This thesis has been submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for a postgraduate degree (e.g. PhD, MPhil, DClinPsychol) at the University of Edinburgh. Please note the following terms and conditions of use:

This work is protected by copyright and other intellectual property rights, which are retained by the thesis author, unless otherwise stated.
A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge.
This thesis cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the author.
The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the author.
When referring to this work, full bibliographic details including the author, title, awarding institution and date of the thesis must be given.
Edgar Allan Poe and Music

Charity McAdams

PhD English Literature

The University of Edinburgh

2013
Declaration

I, Charity McAdams, declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification. All material quoted from other sources has been accurately acknowledged and cited.

Signature: _______________________________

Date: _______________________________
Acknowledgements

Second only to Edgar Poe himself, Peter Dayan is the person to whom this thesis is most deeply indebted. Peter believed in this project from its inception, and kindly and thoughtfully showed me how to navigate this small portion of music and literature. Because of his generosity with his time, his patience with arguments that eluded articulation, and his inspirational insight, this project was always buoyed by a sense of hope and accomplishment that moved far beyond the words on the page.

Alongside Peter, I am most grateful to have been supervised by Sarah Dunnigan, who has so graciously guided me not only through the thesis, but who has also been a mentor in a variety of capacities, including teaching and public speaking, in ways that expose to her kind nature and selfless approach.

I would also like to extend my thanks to The International Association for Word and Music Studies (WMA), as well as to the members of The Word and Music Association Forum (WMAF), whose feedback and support at the intermediate stages of this thesis were invaluable to the evolution and maturation of the project.

Much of the research that went into this thesis was made available through the efforts of the University of Edinburgh’s Interlibrary Loan service, The British Library, and through the charity of Margaret Hrabe, the reference coordinator for the University of Virginia Library.

❖

‘...Green, green, it's green,’ they say,
‘On the far side of the hill...’

...Green, green, I’m going away
To where the grass is greener still...
Abstract

This thesis focuses on the creative work of Edgar Allan Poe, and pieces together how various references to music in his poems and tales function in ways that echo throughout his oeuvre. By taking into account the plots and themes that surround references to music in Poe’s works, this thesis explores how Poe uses and describes music as it inhabits real world settings, liminal spaces, and otherworldly sites. The literature this thesis draws from ranges from tales little-discussed in Poe criticism, such as “The Spectacles” and “The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether,” to more complex and popular tales such as “The Fall of the House of Usher” and “The Masque of the Red Death”; the same is true of the poems, which range from “Fanny” to “Annabel Lee.” The exploration of the less critically popular texts in conjunction with the more critically popular ones brings to light a clear hierarchy of music’s function in the tales and poems of Edgar Poe in ways that converse with his treatment of madness and the divine. The work of music and literature scholars will serve as the basis for distinguishing and historically positioning Poe’s use of certain musical terms, as well as ultimately providing a means to express the mythical, philosophical, and theological implications of music’s place in Poe’s works.
# Contents

DECLARATION.........................................................................................................................2  
AKNOWLEDGEMENTS..............................................................................................................3  
ABSTRACT ...............................................................................................................................4  
CONTENTS ...............................................................................................................................5  
INDEX OF TALES AND POEMS USED.....................................................................................7  
  
TABLE 1: INDEX OF TALES....................................................................................................8  
TABLE 2: INDEX OF POEMS....................................................................................................9  
INTRODUCTION ......................................................................................................................11  
  
OBJECTIVE AND AIMS ..........................................................................................................11  
THEORETICAL BACKGROUND ............................................................................................19  
THESIS OUTLINE ..................................................................................................................27  
LITERATURE REVIEW ...........................................................................................................36  
  
THE QUESTION OF POE’S MUSICAL ABILITY ....................................................................36  
WORD MUSIC .........................................................................................................................45  
WORD MUSIC AS BENEFICIAL TO POE’S WORKS ...............................................................47  
WORD MUSIC AS DETRIMENTAL TO POE’S WORKS ............................................................54  
MUSIC AS IMAGE, OR AS IMAGE AND SOUND ..................................................................59  
CONCLUSION ..........................................................................................................................62  

PART ONE: TALES ..................................................................................................................64  

1. REAL WORLD MUSIC: THE PARLOUR AND THE MADHOUSE ........................................65  
  
CHAPTER OUTLINE ...............................................................................................................65  
DEFINING REAL WORLD MUSIC .......................................................................................67  
THE MEMOIRS OF MADAME MALIBRAN ..............................................................................68  
“THE SPECTACLES”: MARIA MALIBRAN AND THE PARLOUR PERFORMANCE ..................71  
“THE SYSTEM OF DOCTOR TARR AND PROFESSOR FETHER”: MARIA MALIBRAN AND THE  
MADHOUSE PERFORMANCE ...............................................................................................79  
THE DEPARTURE FROM REAL WORLD MUSIC ..................................................................82  
CONCLUSION ..........................................................................................................................92  

2. UNRAVELLING REAL WORLD MUSIC: RODERICK USHER AND THE BALLAD ...........93  
  
CHAPTER OUTLINE ...............................................................................................................93  
THE “MAD TRIST” ...............................................................................................................94  
THE CASE OF THE BALLAD .....................................................................................................107
“ULALUME — A BALLAD” .............................................................................................................. 112
“ANNEBEL LEE — A BALLAD” ...................................................................................................... 123
"THE HAUNTED PALACE": THE BALLAD AND MUSIC ............................................................. 126
CONCLUSION ............................................................................................................................... 134

3. DEPARTURE FROM REAL WORLD MUSIC: SHRIEKS, MURMURS, AND THE MUSICAL VOICE ................................................................. 136
CHAPTER OUTLINE .................................................................................................................. 136
THE INFORMING VOICE: SHRIEKS AND MURMURS ............................................................ 137
THE MUSICAL VOICE: "LIGEIA" AND "MORELLA" .................................................................... 144
CONCLUSION ............................................................................................................................... 151

PART TWO: POEMS ..................................................................................................................... 154

4. EARTHLY MUSIC: HUMANS AND BIRDS .............................................................................. 155
CHAPTER OUTLINE .................................................................................................................. 155
HUMANS AND SONG: TITLES THAT REFER TO VOCAL MUSIC .............................................. 156
BIRDS AND SONG: SUBJECTS THAT REFER TO VOCAL MUSIC .............................................. 163
"FANNY": SWAN SONG ............................................................................................................. 165
“ROMANCE”: SONG AND UTTERANCE ..................................................................................... 167
“THE RAVEN”: ORPHIC SONG .................................................................................................. 173
CONCLUSION ............................................................................................................................... 178

5. OTHERWORLDLY MUSIC: SPIRITS AND THE MUSIC OF THE SPHERES ..................... 180
CHAPTER OUTLINE .................................................................................................................. 180
THE MUSIC OF THE SPHERES ................................................................................................. 181
“THE SLEEPER”: INAUDIBLE MUSIC ....................................................................................... 189
“AL AARAAFF”: SPIRITUAL MUSIC AND ECHOES OF MORTALITY ........................................ 191
“ISRAEL”: A RECAPITULATION OF THEMES .......................................................................... 201
CONCLUSION ............................................................................................................................... 211

6. DEATHLY MUSIC: BELLS, NOTES, AND THE SHADOW .................................................. 212
CHAPTER OUTLINE .................................................................................................................. 212
"ELDORADO" AND "SHADOW. — A PARABLE": MUSIC AND DEATH .................................... 213
“THE CASK OF AMONTILLADO”: BELLS AND THE SINGLE NOTE IN POE’S TALES ............... 220
"THE BELLS": MUSIC OF THE UNKNOWN ................................................................................. 225
“À PÆAN”: SOLEMN MUSIC ...................................................................................................... 230
"THE MASQUE OF THE RED DEATH": THE SINGLE NOTE ...................................................... 236
CONCLUSION ............................................................................................................................... 240

CONCLUSION ............................................................................................................................... 242

WORKS CITED ............................................................................................................................. 249
Index of Tales and Poems Used

This thesis uses Thomas Ollive Mabbott’s edited volumes of Poe’s poems and tales. Poe often substantially edited and published his pieces multiples times in his lifetime, with some final editions of his works being published just posthumously. Mabbott assigns a letter to every known edition of Poe’s poems and tales to distinguish between them: the earliest known edition, whether in manuscript form or published, is edition [A] of that work, and each subsequent edition takes the next letter assignment. This thesis adopts Mabbott’s letter assignments for quick reference to each edition of a work used in this thesis.

In some instances, my argument requires comparison between more than one edition of the same piece. In these instances, I will highlight the difference in the body of my thesis and refer to each edition using Mabbott’s letter system. Outside of these few instances, this thesis uses the editions presented in the following table as the definitive edition of each tale or poem unless otherwise noted. This body of this thesis only analyses Poe’s published pieces, and unless the tables below present different information, the editions used in this thesis are Mabbott’s copy-text editions. However, I have included in brackets the earliest publication date of many texts in this thesis’s body text, including Poe’s, in order to reiterate a clear timeline in his work and in criticism. The following tables list the poems and tales used in the thesis, organising them by first publication date, followed by the titles and dates of the editions used. All italics and stylised emphases in the quotations in this thesis are from the original works unless otherwise noted.
**Table 1: Index of Tales**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Publication Date</th>
<th>Title of Edition[s] Used</th>
<th>Dates of Edition[s] Used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1832 [A]</td>
<td>A Decided Loss</td>
<td>1832 [A]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1832 [A]</td>
<td>The Duc de L’Omelette</td>
<td>1832 [A], 1850 [F]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1835 [B]</td>
<td>Morella</td>
<td>1848 [G]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1835 [A]</td>
<td>Shadow. — A Parable</td>
<td>1850 [F]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1836 [B]</td>
<td>Four Beasts in One; The Homo-Cameleopard</td>
<td>1850 [E]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1837 [A]</td>
<td>Von Jung, the Mystifíc</td>
<td>1837 [A] i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1838 [A]</td>
<td>Ligeia</td>
<td>1848 [F]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1838 [B]</td>
<td>Silence — A Fable</td>
<td>1850 [E]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1839 [A]</td>
<td>The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion</td>
<td>1845 [D]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1839 [A]</td>
<td>The Devil in the Belfry</td>
<td>1850 [F]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1839 [A]</td>
<td>The Fall of the House of Usher</td>
<td>1845 [D]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1840 [A]</td>
<td>The Man of the Crowd</td>
<td>1849 [C]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1841 [A]</td>
<td>The Colloquy of Monos and Una</td>
<td>1845 [B]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1841 [A]</td>
<td>A Descent into the Maelström</td>
<td>1849 [C]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1841 [A]</td>
<td>Eleonora</td>
<td>1845 [B]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1841 [B]</td>
<td>The Murders in the Rue Morgue</td>
<td>1850 [E]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1842 [A]</td>
<td>The Masque of the Red Death</td>
<td>1850 [C]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1842 [A]</td>
<td>The Pit and the Pendulum</td>
<td>1850 [C]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1843 [A]</td>
<td>The Black Cat</td>
<td>1845 [B]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1844 [A]</td>
<td>The Purloined Letter</td>
<td>1849 [C]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1844 [A]</td>
<td>The Spectacles</td>
<td>1850 [D]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1844 [B]</td>
<td>A Tale of the Ragged Mountains</td>
<td>1845 [C]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1845 [B]</td>
<td>The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether</td>
<td>1850 [C]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1846 [A]</td>
<td>The Cask of Amontillado</td>
<td>1850 [B]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

1 This is not Mabbott’s copy-text. The story was changed to “Mystification,” and Mabbott’s copy-text is the 1845 edition of that later tale. The 1837 edition is the only one that mentions Henriette Sontag, however, and it is just this reference this thesis takes from the tale (Mabbott, *Tales* 294).
### Table 2: Index of Poems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Publication Date</th>
<th>Title of Edition[s] Used</th>
<th>Dates of Edition[s] Used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1827 [A]</td>
<td>The Lake — To —</td>
<td>1845 [F]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1827 [A]</td>
<td>Song</td>
<td>1845 [F]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1827 [Only Publication]</td>
<td>[Stanzas]</td>
<td>1827(^2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1827 [A]</td>
<td>Tamerlane</td>
<td>1845 [H]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1829 [A]</td>
<td>Al Aaraaf</td>
<td>1845 [K]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1829 [A]</td>
<td>Romance</td>
<td>1845 [G]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1829 [A]</td>
<td>To —</td>
<td>1845 [D]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1831 [A]</td>
<td>Israfel</td>
<td>1831 [A], 1841 [C], 1849 [G]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1831 [A]</td>
<td>A Pæan</td>
<td>1836 [B]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1831 [A]</td>
<td>The Sleeper</td>
<td>1849 [J]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1833 [A]</td>
<td>The Coliseum</td>
<td>1850 [M]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1833 [Only Publication]</td>
<td>Fanny</td>
<td>1833</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1833 [Only Publication]</td>
<td>Serenade</td>
<td>1833</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1839 [A]</td>
<td>The Haunted Palace</td>
<td>1850 [R]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1840 [B]</td>
<td>Sonnet — Silence</td>
<td>1845 [F]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1843 [A]</td>
<td>The Conqueror Worm</td>
<td>1849 [J]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1843 [A]</td>
<td>Lenore</td>
<td>1849 [K]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1845 [B]</td>
<td>Eulalie — A Song</td>
<td>1845 [E](^3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1845 [A]</td>
<td>The Raven</td>
<td>1849 [T]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1847 [A]</td>
<td>Ulalume — A Ballad</td>
<td>1849 [K]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1848 [B]</td>
<td>To — — —</td>
<td>1848 [B]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1849 [A]</td>
<td>Annabel Lee — A Ballad</td>
<td>1850 [K](^4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1849 [C]</td>
<td>The Bells — A Song [C]</td>
<td>1849 [C], 1849 [G]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1849 [A]</td>
<td>Eldorado</td>
<td>1850 [B]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^2\) The poem is untitled, but is conventionally referred to as “[Stanzas].”

\(^3\) This is not Mabbott’s copy-text. Poe published the poem with the title “Eulalie — A Song” three times in 1845 ([B, C, E]), but Mabbott’s copy-text adopts an 1846 manuscript that changes the title to “Eulalie.” Poe never sought to publish that manuscript, however, so the published editions bear stronger weight for this thesis (Mabbott, *Poems* 348-49).

\(^4\) This is not Mabbott’s copy-text. The last manuscript of the poem that Poe sold to John Sartain in July 1849 changed the title from “Annabel Lee” to “Annabel Lee — A Ballad.” Because this was the final edition (not in manuscript) sold for publication, this thesis adopts it as the copy-text (Mabbott, *Poems* 476-77).
Introduction

Objective and Aims

This thesis explores the significance of the vocabulary of music in Edgar Allan Poe’s (1809-1849) poetry and short stories, with the aim of revealing how this musical vocabulary illustrates a postlapsarian narrative in Poe’s oeuvre in which the yearning for an ancient mythological past that unified words and music contrarily reinforces the present failed human condition that can never reunite the two. By drawing connections between his use of terms such as ‘music,’ ‘melody,’ ‘song,’ and ‘harmony,’ a unified narrative of music emerges: one which works along a hierarchy of divinity as music takes place in settings that move from the earthly to the otherworldly, and as music becomes associated with themes that move from the demonic to the angelic, the sane to the mad, the material to the immaterial, and most importantly, the heard to the unheard.

I will argue that, for Poe, the most earthly of music, that which is most aligned with our ‘real world musical experience,’ music that we might see and hear in a private or public performance, is a rare occurrence in his works. Moreover, those few instances in which it may occur refuse to intimate transcendence, otherworldliness, the ideal, or a number of other tropes that align with a Romantic desire for “enchantment in a world where there is nothing to enchant” (Chua 22). Rather, real world music becomes associated in Poe’s works with physicality, reality, words, or utterance. However, this

---

5 I define ‘real world music’ using Richard Leppert’s (1993) “interlocking” components of eighteenth-century musical experience (64). The theoretical section of this introduction and first chapter will explain these in more detail, but they include the necessity for the music to be experienced “as a sight and sound together, united in performance” (64), opposing ephemeral, imaginary, non-sourced, or supernatural forms of music.
association between music that one might see and hear in a real world sense and utterance becomes complicated in Poe’s works when those works incorporate the theme of madness. In these cases, music maintains its association with words, but it also takes on descriptors of discordance; furthermore, words become associated with the corporeal reality of death, and both the violence of this materiality and the music that surrounds it are depicted with disturbing severity.

The reverse is true, as well, as music moves away from that aligned with the ‘real world musical experience.’ As music takes place in more liminal settings and becomes less attached to aural descriptions that can be specified or understood as representative of our experience of played music in the real world, descriptions of music separate from utterance and move towards silence. When madness in its various forms complicates these texts, it is to point to the otherworldly, or to the more divine aspects of death, in opposition to the physically embodied death that populates the earthly setting. This results in intricate links between audibility, madness, and death (all of which are divided between that which lies inside or outside of our earthly experience). That which is musically voiced without articulation, that which is not or cannot be named, opposes that which is uttered and articulated, or that which is and can be named. As Poe’s works invoke music that can be less and less defined as associated with the real world, his focus on descriptions of utterance begins to dissolve, and the reader is only left with a narrative interpretation of that which is enigmatically musically communicated. In doing so, that which is musically voiced becomes less and less describable in terms of the audible; music becomes more and more silent, always conveying something of the beyond, of the supernatural, and of death.
The crux of this narrative lies within the discourse of failure, however. While earthly music is always associated with utterance, discordance, or both, Poe’s characters, settings, and descriptions of unearthly music cannot continue to indefinitely ascend along some invisible hierarchy that moves from earthly to heavenly music. It is this notion of failure, and the ways in which it unfolds in Poe’s musical discourse, that this thesis ultimately investigates. Central to this postlapsarian narrative and spectrum of music that works along a hierarchy of divinity is the fact that, while references to music permeate Poe’s works, many of the references to music almost never align with what might be described as real world musical experience. Not only is music, as might be expected in Poe’s work, often associated with dreams, madness, death, supernatural spaces, angels, demons, and otherworldly landscapes, but also it is nearly always described in words that refuse to be expressly experienced as played by non-supernatural characters and as sight and sound bound together.

This observation that Poe’s use of music is complex and resists heard sound descriptions while being associated with tropes of death and madness dominates the field; in this way, this thesis takes a new approach to the study of Poe and music by focusing on the interstices of thematic failure in Poe’s works. Beginning with the analysis of earthly, fallen, heard, music that has nothing to do with insanity, death, or supernatural forces, this approach provides the key for the myriad of instances in which Poe’s music is associated with just the opposite. Poe privileges, time and again, descriptions and settings of liminal, unearthly, and unheard music, and it is these descriptions that have taken precedence in studies of Poe and music thus far.
Indeed, the indefinite nature of the descriptions that accompany Poe’s musical vocabulary, as well as the implied importance and intricacies of his engagement with music, is a recurring subtopic of Edgar Allan Poe studies. Many critical pieces refer to the connection in one way or another. However, this is the first study to engage with the topic extensively, and it is unique in thoroughly unfolding Poe’s postlapsarian narrative as integral to understanding his use of music. In fact, there is only one book explicitly written in English on Poe and music, May Garrettson Evans’s (1939) *Music and Edgar Allan Poe: A Bibliographical Study*. Outside of that text, much of the criticism on Poe and music stems from interpositions, digressions, and citations in journal articles and books on other topics, so that the subject of music in Poe’s works recurs in, without becoming the focus of, criticism. The topic arises as a footnote or fleeting thought in works on outside topics (such as Baudelaire, Ravel, and on song settings such as the Alan Parsons Project rendition of “The Raven”), and within Poe studies, there are discussion threads regarding Poe and music that occur in conjunction with certain tales or poems, but these threads are often left unexpanded.

