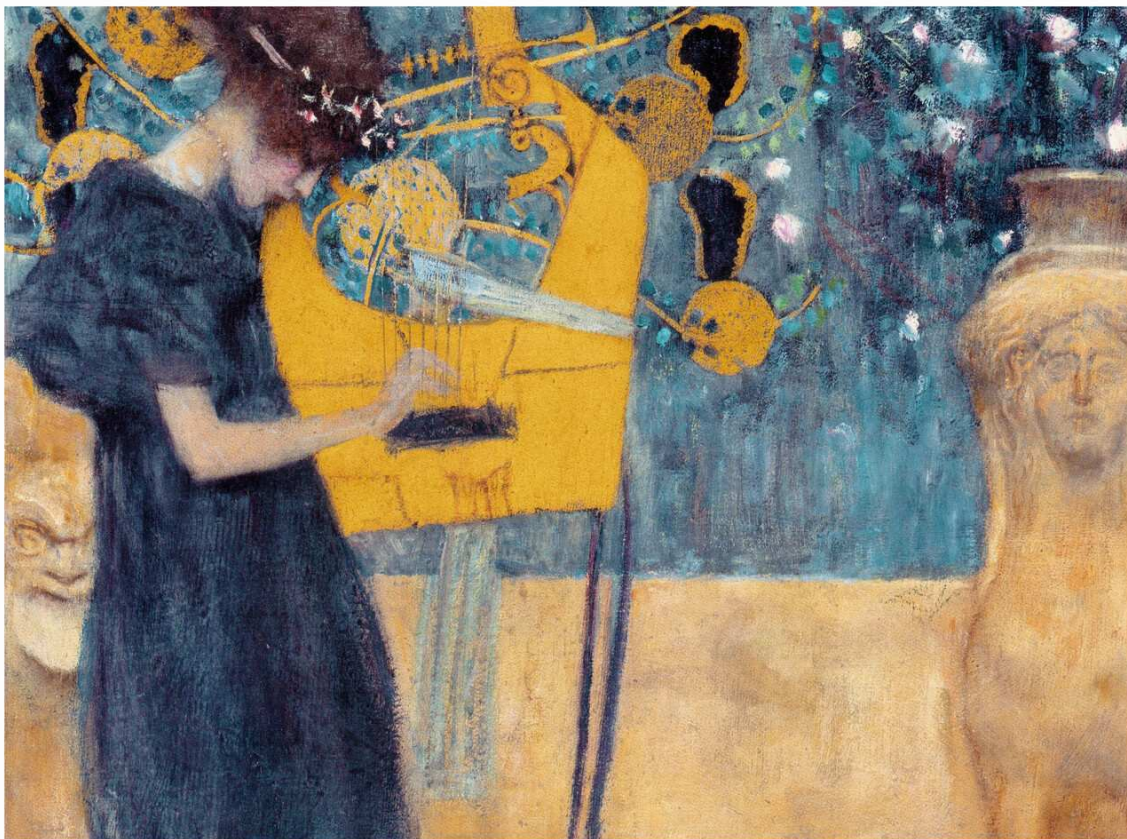
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Music as a communal art in *The Waves* by Virginia Woolf and the poetry of Wallace Stevens

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Introduction

Music has always been subversively interwoven with culture and politics. As the latter categories change music does also, often in reflection of which socio-political voices are 'heard' or 'unheard'. These patterns resulted in profound social and musical change in the early 20th Century, whereby Anglo-American writers, like Ezra Pound and T.S Eliot, sought newer, more experimental ways to represent this modern world; fragmented by democratising developments like western metropolitanism and popular culture. Writers like Eliot and Pound often used music as a poetic metaphor for what was still 'untouched' by the metropolitan 'masses', and uneducated classes. For them, music often served as the last bastion of aesthetic perfection and social integrity. I would contend, however, that not all modernist writers thought about music in this way. As a whole, this study argues that Virginia Woolf, in her famous novel *The Waves*, and Wallace Stevens, in his poems, attend more than most modernists to the voices 'heard' and 'unheard' in the modern musical landscape, while emphasising the unifying and communal qualities of the art.

I intend, in approaching this hypothesis, to resist a particular scholarly paradigm. Often scholars will link 'musical modernism' to 19th Century essayist Walter Pater, who famously posited that 'all art constantly aspires toward the condition of music.' This maxim is a useful literary framework for evoking the modern age's 'breakdown in meaning' which, in turn, leads modernist writers to dispense with traditional narrative fiction, and draw inspiration from 'music's formal perfection', inasmuch as music sits beyond words, and beyond the material realm.

Overall, these types of arguments usually focus upon how music does not 'make sense' or 'mean anything' in linguistically referential terms: divesting it of 'meaning' in relation to the external world. I am personally unconvinced by the usefulness of this conclusion. I shall therefore adopt a different slant in this study: observable in the work of Emma Sutton¹ and Josh Epstein.² These scholars ask socio-political questions about music's role in modernism, such as 'who has access to it, and who does not? Does it enforce, or deconstruct class and gender boundaries? How does it connect and unify people? I will ask these types of questions, while also moving onwards from Emma Sutton's recent, and comprehensive research on how Virginia Woolf was inspired, in her writing, by classical music. Sutton pertinently stresses that Woolf preferred to listen to 19th Century composers like Bach, Mozart, Beethoven and Wagner, rather than composers of her time. Nevertheless, I am convinced that both Woolf and Wallace Stevens' writings, parallel and anticipate radical developments in 20th Century music. I would also contend that these comparisons are useful in illuminating Woolf's socio-politically-driven view on music's role. Yet, despite my intentions, I will first link *The Waves* to classical music, establishing, in doing so, a strong analytical basis from which to analyse the novel in different ways.

Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*

1. *Fugue*

On an obvious level, *The Waves* is a 'musical novel' due to its atypical form: constant alternation between two different narrative-modes. This alternation is demonstrated in the novel's opening. The first few pages are written in the authorial voice, and describe a picturesque coastline. Then, the writing style changes to character soliloquy, narrated by the

¹ Emma Sutton, *Virginia Woolf and Classical Music: Politics, Aesthetics, Form* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014).

² Josh Epstein, *Sublime Noise* (Maryland: John Hopkins University Press, 2014).

novel's six young protagonists: Bernard, Susan, Jinny, Louis, Rhoda and Neville. Through the novel, Woolf changes between these two modes, conveying the passing of time as the protagonists grow from childhood to adulthood, and the coastline changes over the course of a single day.

Gerald Levin, for one, contends that this is an inherently 'musical' form.³ He refers to the end of the novel, at which point Bernard, now an elderly man, abstractly 'unites' the voices of his five friends, and states enigmatically 'I am not one person; I am many people; I do not altogether know who I am – Jinny, Susan, Neville, Rhoda or Louis; or how to distinguish my life from theirs.' Woolf while writing this passage, also wrote a diary entry that reads: 'it occurred to me last night while listening to a Beethoven quartet that I would merge all the interjected passages into Bernard's final speech... this is to show that the theme effort, effort dominates, not the waves... personality and defiance.' Levin contends that this entry, taken alongside the extract from *The Waves* evokes musical 'fugal style'; itself characteristic of Beethoven's 'Quartets.' In musical composition 'fugal style' describes multiple timbres that variate on one single theme. The piece, as a whole, goes through 'the stages of a journey', evoking 'effort', then ending in 'resolved' 'consonance'. This method could be discerned in *The Waves*, inasmuch as multitudinous 'themes' repeat and variate in the novel. Characters pose constant existential questions about grief, time, happiness, solitude and community, while the repeating motif of the coastline and a tide washing upon a shore, denote constant progression and cyclical patterns.

2. *Pantonality*

Levin nonetheless concludes that *The Waves* is not wholly 'fugal' in nature. He writes that 'The edges (of the characters') mutual experience (in Bernard's mind) remains blurred. Experience and feeling are to be understood rather as process, the musical equivalent of which is better described as 'pantonal' than 'fugal.' 'Pantonality' contrasts to fugal style. It is a compositional method coined by proto-modernist composer Arnold Schoenberg, describable as a 'twelve tone' style which ensures that all twelve piano keys are played equally. Levin writes '...in pantonal music...the experience is not only one of continuous variation... but also one of delayed completion... postponement also contributes to the sense of ongoing experience or process... total saturation or perpetual discovery'.

The 'saturated' imagery that opens *The Waves* evokes a 'pantonal' musicality. Woolf compares the dawn rising over the coastline to 'the arm of a woman... couched beneath the horizon... raising a lamp.' Then, she contrastingly describes it as a 'burning bonfire.' After that, the young protagonists are introduced as all 'seeing' different, abstract images: "'I see a ring," said Bernard, "'I see a slab of pale yellow" said Susan, "'I see a globe," said Neville.' Here, there is an effect of 'saturation' and 'discovery', inasmuch as the reader 'discovers' the setting's spatiality in tandem with the characters, as they explore and play in their seaside boarding home. Just as pantonal music aligns all possible piano keys, *The Waves* fragmentarily evokes all possible images that could describe the setting,

Overall, *The Waves* clearly engages with Beethoven's 'Quartets' in an ambiguous and problematic way. This effect is identifiable both in the opening and in the general narrative structure, according to Levin. At this point, we might compare Woolf to early 20th Century composers, like Arnold Schoenberg or Claude Debussy. These composers frequently used pantonality in their work. Both were also very 'forward thinking': rejecting associations

³ Gerald Levin, 'The Musical Style of "The Waves"', *The Journal of Narrative Technique*, 13:3 (1983), 164-171.

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between their music and past traditions. Debussy for instance, responded to critics that labelled his work 'impressionism': 'there is no theory, you merely have to listen.' There are also literary historical implications to Woolf's 'musical' writing style. Michael Whitworth (among many scholars) attributes its fragmented, impressionistic qualities to Walter Pater's view of cognition, whereby on the average day 'the mind receives myriad impressions... a shower of atoms ... evanescent.'⁴ For Pater, aesthetic beauty cuts through reality's flux to provide us with an everlasting mental image. Were this purely to be the case, it might seem that Woolf mostly derives aesthetic inspiration from the past, not the present, and might not be quite so musically 'forward-thinking' as I have hypothesised her to be. Here, I will draw upon the ideas of Perry Meisel, who establishes more problematic links between Woolf and Pater. He contends that Woolf was psychoanalytically frustrated by Pater's influence, and attempted to shed it, and evoke a newer cognitive mode.⁵ This frustration seems to be enacted in *The Waves*, as the novel, after all develops from a fragmented, Paterian opening to a comprehensible plot and established setting. The plot evidences a 'future-facing' instinct informed by a 'musical' and resolutely 'modern' writing style.