Older edited volumes of Poe’s poetry, for instance, often describe Poe’s poems in terms of music. These pieces typically apply musical terms to literature without recourse to any theoretical framework, however. As Sophie Fuller and Nicky Losseff (2004) have pointed out, the “interdisciplinary study of music and literature has been attracting interest […] for over half a century” (Fuller xiii), implying that the distinction between critics of music and literature and critics who use musical terms when writing about literature is relatively new. As Walter Bernhart (2000) has suggested, it has been the work of scholars like Calvin Brown, who fought the “staunch” academic “battle
against the loose metaphorical use of musical terms when applied to literature” that has sought to clarify this difference (Bernhart 117). Early Poe critics tend to belong to the first category of scholars, those whose “loose metaphorical use of musical terms” comprises their portrayal of Edgar Allan Poe’s use of music. In Killis Campbell’s edition of Poe’s poetry (1917), he cites two such comparisons. In the first, he cites Swinburne:

Swinburne wrote in 1872, in summing up the American achievement in literature to date: ‘Once as yet, and once only, has there sounded out of it all [the literature of America] one pure note of original song — worth singing, and echoed from the singing of no other man; a note of song neither wide nor deep, but utterly true, rich, clear, and native to the singer; the short exquisite music, subtle and simple and somber and sweet, of Edgar Poe.’ (The Poems lv)

Swinburne describes Poe as giving rise to “one pure note of original song” as an undefined notion, a choice of words indicative of an imitation of Poe’s own language: the “one pure note” reflects the “bolder note” that “might swell” from the speaker’s “lyre within the sky” in “Israfel” ([G] 50-51). As well as quoting Swinburne’s comments on Poe, Campbell cites Barrett Wendell (1909), who writes that the “utterance of Poe [...] is as incontestably, as triumphantly, itself, as is the note of a song bird” (The Poems lvii). Swinburne and Wendell both use musical analogies to praise Poe’s works, and through the image of the single “note,” both adopt Poe’s own language to do so. The circular use of Poe’s own terms and images in critical and artistic appraisals of his work occurs elsewhere.

---

6 In this quotation, Bernhart refers to Brown’s larger body of work. See, for instance, Brown’s book Music and Literature: A Companion of the Arts (1948), or his article “The Relations between Music and Literature as a Field of Study” (1970).
Other, more recent, threads of discussion regarding Poe and music acknowledge the use of the word “music” or its variants in his works, and these threads of discussion do not remain confined to Poe’s poetry. Ronald Bieganowski (1988) and Mark Canada (2001) allude to the significance of music in Poe’s short fiction, even if they do not elaborate upon that significance. Ronald Bieganowski describes the valet of “The Fall of the House of Usher” as a “valet to a family with a ‘passionate devotion to the intricacies...of musical science,’” who “silently conducts the narrator through intricate passages to Roderick’s study, a wild composition representing his imaginative state. Without musical score or baton, the valet conducts the narrator through Usher’s creation” (207). Bieganowski quotes Poe’s tale in describing the Ushers as devoted “to the intricacies...of musical science,” yet in doing so, Bieganowski responds with his own metaphor of the “wild composition” that Poe’s valet navigates “without musical score or baton.” While Bieganowski does not continue his exploration of the metaphor, the metaphor itself highlights some perceived connection between Poe’s text and Roderick Usher’s “wild composition.”

Similarly, in his analysis of “The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym,” Mark Canada writes, “what eventually saves Pym [...] is [...] a sound that Pym compares to music: he drops his knife, which makes a ‘rattling sound’ as it hits the floor. He writes, ‘Never did any strain of the richest melody come so sweetly to my ears’. Unlike language, music has a place [...] in the realm Pym explores” (67). Like Bieganowski, Canada directly quotes a part of the text that incorporates musical vocabulary, the term “melody,” but he omits any commentary on that “melody,” typically defined as an articulated series of notes, being linked to a “rattling sound.” Rather, Canada responds to
the citation by drawing out his perceived importance of music in the text; he ties music in with the right brain in his argument that Pym explores that side of consciousness, but Canada does not discuss what that connection, in terms of music alone, means in the story as a whole.

Rather than disentangling the internal logic of Poe’s conceptualisation of music in his creative works, scholarship tends to address the way Poe’s works influenced musical composers. They address, for instance, how composers such as Debussy sought to score “The Fall of the House of Usher,” a topic that is not easily clarified through Debussy’s own commentary on the piece. As Jean-François Thibault (1994) explains:

Debussy links the image of the stones [of Poe’s House of Usher] to his own music. [...] he writes in a letter to Jacques Durand, on 26 June 1909: ‘I’ve been working on La Chute de la Maison Usher recently and have almost finished a long monologue for Roderick. It’s sad enough to make the stones weep for what neurasthenics have to go through. It smells charmingly of mildew obtained by mixing the sounds of the low oboe with violin harmonics.’ It seems that Debussy had made the final jump and that the musical texture and language he was looking for had become an integral part of the imaginary structure of the house. (202)

Debussy’s comment appears to highlight his transposition of Poe’s story’s “atmosphere” to the “atmosphere” of his own piece, as though the “low oboe” and the “violin harmonics” arise organically out of Poe’s descriptions. Debussy never finished La Chute de la Maison Usher, which may itself speak to Poe’s multi-layered influence on composers; Jack Sullivan (1999) clarifies that Debussy “was not so much influenced as ‘obsessed,’ identifying himself repeatedly with Poe’s most morbidly isolated hero, with whom he felt a terrible empathy and spiritual kinship” (62), and he felt the influence of the “atmosphere” of Poe’s stories to the extent that he conflated his own sensitivities with those of Poe’s character.
Ravel also spoke of Poe’s effect on his compositions, stating: “the aesthetic of Edgar Allan Poe, your great American, has been of singular importance to me” (qtd. in Sullivan 73). “Singular,” Poe’s own beloved term, implies that Ravel expresses Poe’s influence in a way similar to Debussy. Rather than parsing out Poe’s images and sounds, the composers discuss Poe in a way that assumes the language and “atmosphere” of Poe’s work. Moreover, critics such as Jack Sullivan write of the resultant pieces of Debussy and Ravel in parallel terms, stating that in the “morbid sensuality of Ravel’s ‘Le Gibet,’ the yearning and fantasy of Debussy’s ‘Sirens,’ the ecstatic melancholy of Ravel’s *Daphnis et Chloe* [...] the Poe-like suggestiveness, that indefinite sense of melancholy and the fantastic, creeps up the listener’s spine” (70). Sullivan brings to the forefront again how such proponents of Poe’s “poetic effect” determine the “atmosphere” of his works, and why such an “indefinite” conception makes itself so available to performed music. It is as though the “atmosphere” of Poe’s works, whatever it is, is directly and organically conveyed through performed music. Yet the difficulty in this approach to Poe and music is that it moves circuitously from Poe’s undefined “atmosphere” or “singular importance” to the same quality in musical compositions, which then points back towards Poe; artists and critics might agree on Poe’s influential connection to music, but they cannot use his connection to music written and performed in the real world to explain it.

It is this very circularity that I attempt to avoid in this thesis. While Poe’s work often becomes stubbornly self-referential in a way that is mirrored in criticism, this thesis avoids some of this confusion by initially teasing out the instances in which Poe’s music does not reflect this indefiniteness that has so eluded other scholars. The
significance of Poe’s departure from the real world musical experience can only be explained from the perspective of the singular apparent exceptions to the rule, those few instances in prose and poetry in which ‘real world musical experience’ does seem to be implied and which scholars have heretofore appeared to ignore. Nevertheless, the ways in which these singularities emerge in Poe’s work differs in his poetry and prose. Nevertheless, the ways in which these singularities emerge in Poe’s work differs in his poetry and prose.7

Because of this, the thesis is divided into two parts: short stories and prose, each with three chapters that move from the most ‘real world’ oriented musical experiences to the least.

**Theoretical Background**

Because of the aforementioned circularity surrounding various studies of Poe and music, the body of this thesis does not extensively engage with that scholarship. The detailed reasoning for this omission is outlined in the literature review that follows this introduction. Instead, this thesis presents a different theoretical framework and outline that substantiates, first and foremost, Poe’s postlapsarian narrative. It does so through a use of word and music scholarship that helps to negotiate Poe’s place in the Romantic musical aesthetic (primarily via Daniel Chua, Lawrence Kramer, Peter Dayan, and John Hollander), as well as through those Poe scholars who discuss his existence as an author “properly [located] […] in a textual universe” (Blasing 18), (primarily via Daniel

---

7 The body of this thesis leaves Poe’s nonfictional works out of much of the primary analysis for two critical reasons: firstly, in many of these Poe weaves an opaque web that ties together music and literature without ever making explicit a definition of either, and secondly, Poe’s essays, reviews, and critical theory interweave criteria for defining poetry and prose in ways that, if adapted for this thesis, would overcomplicate the terms ‘poetry’ and ‘prose’ such that neither could be confidently used.
Hoffman, Mutlu Konuk Blasing, Joseph Riddel, and Martin Roth). Rather than first making meaning of the ways in which Poe uses music, this thesis makes sense of the ways in which Poe’s use of music continually arises in liminal spaces rather than real world ones, in terms of madness rather than sanity, and death rather than life. Thus, my theoretical approach to unify these themes of a postlapsarian narrative with madness, death, and liminality, encompasses works that also embrace the discourse of an ancient and undifferentiated experience as the precursor to modern fracture and alienation.

The primary texts that underpin my thesis, then, are: Michel Foucault’s *Madness and Civilization* (1964) in the first part, and Daniel Chua’s *Absolute Music and the Construction of Meaning* (1999) in the second. Foucault and Chua are not invoked as authoritative historians of the treatment of madness and music from ancient to modern times, but rather as practitioners of the kind of discourse in which Poe immerses himself, that of an ancient state of undifferentiated experience that informs the differentiated modern one in which we live. Like Foucault, who famously describes “that zero point in the course of madness at which madness is an undifferentiated experience, a not yet divided experience of division itself” (ix), Chua couches his account of the (re)-emergence of the concept of absolute music in terms of a comparison between the modern world and an ancient Pythagorean universe in which “music tunes the cosmos […] and scales the human soul to the same proportions. This enabled the inaudible sounds of the heavens to vibrate within the earthly soul, and, conversely, for the audible tones of human music to reflect the celestial spheres” (15). Just as Foucault interrogates the modern understanding of insanity as that point “which relegates Reason and Madness to one side or the other […] as things henceforth external, deaf to all exchange,
and as though dead to one another” (ix), Chua negotiates a parallel fissure to Reason and Madness, that between the earthly and the heavenly.

This rupture, that for Chua led to modern disenchantment, is envisioned as a severing of “the umbilical link” (16) between earth and the cosmos and was a protracted historical moment that dominated post-Galilei, who explicitly “collapsed music into ‘reality’ as an audible fact divorced from celestial values” (18). Rather than the “inaudible sounds” of the heavens that vibrated in the “earthly soul,” music in its modern condition is vulgarly ‘heard,’ ‘real,’ and ‘earthly,’ and the notion of music as ‘inaudible’ represents a no longer existent connection to the ‘invisible’ and the ‘otherworldly.’ While I do not subscribe to Chua’s rendering of a musical history that explains a fallen modernity, it illustrates Poe’s expression of a real, audible, or to use Chua’s terms, “demythologised music with an empirical rationality” (Chua 19), which is constantly at war with a celestial inaudible music that he continually tries to reclaim.

When used in conjunction with Foucault, a crucial dichotomy of reason and madness, audibility and inaudibility, the earthly and the heavenly, and the real and the supernatural begins to emerge. In this tension, the ancient “inaudible sounds” to which the human soul vibrated (a kind of heavenly silence) have made way for another kind of silence, that which reinforces the modern severance from that prelapsarian cosmic tuning. Towards the end of this thesis, I will differentiate between the ancient “inaudible sounds,” the heavenly silence, and that silence that represents a severance from that ideal, as a distinction between Silence (the ideal) and silence (the real); these both align, of course, with Music (the ideal) and music (the real).
This is not the first work in Poe studies to discuss his work in terms of a series of dichotomies, however, and it is not the first to discuss his work in terms of a postlapsarian narrative. Edgar Allan Poe has often been depicted as a figure embodying a series of polarities. Not only has Poe and his work been articulated in equally demonising and glorifying terms, but as Joseph Moldenhauer (1968) explains,

his writings, both imaginative and discursive, exhibit extreme contradictions of thought and feeling. Between and sometimes even within individual works Poe appears as a Shelleyan romantic and as an eighteenth-century rationalist, as a neurotic escapist and as a broadly social figure, as a neo-Platonic visionary and as a severe logician or a commonsense realist, as a selfless devotee to artistic ideals and as a calculating exploiter of literary fads. It has therefore been the challenge of his critics, particularly in recent years, in turn to seek the essential Poe. (284)

More than each of these incarnations of Poe appearing in his works, critics have sought to find commensurate interpretations in various forms. While acknowledging the merit of viewing Poe’s works through the lens of Romanticism, Sentimentality, neo-Platonism, social history, and any number of other critical filters, this thesis avoids seeking “the essential Poe” as much as it avoids drawing upon or responding to Poe’s works in terms of one specific literary tradition. Yet, each of these traditions arises from time to time in the thesis, and the tendency to privilege certain critical perspectives, such as those invoking a postlapsarian narrative, inevitably takes place.

Integral to other critical works in Poe’s studies that incorporate this postlapsarian narrative is the notion of Edgar Allan Poe’s displacement; to use John Minahan’s (1992) term in describing Keats’s work, a term that will arise near the conclusion of this thesis, the “not-this-ness” of Poe’s writing (52). That quality that I am describing as the “not-this-ness” of Poe’s work is illuminated most cogently in the context of Poe’s
transatlantic identity as argued by Mutlu Konuk Blasing (1987) in the opening chapter to her book on *American Poetry*. She writes:

Edgar Allan Poe’s failure as a poet appears to be a matter of consensus among his English and American readers […]. Yet he is best placed in a transatlantic context, for his failure — and his success — directly stem from his American displacement […]. Poe urges us not to forget that ‘the world is the true theatre of the biblical histrio’; his world, however, is curiously suspended between England and America, in a midatlantic Atlantis outside history. It is this estrangement from both his English and American backgrounds that shapes his work. (17-18)

Beyond this introduction, I do not address in any detail the notion of Poe as a writer in a “transatlantic context.” However, multiple facets of Blasing’s argument provide the broad framework upon which this thesis rests. First is the idea of Poe’s universal “failure as a poet,” and second is that of his being “curiously suspended” in a mythical place “outside history.” I will address the first before returning to the second with a more detailed response to Blasing’s argument.

In terms of the idea of Poe’s “failure as a poet,” the notion that Poe found ardent fellowship in artists such as Alfred Tennyson, Charles Baudelaire, and Claude Debussy while other artists, such as T.S. Eliot and James Russell Lowell, censured him, has not escaped critical attention. Instead of adding to the already detailed histories of Poe criticism provided by other writers, most notably and recently by Scott Peeples (2004) in his *The Afterlife of Edgar Allan Poe*, I would like to present a comment by one of Poe’s harshest critics, Harold Bloom (2008), as representative of the complexities in assessments of Poe’s work that speak to the larger issues of this thesis. Bloom has argued, “Poe’s verse (I will not call it poetry) is indefensible” and that his “Gothic tales were accurately represented (even a touch improved) by the series of horror movies starring Vincent Price” (*Bloom’s* xi). Despite this harsh assessment of Poe, Bloom
concedes one point about him, that he is “inescapable […]”: he dreamed universal nightmares” (xi). While purporting that the “plain badness of Poe’s various styles, in prose and verse, is merely palpable,” Bloom softens his gaze on Poe when he claims that “Poe dwells, with the rest of us, in Plato’s Cave but wants, more desperately than most do, to find his way out into the disembodied light” (xi). According to Bloom, Poe cannot write himself “out of the proverbial paper bag” (xii), but he allows that Poe “was a religious writer without a religion,” and that he “had something to say,” even if he had “little skill in saying it” (xii).

Bloom’s concessions about Poe, that he “dreamed universal nightmares,” that he so “desperately” wanted to “find his way out into the disembodied light” from the Platonic cave, and that, enigmatically, he “had something to say,” typify the underlying messages of both Poe’s supporters and detractors: Poe has somehow related that he “had something to say” both to those who find his writing intolerable and to those who find it admirable. If Poe’s style is so indefensible to some and so beloved by others, it must contain another quality, either in subject or expression, that conveys to a critic such as Bloom that he “dreamed universal nightmares” and that he so “desperately” wanted to “find his way out into the disembodied light” from the Platonic cave. This thesis will go on to explore the idea that music becomes a form of expression, lacking articulation, in Poe’s work, that best conveys this undefined “something to say” of Poe’s. My interpretation is rooted in Blasing’s parallel response to Poe’s possible failure, which she also articulates in Platonic terms.

While maintaining that Poe’s “failure — and his success — directly stem from his American displacement” (17), she goes on to argue:
To borrow Derrida’s terms for this Platonic distinction, the raven’s language is the ‘rememoration’ of writing, which is non-knowledge, forgetfulness, or oblivion, as opposed to true memory, which is knowledge or a repetition of truth. The only force capable, in postmythological times, of distinguishing between the true poet’s ‘angelic,’ Orphic music and the failed or fake poet’s hellish chatter is the standard, established by history, or craft. […] Without cultural and historical authorization, he works in an echo chamber of forms empty of significance and is condemned to self-parody — to exposing himself his manipulation of the physical and temporal properties of the language he would sound celestial notes with. (32)

Just as I have opened my discussion of Poe and music with the theoretical discourse of Chua and Foucault, Blasing incorporates into her discussion of Poe’s music the recognition of Poe’s entrenchment in “postmythological times.” However, while Blasing differentiates between the “true poet’s ‘angelic,’ Orphic music” and the “failed or fake poet’s hellish chatter,” thus relegating Poe and only Poe as a singular transatlantic artist to “an echo chamber of empty forms,” I maintain that Poe extends this failure to the modern condition of art, and that music becomes the one art form which best expresses this failure. I argue, instead, that his meta-commentary on his “manipulation of the physical and temporal properties of language” not only confines him to “self-parody,” but rather the inescapability of the poet’s failure paradoxically points back towards the “celestial notes” that he cannot sound.

In taking an argument such as Blasing’s a step further, this thesis follows in her footsteps in embedding this argument in the implicit recognition of Poe as “a practitioner of the ‘writerly’ text” (18), the critical Deconstructionist notion that Blasing herself argues for and against. As Scott Peeples explains, such Deconstructionist interpretations of Poe’s work find their root in work such as Edward Davidson’s (1957), in which he claims that Poe “plays heaven and hell, God and Satan, and tends more and more to
enter a private world from which reality and even meaning, normally considered, are excluded” (qtd. in Peeples 76-77). Moreover, for later critics such as Joseph Riddel (1979), “Poe’s ‘realm of dream’ is the ‘realm of language,’ always pointing to the ‘absence of the ideal’” (Peeples 85). Although in responding to Deconstructionist readings of Poe, Blasing argues that such “readings of Poe’s fiction properly locate him in a textual universe,” she maintains that they fail “to register his historical problem with the library of texts he finds himself in” (18). I maintain, however, that readings such as Blasing’s can, in the case of the question of Poe and music, be underpinned and informed by Deconstructionist-influenced interpretation, such as Daniel Hoffman’s work *Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe* (1972) which I often respond to in this thesis, and indeed can bring light to the nuanced interpretations of Poe that she goes on to develop, interpretations stemming from her claim that Poe differentiates himself from both Romanticism and that “which Harold Bloom terms the ‘American Sublime’” (24), or that “integration of the angelic imagination with natural law” (24), such that Poe’s work “can only confirm the absolute separation of the eternal and temporal worlds” (23).

Indeed, this thesis will refuse the dominating Psychoanalytic interpretations of Poe, and will instead interrogate music’s place in Poe’s work to tease out the implications highlighted by Blasing’s anti-Romantic, anti-‘American Sublime’ interpretation of Poe. Building upon her position, this thesis will develop the assertions that, for Poe, “the means of poetry […] belong to our fallen estate and are at odds with the transcendent aims of poetry. […] ‘Beauty’ is an effect created precisely by our

---

8 Blasing perches her argument atop the fundamental separation of verse and prose fiction in Poe’s oeuvre. For reasons that will be more explicitly articulated in the Literature Review of this thesis, I avoid such a distinction in analysing Poe’s work.
failure to reach ‘supernal Beauty’; it is an effect of our recognition of our limits” (Blasing 24). Incorporating this argument into an analysis of both Poe’s poetry and prose fiction, this thesis will do more than argue that, as Blasing states,

while the poet can hear the music of the spheres — a harmony that precludes sounds [...] — he cannot ‘name’ this ‘silence’ without the means of the music of verse [...]. The poet has authority over ‘the circumscribed Eden’ of dreams; the circumscribing or defining words subscribe to another authority and are subject to time and history, thus rendering the dreamed-of paradise unspeakable and unrecoverable. This paradise is both a radiant center before time and a nature before history [...]. (23)

Although I agree that Poe’s “poet,” or representative voice in his tales and prose fiction, finds his “dreamed-of paradise unspeakable and unrecoverable,” that “radiant center before time and history,” I argue that he cannot “name” that “harmony that precludes sounds” of the music of the spheres precisely because he cannot ‘hear’ it. Rather, Poe’s work engages with the notion of a prelapsarian world from which we are completely excluded, and music becomes the idea that most clearly conveys and incorporates notions of dispossession, an attempt to escape from history and time and return to an undifferentiated and non-temporal past. Music becomes representative of that which is, to appropriate Blasing’s terms, “cut off from a productive intercourse with the underworld and the world of nature, and the speaker remains arrested in a mediation that fails to mediate. [...] We move forward and backward at the same time, as pleasure turns to pain, future hope reverts to past despair” (Blasing 30).

**Thesis Outline**

After the substantial literature review, this thesis is divided into two main sections, with the first three chapters of each section following the trajectory I have just
described. Chapters one to three, dealing with Poe’s short stories, begin with examples of real world music, in which the seen and the heard forms of music have either nothing at all to do with madness, or deal with madness of the physical, of the violence of death, and of the animalistic and earthly. In all of these instances, there is a continual insistence on a connection between the real world musical experience and the materiality of language. The first three chapters then gradually introduce liminal and then extreme examples of music associated with the inaudible, the unearthly, the supernatural, and the madness associated with the psyche, the otherworldly, and the implications of the death of the soul. The second half of the thesis, dealing with Poe’s poetry, follows the same course. This organisation best reinforces the modern postlapsarian division that underscores Poe’s works while also revealing the crucial paradox inherent in this failure that I argue is intrinsic to understanding his use of music overall: failure is a perversity that points heavenwards.

Chapter one, “Real World Music: The Parlour and the Madhouse,” lays the groundwork for the rest of the thesis by investigating the tales least discussed in criticism regarding Poe and music: “The Spectacles” (1844) and “The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether” (1845). I argue that these tales are often ignored in criticism on Poe and music due to their singular nature as examples of what this thesis describes as ‘real world music.’ I base my definition of the experience of real world music on Richard Leppert’s (1993) description of the eighteenth-century consumption of music in domestic contexts. Leppert’s work provides a useful framework for understanding real world music as this thesis formulates it, because it deals primarily with consumption in terms of sight and sound in conjunction with one another, aspects of the musical
experience which, crucially, become confused in much of Poe’s work. In Richard Leppert’s *The Sight of Sound: Music, Representation, and the History of the Body* he describes the experience of music in the era as follows:

First, and most obvious, music comprises certain phenomena experienced as sound via the sense of hearing. Second, in Western high culture music refers to notated ‘instructions’ for producing such sounds. Third, and here the story becomes more complex, music is a sight, a richly semantic visual phenomenon. It is a sight in performance, thus an embodied and interactive, hence social, practice (except when performed for the self, out of the hearing of others). […] Music as a sight and sound together, united in performance prior to the advent of recording technology, cannot be fully understood except in this conjunction. (64)

Thus, I frame real world music as follows: 1) it must be described as experienced by a character in Poe’s works as “sound via the sense of hearing,” 2) it must have the potential of being notated in the early nineteenth-century Western tonal tradition, and 3) it must have a visible source of its performance. These three components of real world music are crucial to understanding Poe’s depiction of music in his works, precisely because music in Poe’s writing rarely fully aligns with all of them.

These first two tales analysed in chapter one, however, work outside of the norm in Poe by revealing those few instances in which these three components of real world music are more closely followed. Moreover, the two also become linked with one another through a third source that ties them both together: the Countess de Merlin’s 1840 text on the opera star Maria Malibran, *Memoirs and Letters of Madame Malibran*, which Poe draws from in both texts. The connections between the tales and this third source illuminate Poe’s different treatment of music in tales that lack madness (such as “The Spectacles”) and tales that focus on madness (such as “The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether”), and will cement the association between earthly, audible, music
and utterance or utterance and discordance. The chapter will rely on the adaption of Foucault’s terminology from *Madness and Civilization* to discuss themes of private and public performance as they relate to sanity and madness.

Continuing with an analysis of Poe’s short stories, the second chapter, “Unravelling Real World Music: Roderick Usher and the Ballad,” primarily addresses “The Fall of the House of Usher” (1839) as an example of the shift away from real world music and the shift towards the different associations with liminal music in Poe’s works. The tale, like “The Spectacles” and “The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether,” represents a number of singularities in Poe’s body of work; most importantly, it contains an inset poem, one which is the only of Poe’s inset poems in his tales described as a “ballad.” Through the investigation of Poe’s use of the term “ballad” in this context and in the poems “Ulalume — A Ballad” (1847) and “Annabel Lee — A Ballad” (1849), as well as through the differentiation of this tale from those in the first chapter, this section begins to unveil Poe’s postlapsarian discourse as it emerges from close critical reading. This chapter also ties Poe’s narrative more directly to Foucault’s, revealing the implications of madness and liminality and inaudibility as they relate to one another in this overarching conversation of the modern state of disenchantment as opposed to an ancient undifferentiated experience of words and music, sanity and insanity.

The third chapter, “Departure from Real World Music: Shrieks, Murmurs, and the Musical Voice,” builds directly on the themes introduced in the first two by focusing on the stories “Morella” (1835), “Ligeia” (1838), and “Eleonora” (1841). This chapter interrogates more deeply the issue of the musical voice in Poe’s tales, which avoids articulation and which refuses to be bound by utterance. This chapter also incorporates
into the discussion of music in Poe’s works an analysis of those descriptors that appear to associate with music or with utterance but can never quite be defined as either: the murmur and the shriek. In investigating the place of these in-between descriptors of voice in examples of the murmur and the shriek, this chapter perpetuates the discussion of the differentiated experience as it is communicated through music. It is in this chapter that the hierarchy of divinity mentioned at the outset of this introduction begins to emerge, moving from the earthly, the heard, and the more animalistic and diabolically mad, to the unearthly, the inaudible, and a more mystical form of madness, a discussion that Foucault again underpins.

The first half of the thesis thus establishes a spectrum of music in the short stories of Poe as they relate to postlapsarian understandings of madness. Real world music, associated with words and utterance, gives way to a musicality that becomes completely separated from real world music; earthly madness, associated with the animalistic and the audible, gives way to a madness that speaks of other worlds. The second part of the thesis parallels the first in both structure and theme, building upon the ideas introduced thus far, shifting the theoretical focus from treatments of madness via Foucault to treatments of postmythological music via Chua, John Hollander (1961), Peter Dayan (2006), and Lawrence Kramer (1984). This theoretical shift moves the focus of the second part of the thesis to a deeper engagement with the idea of Poe as the anti-Romantic who subscribes to a post-Pythagorean universe. It is in this second part of the thesis that the rupture in the hierarchy of musical divinity that moves from the earthly to the divine takes precedence. In this section, I focus on Poe’s discourse of failure, such that music cannot continue to indefinitely ascend along an invisible
hierarchy that moves from earthly to heavenly music. Rather, Poe incorporates aspects of deformity, darkness, and failure into his descriptions of music that do not otherwise fit into the notion of the real world musical experience. In doing so, he draws attention to the idea that music’s failure to express a kind of heavenly and divinely Silent music is a perversity that still points heavenwards.

The fourth chapter, “Earthly Music: Humans and Birds,” again returns to the notion of real world music, this time in Poe’s poetry. Beginning by refusing the idea that Poe’s poems were ever themselves meant to be songs, this chapter goes on to discuss the only instances in Poe’s poetry in which inhabitants of the real world are associated with musical performance, all of which invoke bird song. By looking at these instances through the lens of Lawrence Kramer’s assessment of music in Romantic poetry, this chapter establishes Poe invested in an anti-Romantic and postmythological conception of music and literature. The theoretical framework for this claim is erected through word and music studies, and all of the critics in the field that this thesis engages with somehow contribute to an understanding of the post-Romantic and postmythological worldview. At the same time, the second part of this chapter goes on to elaborate upon the vocal music of Poe’s poetry as it is tied to bird song, showing how this particular image in Poe’s works introduces the paradoxical birth and death of music in ways that reconfigure the separation between utterance and the musical voice. This reinforces the claims made in the first part of the thesis, namely that real world music, associated with the audible and the uttered, can only express earthly experience, whereas inaudible music, associated with that which is enigmatically voiced, attempts to express something of the otherworldly.
The fifth chapter, “Otherworldly Music: Spirits and the Music of the Spheres,” explicitly picks up on the divisions that I have been continually referencing: the audible and the inaudible, modernity and the ancient past, reason and madness, and the earthly and the unearthy. In this instance, the chapter focus moves away from the earthly and towards and exploration of the otherworldly in Poe’s poetry. In doing so, it introduces another level of division in Poe’s poetry, the expression that separates the “ordinary use of language” and that which is “identified with music” (P. Dayan, *Music Writing* 98).

The chapter begins by reiterating the disruption of real world music in Poe’s poetry and establishes his conceptualisation of the ‘music of the spheres’ as akin to Chua’s; the concept of the ‘music of the spheres’ reiterates the separation between an ancient idealised past and a modern fallen present. This separation reveals how Poe connects the ethereal, the otherworldly, and a sense of the spiritual realm with a higher, more silent, form of music, while the material, and the non-spiritual are circumscribed to the earthly and connected with a lower, more audible, form of music. The chapter then goes on to discuss the most extreme examples of music in Poe’s poetry that is described in terms of inaudibility. The iteration of the unheard, the synesthetic, and the indefinite in Poe’s poetry cohere in ways that speak to a divide in Poe’s works, from his tales through his poetry, between music in the ordinary, real world sense, and music that relates to the ideal, the otherworldly, and the beyond.

The sixth chapter, “Deathly Music: Bells, Notes, and the Shadow,” concludes the thesis with the crucial interrogation of the purpose and use of modern failure via music in Poe’s works. By reintegrating a discussion of Poe’s tales with his poetry, this chapter negotiates the interstices of audibility and inaudibility in Poe’s works. The themes
discussed throughout the thesis re-emerge at this point: by summarising a series of
oppositions in Poe’s works, including the heavenly and the demonic, the soul and the
body, the ethereal and the earth, madness and sanity, and dual forms of death and
silence, this chapter proposes that the liminal singularities in Poe’s depictions of music,
those that are audible but not quite articulated music, reveal a kind of failure that
perversely points heavenwards.

In other words, this thesis concludes by revisiting the discourse underpinned by
Foucault and Chua that I posed earlier in this introduction. If humans are fallen and the
ancient chain connecting the earthly soul with the inaudible music of the spheres has
broken, then the complete ascent from the vulgarly earthly audible music and the
divinely Silent is an impossibility. Rather, humans are incapable of perceiving the
celestial and divinely Silent music, and that which incorporates deformity, darkness, and
a more liminal and fallen music, becomes a perversity that still points heavenwards.

By presenting in some detail how Poe scholars conceive of the role of music in
Poe’s works, and moreover, by presenting those conceptualisations as they fit into the
categories listed above, the literature review of this thesis will reveal the critical gaps in
knowledge that this thesis addresses and will justify my own methodology. In doing so,
the literature review will lay the groundwork for exploring how Poe envisaged music
and its place in his creative works, and whether music in Poe’s works, however it is
conveyed, relates the enigmatic “something” that Poe had to say. By exploring this
relationship between Poe and music, this thesis unravels what that “something” might
be; if he “dreamed universal nightmares,” to use Bloom’s phrase, then this thesis asks
how music’s place in Poe relates to them. To begin to approach this “universal” topic,
however, the literature review starts with the most basic question: what did Poe know about music? By beginning with this question, the literature review will lay the groundwork for the ways in which this thesis takes a different approach to the study of Poe and music than exists in current scholarship.
Literature Review

Outside of the various threads of Poe and music to be found in Poe analyses, as mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, and outside of the ways Poe might have influenced musical composers, there appear to be four main categories of how critics discuss Poe and music: Poe’s musical abilities, his word music, his music as image or his music as image and sound, and his music as indefinite. The literature review will address the first three categories; the idea of Poe’s music as indefinite will develop through the thesis and the wider literature on the subject will be revisited throughout this thesis.

The Question of Poe’s Musical Ability

The idea that Poe was musically inclined, or that musical influences surrounded him in one way or another, often informs critical analyses of Poe’s literary connection to music. Charmenz Lenhart (1956) begins her chapter on Poe in her book Musical Influence on American Poetry with the claim that “Poe is one of the most musical poets America has produced,” and she goes on to argue that “Poe’s personal interest in and talent for music were hereditary” (125). Lenhart writes about the musical abilities of Poe’s parents and grandparents, that his grandmother “was one of the most famous vocalists at Covent Garden Theatre Royal,” and that his mother Eliza was “fine as a vocalist in the light operas of the day” (125-26). Other biographers also incorporate into their portrayals of Poe the notion that his mother was a “fine” singer. Recently, Kenneth Silverman (1991) wrote that Eliza Poe was an “admired singer [...] [who] became particularly associated with a song entitled ‘Nobody Coming to Marry Me’” (4). Edgar
was just “nearly three” years old at the time of his mother’s death (Silverman 9), but Lenhart posits that Poe’s musicality is genetic, or that he “inherited [...] musical talent” from his mother (Lenhart 126).

Lenhart justifies her claim that Poe “inherited” his “musical talent” with evidence showing that “he was something of a flutist” (127), an idea propagated to the present day that, when traced, illustrates some of the problems surrounding what we know about Poe’s musical ability. When biographers incorporate this notion about Poe playing the flute into their books, it takes the form of the story that Poe would accompany his childhood friend Elmira Royster as she played the piano. Peter Ackroyd (2008) writes that “she [Elmira Shelton née Royster] played the piano, and he [Poe] sang and played the flute” (23). None of the biographers who write about Poe as flautist cite the original source of this biographical detail; multiple biographers incorporate versions of this story into their depictions of Poe’s early life, but the evidence each biographer gives for Poe playing the flute is indirect.

May Garrettson Evans (1939) notes without direct citation of her source that it “is told also of Poe that he played on the flute (some say on the piano too) and that he had a good voice” (2). It is likely that Evans uses that same source as Charmenz Lenhart, who justifies the story by claiming that “Several biographers mention this fact. The instrument was widely used by young men of the day” (302). Lenhart references Killis Campbell’s The Mind of Poe (1933), in which he writes that Poe “sang well, so it has been held; and he is likewise said to have played the flute” (11). Killis Campbell, in turn, cites Hervey Allen (1926), another biographer, as his source.
Hervey Allen is invariably the principal source for this notion of Poe playing the flute. He provides evidence for it in a couple of instances. In one, he presents a record of J. Allan, Poe’s adopted father, having bought at auction in 1812 a flute for twenty-one dollars, which H. Allen suggests is “the same flute upon which Edgar Allan Poe afterwards learned to play in those early, easy days in Richmond which were to permeate his dreams” (36). Although the record of J. Allan buying the flute is hardly disputable, Hervey Allen’s idea that the flute was for Edgar Poe is purely conjectural; H. Allen accounts for the fact that Poe would have been three years old at the time of the purchase and new in the Allans’ household by imagining that J. Allan’s “thoughts must have wandered […] or have paused between the wailing notes of his new flute to consider the future of the little orphan whose bare feet could be heard padding about upstairs” (40), such that the flute playing becomes transferable from J. Allan to E. Poe.