3. *Soundscape*

As the protagonists age, most move to London; some of them become alienated from urban life and acquire relatively classist views. Neville, while at university, dislikes the banal 'shop girls' talk: 'their titter, their gossip, offends me... nudges me, in moments of purest exultation to remember our degradation.' Bernard, also at university, distastefully observes the singing 'hunting boys': all divisions are merged – they act like one man.' Louis, working in the city, snobbishly observes the city clerks, differentiating himself from them, according to the sound of his 'Australian accent': 'If I speak... they prick their ears, waiting for me to speak again, in order that they may place me.' These alienating experiences are not processes of 'seeing' but of 'listening' to the city. Forthwith, I will link these instances of 'alienating noise' to the category of the modern 'soundscape.'

R. Murray Schaefer views the modern soundscape as a contestation of 'music' against metropolitan 'noise' (such as radios, gramophones, advertising, vehicles and industrial machinery). Further, Schaefer establishes a difference in between 'signal sound' and 'keynote sound'. We hear 'signal sound' 'consciously' and naturally focus upon it, so it is therefore based in higher frequencies: melodious or obviously rhythmic, like a drum. In contrast, we hear 'keynote sound' 'peripherally', as it is usually 'ambient', backgrounded and based in lower frequencies. The modern soundscape blurs the 'noise' - 'music' boundary due to its 'acousmatic qualities'; a term that characterises an inability to discern a sonic origin point: where a sound 'came from'. For Schaefer, this state-of-things means that we must 'discriminately' listen to the soundscape – we must differentiate between 'signal' and 'keynote' sound and, more broadly, discern those sounds that 'enrich us' and those which do not. Overall, Schaefer's ideas are very complex. However, they are seemingly typified in Neville, Bernard and Louis' narration. These characters 'discriminately' listen to the sounds which, for them, are 'non-enriching'.

Kunyan Wan summarises a fairly obvious but important objection to Schaefer's ideas:⁶ 'peripheral hearing' and 'indiscriminate listening' are both important in creating a

⁴ Michael Whitworth, 'Virginia Woolf and modernism', in *The Cambridge Companion to Virginia Woolf*, ed. by Sue Roe and Susan Sellers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 146-163.

⁵ R. Murray Schaefer, *The Soundscape: The Tuning of the World* (Vermont: Destiny Books, 1977).

⁶ Kunyan Wan, *Hearing Virginia Woolf's Novels* (University of Sydney, 2019).

‘sonorous democracy’, where all ‘voices’ can be heard. Accordingly, processes of ‘indiscriminate listening’ in *The Waves* reduce feelings of alienation and promote ‘communality’ (the latter effect being central to my argument).

Later in the novel Bernard ‘indiscriminately listens’, when walking through city crowds he reflects ‘am I not, as I walk, trembling with strange oscillations and vibrations of sympathy, which, unmoored as I am from a private being, bid me embrace these engrossed flocks...?’ The abstract nouns ‘oscillations’ and ‘vibrations’ connote low frequencies, perhaps Schaeffer’s ‘keynote sound.’ Jinny also ‘indiscriminately listens’ when she attends a London ball. Dancing, she remarks empathetically that ‘there are girls of my own age, for whom I feel the drawn swords of an honourable antagonism’, ‘the single and solitary mate, tumble and become many,’ ‘that is an old man – I should be a child with him.’ Here, the ideas of Elicia Clements are useful: she posits that this is a profoundly ‘musical’ scene, representative of music’s capacity to ‘reconfigure human interaction.’⁷ There is also a lexically palpable ‘physicality’ in the way that Jinny redefines her identity somewhat, through dance, against Edwardian restrictions upon her, as a woman. Therefore, when Jinny and Bernard both encounter ‘lower frequency music’, a more ‘physical’ type of sound that affects the body, they experience feelings of ‘communality’, self-redefinition and possibility.

4. *Composer*

Here, I will write in a slightly tangential way, in order to place ‘discriminate’ and ‘indiscriminate’ listening in a literary historical context. I have stated that in *The Waves*, a lower frequency, palpably ‘physical’ type of music denotes a process of self-redefinition. In Bernard’s case, this music incorporates ‘his self’ into the urban masses. The self’s relationship to the masses is, importantly, a key modernist subject, which stems, arguably, from French poet Charles Baudelaire, and his thinking on urban life.

Baudelaire’s vast influence on modernist literature is established by Peter Nicholls. He contends that modernist writers tend to construct the self through opposition to the ‘other’.⁸ Baudelaire enacted this process in devising an archetype, the ‘flâneur’: a wandering poet that oscillates to and away from the metropolitan crowds. This oscillation empowers the flâneur, in that they lack ‘obligation’ towards the other, while simultaneously ‘poeticizing’ the endless crowds. To quote Baudelaire: ‘... to be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home, to see the world, to be at the centre of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the world... the spectator is a prince who everywhere rejoices in his incognito’.⁹

Bernard is easily configurable as Baudelaire’s ‘wandering poet.’ He has an obsession, after all, with ‘poeticizing’ the urban crowds and ‘making phrases’ about the way that people act, while representing them in fiction or poetry form. Neville describes Bernard thus, ‘We are all phrases in Bernard’s story, things he writes down in his notebook... he tells our story with extraordinary understanding, except of what we most feel. For he does not need us.’ Bernard at first feels very little obligation to the ‘other’ represented in his writing. However, his poetic worldview changes later in the novel; this change is linked, specifically, to the role of Percival: a central character.