Hervey Allen appears to impose his record of J. Allan purchasing the flute upon the central story of Poe’s flute playing to which later biographers refer, namely that, “during the Summer and Fall of 1825,” Poe would “slip over to the Royster House nearby and […] spend long hours in the parlour with Elmira. She played the piano and they would sing together, Edgar in a fresh young tenor voice, or he would accompany her upon the flute which he played quite well” (119). Allen observes that the only evidence for Poe’s teenage musical trysts come from interviews Elmira herself gave to Edward Valentine in 1875, fifty years after the fact. Hervey Allen notes that:

In the accounts of Elmira […] and her accounts of Poe, I have followed carefully the letters from her to Ingram, published in his biography of Poe, and other letters of interviews with Mrs. Shelton by Edward V. Valentine of Richmond, later sent to Ingram and now at the University of Virginia. Some of these latter have never been published. (118)
John Ingram’s *Edgar Allan Poe: His Life, Letters and Opinions* (1880) which contains the published accounts that Allen mentions does not contain this piece of information about the flute, implying that Allen takes as his source those of the letters that had “never been published” when Allen first wrote the biography in 1926 (Allen 118). It is these letters that must contain any evidence that Poe could play the flute. The letters still reside at the University of Virginia in the John Ingram Collection. In my communications with Margaret Hrabe at the University of Virginia, I have not been able to locate the specific letter that contains this citation, although that is not definitive proof that it does not exist (Hrabe). In either case, the letters in the collections are “second hand” according to Arthur Quinn’s 1942 biography of Poe (91), having been transcribed from Valentine’s original collection before they were sent to Ingram, and thus have “only partial validity.” Moreover, Quinn clarifies that Elmira herself was “not responsible for the style [of the letters], for it was evidently a series of answers to questions by Mr. Valentine” (91). Quinn proceeds to quote the same conversation that mentions Poe’s being “fond of music,” which despite his reservations, Quinn believes to have “a directness and an informality which bear a flavor of truth” (91). The “flavor of

---

9 Hervey Allen mentions that “Ebenezer Burling would go along” to these music sessions (119). The only time Burling appears in the letters occurs in the letter catalogued as number 263 and published in *Appletons’ Journal* in 1878. This letter only states that Poe was “passionately fond of music,” and does so separately from the fact that Burling and Poe “used to visit [Elmira’s] house together very frequently” (Hrabe; Ingram, “Unpublished” 429).

10 When Quinn cites this conversation, “entitled ‘Conversation with Mrs. Shelton at Mr. Smith’s corner 8th and Leigh Streets, Nov. 19, 1875’” (91), he explains that the manuscript that he uses is an original from the Valentine Collection. He writes that he “prefer[s] this original form to later versions of the same conversation, sent by Valentine to Ingram, and referred to incorrectly by later biographers as ‘Mrs. Shelton’s Letters.’
truth” does not, however, account for the fact that the letters are twice removed from Elmira’s statement, a statement which was taken fifty years after the events described.

The multiple layers of questionable validity of this source draw attention to the momentum the idea of Poe playing the flute gains in Hervey Allen’s biography, and then in the subsequent biographies that inherit it. Allen develops and embellishes the image of Poe’s playing the flute:

One can imagine the little girl sitting on the sofa in the Royster parlour, the sheets of music and the flute lying upon the open pianoforte […] One can almost hear their fresh voices blending in The Last Rose of Summer, through the half-open window; or the tinkle of the piano and the low bubbling notes of the flute. (119)

Not only does Allen title the biography Israfel, drawing a direct comparison between Poe and the eponymous angel “whose heart-strings are a lute” from his poetry ([G] 2), but he also poetici[s]es the image of the “low bubbling notes” of Poe’s flute. “One can imagine,” Allen writes, “One can almost hear” the romanticised “tinkle of the piano” in the idealised scene Allen paints. In doing so, he enlarges the conceptualisation of Poe’s direct musical experience in ways that impact how one might view his works.

Along with his flute playing, Poe’s singing voice is also romanticised in some critical pieces. Lenhart maintains that “Poe’s speaking as well as his singing voice has been frequently praised. It was said that he literally sang his more musical poems” (127). Lenhart attempts to use this as an establishment of Poe’s extra-literary musicality in order to launch an appraisal of Poe’s literary musicality in much the same way that H.
Allen did with Poe’s flute playing. There appears to be more justifiable evidence for Poe having a pleasing voice than there is for Poe playing the flute, with the caveat that Poe’s singing is praised in the same ways as his speaking voice, so that the two conflate. In the same paragraph just cited, Lenhart describes Poe’s voice as a “rich baritone,” which she uses to bolster the idea that he “sang his more musical poems” (127). She thus implicitly defines his speaking voice as one that lends itself to singing, suggesting that Poe’s “more musical poems” are those that could literally be sung, which helps Lenhart to create a platform for discussing the role of music in Poe’s works (127).

Similar anecdotes of Poe’s speaking and singing voice abound. Mary Louise Shew, a friend of Poe, apparently remembered: “Mr. Poe came to town to go to a midnight service with a lady friend and myself. […] [He] sang the psalms with us, and to my astonishment struck up a tenor to our soprano […]. [He] sang the hymn, without looking at the book, in a fine clear tenor” (qtd. in Ingram, “Unpublished” 422). Thomas Wentworth Higginson (1879) implies that Poe had control over the “musical” quality of his voice when reading a poem, as well. Higginson describes the distinction between hearing Poe speak and seeing him recite his poetry in similar terms to Shew’s description of Poe singing. He claims “that when introduced he [Poe] stood with a sort of shrinking before the audience and then began in a thin, tremulous, hardly musical voice, an apology for his poem” (73). Once he began to read the poetry, however, “his tones had been softening to a finer melody than at first, and when he came to the verse: ‘Ligeia! Ligeia, / My beautiful one! […]’ his voice seemed attenuated to the finest golden thread; […] The melody did not belong, in this case, to the poet’s voice alone; it was already in the words” (74). Higginson combines the development of the “melody”
of Poe’s voice with a performance of his poetry, that performance and the words themselves coming together to create the “melody.”

Other writers claim that Poe’s voice was “melodious” even without singing or reciting one of his pieces. Mary Gove Nichols notes in her Reminiscences of Edgar Allan Poe (1931) that in speaking Poe’s “voice was melody itself” (8), and Thomas Chivers (published posthumously in 1952) goes so far as to argue that Poe’s “voice was soft, mellow, melodious, and rather more flexible than powerful. It was as musical as Apollo’s Lute, and as plaintive in its utterances of his Memnonian Mysteries” (62). Whether the claims are that Poe could sing well, that his voice transformed to the “melodious” when reciting his poetry, or that his voice was “musical” when he spoke, writers have perpetuated the image of the musically-inclined Poe.

The critical attention to the possibility of Poe’s musical abilities does not end with his singing and his flute playing. Lenhart, among others, has also focused on the fact that Poe’s young wife Virginia’s “fatal illness was ascribed in its day to the rupture of a blood-vessel while she was singing” (127), a dark romantic image originating with Poe himself. In a letter to George W. Eveleth dated January 4, 1848, Poe wrote:

Six years ago, a wife, whom I loved as no man ever loved before, ruptured a blood-vessel in singing. Her life was despaired of. […] At the end of a year the vessel broke again — […] Again in about a year afterward. Then again — again — again and even once again at varying intervals. […] I became insane, with long intervals of horrible sanity. (“Letter 259” 639)

Poe’s letter describes Virginia’s extended decline resulting from a “‘death-in-life,’ as many people then referred to tuberculosis” (Silverman 179). Yet, when that anecdote appears in some biographies, the rupture while singing implicitly leads to Virginia’s immediate demise. Although it is more accurate to say, as Silverman does, that Virginia
“was hemorrhaging from her lungs” over an extended time, critics and biographers prefer to incorporate the detail that she was singing when she “began to bleed from her mouth” (Silverman 179). Even Silverman himself begins the paragraph describing Virginia’s death with the notion: “The son of a celebrated singer, Poe always encouraged Virginia’s own taste for singing” (179), a notion which stemmed from Virginia’s mother Maria Clemm, who wrote on August 19th of 1860 that “Eddie finished Virginia’s education himself, and, I assure you, she was highly cultivated. She was an excellent linguist, and a perfect musician” (Clemm). The story, in which Virginia’s musicality is defined and influenced by Edgar’s, leads to a conflation of Poe’s work with the legend of his wife dying in an anti-swansong.

D.H. Lawrence (1919) exemplifies the ways this anecdote has made its way into some criticism, writing that Poe’s “grand attempt and achievement was with his wife; his cousin, a girl with a singing voice. [...] It was the intensest nervous vibration of unison, pressed higher and higher in pitch, till the blood-vessels of the girl broke, and the blood began to flow out loose. It was love” (113-14). In the same piece, Lawrence aestheticises Poe as a “vampire”; Lawrence’s defining Virginia as “a girl with a singing voice” in the terms of this aesthetic links Virginia’s blood with her “singing voice,” and Poe’s pressing her in “nervous vibration” until the “blood-vessels of the girl broke” compounds the images of her singing and his vampirism (114). Lawrence goes so far as to argue that, to Poe, “the woman, his wife [...] was Ligeia” (114), merging Virginia with one of Poe’s characters often associated with music, a character this thesis will explore. Lawrence uses the story surrounding Virginia’s death to create a mythical connection between Poe and music through the medium of Virginia’s own musicality.
Critics express Poe’s mythical connection to music in other ways, as well. By way of preface to her bibliography of musical works inspired by Poe’s writings, May Garretton Evans writes of “an interesting tradition” about Poe that, “having been so deeply moved by the singing of an anthem in church one Sunday, [...] he left the pew and advanced slowly up the aisle toward the choir — rapt, entranced. Only when the music ceased did he become aware of his strange and conspicuous actions” (2). While Evans frames this anecdote with her aside that it “is a pretty story — let us hope it is true,” she too appears to use this biographical note to imply that Poe had an innate and mystical attachment to music (2). Evans admits that Poe “was certainly not [...] a musician in any special sense of the word” (2), but the anecdote Evans cites works akin to Lawrence’s, connecting Poe with music in a mythical way.

The critics who attempt to escape this mythical connection between Poe and music do not necessarily draw more concrete conclusions regarding Poe’s biographical musicality. For instance, Killis Campbell attempts to tie together Poe’s musical ability and his poetry. Campbell states that Poe “was fond of the piano and of instrumental music generally. In an early letter (written in 1835) he remarks that he has been making ‘some odd chromatic experiments’ by way of testing the music of some of his own lines” (The Mind 11). Campbell interprets a statement in one of Poe’s letters as Poe using the piano to test the music of his poetry, although he does not explain how the chromatic scale reflects the words of Poe’s verses. Moreover, Poe’s letter (1835) expresses a slightly different notion: “In short — I especially pride myself upon the accuracy of my ear — and have established the fact of its accuracy, to my own satisfaction at least, by some odd chromatic experiments. I was therefore astonished to
find you objecting to the *melody of my lines*” (Poe, “Letter 52” 115). Poe’s letter does not describe him testing the lines of his poetry. Poe writes that he makes some “odd chromatic experiments” separately from the assertion that the “melody” of his “lines” should not be criticised. The “chromatic experiments” speak to the “accuracy” of his “ear,” rather than to the poems themselves. Moreover, this description says nothing about what the “experiments” might be.

Ultimately, all of the evidence reveals that, in spite of the romanticised image of the musical Poe to which some critics subscribe, one cannot prove Poe’s extra-literary musicality. The notions that he could sing, play the flute, or that he inherited musical talent are based on anecdote, romance and conjecture. Thus, any more comprehensive study of Poe and music, such as this thesis, must necessarily omit the image of the musically inclined Poe as demonstrative of the ways his texts engage with music. Another way it might engage with this, however, is through a notion stemming from the idea of the musically talented Poe, that his abilities affected the musicality of his poems, enough for Poe to “test” it: the hypothesis that the music of Poe’s poetry might be measurable or produced by the sounds one would hear in reading it aloud leads to one of the most common ways in which critics discuss Poe’s music.

**Word Music**

Predominantly, critics define Poe’s literary music as a combination of rhyme, rhythm, meter, and diction. Some critics use the phrase “word music” to describe this idea specifically, although those critics who use the phrase “word music” as a way of
encompassing rhyme, rhythm, meter, and diction do not often define what they mean by the phrase. From a theoretical musico-literary perspective, “word music” might be the critical interpretation of a text as aiming at, as Steven Paul Scher (1970) defines it, “imitation of musical sound” either in prose or in poetry (152). When Scher describes “word music” in this way, he uses it to refer to an author who “supplements his ordinary source (i.e., poetic imagination) with direct musical experience and/or a score, or allows his imagination to be inspired by music; he thus assumes the role of transmitter, rendering (suggesting, describing, or creating) music in words” (152). Critics who write about Poe’s “word music” do not always use the term in ways that align with Scher’s definition, nor do their uses of the term necessarily align with one another; they do not require the “word music” of Poe’s texts to derive motivation from Poe’s “direct musical experience” or “musical inspiration.”

Rather, critics most often maintain that Poe suggests music in words — that his words are suggestive of music. Many never use the phrase “word music” at all, but still present the idea that rhythm, rhyme, meter, and the sounds of words all render Poe’s texts musical. Some critics distinguish between Poe’s poetry and his fictional prose as conveyors of “word music,” focusing more often on poetry than prose, but these distinctions are not categorically separated by any means throughout Poe criticism. Most often, Poe’s “word music,” when the phrase or concept arises, has little to do with “music” in image or idea. Whether or not Poe’s “word music” was a benefit or detriment to his works is, however, a critical point of division.
Word Music as Beneficial to Poe’s Works

Early editions of Poe’s collected works often use musical terminology to describe his poems, their editors writing in the literary tradition that frames poetic sound effects as music. Stedman and Woodberry, who edited a volume of Poe’s poetry in 1895, wrote:

Without doubt, a distinctive melody is the element in Poe’s verse that first and last has told on every class of readers, — a rhythmical effect which [...] was its author’s own; [...] the *timbre* of his own voice was required for that peculiar music reinforced by the correlative refrain and repetend; a melody, but a monody as well, limited almost to the vibratory recurrence of a single and typical emotion, yet no more palling on the ear than palls the constant sound of a falling stream. It haunted rather than irked the senses, so that the poet was recognized by it. (xvi)

Initially, Stedman and Woodberry describe Poe’s “distinctive melody” as “a rhythmical effect.” They move on from there to describe the “peculiar music” of Poe’s works as “reinforced” by “refrain and repetend” driven by the “*timbre*” of his voice, or by its undefined tone-colour. The combination of these elements, with the addition that Poe’s music is not just “a melody, but a monody as well,” leads to the curious idea that, although “limited almost to the vibratory recurrence of a single and typical emotion,” this somewhat “limited” “melody” is not “palling.” Poe’s “melody” and “monody” are instead “distinctive,” reminiscent of Barrett Wendell’s comparison of the distinctiveness of Poe’s works to the “note of the song bird” (qtd. in Campbell, *The Poems* lvii). Both of these analogies of the song bird and the stream notably arise in Poe’s works themselves, for instance in “Fanny” and in “Al Aaraaf,” such that music is associated with sounds of the natural world, rather than with instruments or performed song. Stedman’s and
Woodberry’s lack of definition of the “peculiar music” of Poe’s poetry or its “haunt[ing]” effect does not stand alone in Poe criticism.

Charmenz Lenhart writes a comparable description of Poe, namely that he “is one of the most musical poets America has produced [...] his verses [are] exceedingly melodious, his rhythms fluent, and his phrasings memorable and haunting” (125). Lenhart equates the idea that Poe was a “musical poet” with the idea that his verses are “melodious,” but she goes on also to include rhythm and a “memorable and haunting” poetic effect as components of Poe’s musicality. In doing so, Lenhart makes a point quite similar to Stedman and Woodberry, maintaining that the “melodious” quality of Poe’s poetry renders a poetic effect beyond its sound alone. A distinction arises between the sounds of words alone as music, and the sounds of words carrying with them an undefined psychological or emotional effect that can itself be described as music.

In both cases, the notion of Poe’s word music is partly an extension of the idea that Poe enjoyed, and may have attempted to emulate, poets known for word music of their own. Jay Hubbell (1960) states that “Poe was particularly fond of just those British poets who excelled in word music: Milton, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats, and Tennyson. In turn his own poems have drawn high praise from those British masters of verbal melody: Tennyson, Swinburne, and Yeats” (155). Hubbell, like Stedman and Woodberry, argues that because Poe wrote often about the “melodic” or “musical” qualities of other poets, and because these other poets are said to have “excelled in word music,” this is a quality that Poe appreciated and perhaps attempted to recreate. In doing so, Hubbell equates “word music” with the phrase “verbal melody” without further defining it, but he appears to parallel Floyd Stovall’s (1930) description of Poe’s word music:
Poe’s [...] idea, that music is essential to poetry, is implicit in Coleridge’s requirement that poetry should have ‘an exact correspondent recurrence of accent and sound.’ Poe means the same thing when he says that ‘verse originates in the human enjoyment of equality.’ [...] Rhythm, rhyme, meter, and the line are but modes of equality. I do not think Coleridge would have agreed that poetry is a less capable Music, though he did say that the ‘sense of musical delight, with the power of producing it,’ is one of the proofs of poetic genius. (“Poe’s Debt” 87-88)

Like Lenhart, Stovall equates Poe’s idea “that music is essential to poetry” with the idea that music is the equality of “rhythm, rhyme, meter, and the line.” The description of the poetic effect produced by Poe’s word music varies from critic to critic, however. For James Albert Harrison (1902), “The Bells” is a “melodious onomato-poem, the most perfect imitation in word, sound, and rhythm, in suggestion, in exquisite mimicry, of its theme ever written” (287). While engaging with the idea of a literal “melody” in the poem, Harrison does not overtly discuss poetic effect, apart from the “exquisite mimicry” of bells. Harrison goes on to write that the “very spirit — and spirituality — the essence and aura of the musical bell-metal, with all its golden and silver and brazen tones, seems to have flowed into the poet’s soul as he wrote, and to have taken tongues never before so musically voiced” (287). Harrison describes the “bell-metal” as “musical,” even though a bell is a percussion instrument capable of playing only a single note (again reminiscent of the “note of the song bird”). He then grants it a “spirit” and an “aura” that is transferred to Poe’s “soul” before being “musically voiced” in multiple “tongues,” tying together the “musical” quality of the poem and the oblique “spirit” with which it endows the poem.

Arthur Du Bois (1940) also writes about “The Bells” in terms of its poetic effect, his idea of that effect varying slightly from Harrison’s. For Du Bois, if “one doesn’t get
lost in the sound of the poem, [...] one misses the music and drama of the shifts in dominant vowel and consonant sounds”; its “rhythms develop madness more loudly than the words do” (243). Du Bois describes this idea of “getting lost” in the “music” of Poe’s poetry as itself being integral to the intended poetic effect rather than a detriment to the experience, of the poem. One must “[get] lost” in the rhythm of the poem, so that the poetic effect may arrive with the same obscurity; it “develop[s] madness,” much in the same way that Harrison talks about it giving the poem a “spirit” or “aura.” However obscure the poetic effect described, one quality binding the described effects is an underlying emotional equivalent, whether it is through “haunting,” “madness,” or a “spirit.” These critics endow music with the power to elicit a vague emotional reaction.