⁷ Elicia Clements, ‘Transforming Musical Sounds into Words: Narrative Method in Virginia Woolf’s *The Waves*’, *Narrative*, 13:2 (2005), 160-181 (pp. 171-172).

⁸ Peter Nicholls, *Modernisms* (California: University of California Press, 1995).

⁹ Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life: and other essays*, ed. by Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon, 1964).

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To reiterate: in modernist fiction, movement 'away from' the urban crowds, represents the affirmation of a stable sense of self. In *The Waves*, the protagonists move away from said crowds when they meet at a privileged Hampton Court restaurant, bidding goodbye to their childhood friend Percival, before he leaves England for India. They each feel palpably 'separate' from one another, not only due to the setting, but also due to Percival's presence; linked to the fact that he is a handsome, entrepreneurial and adventurous man whom they all admire greatly. Their view of him is conveyed when Jinny narrates 'our differences are as clear cut as the shadows of rock in sunlight ... walls made of Percival' and Louis, similarly, remarks 'do not let the swing door cut to pieces this thing we have made'. Both characters experience an affirmed sense of self. This sense of affirmation is emphasised by the sunlight imagery: Percival radiates, like the sun, and symbolically allows the protagonists to 'see each other clearly'. Woolf also accentuates her methods with musical imagery, when Rhoda remarks 'there is dancing and drumming, horns and trumpets,' imagery that connotes 'melodiousness' and rhythm. Taken together, these methods evoke an encompassing metaphor of musical harmoniousness.

The protagonists spend much of the novel's latter half grieving, when Percival dies in a horse-riding accident in India. Around this point, Rhoda attends an opera, and remarks that 'Percival has left me with this humiliation'. She then describes 'faces upon faces' and the 'beetle shaped men with their violins'. Percival, by implication, accompanied Rhoda to the opera while he was alive. The imagery also conveys how Rhoda can no longer 'discriminate' between faces, that were coherent and ordered in Percival's presence. Rhoda does not, however, 'indiscriminately' listen to the opera either, like Jinny does while dancing at the ball. This exacerbates her anxiety and depression.

I would contend, at this point, that Percival symbolises a 'composer', and his death, a 'death of the composer' which incites aesthetic and social change. I would posit, but not assert, a link to Roland Barthes' famous study *The Death of the Author*. In general, however, the idea seems clear when we examine what Percival represents: melodious qualities, related to Schaeffer's 'signal sound', and stable affirmations of setting and selfhood. Overall, Woolf's forward thinking musical strategies entail a fragmented, pantonal ambiguousness to setting and selfhood. These strategies are further evoked, therefore, by Percival's death.

On a different note, Bernard is incited, after Percival's death, to withdraw from the role of the 'wandering poet', and perceive the world in a 'non-narrative', 'musical' way. He walks down a canal at night, after Percival's funeral, and notes the musical sounds of the city: 'the knocking of railway trucks in a siding.' Further, the 'boasting boys' that he disparaged at university '(sing) as they used to sing, across the court on winter's nights.' Bernard feels enriched, overall, in not being called to 'judge' or 'give (his) opinion', for the 'houses and trees are all the same in this grey light'. Here, there are resonances to the night-time, in that it intensifies Bernard's experience of sound. On a symbolic level Percival, the personification of sunlight, can no longer 'illuminate' it. Mainly, however these descriptions evoke Bernard's sense of musicality, whereby he no longer 'narrativizes' the world, and feels that the author/poet can be incorporated themselves into the subject of their writing. This musical effect is emphasised at the end, when Bernard reflects upon his life (now that he is an elderly man) via long soliloquy, uninterrupted by other characters. In this way Woolf, in avoiding changing characters, 'gives up' her authorship to Bernard, perhaps her role as a 'composer' too. Then, Bernard gives up his authorship, musically 'uniting' the voices of his

friends and affirming that '(does not) know who (he) is' or 'how to distinguish (his) life from theirs.'

Woolf, overall, presents an emergent type of author in *The Waves*: one that 'indiscriminately listens', without limiting the world's aesthetic potential via subjective narrativization. This ethos anticipates 20th Century musical paradigms, whereby composers and musicians would not shape sounds into something 'formally perfect', but let them 'be as they are'. Here, a powerful comparison can be drawn to the influential mid-century American composer John Cage. He was famed for considering 'everything as music', which led to his ambient noise experiments, like 1952's controversial piece 4,33, and beyond that other avantgarde compositions. Importantly, I would not contend that Cage derived any consistent influence from Woolf's work, if any at all. Instead, it seems clear that he understood the modern aesthetic in the same way that she did. This is a fact evidenced via David Bernstein's ideas about Cage's work; Bernstein writes 'Cage sought to withdraw his own subjectivity from the creative process through use of change and indeterminacy. The result was a seemingly depersonalized musical style, emphasizing the objectification of musical sound' (Cage did this through use of carefully controlled, mathematical strategies).¹⁰ Sounds, or perhaps voices, taken as they are without 'narrativization' seem to be a key formal medium of *The Waves*.