Stovall (1925) similarly argues that Poe’s word music has an emotional poetic effect. This is specifically true of the names that Poe gives to his female characters:

[They] are usually unfamiliar and always beautiful, especially because of their musical quality. This quality he secured chiefly by the use of long vowels, liquids, and nasals. [...] Lenore was selected for the poem ‘Lenore’ because of its musical quality and its sonorous, mournful sound. In ‘The Raven’ there was the additional and determining reason that Lenore rhymed perfectly with *nevermore* [...]. In practically every case, the name is appropriate to the character, and even adds materially to the effect which Poe was desirous of producing upon the reader’s mind. This effect was usually that of sadness. (“The Women” 197-98)

Stovall makes more than one connection between the sounds of the characters’ names and music in this passage. Not only are the names “unfamiliar” and “beautiful” due to the “musical quality” of their sounds, but those “long vowels,” “liquids” and “nasals” can even be inherently “mournful,” as in the case of “Lenore.” Stovall links sound to sense while simultaneously claiming that this unification of sound and sense adds “materially” to whatever “effect” Poe “was desirous of producing upon the reader’s
mind.” By focusing on the names as musical, Stovall also opens the door to both Poe’s poetry and tales as being equally subject to the sounds of his words as music. In a way similar to Du Bois, who argues that the awareness of the sound of “The Bells” “develops madness,” Stovall, in a sense, argues that the awareness of the names of Poe’s characters “usually” has an effect of “sadness.” In short, the sound of the words is equivalent to their music, and such music renders madness or sadness as a psychological, or emotional, effect.

This relationship between the sonority of Poe’s works and emotional effect sometimes presents itself in criticism as rendered through the spell the sonorous “music” provides; word music becomes a form of incantation that either affects the reader directly or indirectly. Paul More (1923) describes this effect (although he does not agree that it is “the most characteristic of Poe”) as the poet seeking:

> to attain the effect of musical evocation by throwing the thinking part of us under a kind of hypnotic spell which leaves the emotional part of us free to float off in a state of vague revery [...] No doubt there is verse of this pure evocative quality in our Poe, notably in The Valley of Unrest and The City in the Sea, and in these lulling cadences of The Sleepers [...] There is, I maintain, an opiate magic in such lines as these equal in potency to anything ever produced by [Coleridge]. (304-05)

The poetic effect sound provides is not a psychological state for More, but rather an “opiate magic.” The meaning, then, becomes a non-meaning, a detachment from the earthly that is induced through the implied sonority of Poe’s poetry. This idea of the “hypnotic spell” of Poe’s works leads into a common critical analysis of Poe’s belief in and use of the power of words. Dennis Pahl (2009) explains this to some extent, transferring the power of the sound of words from text to reader and back into the text itself. Although he does not use the word ‘music’ in his description, Pahl refers to the
sound of words and their effects in ways that align with other critical discussions of Poe’s “word-sounds,” to use Pahl’s term:

We can observe this [‘power of words’] when characters within his fiction narrate their own emotionally charged stories inside the story proper, or simply when the voice of a character, his or her word-sounds, serve to enchant, to stir feelings of melancholy, or to incite terror. [...] In Poe’s language-world, sounds, however they are combined, seem to take on, as Burke would say, a life of their own, offering up what Poe in ‘The Philosophy of Composition’ calls their ‘altogether novel effects.’ (45-46)

For Pahl, the “word-sounds” of Poe not only create an effect for the reader, but also for the characters of the stories themselves, for whom “voice[s]” or “word-sounds” “enchant,” “stir feelings of melancholy,” and “incite terror.” Pahl uses the idea of “word-sounds” as magical to explain the poetic effect of a vague emotion, such as melancholy and terror, which rather than being directly linked to the sounds themselves, are rather “stirred” and “incited” by the sounds in the same way that a character is “enchanted,” or affected in a way that drives the character to what Paul More described as “vague revery.”

More and Pahl contend, also, that this emotional effect of word music is calculated. More presents a case for the “logical structure and completeness of The Bells,” writing that it is in that poem that “poetry does become pure music and pure beauty, almost to the exclusion of ideas, yet [...] its effects [are] calculated with the mathematical finish of a Bach” (305). Adding to the tangential comparison between Poe and Bach, the “pure music and pure beauty” of “The Bells” parallels the idea of word music as having the powers of enchantment. While part of what More argues is that the material sonority of Poe’s work is self-aware and purposeful, the fact that he directly equates “pure music” with “pure beauty” and claims they are both to be found in Poe’s
poem reveals again this lurking idea that the music of the work creates an enchantment
by which music becomes beauty in a way that makes itself available to the reader. That
Poe writes “almost to the exclusion of ideas” is unimportant, as long as the spell that the
music of the poem provides allows for that transformation from poetry to pure music
and pure beauty.

The idea that the “word music” of Poe’s poetry creates a spell for the reader
works alongside the idea that Poe aimed to scientifically practice this effect in his works.
In his PhD thesis, Joseph Coulson (1985) writes that for “Poe, music was the key — he
struggled and revised and searched for a logic of sound that continually eluded him”
(11). Not only does Coulson define music as a “logic of sound,” he argues that such a
logic “continually eluded” Poe. Even if that “logic […] continually eluded” Poe,
Coulson still argues in favour of the use of sound in his works, maintaining that “The
Raven” is “absolutely relentless in its movement and repetition of sound, so much so
that we stop discriminating words and we are left purely with music. [...] Poe desired a
confluence of sound powerful enough to short circuit the reader’s attention to statement
and the arrangement of words on the page” (12). Coulson seems to imply that the
“music” of this poem in particular actually does “short circuit the reader’s attention,”
going on to state definitively that “Poe appealed to the ear through tone color and
through the interplay of verbal and metric rhythm [...] producing a kind of stultifying
hypnosis, a mesmerizing musical effect that seeks to displace the logic of denotation
with its own more subjective logic [...]. Poe understood the power of word music”
Coulson maintains that Poe never discovers “logic of sound,” because his successes with the “music” of his works belong to “subjective logic,” even though he categorically claims that Poe’s “tone color” and “rhythm” produce “a mesmerizing” effect or “hypnosis.” For other critics, the effect of Poe’s word music can come across as forced and clumsy, however, and this critical division in the positive and negative interpretations of Poe’s word music shows the inherent complications in understanding Poe’s music as word music alone.

**Word Music as Detrimental to Poe’s Works**

Aldous Huxley (1930), one of Poe’s harshest critics, largely decries the sonority of Poe’s works, arguing of “Ulalume”:

> the walloping dactylic metre is all too musical. Poetry ought to be musical, but musical with tact, subtly and variously. Metres whose rhythms, as in this case, are strong, insistent, and practically invariable offer the poet a kind of short cut to musicality. They provide [Poe] (my subject calls for a mixture of metaphors) with a ready-made, reach-me-down music. (162)

Huxley’s issue with the “musicality” of Poe’s works as defined by “metres,” in this case, is that he believes Poe only includes in his poetry what fits a predetermined shape. For Huxley, “Ulalume” is “all too musical,” the musicality overshadowing every other element of the poem. It is this overshadowing that becomes important for critics who argue against the success of Poe’s word music.

---

11 Although Coulson, among others, refers only to Poe’s poems as “musical” in this quotation, he also writes that “Poe’s favoring of the lyric and short story showed his concern for writing to speak with the same immediacy and emotional appeal as music” (10), introducing the short story into his argument. Differentiation between Poe’s artistic media in terms of musicality blur in Poe criticism in this fashion.
Those critics who argue that Poe’s music as defined by metre and word sounds has a negative impact on his work often take issue with the materiality of word music.

Either, as Emerson famously put it in 1859, Poe becomes “the Jingle Man” (Peeples 64), or as Michael Williams (1988) states:

According to Lynen, ‘a word is destroyed by the meaningfulness which makes it a word ... In becoming a word, it has already started to merge with the reality it signifies.’ Such a description, however, does not seem to accord with, for example, the resolute materiality of Poe’s language, with its musical rhythms, bizarre rhymes, and occasional emphasis on the obviously scriptive character of his words. (7-8)

Williams does not deny the “musical” character of Poe’s works, but this character is associated with rhythm alone, while the rhymes become “bizarre” and the nature of his words “obviously scriptive.” Williams brings to the fore an issue with the “resolute materiality” of Poe’s “musical rhythms.” While some critics do not consider this materiality an obstacle to any enchanting effects, other critics who attempt to break down the music of Poe’s language do consider it an obstacle, and often dismiss its “magical” qualities. Norman Foerster (1923) writes, “[Poe] failed to observe that a true marriage of [the poem and the song], rather than a mere combination, is impossible, for although sound may be wedded to image, it is not in the full sense musical sound, music being properly free of limiting images” (324). Foerster conceives of music in a decidedly nineteenth-century fashion, described by Daniel Chua (1999) as the Romantics having removed “music from historical reality altogether and enclosed it in its own ‘separate world’, where its signs could reflect each other within an autonomy so
pure that its being discovered itself as tautology: music is music” (4). Foerster opposes, then, the concept of “the mythical union of a lower reality embodied in language and a higher one embodied in music” (Kramer, *Music* 2), to use Lawrence Kramer’s (1984) phrase.

For Foerster, as well as Williams, the materiality of Poe’s language makes it difficult to determine where musical meaning and word meaning begin and end, leaving the reader with the consciousness of the material without the “poetic effects” of the music earlier described. Echoing Williams’s interpretation of Poe’s “musical rhythms” and “bizarre rhymes,” Foerster writes:

> a writer [...] some time ago quoted [*King Lear*] [...] as an instance of those moments when the play ceases for us and we are transported by the magical music of the lines to the universal, the absolute. These moments occur, we must agree, in all the greatest literature; but when the writer of the article goes on to quote the first stanza of ‘To Helen,’ and to remark, ‘They are like music rising at the wave of a great conductor’s wand’ [...], one cannot but feel that he has unconsciously changed the subject [...] it does not rise above the normal experience of life but sinks beneath it. (327)

To Foerster, the material musicality of Poe’s language is the opposite of magic; rather than transport the reader by “magical music” to “the universal, the absolute,” it draws attention to itself, and will thus “sink beneath” the “normal experience of life.” It is not that Foerster denies the possibility of the poetic effect, the transformational quality of music, but he denies Poe’s ability to exhibit it. In doing so, however, Foerster claims that “all the greatest literature” has “these moments” of transformational “magical music.” *King Lear*, the only text cited, among others, must include “these moments,” but what
qualities that these other texts have as opposed to Poe’s, however, remain unnamed. In Kramer’s terms, the “union” between “poetry” and “music” remains “mythical.”

T.S. Eliot (1949) goes so far as to argue that “in translating Poe’s prose into French, Baudelaire effected a striking improvement: he transformed what is often a slipshod and shoddy English prose into admirable French” (336). As Riddel (1979) aptly summarises, “In English Poe is Emerson’s jingle man; transcribed into French, he inaugurates the revolution of the word, as in […] Borges’ Pierre Menard, the ‘Symbolist from Nimes’ who was a ‘devoté of Poe, who engendered Baudelaire, who engendered Mallarmé, who engendered Valéry, who engendered Edmond Teste’” (118). Pamela Faber (1989) argues that one of the primary reasons for Poe’s success in French is that “the music of Poe’s prose is not translated,” as the “French translation spares us many of Poe’s alliterations (ex. ‘thrilling and enthralling’ becomes ‘pénétrante et subjugante’)” (256). This is what Faber attributes to Poe’s success in France, the deletion of Poe’s “music.” Yet, those French poets such as Baudelaire and Mallarmé who famously translated Poe’s poetry and prose into French and found in him an aesthetic comrade, in terms of music’s place in art and beyond, did not exclusively respond to the idea of the “music” of Poe’s poetry in English or in French as it stemmed from the poetry itself. As Lois Davis Vines (1999) writes, “Mallarmé was also impressed by Poe’s views on the relationship between poetry and music, which he found in ‘The Poetic Principle’ and in ‘Letter to B — ’ […] As a poet Mallarmé became obsessed with refining the use of language in order to produce musical effects through poetry” (172). Poe’s “success in France” as it originated in Baudelaire and Mallarmé did not just originate because the
word music of the English originals was somehow extinguished. The authors responded to and propagated a relationship between Poe and music that moved beyond word music. The lineage from “Poe to Valéry,” as T.S. Eliot framed it, in terms of poetic ideology and music, complicates Eliot’s original work and comment about the benefits of translation. Carl Dahlhaus (1978) implies the existence of a complicated musical lineage between the artists when he contends:

From the same ideohistorical root as the desire for a ‘pure matter’ in language and music comes the conception that a poet, by being nothing but a ‘literary engineer,’ evokes the ‘wonderous.’ [...] just as characteristic of E.T.A. Hoffmann and Edgar Allan Poe as it was later on for Mallarmé and Valéry, [this] seems to derive from the romantic music esthetic of the late eighteenth century, whence it transferred to poetics in Hoffmann. (One could undoubtedly spin the thread of the history of this idea all the way back to Pythagoreanism, but the feeling of dichotomy and contradiction is missing in earlier stages.) This is one of Wackenroder’s central poetic-philosophical motifs; in his ‘Joseph Berglinger,’ the discrepancy between the ‘miracle of music’ and the means of invoking it determines the ‘inner form’ of the novella. (150)

The French elimination of Poe’s word music cannot thus eliminate the relationship between Poe’s works and music altogether. It speaks to deeper theoretical, philosophical, even theological connections, connections which frame Poe’s literary music in terms that move beyond word sounds. Both positive and negative interpretations of Poe’s word music rely heavily on personal critical preference while invoking themes of enchantment, magic, reverie, or the evocation of the wondrous without defining or expanding upon those themes. Writers and critics are interested in either upholding or dismantling the idea of Poe that Mallarmé alludes to in his own translation of “Le Tombeau d’Edgar Poe” (ca. 1875):

[...] (they) once hearing the Angel
To give too pure a meaning to the words of the tribe
They (between themselves) though (by him) the spell drunk
In the honorless flood of some dark mixture. (qtd. in Lloyd 220)

As Roger Pearson (2004) explains, Mallarmé’s “poem itself is intended to counter future philistine ‘bad language’ about Poe by its own poetic ‘good language’” (214), and these lines in particular refer to “the Blasphemers” who “have tried to stop up the essence of Poe” (169). In this mixed metaphor of pure language, spells, and dark essences, the French identification with Poe cannot be interpreted as due to the absence of Poe’s word music alone. Whether or not word music comes into play, the analytical result of its framework is the reiteration of Poe’s music as either overly scriptive and crassly rhythmic or as spellbinding and transcendent. In neither case do analyses coherently present Poe’s understanding and use of music.

**Music as Image, or as Image and Sound**

This leads to another way in which critics and artists discuss Poe and music: the musical effect of Poe’s works stems from music as an idea rather than the sounds specifically created through diction, rhythm, rhyme, and metre. However, all too often music as both sound and image merge, rather than music as image standing alone. Those critics who discuss Poe’s music as image sometimes blur images into the realm of the synesthetic. For Krishna Rayan (1969):

There is an aspect of Poe’s notion of musical indefiniteness that is of great significance [...] ‘The orange ray of the spectrum and the buzz of the gnat’ were one to him, and he could speak of a melodious strain issuing from a flame. This secret of image-making that had been lost since the Metaphysicals and was accidentally recovered by Poe has generated what is most distinctive in modern imagery — its discordant joining of thunder and rubies, of the sunset and the operation table. (78)
Rayan cites a section of Poe’s “Marginalia” from 1844, in which Poe writes, “The orange ray of the spectrum and the buzz of the gnat (which never rises above the second A), affect me with nearly similar sensations. In hearing the gnat, I perceive the color. In perceiving the color, I seem to hear the gnat” (1322). In doing so, Rayan introduces the idea of Poe’s music as synesthetic images, which give rise to a “secret of image-making [...] accidentally recovered.” Poe’s “musical indefiniteness” as “image-making” becomes responsible for the Modernist music of poems such as Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”; Eliot disliked Poe’s actual “word music,” as described before, yet as Rayan argues, utilises a different kind of Poe music, an imagist one. The association between Poe’s synaesthesia and his music introduces an association between those images that have no real world equivalents.

As critics attempt to discuss music in Poe in terms of its effect, whether in the synesthetic or symbolic images that his fiction creates or in the “word music” or sound of his works, the two camps often combine. Some critics, such as Charles Kent (1902), maintain that Poe’s word music and the images of his poetry work in tandem with one another. He writes that Poe’s “music may not suggest definite sentiments or present distinct pictures. [...] Its music is mainly in its melody, which is entrancingly complex, never severely simple, but there is no lack of harmony between the matter and manner of his poetry, for these beautifully aid each other” (xxv). Although Kent argues that Poe’s “music” does not “suggest definite sentiments or present distinct pictures,” he implicitly acknowledges that Poe’s “music” may present indefinite or indistinct ones. More than

12 He also refers to “The Colloquy of Monos and Una” (1845), to be discussed in the second part of this thesis: “issuing from the flame of each lamp, (for there were many,) there flowed unbrokenly into [his] ears a strain of melodious monotone” (614).
this, while Poe’s “music” comes from its “melody,” or what Kent implies is word music, Kent uses the term “harmony” to describe the relationship between this word music and the images, however indistinct, attached to it.

When Celia Whitt (1937) writes about her perception of the musicality of “The Assignation,” she begins by describing all of those characteristics in favour of sonorous “word music,” writing that the story evinces “the first time in his writing [that] Poe reaches the high point of his rhythmic, melodic prose, and in the third stanza of the embedded poem, also for the first time, the high point of his musical effects in poetry” (124). Whitt uses rhythm and melody in direct exchange with “musical effects,” supporting the idea that Poe’s word music is sound alone, whether in poetry or prose. She goes on in the article, however, to write of the story that “music precedes death” (130), revealing that Whitt also takes a more symbolic, idea-based view of Poe’s music, as well, noting its association with death and perhaps its indication of a transfer to the otherworldly.

An example of an understanding of these indistinct qualities of music is exhibited in the work of Daniel Hoffman (1972), who similarly speaks of the symbols, images, and ideas of music in Poe while at the same time discussing the material “word music” of Poe’s works:

When Edgarpoe has really set his lyre within the sky he is capable of a lovely music, a lyrical movement, a fortuitous lilt of chiming sounds. […] Occasionally Edgarpoe strikes on the lute-strings of his heart a few chords which sound as sweetly as do any struck by Shelley or Byron. Who cannot but be charmed by the melodiousness of rhyme and alliteration, the lulling lilt, and the indefiniteness of meaning imposed by a syntax purposely inconclusive, of the last stanza in ‘To One in Paradise.’ (53)

While Hoffman assumes Poe’s symbols of the “lyre,” of the “lilt,” of the
“melodiousness,” the “indefiniteness,” and the “mellifluous” with tongue-in-cheek self-awareness designed to reflect in prose Poe’s “very uneven ear” (53), the fact remains that Hoffman discusses Poe’s word music, his “rhyme and alliteration,” with that recurring “indefiniteness of meaning” that creates the idea, or image of music in his works. This becomes problematised, however, by a conflation with various components of word music, moving away from a possible internal consistency in Poe’s depiction of music as image or idea, and back towards a personal reaction to either Poe’s “chiming sounds” or his “uneven ear.”

Conclusion

The ways in which these categorical responses to Poe and music sometimes converge and sometimes diverge are effectively summarised in N. Bryllion Fagin’s The Histrionic Mr. Poe (1949). In a section devoted to a critical review of responses to Poe’s poetry, Fagin notes that even “a carping critic of Poe,” Ludwig Lewisohn, “grants [Poe] the possession of one pure gift — the gift of verbal music. ‘The music of “To One in Paradise,”’ he remarks, ‘has an enchantment that no analysis can deaden or destroy’” (136). Although Fagin appears to further define this “music” by categorising it as “verbal music,” Fagin only uses this categorisation to reveal the complexity of the term. Fagin responds by asking directly, “what precisely was this gift? Hundreds of studies have been attempted of Poe’s versification, of his rhymes, rhythms, stanzaic forms, his use of consonants and vowels, of tone-color and synesthetic effects; the result has been to leave us, in the main, no wiser than before” (136). Poe’s “rhymes, rhythms, stanzaic
forms, [...] and synesthetic effects” all fall under the umbrella of a “gift” of “verbal music” that remains unsatisfactorily explained, while representing some inexplicable “enchantment” that even “carping” critics recognise. Some critics assess Poe’s biographical connection with music, some explain it as the word music of his poetry, some the images of his poetry and prose, and some bring all of them together into an indefinite amalgam, and “the result has been to leave us, in the main, no wiser than before.”

This thesis thus takes a different approach to the study of Poe and music by omitting a reliance on the possibility of Poe’s musical abilities, his word music, his influence on musical compositions, or on a combination of music as synaesthesia, image, or sound. Instead, the thesis is embedded in a postlapsarian narrative formulated via word and music studies critics such as Daniel Chua, Lawrence Kramer, John Hollander, and Peter Dayan, as they relate to the notion of Poe as moving in a “textual universe, where there is no origin, authority or Word but only a library of texts and signifiers circulating multiple images of the absence of nature or God” (Blasing 18). In confining the focus of this argument to the language and images Poe uses around music in his poetry and short stories in the context of a wider, post-Pythagorean and post-Enlightenment discourse, this thesis reveals a spectrum of music in Poe that works along a hierarchy of divinity; in it, music in various incarnations can relate to utterance, audibility, failure, and that which can be named as well as that which voices without articulation, that associated with death, the otherworldly, and the unnameable.
Part One: Tales
1. Real World Music: The Parlour and the Madhouse

Chapter Outline

This first chapter lays the groundwork for the rest of the thesis by establishing one of the primary ways it differentiates itself from existing criticism: it explores examples of real world music in Poe’s tales. Critics have discussed the connections between Poe and composers who were influenced by his works, they have investigated music as an abstract concept in Poe’s creative and critical works, and they have often considered the interpreted word music of his pieces as indicative of Poe’s understanding of music altogether. In none of these analyses do they explore Poe’s creative textual descriptions of ‘real world music’ as this thesis defines it.

This first chapter uses Richard Leppert’s (1993) description of the eighteenth-century consumption of music in domestic contexts as a framework for real world music: these include that music must be described as experienced as “sound via the sense of hearing” (64), music must be capable of notation in the early nineteenth-century Western tonal tradition, and music must have a visible source of its performance. This chapter applies this definition of real world music to the only two tales in all of Poe’s fiction in which references to music fit its description: “The Spectacles” (1844) and “The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether” (1845). By setting real world music as the standard that Poe continually refuses outside of these two texts, this chapter establishes a set of associations in Poe’s fiction from which he never wavers: real world music is heard, material, associated with utterance, and often vulgar, violent, and dissonant.
This chapter establishes this series of associations by developing the significance of a source that ties these two stories together, the Countess de Merlin’s 1840 text *Memoirs and Letters of Madame Malibran*. Poe plagiarises descriptions of the operatic star Malibran’s musical performances in order to highlight his own characters’ performances as transmitted to the reader through words alone. The continual descriptive insistence on comparing his own characters’ singing performance with “utterance” and “words” opposes the theoretical idea of song as “broaching the ineffable” in what Lawrence Kramer describes as “the mythical union of a lower reality embodied in language and a higher one embodied in music” (*Music* 2). Far from uniting “language” and “music,” or even uniting language and descriptions of music, Poe’s works reveal an artistic need to separate the two.

After establishing the defining examples of real world music in Poe’s tales, this chapter illustrates how references to music in his stories begin to subtly shift away from this real world definition in tales such as “Four Beasts in One” (1836), “The Devil in the Belfry” (1839), and “The Duc de L’Omelette” (1832): stories that incorporate death, madness, and demonic elements that either reinforce the violence of earthly death, the animalism of earthly madness, or the horror of the earthly and diabolic supernatural. These stories oppose those that dominate Poe’s works, which explore death, madness, and the supernatural as something apart from earthly experience, and the treatment of music indicates the difference. This shift between sane and rational real world experience and that tinged with earthly madness, death, and horror, is expressed by adopting Michel Foucault’s (1964) terminology from *Madness and Civilization* to discuss themes of private and public performance as they relate to sanity and madness.
Defining Real World Music

In Richard Leppert’s *The Sight of Sound: Music, Representation, and the History of the Body* he describes the domestic consumption of music as having five “interlocking and mutually mediating but inevitably dialectical and different” components (64),¹³ the first three of which provide the basis for real world music as this thesis defines it:

First, and most obvious, music comprises certain phenomena experienced as sound via the sense of hearing. Second, in Western high culture music refers to notated ‘instructions’ for producing such sounds. Third, and here the story becomes more complex, music is a sight, a richly semantic visual phenomenon. It is a sight in performance, thus an embodied and interactive, hence social, practice (except when performed for the self, out of the hearing of others). […] Music as a sight and sound together, united in performance prior to the advent of recording technology, cannot be fully understood except in this conjunction. (64)

To fulfil the first definition, real world music (as this thesis frames it) must be experienced by a character, in either a story or poem, as “sound via the sense of hearing”; it must be recognised and described by a character as a heard sound. Although the reader does not experience the textual description as heard sound, real world music must describe a sound that has been experienced by the reader or could reasonably be experienced by the reader. To fulfil the second definition, a character must perform music that has the potential of being notated in the early nineteenth-century Western tonal tradition, although he or she might not explicitly follow “notated ‘instructions’ for producing such sounds.” Any sound described in a way that would escape notation cannot be considered real world music by this definition, even if it is described with

---

¹³ Leppert’s definitions describe the domestic consumption of music in England in the eighteenth century, but provide the basis for understanding the consumption of music in a broader context through the nineteenth century, and thus are relevant to this thesis.
musical terminology by a character in the text. To fulfil the third definition, real world music must have a visible source of its performance.

The first two short stories to be analysed, “The Spectacles” and “The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether,” first published in 1844 and 1845 respectively, are those in which the music described comes closest to fulfilling all three definitions of real world music. In both cases, it takes the form of vocal music. It is these two instances that provide the keys to interpreting the different contexts in which music arises in Poe’s creative pieces. Moreover, both stories draw from a single source, the Memoirs and Letters of Madame Malibran, a source that illuminates the ways in which Poe presents and conceives of real world music.

The Memoirs of Madame Malibran

Poe reviewed the Memoirs and Letters of Madame Malibran in 1840 (Poe, Rev. of Memoirs 248-49); in 1844 he published the first edition of “The Spectacles” and wrote his first manuscript of “The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether” (Mabbott, Tales 886, 1002). Although there is a four-year interval between his review of the memoirs and the two short stories, the three are closely related and together reveal the creative foundation for Poe’s use of real world music. Born in 1808 (Fitzlyon 23), Maria García Malibran was Poe’s contemporary, and like Poe, she spent time in both England and America. She performed in New York between 1825 and 1827 when she was 17-19 years old: on the “1st [of] October, 1825, Garcia and all his family […] embarked in Liverpool for New York, which they reached thirty-seven days later,” and
on the “28th [of] November, 1827, twenty-eight days after leaving New York, Maria Malibran arrived in France” (Fitzlyon 34, 54). Although he was in America at the same time as Malibran, Poe would not have seen her perform, as he was at home in Richmond and a student at the University of Virginia at that time (Quinn 92-113).

In fact, his experience of opera or concerts altogether is difficult to reconstruct. He does not write in his creative pieces about any musical performers or performances that he could not have read about. In that sense, his tales give us no firm evidence concerning what music Poe actually heard. He would not have seen Malibran perform, yet Poe uses multiple details of her performances and life from the memoirs in these two tales. Apart from Malibran (and Henriette Lalande, indirectly), Angelica Catalani and Henriette Sontag are the only other famous singers that Poe refers to in his creative works, and those references to Catalani and Sontag are insubstantial. In “The Purloined Letter” (1844), Dupin describes the Minister’s downfall with the metaphor: “in all kinds of climbing, as Catalini [sic] said of singing, it is far more easy to get up than to come down” (993). In “A Decided Loss” (1832), he puns that “two cats […] leapt up simultaneously with a flourish a la Catalani” (57). In “Von Jung, the Mystific” (1837), the narrator claims, “I have seen Sontag received with hisses, and a hurdy-gurdy with sighs” (294). As with Malibran, Poe would not have seen Catalani perform; she never performed in the United States, and he would have just missed her presence in London when he was there as a child. An article entitled “Madame Catalani” from a 1849 edition of Chambers’s Edinburgh Journal cites her travels: “Madame Catalani arrived in

---

14 Cat puns were close to Poe’s heart. Mary Louise Shew reminisced of Poe’s cat: “He called her ‘Catarina’: she seemed possessed. I was nervous and almost afraid of his wonderful cat” (Ingram, “Unpublished” 423).
London in December 1806” and she “came to Paris in 1814” (“Madame Catalani” 344). The Poe family did not arrive in Great Britain until 1815 (Quinn 65). Catalani is mentioned in Malibran’s memoirs (Merlin lix), but the memoirs were not published until 1840, and “A Decided Loss” was published in 1832, so Poe must have discovered Catalani in another source. Certainly, neither reference relies upon personal experience of Catalani’s performances: the first pun plays on Catalani’s attributed words, rather than her music. The same is true of Sontag, in that she never performed in the United States and her London performances occurred long after Poe was there, but she was also so famous “that the term ‘Sontag fever’ gained general currency, and she was similarly idolized everywhere” (“Sontag, Henriette”).

Similarly, Merlin’s Memoirs and Letters of Maria Malibran is the only definite source for Poe’s knowledge of Malibran herself. The second volume of the memoirs describes personal stories such as Malibran’s troubled relationship with her husband M. Eugene Malibran (Merlin 2: 6-8), and the first volume describes tales such as her distaste for competing singer Henriette Lalande (1: 108). The volumes also describe Malibran as a “fair syren” who not only became famous for her performances in the opera, but who was also popular in private circles (1: 37, 191):

I assembled at my house a sort of musical jury — a party of unbelievers. They were, as I expected, struck with astonishment on seeing and hearing her. Maria Malibran was sublime as a dramatic singer, but her most triumphant efforts were those little extempore fiorituri, with which she was wont to electrify her hearers in small private circles. On these occasions, when she gave free scope to her own inspirations, she seemed like the very genius of music. What a fund of original ideas, what exquisite taste, did Madame Malibran evince, when she imparted new life to a composition, by adorning it, as it were, with the brilliant and vivid hues of the rainbow. Before Madame Malibran had sung her first aria at my party, she had completely converted the little group of unbelievers into devout worshippers. (1: 38-39)
More than excelling in her private performances as the “very genius of music,” the
author describes how Malibran affected the inmates of an asylum after she found herself
visiting one in her travels (1: 212-14). While there, Malibran sang for a patient and also
received a performance from other patients in turn. Each of these details of Malibran’s
personal life that Poe read about for his review in 1840 plays out in the two stories in
which Edgar Allan Poe comes closest to using real world music. F. Eugene Malibran is
one possible nominal influence for Eugénie Lalande of “The Spectacles,” and Henriette
Lalande shares her surname with Eugénie and Stéphanie Lalande in the same story. The
asylum that Malibran visits is different from the one portrayed in “The System of Doctor
Tarr and Professor Fether,” but the singing inmates, the director of the asylum, and the
idea of a young woman singing in a private chamber all appear in the story in ways that
can be illuminated when read in the context of the memoirs that Poe reviewed.

“The Spectacles”: Maria Malibran and the Parlour Performance

“It was [on] an opera night” that Napoleon Buonaparte Froissart Simpson sets
the scene for “The Spectacles” (889). Refusing to wear glasses for fear that they
“[disfigure] the countenance” (888), he heads off with his friend Talbot to attend the
“P— Theatre” (888). He never gives a location for the theatre, but Mabbott comments
that the “Park Theatre was the leading playhouse of New York” (917). The theatre
promised “a very rare attraction” (889) which is never named, but certainly someone
like Maria Malibran would constitute that rarity in New York. Despite the “rare
attraction,” whatever or whoever it may be, and the “front seats” in which Simpson and
Talbot sit (889), Simpson “amused [himself] by observing the audience” (889), and calls his friend a “a musical fanatico” for giving “his undivided attention to the stage” (889). Simpson has not even turned his “eyes to the prima donna” (889) when he sees a woman in a viewing box, “grace personified, incarnate” (889). Simpson takes no notice of the opera, but becomes entranced with this woman, who we later discover is an elderly woman named Madame Lalande, who he describes here as his “first love” (895).

Simpson curiously misses the entire performance by being entranced by the vision of the “magic of a lovely form in woman — the necromancy of female gracefulness” (889) and by the sight of a “diamond ring [...] of extraordinary value” (890). Overcome by her beauty, which he does not really see correctly due to the absence of his spectacles, and overcome by her wealth, about which he makes no mistake, Simpson neither describes nor responds at all to the opera, to the dismay of his companion, who after being subjected to Simpson’s questions about Lalande during the performance, says to him: “do hold your tongue, if you can” (892). Thus, he is introduced to the story as wilfully ignorant of music, as unmoved by the “rare attraction” of the opera as the sight of this woman and her wealth moves him.

The opera’s “very rare attraction” is not the only musical performance in the story. Simpson’s initial characterisation is suddenly upset when he later attends Lalande’s home for “a little musical levée,” which promised to showcase “some good singing” (904). He sets the scene in the following manner:

The evening thus spent was unquestionably the most delicious of my life. Madame Lalande had not overrated the musical abilities of her friends; and the singing I here heard I had never heard excelled in any private circle out of Vienna. The instrumental performers were many and of superior talents. The vocalists were chiefly ladies, and no individual sang less than well. At length,
upon a peremptory call for ‘Madame Lalande,’ she arose at once, without affectation or demur, from the *chaise longue* upon which she had sat by my side, and, accompanied by one or two gentlemen and her female friend of the opera, repaired to the piano in the main drawing-room. [...] I was [...] deprived of the pleasure of seeing, although not of hearing her, sing. (904-05)

Even though Lalande is “accompanied by one or two gentlemen and her female friend” at the piano in the drawing room, the narrator does not follow them; he does not actually see her sing. In terms of Leppert’s definitions appropriated for this thesis, the third definition is held in limbo; although the narrator sees the piano, sees Lalande and company retire to it, he does not experience the actual musical production as a “richly semantic visual phenomenon” (Leppert 64).

Herein lies the crux of the story’s twist. Because Simpson’s pride causes him to refuse to wear his spectacles, Simpson sees and speaks to Eugénie Lalande, the woman he ‘saw’ in the opera and with whom he believes himself to be in love, but he hears Stéphanie Lalande sing. He eventually discovers that Eugénie is his great-great-grandmother, and Stéphanie his age-appropriate faceless, speechless musical performer.

To return for a moment to Malibran’s memoirs, if the real Eugene Malibran, Maria Malibran’s husband, is read as one of the inspirations for the fictional Eugénie, the quality they have in common is an attachment to material wealth. While Eugénie is actually wealthy in the tale, Eugene Malibran “became a bankrupt, the inhabitant of a jail” and continually pursued for financial reasons Maria Malibran, who gave “up even her marriage settlement to the creditors of her husband” (Merlin 2: 8), so that “The Spectacles” inverts Malibran’s biographical story. Simpson’s attachment to material wealth enhances his blindness to any other qualities, so much so that he can clearly see Eugénie’s wealth, but mistakes everything else. Simpson’s fervour for Stéphanie
Lalande’s performance is then immediately questionable, especially as he acknowledges directly that he was denied the “pleasure of seeing, although not of hearing her, sing” (905):

The impression she produced upon the company seemed electrical — but the effect upon myself was something even more. I know not how adequately to describe it. It arose, in part, no doubt, from the sentiment of love with which I was imbued; but chiefly from my conviction of the extreme sensibility of the singer. It is beyond the reach of art to endow either air or recitative with more impassioned expression than was hers. Her utterance of the romance in Otello — the tone with which she gave the words ‘Sul mio sasso,’ in the Capuletti — is ringing in my memory yet. Her lower tones were absolutely miraculous. Her voice embraced three complete octaves, extending from the contralto D to the D upper soprano, and, though sufficiently powerful to have filled the San Carlos, executed, with the minutest precision, every difficulty of vocal composition — ascending and descending scales, cadences, or fioriture. In the finale of the Sonnambula, she brought about a most remarkable effect at the words —

Ah! non giunge uman pensiero  
Al contento ond ‘io son piena.’

Here, in imitation of Malibran, she modified the original phrase of Bellini, so as to let her voice descend to the tenor G, when by a rapid transition, she struck the G above the treble stave, springing over an interval of two octaves. (905)

This citation makes this tale one of only two tales in which Poe cites operatic pieces (the other being “The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether”). In doing so, Simpson (and thus Poe) appears to exhibit some knowledge of scored music, describing Lalande’s vocal range with control and precision, a fact that led Charmenz Lenhart to conclude that this “single passage from the prose tales should prove that Poe [himself] understood much about vocal music” (130). As Mabbott soon pointed out (Tales 917), however, and Burton Pollin (1965) elaborated upon, the ‘proof’ of Poe’s musical knowledge was nothing more than an example in which Poe:

coalesced two descriptions of [Malibran’s] voice for part of his review without the benefit of quotation marks. Now in need of material for the vocal
enchantments of Madame Lalande, following the suggestion about ‘a difficult bravura’ in the original, he quoted his own borrowing from the *Memoirs of Madame Malibran*, which Poe reviewed for *Burton’s Gentleman’s Magazine*. (Pollin, “The Spectacles” 188)

What Pollin does not discuss, however, is that Poe borrowed something else from the *Memoirs and Letters of Madame Malibran*: the name ‘Lalande’ itself. Far from an arbitrary choice, the name appears in chapter sixteen of the first volume in reference to Henriette Méric-Lalande.

The memoirs describe Lalande’s relationship to Malibran as follows: “On her arrival [to London, Malibran] found that Madame Lalande was the prima donna whom she herself was to succeed. This lady had become a considerable favourite in England, which annoyed Madame Malibran not a little” (Merlin 1: 108). Malibran decided upon seeing Lalande perform, and the memoirs quote letters Malibran wrote to a friend in which she describes Lalande’s performance. Malibran describes Lalande’s “middle notes [as] wiry, and [as having] a harsh and shrill effect’ (1: 112) and her voice as having “trembled so, that none could find out whether it was sweet or harsh” (1: 110); she “utterly spoiled the pretty cavatina” and “finished her part in the same bad style in which she began it” (1: 111). Malibran gathers her information while viewing Lalande’s performance of Bellini’s *Il Pirata*, an opera Malibran calls “decidedly feeble” (1: 112).