The poetry of Wallace Stevens

1. *Difference*

Thus far in this study, I have drawn upon some relatively well-established scholarly arguments. Chief of these is the idea that modernity fragments and blurs the demarcations between selves; negating the representational value of traditional narrative fiction. This negation evokes alienation for the modern subject. In *The Waves* Virginia Woolf seeks to counter that alienation by depicting the unification of multiple selfhoods, the musicalizing of traditional narrative and the death of the composer.

While these ideas are abstract and theoretical, they also have socio-political resonances. It is well established that Woolf had a lifelong interest in ideas about 'unification' and 'communality' and worked for Marxist or Feminist causes. I have demonstrated that her work aesthetically parallels, and anticipates, some radical cultural changes in 20th century music.

All the same, it is important to acknowledge that Woolf was not a very socio-politically-radical individual by our standards. Many scholars might disagree with my characterisation of her 'forward-thinking' ideas about music. One such voice might be John Carey, who controversially argues that regressive elitism and even proto-fascism were inherent to more-or-less the entirety of Anglo-American modernism.¹¹ A conservative, rather than progressive view of musical modernism might be imposed by thinkers of his ilk upon Woolf and her contemporaries. These readings cannot be overlooked, as the musical qualities of *The Waves* might well evoke the work of Debussy and John Cage, but they do it in an admittedly subtle and ambiguous way. It is also debateable as to how 'unifying' these musical aspects really are, as throughout *The Waves*, the protagonists tend to distastefully

¹⁰ David Bernstein, 'Cage and high modernism', in *The Cambridge Companion to John Cage*, ed. by David Nicholls (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 61-84.

¹¹ John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice Among the Literary Intelligentsia* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992).

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keep the dynamism of modern life, represented by the urban 'soundscape', at bay. It is not until the end of the novel that Bernard dispenses with 'discriminate listening' and the 'separation of selves.'

These criticisms are important, but I would still suggest that there is political significance in Woolf's use of music as an ambiguous metaphor for the importance of community and interconnection. Her ideas are further illuminated by comparison with the poems of Wallace Stevens (a contemporary of Woolf's in the United States). Stevens had practically identical concerns in his poetry which he also expressed via musical metaphors. Both writers 'anticipate' rather than 'reflect' change.

Woolf's novel only seems to 'imagine' how modern alienation might be countered by music. Stevens' poetry, on the other hand, 'embodies' that very process. He 'gets to the point', as a poet, so-to-speak, much faster than Woolf, as a novelist, does. We might further speculate on contrasts between the two, and imagine Stevens absorbing residual, late 19th century American-transcendentalist philosophies: ideas about community and interconnection espoused by thinkers like Whitman, Emerson and Thoreau. Yet, considering that these cultural differences are almost insurmountable, we must hone in upon the symbolic minutiae of Stevens' work to usefully compare it to *The Waves*.

2. *Elegy*

We may begin with reference to a recurring symbol of death in Stevens' poems. He often imagines and writes about a semi-human, semi-divine figure, who is sometimes unnamed, other times named according to classical myths, and who tends to 'die' in some way. In *The Man with the Blue Guitar* Stevens describes this figure in 'singing' them: 'I sing a hero's head, large eye, and bearded bronze, but not a man' 'ah, but... to drive the dagger in his heart.' His use of imagery evokes a classical statue, perhaps of a Greek or Roman hero. This poem was written in 1937. Five years later, in 1942, Stevens recalled that image in *Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction*, describing in stanzas six and seven the 'death' of the Phoebus, the Roman sun-God: 'The death of one God is the death of all. Let purple Phoebus lie... Let Phoebus slumber... Phoebus is dead...' Already, we might cast our minds back to the symbolism woven throughout *The Waves*: Percival is described as a personification of the sun, and his death is symbolised by a sunset.

These symbols must be further related to the schools of thought that inspired Stevens. He attended Harvard until 1900, and met while there the influential philosopher George Santayana. Santayana made Stevens aware of the scholarly dialogue on the Nietzschean 'death of God' and its ramifications. Santayana wrote about his ideas in *Interpretations of Poetry and Religion*: a book that profoundly influenced Stevens. The nature of that influence is comprehensively studied by Milton J Bates, who summarises Santayana's ideas thus: 'religion is poetry in which we believe, usually without knowing it to be poetry... the highest poetry is identical with religion. By allowing us a glimpse of the ideal, it likewise gives direction and meaning to our lives... poetry must step forward to provide us with a new mythology.' Bates discusses how in *Notes Towards a Supreme Fiction*, Stevens depicts the poetic creation of a 'major man', after the 'death' of conventional Gods. Bates notes that 'Stevens' major man has often been compared to Nietzsche's ("superman") ... (but) whereas Nietzsche imagined the superman partly in revulsion against the "herd man," (Stevens)

insists that the (poet) take common people into account when devising his hero'.¹² This is only one symbolic presentation of the 'supreme fiction' that replaces the divine. Stevens reinterpreted the symbol throughout his poetry. In *Final Soliloquy of an Interior Paramour*, he equates God and the human imagination. He describes the latter as semi-divine; 'sitting apart' from our consciousness, but not precluding our 'agency.' As most scholars of Stevens have accepted, the 'imagination; in his work is a powerful and transforming thing that can 'recreate' the world.