In terms of Lalande’s physical appearance, Malibran writes:

> I will give you an account of the *debut* [sic] of Madame Lalande. […] Venga la bella Italiana, said I to my little self. I was all impatience, and as she appeared I stretched over the box to catch a glimpse of her. Alas! what a disappointment! Picture to yourself a woman of about forty, with light hair and a vulgar broad face, with an unfavourable expression, a bad figure, as clumsy a foot as my own, and most unbecomingly dressed. (1: 110)
Malibran’s spiteful descriptions of Lalande convey an antagonistic relationship that comes into play in Poe’s work when Poe goes on to use Lalande’s name in his tale as the attribution for the plagiarised positive and detailed descriptions of Malibran’s singing. Rather than camouflaging this sleight-of-hand in exchanging the real Malibran’s performances for the fictional Lalande’s, Poe draws attention to his plagiarism of the memoirs via his review by illustrating Lalande’s performance as an “imitation of Malibran”; the fictional Lalande’s singing is a textual “imitation of Malibran,” itself copied from Poe’s review, copied from the memoirs. In contrast, the voiceless, faceless “prima donna” from the story’s beginning never returns in the story. Whatever the “very rare attraction,” Simpson does not hear or see it. He sees Eugénie Lalande, his great-great-grandmother who derives her name from Malibran’s hated husband (Eugene) and rival (Henriette Lalande). Moreover, he does not hear or see Eugénie herself sing. Simpson instead goes to a smaller performance and hears another substitution, Stéphanie Lalande, and in his description of her performance, Poe draws attention to it being in “imitation of Malibran,” and thus to the stark contrast between the specific, the material, and the completely comprised of words Lalande of the story and the voiceless, faceless “rare attraction” whom she opposes. Simpson can only repeat plagiarised words that relate to the performance of the real “genius of music,” Malibran.

In choosing the descriptions for Stéphanie Lalande’s “imitation of Malibran,” Poe derives the excerpts from two different volumes of the memoirs; the first part of the excerpt (that apart from Lalande’s “electrical” effect) comes from the second volume:

Madame Malibran’s voice embraced three complete octaves, extending from the contralto D to the upper soprano D. There is no sound in nature which can convey any idea of her lower notes. Those who never heard her sing the
romance in Otello, — those who had never heard her soul-moving tones in that sublime phrase in the Capuletti, *Sul mio sasso*, have not felt the vibration of the tenderest chord of the heart. Her voice, though sufficiently powerful to fill the spacious theatres of San Carlos and La Scala, was capable of executing with precision all the difficulties of vocal composition: ascending and descending scales, fiorituri, cadences, all were equally easy to her. (Merlin 2: 122-23)

Poe rewrites this section with changes demonstrative of his use of his musical vocabulary in his short stories. Firstly, he changes the idea that there “is no sound in nature which can convey any idea of her [Malibran’s] lower notes” to the idea that Lalande’s “lower tones were absolutely miraculous.” Secondly, rather than “sing the romance in Otello” as Malibran does, Poe changes Lalande’s performance to an “utterance of the romance in Otello.” Malibran’s “soul-moving tones in that sublime phrase […] *Sul mio sasso*” become Lalande’s “tone with which she gave the words ‘*Sul mio sasso.*’” The idea of “the vibration of the tenderest chord of the heart” is omitted completely in Poe’s tale.

The second part remains largely unchanged from the original: “But who can describe the electrifying effect she produced in the finale? ‘Ah! non giunge uman pensiero / Al contento ond ‘io son piena.’ By an ingenious transposition of the original phrase of Bellini, her voice descended to the tenor G; then by a rapid transition she struck the G above the treble stave, an interval of two octaves” (Merlin 1: 192). The major difference is that Poe reiterates that Lalande brings “about a most remarkable effect at the words” themselves. Poe omits the “soul,” “nature,” the “sublime,” and the “heart.” As opposed to the Malibran of the memoirs, Poe’s literary Lalande is all “utterance” and “words.”
Poe makes the distinction purposefully, as his own reaction, published in 1840 separately from this tale, to reading the Memoirs of Madame Malibran takes a more passionate tone: “No thinking person, hearing Malibran sing, could have doubted that she would die in the spring of her days. She crowded ages into hours. She left the world at twenty-five, having existed her thousands of years” (“Marginalia” 1345). Rather than repeat this, more mystical, interpretation of the memoirs that omits any specific mention of Malibran’s words or the individual notes she sings, Poe opts for plagiarising those elements he personally avoids from the memoirs themselves, highlighting the description of Lalande’s singing as transmitted through words alone. The continual descriptive insistence on comparing Lalande’s singing performance with “utterance” and “words” opposes the theoretical idea of song as “broaching the ineffable” in what Lawrence Kramer describes as “the mythical union of a lower reality embodied in language and a higher one embodied in music” (Music 2). Far from uniting “language” and “music,” or even uniting language and descriptions of music, Simpson’s description of Lalande’s vocal range remains separate from the words she utters, and Poe’s plagiarism of the review and of himself highlights this separation by further emphasising the words themselves.

Moreover, this is the only story in which he specifically describes the performance of music in a way that refers explicitly to the notes in a score. That is not to say that elements of real world music do not occur elsewhere in the stories (“The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether” also refers to a musical note and “The Fall of the House of Usher” (1839) references a musical piece); but this is the only story in which he refers to the specific notes on the material score, the ‘notated ‘instructions’ for
producing” music (Leppert 64). This is also one of Poe’s least supernatural tales, and exemplifies a rare instance in Poe’s oeuvre as it is devoid of an underlying theme of madness. Details of the story might be exaggerated, but overall the tale depicts what could be ordinary life, and it is the only story in which a character gives a private concert performance in the nineteenth-century parlour tradition. Poe plays on custom, and on repetition and imitation, to reinforce the superficiality of the scene. The character Lalande acts as a namesake of the real Lalande and sings “in imitation of Malibran,” the description of which in turn repeats multiple textual layers; all these elements of repetition and imitation reinforce the levels of distance and materiality between the reader and musical performance. That technique changes slightly in “The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether.”

“The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether”: Maria Malibran and the Madhouse Performance

The connections between the Memoirs and Letters of Madame Malibran and “The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether” are not as direct as those between the memoirs and “The Spectacles.” In the anecdote of Malibran singing for a patient,

Madame Malibran approached a piano which stood in the chamber, and ran her fingers over the keys. In an instant the poor maniac was all attention. She sang the romance in Otello. ‘Is this divine?’ exclaimed the young man, and he appeared violently excited. ‘No,’ he added, ‘this is the voice of a woman’: then bursting into tears, he threw himself into a chair and sobbed aloud. (Merlin 1: 214)

In this account and in “The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether,” a young woman sings an aria in a madhouse, even if the details are not directly repeated. The
crucial element from this anecdote that resonates in this story and many of Poe’s others, is the “poor maniac’s” struggle in hearing Malibran: he initially questions whether the experience is “divine,” then realising it is “the voice of a woman,” he weeps. One possible interpretation of this anecdote illustrates an idea that this thesis will associate with Poe’s use of music in his creative works; initially experienced as “divine,” Malibran’s singing is immediately recognised as nothing more than the earthly “voice of a woman,” and both the acknowledgement and suffering of this duality stem from the “poor maniac.”

The anecdote links and embodies in the “poor maniac” questions of the relationship between madness, divinity, failure, and singing, all of which will be key themes in this thesis. The following anecdote from the memoirs thus takes on a deeper significance, that in which Malibran receives her performance in turn: “Several of the lunatics wished in their turn to sing to Madame Malibran, who very patiently listened to them, although the discordance of their tones was indescribably disagreeable” (1: 214). Malibran’s private performance as it is interpreted by one kind of madness relates to divinity, albeit through mortal failure to be divine; the group performance of another kind of madness made public lends itself to a described “discordance,” which does not relate to divinity at all.

These themes find their parallel in “The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether,” a story that opens with the narrator finding himself in an occupied parlour of the “private Mad House”: “At a piano, singing an aria from Bellini, sat a young and very beautiful woman, who, at my entrance, paused in her song, and received me with graceful courtesy. Her voice was low, and her whole manner subdued. I thought, too,
that I perceived the traces of sorrow in her countenance” (1004). As in “The Spectacles,”
the aria is by Bellini, although here it remains unnamed. While the narrator of “The
Spectacles” is completely cut off from seeing Lalande sing, the young lady of this story
implicitly performs long enough for the visitor to recognise her performance, but the
young lady also “pause[s] in her song” “at [his] entrance.” In this way, both narrators do
not describe seeing the performance. As in “The Spectacles,” the third definition of real
world music, that “music is a sight,” is held in limbo (Leppert 64). In both of these tales,
the narrators know the source of the singing, but cannot be said to explicitly watch the
musical production as it unfolds. Both narrators are removed from the sight of
performance, forcing them to describe the visual aspect of the performance as they
imagine it, not as they see it.

The narrator never describes the details of the piece, because the young lady
stops singing once her private playing is exposed, and although the narrator does
mention that her “voice was low” when she pauses and receives him into the parlour, she
is not singing at this point. Even as he describes her speaking in a “low” voice, the
narrator carefully omits her words. A point that will return in stories such as “Ligeia,”
this “low” quality does not clearly refer to being “low” in pitch or in volume, and in its
ambiguity often is generically used in Poe to signify some undercurrent of solemnity and
mystery.

The two stories have other elements in common. They contain the only two

15 According to Katherine Preston’s 2001 text Opera on the Road: Traveling Opera
Troupes in the United States, 1825-60, there were performances of La Sonnambula in
Philadelphia in 1839 (64), when Poe lived there (Quinn 268). There is no historical
evidence available to suggest Poe attended them.
instances in which the characters sing a high art song by a recognised composer presumably accompanied with lyrics. Both evoke concordant and readily imaginable musical performances, although in “The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether” one might not know which Bellini aria she sings. A major difference between the two stories is that in “The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether,” the music is less specific, less clearly described, so that it does not draw so explicitly upon the reader’s musical memory. What these two stories share is that individual females perform in private spaces: Lalande for company and the young girl of the latter story for herself. Whereas Simpson, however, gives the reader every reason to doubt his description of Lalande, as his abundant attention to the material world renders him blind to interpreting it, the narrator of “The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether” wrestles with a more complex relationship in his story between the expression of madness in terms of public and private musical expression.

The Departure from Real World Music

The narrator of “The System of Doctor and Professor Fether” later attends the dining room of the asylum and encounters multiple discordant musical performances. Seated at the far end of the room are “seven or eight people with fiddles, fifes, trombones, and a drum. These fellows annoyed [him] very much, at intervals, during the repast, by an infinite variety of noises, which were intended for music, and which

---

16 In “The Fall of the House of Usher” (1839), Poe cites the “last waltz of Von Weber” (405), and although Roderick Usher may or may not sing lyrics to the piece, the real world piece itself does not have any lyrics. This will be discussed in the following chapter.
appeared to afford much entertainment to all present, with the exception of [himself]” (1009). As opposed to the previous examples, this is real world music in the sense of being “experienced as sound” and as “a sight,” with a visible source. However, this instance problematises the idea of the second definition of real world music, which refers to “notated ‘instructions’ for producing such sounds” (Leppert 64). These “seven or eight people” perform their “intended […] music” in a space made public and not purely for a concert setting; the people provide background “noise” to an already cacophonous dining environment. Their cacophony increases as the dinner progresses, as diners “jested — they laughed — they perpetrated a thousand absurdities” while “the fiddles shrieked — the drum row-de-dowed — the trombones bellowed like so many brazen bulls of Phalaris — and the whole scene, growing gradually worse and worse, as the wines gained the ascendancy, became at length a sort of Pandemonium in petto” (1017). The noise of the scene builds upon itself, as the people “jested,” then “laughed,” and then the “fiddles shrieked.” The fiddles are depicted with a distinctly vocal description, ‘shrieking,’ such that they cannot even be described in terms of their limitations as musical instruments. Poe’s attribution of this cacophony to a “Pandemonium in petto” describes the scene as Pandemonium in miniature, linking it to a term of musical direction in a way that links the chest voice with chaotic and cacophonous sound. The musical term becomes intimately tied to the protracted and harsh noises and the concept of a kind of nightmarish earthly struggle. As opposed to the controlled and precise way in which Poe describes Lalande’s performance in musical terms, and opposed to the young lady’s “low” voice that opens the story, the ‘musical performance’ of this mad group is neither associated with words nor with concert music,
but with cacophony.

At one point, the same orchestra breaks out “with one accord, into ‘Yankee Doodle,’ which they performed, if not exactly in tune, at least with an energy superhuman, during the whole of the uproar” (1020). Mabbott points out the most glaringly out-of-place element of the performance, that in “Poe’s day ‘Yankee Doodle’ was our most popular national air, but its selection by a French orchestra, even if mad, was certainly extraordinary” (1024). They perform their bizarre choice of music with “energy” and “during” an “uproar” and “not exactly in tune,” all implying cacophony. Moreover, they do so to mask another source of discord. A sudden “series of loud screams, or yells” arise from the inmates (the previous sane managers of the asylum) (1014). After the narrator inquires after the nature of the sound, the director of the asylum chalks it up to being “mere bagatelle” in which the “lunatics […] get up a howl in concert […] as is sometimes the case with a bevy of dogs at night. It occasionally happens, however, that the concerto yells are succeeded by a simultaneous effort at breaking loose; when, of course, some little danger is to be apprehended” (1015).

Not only is the cacophonous “howl” of the so-called “lunatics” described in the terminology of music, but this expression of madness also takes a form that resonates with Foucault’s description of the development of the perception of madness associated with the caged or the asylum: “Madness borrowed its face from the mask of the beast […] as if madness, at its extreme point […] managed to rejoin, by a paroxysm of strength, the immediate violence of animality. This model of animality prevailed in the asylums and gave them their cagelike aspect, their look of the menagerie” (Foucault 72). In fact, many of the characters of “The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether”
who produce cacophonous sounds described in musical vocabulary, are compared to animals. In this instance, the “mere bagatelle” is compared to that of a “bevy of dogs.”

One man in particular describes himself in the third person, as a frog, claiming: “Sir, if that man was not a frog, I can only observe that it is a pity he was not. His croak thus — o-o-o-o-gh - o-o-o-o-gh! was the finest note in the world — B flat” (1012). The narrator goes on to elaborate that then, “again, the frog-man croaked away as if the salvation of his soul depended upon every note that he uttered” (1020). Another character believes herself to be a rooster, and would “sing out incessantly, at the top of her voice, ‘Cock-a-doodle-de-dooooooh!’” (1021). Noticeably, the further the descriptions of the noises descend into the mad and the bestial, the further they move away from real world music. Even though these examples fit some elements of the rules for real world music, being experienced as “sound via the sense of hearing” and as “sight,” their descriptions associate them with cacophony rather than musical performance (Leppert 64).

Returning to Foucault, he writes: “Here is madness elevated to spectacle above the silence of the asylums, and becoming a public scandal […] Unreason was hidden in the silence of the houses of confinement, but madness continued to be present on the stage of the world — with more commotion than ever” (69). Although this thesis does not appropriate Foucault’s differentiation between perception of “unreason” and “madness,” the distinction between the “silence” of “confinement” and the “commotion” of madness on the “stage of the world” permeates Poe’s tales. Understanding this in terms of Foucault’s separate discourse in *Madness and Civilization* draws attention to a key element in the relationship between the public musically-described madness and
cacophony. Unlike madness elsewhere in Poe’s works, none of this loud, animalistic public depiction of madness via music points toward spirituality, mystery, or the beyond.

To once again turn to Foucault:

animal metamorphosis is no longer the visible sign of infernal powers, nor the result of a diabolic alchemy of unreason. The animal in man no longer has any value as the sign of a Beyond; it has become his madness, without relation to anything but itself: his madness in the state of nature. The animality that rages in madness dispossesses man of what is specifically human in him; not in order to deliver him over to other powers, but simply to establish him at the zero degree of his own nature. For classicism, madness in its ultimate form is man in immediate relation to his animality, without other reference, without any recourse. (73-74)

This description pointedly sums up a specific kind of relationship between animalism and madness that speaks to one kind of earthly madness and diabolism in Poe. In what this thesis describes as an earthly madness, a materially-based madness, the “animal in man” has no “value as the sign of a beyond; it has become his madness, without relation to anything but itself.” This kind of mania is diametrically opposed to that anecdote of the “poor maniac” who weeps after Malibran sings to him. The madness of the public animalistic display is a madness tied fully to the bestial and not to a sense of the beyond; this madness, and/or this explicit tie to the earthly, when expressed in musical terms in Poe, is continually made more present, whether through emphasis on words, on discord, or on the materiality of the performer or performance instrument. Each of these qualities points back to a notable absence of any “sign of a Beyond.”

Like “The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether,” “Four Beasts in One” (1836) is a tale of madness. Mabbott describes it as a “combination of stories about the freaks of a mad ancient monarch and the caricatures of a nineteenth-century king of France […] the result is one of the best of the tales of the grotesque” (Tales 117). The
narrator has the reader “suppose” that “it is now the year of the world three thousand eight hundred and thirty, and […] [we are] at that most grotesque habitation of man,” Antioch (120). The narrator then leads the reader through the city, through “an infinity of mud huts” (122) and to “the new Temple of the sun” (122) before describing an “extraordinary tumult […] a loud noise even for Antioch” (123) stemming from “the principal street, which is called the street of Timarchus” (124). The narrator guides the reader from the “huts,” or private homes, through to the “Temple” and then to a “principal street,” where the public gathers.

Discordant sound emerges from “the principal street”: “The uproar increases. Shouts of laughter ascend the skies. The air becomes dissonant with wind instruments, and horrible with the clamor of a million throats” (124-25). The dissonance builds as the story’s “mad” “king” approaches, a grotesque “king” who is a “cameleopard” that has “the visage of a man” (123-24, 126). As opposed to the normalised interior of “The Spectacles” and the initially normalised interior of “The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether,” the public space of “Four Beasts in One” is grotesquely present, creating a vivid, loud, and bizarre Antioch of the past. In this public space, the “wind instruments” create dissonance parallel, nearly synonymous, with the air becoming “horrible” with the “clamor of a million throats.”