It seems possible, without making too much of an inductive leap, to relate these ideas to Woolf's presentation of authorship in *The Waves*. Bernard undergoes a similar aesthetic realisation to that which Stevens appears to have gone through. Percival's death incites Bernard to 'untrain his ear' and 'hear' both the soundscape and 'the common man' whilst narratively uniting the voices of his friends. In the process, he gives up his authorship, configuring his imagination as 'separate' from his consciousness.

Years before Stevens wrote *Paramour*, *Supreme Fiction* and *Blue Guitar*, he published the poem *Mozart* 1935. Therefore, before coalescing the symbolic death of a divine, idol-like figure into the philosophical 'supreme fiction', he related the symbol, in *Mozart*, to changes in the modern-musical landscape. The poem opens with a request to a 'poet' to be 'seated at the piano (to play) the present.' The second stanza describes a corpse carried down the stairs: 'If they throw stones on the roof, while you practice arpeggios it is because they carry down the stairs a body in rags.' In the final stanza, the speaker remarks 'we may return to Mozart' who, by implication, is the body '(carried) down the stairs, 'he was young, and we, we are old.' This juxtaposition of enigmatic images effectively represents the symbolic 'death of the composer'.

Even beyond that, Stevens describes a new kind of 'music' that might elegiacally emerge from 'his' death. He bids the 'poet' at the piano, 'be thou the voice, not you. Be thou, be thou the voice of angry fear... be thou that wintry sound as of a great wind howling, by which sorrow is released.' In harnessing this imagery, the 'poet' is still alluding to the 'sorrow' of the crowd outside, but, simultaneously, he is also playing a music that is as ineffably mournful as a howling wind, free from definitive representation and 'separate' from the confines of consciousness: him and the crowd. In these two stanzas, Stevens uses assonance to emphasise this sense of musical release, with the 'ou' and 'oi' sounds juxtaposed to the final 'e'. This metaphor works on two levels: firstly, it conveys Stevens' ethos of the imagination being separate from consciousness, as I previously noted, and also draws our mind back to Woolf, whereby a new kind of music, a kind of mourning elegy, might emerge after the death of the individual composer.

In further exploring the musical ramifications of these ideas, I will seek to 'ground them' a little more. In the final stanza of *Mozart* Stevens less uses the pronouns 'thou' and 'you' than 'we', writing 'we may return to Mozart. He was young and we, we are old'. He therefore indicates (but does not clearly assert) a process by which the individual 'poet' becomes part of a wider community, as a function of the sorrowful music that he plays.

Bonnie Costello studies Stevens' use of collective pronouns in his poetry. She writes that Stevens' poetry exhibits an 'active imagining of the collective... his 'we' gives freshness

¹² Milton J. Bates, 'Stevens and the Supreme Fiction', in *The Cambridge Companion to Wallace Stevens*, ed. by John N. Serio (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 48-61.

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and vividness to the inner imaginary of plural humanity.’ Costello studies Mozart 1935, but dwells also upon the poem *The Creations of Sound*. In this work, Stevens imagines a ‘secondary poet’ that functions as an ‘accretion’ of ‘we’/‘voices’; he ‘collects from us’ while ‘we collect from him’. According to Costello, Stevens uses an architectural metaphor of ‘music’ coming from the ‘walls and ceilings and floors of language’, creating ‘... the artifice of “ourselves” made from the “spontaneous particulars of sound”’. Individual spontaneity is not at odds with the “secondary expositor” that collects “us”.¹³

Costello’s argument is clear, convincing, and useful for my purposes. With the ‘primary poet’, the ‘composer’ being dead, Stevens replaces him with a second figure, a symbolic ‘poet’ that reappears both in *Mozart* and *Creations*. This figure is reminiscent of Bernard in *The Waves*, in that he interconnects, but does not demarcate, ‘individual spontaneity’, establishing music as an intrinsically communal art.

3. *Synaesthesia*

But what, we might ask, once again, are the social ramifications of this aesthetic change that Stevens is writing about? I would suggest that they are numerous, and related to the hypothesis that I posited earlier, in that Stevens and Woolf anticipate some radical developments in 20th century music.

In returning to that hypothesis, I will note that for some scholars, Wallace Stevens is a ‘jazz poet’. This phrase somewhat likens his poems to countercultural American movements, like *The Harlem Renaissance* or *The Beat Generation*. Stevens, a 1930s upper-middle-class white insurance man, of course exhibited no personal interest in movements like these, but nonetheless his poetic radicalness is seen by writers like C.M Taylor as paralleling them. Taylor suggests that Stevens engages with ideas of repetition, onomatopoeia and counterculture inherent to the jazz idiom.¹⁴ For me, arguments like Taylor’s, however interesting, mostly engage with stereotypical perceptions of jazz ‘musicality’, while overlooking the smaller details about aesthetic theory and social context. Yet I am still convinced that this a useful line of thought, and would contend that my ideas, so far, elicit a suitable analytical basis for jazz idioms in Stevens’ poetry. They do however, require more specific resonances as to how jazz is produced within its social context.

Peter Martin’s ideas about jazz ‘spontaneity and organisation’ are useful at this point. Martin draws upon Howard Saul Becker’s concept of ‘art worlds’, and argues that in jazz, the music itself is always closely interwoven with its social/production context. Martin then argues that, contrary to popular perceptions of jazz as raw, emotional and improvisational, it is always informed by numerous confining factors according to the musician’s ‘art world’. Martin writes ‘While the jazz solo is often described as an act of self-expression... it is nonetheless the case that a variety of influences may bear upon the soloist ... (who is the audience?) ... is it the anonymous crowd... the other musicians ... a respected mentor... a lover?’ and further, ‘it is in reconciling the tension between innovation and tradition that players seek to achieve that integration of the individual and the collective at the heart of the jazz aesthetic’.¹⁵

¹³ Bonnie Costello, ‘Collecting Ourselves: “We” in Wallace Stevens’, *ELH*, 85:4 (2018), 1065-1092.

¹⁴ C.M Taylor, ‘Blue Order: Wallace Stevens’ Jazz Experiments’, *Journal of Modern Literature*, 32:2 (2009), 100-117.

¹⁵ Peter Martin, ‘Spontaneity and Organisation’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Jazz*, ed. by Mervyn N. Cook (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 133-52.

Those different factors that influence jazz performance could all be configured as Stevens' 'secondary poet', who balances 'spontaneity' and 'community' in *The Creations of Sound*. Musical interplay between individual and community is also represented in *The Idea of Order at Key West*. The speaker of this poem is walking in Key West, Florida and listening to a woman sing on a nearby beach. He describes how 'The water never formed to mind or voice', 'It may be that in all her phrases stirred the grinding water and the gasping wind; but it was she and not the sea we heard. For she was the maker of the song she sang.' These stanzas are strewn with repetition, sibilance, internal and ABCCDA rhyme, which convey tension and release through interplay. There is also a descriptive paradox, in that the woman and the ocean seem interrelated, in the speaker's mind, while also being totally separate from one another. The speaker hears music out on the beach that cannot be subsumed or attributed to any one composer or 'imagination'. And yet, these three overlapping imaginations (the speaker, the woman and the ocean) seem to form an 'art world' of total concord, in accordance to Becker's concept. Stevens emphasises this in the final stanza, portraying Key West as a 'community', an 'art world' in-and-of-itself: '... tell me, if you know, why, when the singing ended and we turned toward the town, tell why the glassy lights, the lights in the fishing boats...mastered the night and portioned out the sea, fixing emblazoned zones...' This imagery conveys that music is always closely linked to the beautiful and interconnected elements of the environment in which it is composed.

I have addressed that Stevens, through jazz idiom, presents music as linked to social context. To address how he represents its 'performance' and 'practice', I will turn to Travis Jackson, who researches 'jazz as a musical practice'. He suggests that jazz emerges as an 'aesthetic' of 'evaluative criteria' through performance. Jackson writes that '... (jazz) musicians (foreground) the same group of concerns ... developing "an individual voice" ... creating music that is "open enough" to allow other musicians to bring something (in)...' Then, Jackson quotes Duke Ellington: '(ingredients) must be combined by skilled cooks using the idiomatic and idiosyncratic knowledge they possess', 'it's not what goes into the music that makes the difference: it's what the musicians do with the ingredients they have gathered.'¹⁶ Here, there are profound similarities in between Duke Ellington's use of cooking metaphors, and a particular quote from another Stevens poem, *Peter Quince at the Clavier*: 'music is feeling then, not sound.' Herein, I would argue, lies the key to Stevens' view of musical practice and performance. Music receives proper definition through action, use and personal interpretation; not through analysis or intellectualisation. It is not the cause, but the consequence that creates definition. This idea can be clarified via further analysis of *Peter Quince at the Clavier*.

The poem is a retelling of *Susanna and the Elders*, a Biblical story, and evokes a celebratory, sensual atmosphere, somewhat contrary to the sombre storyline of a woman falsely accused of adultery. This is achieved via, what I will call, 'synaesthetic metaphors' which connote intersections between different senses. Stevens writes about 'the strain waked in the elders by Susanna... (they felt) the basses of their beings throb in witching chords, and their thin blood pulse pizzicati... 'Susanna lay ... she sighed, for so much melody.' Stevens' use of synaesthetic imagery and assonance is subtly indicative of his purpose in retelling this story. He untethers it from the Bible, the source of 'authority' and the figurative 'composer', and in doing so attends to the synaesthetic-bodily musicality

¹⁶ Travis Jackson, 'Jazz as musical practice, in *The Cambridge Companion to Jazz*, ed. by Mervyn N. Cook (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 81-95.

Music as a communal art in *The Waves* by Virginia Woolf and the poetry of Wallace Stevens

performed by the story's 'players', portraying them as if they were part of a jazz band. Therefore performance, for Stevens, is more important to music than analysis or narrativization. The jazz idiom enables him to link synaesthetic/sensory crossover with performance, which represents the overlap between art, personal sensations and experience. For him these ideas are inherent to the nature of music.

4. *Change*

I will refocus, at this point, on the comparisons with Virginia Woolf, and draw upon another study written by Elicia Clements. She suggests that Woolf was constantly inspired, in her writing, by her close friend Ethel Smyth, who was a composer and suffragette, and was a forward-thinking and non-conforming person. For Clements, the character 'Miss La Trobe', in Woolf's novel *Between the Acts*, is modelled after Smyth: 'Woolf was able to accept Smyth's inconsistencies, differences, and social clumsiness, leading her to create an artistic figure who portrays both the failures and triumphs of human interaction. La Trobe... intermingles with the owners of (a) country house... is also behind the bushes with the group of performers from the community... in the pub, crossing (class and gender) boundaries... in turn, the novel asks that the reader listen to La Trobe's symphony, a vibrant rapture of discordant life.'¹⁷ Overall Woolf, in her writings in fiction about music, had in mind a new type of composer, whose identity lacks the restrictions of class and gender. This imagined composer, modelled after Smyth, would create music evocative of discordancy, experience and performance.

In Peter Quince at the Clavier, Wallace Stevens imagines that same composer as Peter Quince who (as did not previously mention) is a minor character from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In the play he's a satirical character, an amateurish playwright and actor, bookish and by no means skilled musician who plays the 'clavier'. Nevertheless, Stevens reimagines him as portraying 'the vibrant rapture of discordant life', in musically retelling *Susanna and the Elders*. Stevens, like Woolf, writes about how musicians, via their personal and very idiosyncratic voice, might performatively draw attention to the heterogeneous voices beyond their own. Stevens coalesces this idea in the final two stanzas of Peter Quince. He writes about how 'maiden's voices (have) 'died', 'maidens die, to the auroral celebration of a maiden's choral' and further how 'Susanna's music' 'escaping', 'left only Death's ironic scraping'. These metaphors indicate, perhaps, how the emotional - 'musical' resonances of the evil treatment of biblical/mythic women, like Susanna, are lost to history.

I will briefly reiterate a reading of *The Waves*, also posited by Elicia Clements, which I mentioned earlier. Midway through that novel, the character Jinny dances at a London ball. She understands herself, while dancing, as undergoing patterns of self-redefinition, the music 'reconfiguring social interaction', and deconstructing Edwardian restrictions upon her, as a woman. Peter Quince's narration allows Susanna to undergo a similar change. It's clear therefore, that both characters are musically and heterogeneously represented in an emergent communal art. This process deconstructs confining social restrictions via a 'performative' written mode that both Woolf and Stevens use.

These ideas all contribute to the 'socio-political change' that I have constantly alluded to. My final example will be the 1937 Stevens poem, *The Man with the Blue Guitar*, which more-or-less coalesces all of these ideas. The eponymous 'man' is a 'secondary poet' of

¹⁷ Elicia Clements, 'Virginia Woolf, Ethel Smyth, and Music', *College Literature*, 32:3 (2005), 51-71.

sorts who, like the Mozart poet, has volatile relationship with the 'audience'. They order him '(to play) a tune upon the blue guitar of things exactly as they are.' Even as the guitarist rejects and seemingly satirises these demands: 'so that's life then things as they are?... a million people on one string?' he also uses collective pronouns 'do not speak to us of the greatness of poetry', and constructs an 'art world' whereby 'there are no shadows anywhere' and 'the earth, for us, is flat and bare.' This image conveys that no imagination, neither the guitarists nor the audience's, can lay claim to the figurative, spatiality of the desolated 'modern world'. Further, the pronouns convey the audience seizing control of the narrative and becoming the 'composer' themselves. As the guitarist plays, his role fluctuates between himself and the audience.

Should we examine *Blue Guitar* as a whole, for L.S Klatt the poem signifies a movement in American poetry, 'away from melody, verse that rhymes, harmonizes' to 'worldviews coming apart at the seams.' Klatt suggests that 'the crisis of meaning brought about by the dissolution of the gods compelled Stevens and his fellow composers to liquefy hard-and-fast statements into mutable phrasings and recombinant particles, later resulting in mournful music'¹⁸ akin to the jazz idiom which I identified. In my view, this cultural aesthetic change in music and literature, is not quite so apocalyptic as Klatt thinks; the loss of 'hard and fast statements' can be very unifying. This unification is conveyed in the penultimate Canto of *Blue Guitar*: 'throw away the lights, the definitions and say of what you see in the dark.' Stevens and Woolf both understand that the sun has set on the modern world. Phoebus (Percival) has died, and with him definition. Now, everything is 'dark', and we cannot see each other 'clearly'. Therefore, sound/music, not narrative, will provide interconnection again. Also, music, in its ineffability, does not have an artform that 'does not make linguistic sense,' rather it can make infinite sense, in being ingrained with infinite meaning.

Conclusion

Overall, it seems overwhelming clear that in Woolf and Stevens' work, music is an interconnecting 'antidote' to modern alienation. Their 'musical' mode of writing is itself radical; subtly directing modernist writing away from aesthetic conservatism to progressivism. Moreover, their uses of metaphor anticipate and parallel 20th Century musical developments and figures, including the work of Schoenberg, Debussy and John Cage, jazz theory, and also, perhaps, media theories of 'darkness' and music in relation to radio and cinema, and the 'mournfulness' of American blues music, rhythm and blues and rock, as L.S Klatt notes. These kinds of interdisciplinary connections would, of course, have to be established by other studies, which might also reaffirm the social resonances of my, admittedly very theoretically based analysis. Nevertheless, it still seems that there is a scholarly gap, pursued by some, yet overlooked by many, in that some modernist writers looked to the future in their writing, not just to the past. Music, it seems, is an art form that aids the former kind of process. Remembering this fact may allow us a profoundly richer understanding of literature and culture.

¹⁸ L.S Klatt, 'Blue Buzz, Blue Guitar: Wallace Stevens and the Poetics of Noisemaking', *The Georgia Review*, 73:1 (2019), 141-154.

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