Just after this, “a troop of a similar description” to “a thousand chained Israelitish prisoners […] [who] have made a Latin hymn upon the valor of the king, and are singing it as they go” (124) pass by with a “Latin hymn”:

A thousand, a thousand, a thousand,
A thousand, a thousand, a thousand,
We, with one warrior, have slain!
A thousand, a thousand, a thousand, a thousand,
Sing a thousand over again!
Soho! — let us sing
Long life to our king,
Who knocked over a thousand so fine!
Soho! — let us roar,
He has given us more
Red gallons of gore
Than all Syria can furnish of wine! (124-25)

Poe prints the hymn in the text and the narrator re-describes it a few times. The “hymn” is first printed in Latin, then printed again in this English translation. In the English version, he further draws attention to the words of the “hymn” by using a forced masculine rhyme. He then notes within the tale that “Flavius Vopiscus says, that the hymn here introduced, was sung by the rabble upon the occasion of Aurelian, in the Sarmatic war, having slain with his own hand, nine hundred and fifty of the enemy” (125). Instead of the lyrics of a more spiritual “hymn,” these lyrics call for a “roar” for the “king” who has “given us more / Red gallons of gore.” Not only does Antioch have a mad king with a bizarre embodiment, but the tale centres on a gory attachment to the material aspects of death. This perverse hymn, moreover, does not follow any real piece of music, nor does it mention a score. Rather, instead of being tied to music, it is tied to noise. As if this were not pinned enough to the materially diabolical, the narrator describes it being “sung by the rabble” and then moves further away from real world music by having this “hymn” for and by the “rabble” then reflected in a “song of triumph” that Epiphanes, a kind of supernatural creature, sings for himself:

Who is king but Epiphanes?
Say — do you know?
Who is king but Epiphanes?
Bravo! — bravo!
There is none but Epiphanes,
No — there is none:  
So tear down the temples,  
And put out the sun!

Well and strenuously sung! The populace are hailing him ‘Prince of Poets,’ as well as ‘Glory of the East,’ ‘Delight of the Universe,’ and ‘most remarkable of Cameleopards.’ They have *encored* his effusion, and — do you hear? — he is singing it over again. (126-27)

The “song of triumph” is also specifically printed in the text, and after being described as being “strenuously sung” is then repeated in an encore. Again, the lyrics to this “song” are marked by specific, material, and horrifying images, with the call to “tear down the temples, / And put out the sun,” but again it is the words that are specific and not the music of the “song.” Not only is the singing “strenuously sung” by the “rabble” and couched in other forms of discordance in the preceding paragraph, but that discordance is not reflected in musical terms, but in words themselves. The animalism of Epiphanes, the “cameleopard” that has “the visage of a man,” does not point to any sort of a beyond. The madness, expressed in musical terminology, does nothing but establish man, in Foucault’s terms, “at the zero degree of his own nature” (74).

Like Epiphanes, the creature that is both man and giraffe, there are supernatural characters in Poe’s tales closely allied with bestial, diabolical, earthly madness, and the vocabulary of music associated with them follows the same principles. Another story that portrays an instrument of the public sphere in a descriptively material manner is “The Devil in the Belfry” (1839). In this story, the devil carries “a fiddle nearly five times as big as himself” (371). The first time the devil uses the fiddle, he uses it to beat the belfry-man: “lifting up the big fiddle, beat him with it so long and so soundly, that what with the belfry-man being so fat, and the fiddle being so hollow, you would have
sworn that there was a regiment of double-bass drummers all beating the devil’s tattoo up in the belfry of the steeple of Vondervotteimittiss” (372). The fiddle used as a weapon turns into an untuned instrument, like “a regiment of double-bass drummers.” When the devil actually plays the fiddle, he does so in the town belfry such that the public can hear it: “In his teeth the villain held the bell-rope, which he kept jerking about with his head, raising such a clatter that my ears ring again even to think about it. On his lap lay the big fiddle at which he was scraping out of all time and tune, with both hands, making a great show, the nincompoop! of playing ‘Judy O’Flannagan’ and ‘Paddy O’Raferty’” (374). As in “The Spectacles” and “The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether,” the tunes “Judy O’Flannagan” and “Paddy O’Raferty” are quite possibly solely derived from other authors Poe would have read, in this case William Maginn and Washington Irving (Levine 431). These tunes, like ‘Yankee Doodle,’ are not high art music, nor are they played in accordance with their notation, for the devil plays by “scraping out of all time and tune.”

Moving even further along the trajectory of the diabolical and into hell itself, in “The Duc de L’Omelette” (1832) music becomes even less like real world music while maintaining qualities associated with this earthly madness and diabolism. The Duc arrives in the halls of the devil and hears something described in terms of melody, a description that changes slightly between the first and final versions. In the first version of the story, the Duc looks through an “uncurtained window” and sees the “most ghastly of all fires,” to which Poe comments: “Could he have imagined that the glorious, the voluptuous, the never-dying symphonies of that melodious hall, as they passed filtered and transmuted through the alchemy of that enchanted glass, were the wailings and the
howlings of the hopeless and the damned?” ([A] 36). In the final version of the story, this description changes: “He could not help imagining that the glorious, the voluptuous, the never-dying melodies which pervaded that hall, as they pass filtered and transmuted through the alchemy of the enchanted window-panes, were the wailings and the howlings of the hopeless and the damned!” ([F] 36; emphasis mine). In both cases, the shift from “Could he have imagined” to “He could not help imagining” brings more force to the link between the “wailings and howlings” and the music he hears as he looks out into the fire, such that the first definition of real world music is maintained: he experiences the melodies as “sound via the sense of hearing” (Leppert 64). In terms of the third definition of real world music, that “music is a sight,” the Duc has access to its transmission through the “window-panes,” but they are “enchanted,” their “alchemy” affects his vision of the musical production such that he could “not help imagining” its source. Even if one is to assume that the Duc is correct in his interpretation, what in the first version is “symphonies” becomes “melodies” and excises the description of the hall itself as “melodious.” Through these changes, Poe renders that which is “melodious” less specific; rather than being a specific series of notes, or even performed pieces in their entireties, as “symphonies” would be, that which is “melodious” does not signify a complete musical piece. In both versions, however, this description of the “melodious” is associated with torture, hellfire, and the most material versions of death and damnation. More importantly, both versions leave the “wailings and howlings” unarticulated; no words are pinned to the music, but rather the music conveys an unarticulated agony. Thus, as the settings of Poe’s stories and as Poe’s plots move from the earthly, the sane, and the lack of the supernatural through the earthly and the mad,
the deathly and the gory, descriptions of music move from consonant descriptions based on real world sources to discordant and loud articulations of agony or screams. As the plot and setting move toward the diabolical supernatural, as in “The Duc de L’Omelette,” descriptions of music, although maintaining an unarticulated sense of agony, fit less and less into the definition of real world music, becoming more complex and indefinite.

**Conclusion**

This chapter began with discussing the *Memoirs and Letters of Maria Malibran* as a possible source for “The Spectacles” and “The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether” to provide a basis for what this thesis describes as real world music. By showing how real world music is most simply projected when madness and the supernatural are absent and the tale one of the quotidian, this chapter shows how music descriptions begin to shift once these other elements come into play. The incarnation of madness described in this chapter, described in Foucault’s terms as having no “value as the sign of a beyond; it has become his madness, without relation to anything but itself” (73), opposes another kind of madness that will arise in Poe’s tales, the diametrically opposed madness embodied in the anecdote of the “poor maniac” who weeps after Malibran sings to him. Thus, the following chapter looks at “The Fall of the House of Usher” as another tale of madness that involves a musical performance, and teases out what happens to the description of that musical performance in terms of a real world music definition as the plot and setting move away from the earthly.
2. Unravelling Real World Music: Roderick Usher and the Ballad

Chapter Outline

Continuing with Poe’s tales, this second chapter uses “The Fall of the House of Usher” (1839) to explore the tension points of real world music: how descriptions of music stretch beyond the boundaries of real world music when certain types of madness and liminal settings take precedence in the tale. The story contains the only other instance besides those named in the first chapter in Poe’s tales in which a character gives a musical performance of a named real world composition, but it begins to obscure any adherence to real world music by confusing descriptions of the performance as audible and as seen by the narrator protagonist.

The story also contains the only other instance in Poe’s tales in which printed “verses” accompany the musical performance, as in “Four Beasts in One.” Yet, those verses, Poe’s poem “The Haunted Palace,” are in turn described as a “ballad,” making it the only instance in Poe’s tales in which a “ballad” is named as such and tied to a musical performance. Poe does, however, use the term to describe three other poems, two of which are analysed in this chapter: “Ulalume — A Ballad” (1847) and “Annabel Lee — A Ballad” (1849). An interrogation of these two poems in the context of the tale cements a divide in Poe’s works between an ancient mythologised past in which ballads were unified ideal performances of words and music and a modern postlapsarian present in which ballads can never reunite the two.

Thus, this chapter explores the various singularities in the tale, and two related poems, beginning by positioning the setting of “The Fall of the House of Usher” as
liminal and the plot as bordering on the otherworldly, the significance of which is traced through a convergence of the postlapsarian narrative just described and the importance of the theme of a different kind of madness from that described in the first chapter. In this case, madness no long is that associated with violence, animalism, and diabolism. Rather, madness becomes linked with the otherworldly, the unknown aspects of death, and the angelic and demonic outwith that which can be articulated.

This convergence of themes will reveal that, as Poe’s tales describe music as that which resists the definitions of real world music, as music is described as complexly seen, not quite audible, and as something which cannot be pinned to early nineteenth-century Western tonal tradition, it automatically becomes associated with the otherworldly, with madness that speaks of an unknown beyond, and with the aspects of death that cannot be pinned to the physical world. All of these associations underscore Poe’s postlapsarian narrative. In our modern condition, words can no longer be unified with music as an expression of the otherworldly. Rather, heard, material, and real world music associated with words becomes vulgar, and unheard, immaterial, and otherworldly music associated with silence becomes associated with a dark unknown. The distinction between the two underpins the remainder of the thesis.

The “Mad Trist”

The narrator of “The Fall of the House of Usher” takes a relatively large amount of space to describe the surroundings of the house itself; he takes five extended paragraphs before he even enters the house to portray the landscape and the “atmosphere
peculiar” to the setting (399). Poe’s description of the atmosphere in this story, along with his descriptions of those of stories like “William Wilson” (1839), prompts critic Gerhard Joseph (1973) to argue that “physical objects are suffused with a mingled aura of ineffable beauty and suffocating gloom; houses and palaces and cities are built to a shadowy music and take upon themselves deathlike associations” (420). No musical terms or descriptions arise in the narrator’s description of the house, however, even if for Joseph music mingles with death in the story’s “suffocating gloom.”

Rather, the crucial element to the setting of “The Fall of the House of Usher” is the house’s situation upon a “silent tarn” (400). Combined with the story’s beginning on “a dull, dark, and soundless day in the autumn of the year” (397), silence pervades the environment of the house, seemingly arising from the water itself. The water plays a crucial role in the story’s opening, as the last description of the house’s external setting the narrator gives is of a “barely perceptible fissure, which, extending from the roof of the building in front, made its way down the wall in a zigzag direction, until it became lost in the sullen waters of the tarn” (400). When the story approaches its climax, the narrator ties the brewing electrical storm that surrounds the mansion to the tarn itself and, crucially, to a romance called the “Mad Trist” that Poe invents for the purposes of the tale. The narrator, begging Usher not to watch the storm unfold, suggests to Usher:

‘These appearances, which bewilder you, are merely electrical phenomena not uncommon — or it may be that they have their ghastly origin in the rank miasma of the tarn. […] Here is one of your favorite romances. I will read, and you shall listen; — and so we will pass away this terrible night together.’ The antique volume which I had taken up was the ‘Mad Trist’ of Sir Launcelot Canning; but I had called it a favorite of Usher’s more in sad jest than in earnest; for, in truth, there is little in its uncouth and unimaginative prolixity which could have had interest for the lofty and spiritual ideality of my friend. (413)
The sources of and reason for Poe’s invention of the “Mad Trist” has received little scholarly consensus, apart from the fact that it represents a medieval romance and symbolises the events of the frame narrative in one way or another. Certainly many sources possibly influenced Poe’s tale, but one possible source that scholars may not have discussed explicitly or at length is that of the medieval legend of Tristan and Iseult. The invented author “Sir Launcelot Canning” derives his first name from the Arthurian romance intimately connected to the story of Tristan and Iseult. Of course, the specific versions of the Tristan and Iseult story that Poe might have read, read about, or heard of are difficult to discover, and it is beyond the scope of this thesis and fruitless to trace all the possible variations of the tale to which he may have been exposed.\footnote{See \textit{A Bibliography of Modern Arthuriana (1500-2000)}, edited by Anne Howey and Stephen Raimer (2006), for the sheer number of permutations of the story (Howey).} Poe may have known any number of versions.

As David Shirt (1980) writes, in “1785 Myller published his edition of Gottfried von Strassburg’s \textit{Tristan und Isolde}, although […] in 1776, the appearance of the Comte de Tressan’s \textit{Histoire de Tristan de Léonis et de la Reine Iseult} […] based on a 1589 prose compilation, seems to have launched the vogue for the Tristan stories” (13). He goes on to say that the “cause was quickly taken up […] by Sir Walter Scott who published his edition of \textit{Sir Tristrem} in 1804,” but that it was not until the end of the nineteenth century that the first critical editions and translations were published of the various versions of the story (13). Of all of the versions of the tale, apart from Malory’s, Poe would have most likely been aware of Walter Scott’s (1804) \textit{Sir Tristrem; A Metrical Romance of the Thirteenth Century} as ‘written’ by Thomas of Ercildoune, or
Thomas the Rhymer. Poe definitely read and admired Scott, and Scott has been convincingly named a source for a few of Poe’s works, most notably “Ligeia” (1838) (Mabbott, *Tales* 306). Thus, for the purposes of comparison in this thesis, Scott’s versions of the tale of ‘Tristrem’ and ‘Ysolt’ will be used.\(^\text{18}\)

The details of Poe’s “Mad Trist” are not requisite for understanding the importance of the connection between the story and the legend of Tristrem; Poe’s version involves a hero knight, a hermit’s home, a dragon, and a shield, all of which come into play in various permutations of the legend of Tristan and Lancelot. In Poe’s version, the hero knight, called “Ethelred,” slays a dragon (414), as Tristrem does in Scott’s rendition of Thomas the Rhymer’s version of the tale (66). However, in Scott’s version, Tristrem cuts off the dragon’s tongue after killing it, and is “deprived of his senses” due to its poison (66). After being reunited with Ysodd, his sanity is restored and he pledges the tongue and his ship as symbols of honour that he truly did kill the dragon (66). This pledge is crucial, as it represents two of three key elements associated with Tristrem in nearly all of the legends surrounding him: firstly, his madness (represented in this tale by the tongue) and secondly, his continual association with the sea (represented in this tale by the ship). The third key element associated with Tristrem, his musicality, comes into play elsewhere. Scott describes him as “a perfect master of the harp” (cvi), and in the Rhymer version of the tale, Tristrem “asks from King Mark a ship […]”. Mark reluctantly grants his request, and he embarks with […] his harp as his only

\(^{18}\) Multiple versions of the tale exist in Scott’s book. He writes his version of Thomas the Rhymer’s edition and then writes an abstract description of “French metrical romance” versions of the story (203). When referring specifically to Scott’s tale, this thesis will use the names “Tristrem” and “Ysolt” or “Ysond,” but when speaking of the tale in general, will return to using “Tristan” and “Iseult.”
solace” (63), such that Tristrem’s voyage on the sea and his harp playing become intimately linked. In Scott’s other version of the tale (the French fragments), the harp is tied to the sea as well: “I landed with nothing but my harp, which had long been my only consolation. Soon you heard of my skill on that instrument, and I was sent for to court. […] I taught you the sweetest lays on the harp” (211). He does all of this by opting to “feign madness” as a disguise from the king who already knows him, using the mask of the madman to allow him to speak freely in Mark’s court, bringing the three elements of his madness, his musicality, and his association with the sea, full circle (207).

If this is read as a possible source of Poe’s “Mad Trist,” the title refers explicitly to the madness of Tristrem, (the ‘Mad’ ‘Trist’rem), and Poe’s “Mad Trist” itself ties into the frame narrative of “The Fall of the House of Usher.” In this way, the ties between Tristrem’s madness, his musicality, and his connections to the sea evoke an interpretation of “The Fall of the House of Usher” that exposes numerous threads integral to this thesis. Beginning with the connection between Tristrem, the sea, and madness, let us return to Foucault, who uses the story of Tristan to illustrate the links between water and madness, a madness that precedes and differs from that described in the previous chapter:

Already, disguised as a madman, Tristan had ordered boatmen to land him on the coast of Cornwall. And when he arrived at the castle of King Mark, no one recognized him, no one knew whence he had come. But he made too many strange remarks, both familiar and distant; he knew too well the secrets of the commonplace not to have been from another, yet nearby, world. He did not come from the solid land, with its solid cities; but indeed from the ceaseless

---

19 In Scott’s version of the “French Metrical Romances,” as in various other versions, the mad or fool Tristrem inverts his name to Tramtrist or Tramiris: “Queen Ysolt, I am Tramtris” (Scott, Sir Tristrem 211).
unrest of the sea, from those unknown highways which conceal so much strange knowledge, from that fantastic plain, the underside of the world. (Foucault 12)

Foucault’s interpretation of Tristan uncovers madness both “familiar and distant,” a madness that, whether or not it was purposefully adopted, speaks of “strange knowledge” from a “fantastic plain.” The myth of Tristan ties into Foucault’s overarching description of madness as read through the symbolism inherent in the historical roots of the “Ship of Fools,” which he argues becomes part of the “imaginary landscape of the Renaissance” (7). Of this connection between madmen and the sea, Foucault writes:

to hand a madman over to sailors […] made him a prisoner of his own departure. But water adds to this dark mass of its own values; it carries off, but it does more: it purifies. […] It is for the other world that the madman sets sail in his fools’ boat; it is from the other world that he comes when he disembarks. The madman’s voyage is at once a rigorous division and an absolute Passage. In one sense, it simply develops, across a half-real, half-imaginary geography, the madman’s liminal position on the horizon of medieval concern — […] he is kept at the point of passage. […] One thing at least is certain: water and madness have long been linked in the dreams of European man. (10-12)

The madman that Foucault describes in this passage, the madman that finds root in the middle ages, precedes the division between “the silence of the asylums” and “madness [that] continued to be present on the stage of the world — with more commotion than ever” that tied into the madness described in the previous chapter (Foucault 69). The sea places the madman in a “liminal position” that speaks of “the other world,” one continually promising embarkation and arrival to and from this “other world,” and one which purifies him by making him a “prisoner of the passage” (11), as Tristan is. Yet rather than setting sail for other worlds, Poe’s Tristan, Roderick Usher, sits in his mansion instead of a ship, on a tarn instead of the sea. As opposed to the sea, the lake is
stagnant, representative not of voyage, but of immobility and circumscription. The water that promised voyage *across* to other worlds for Tristan is the water through which Roderick Usher can only travel *downwards*, and thus the sea that purifies becomes a tarn that damns.

Indeed, whereas Tristan and Iseult are ‘cursed’ with a love potion, Roderick and Madeline Usher are trapped in an incestuous “sexual curse,” as critics such as John Allison (1988) have explained (43). Whereas Tristan uses a mask of ‘madness’ to unite himself with Iseult, in Poe’s tale, Roderick’s madness keeps Madeline at a distance, eventually so far as to put her “living in the tomb” (416). Whereas Tristan is a “prisoner of the passage” of the sea, a liminal figure that speaks of other worlds, the “fantastic plain,” in Foucault’s terms, Roderick is a liminal figure of the tarn, into which the only passage to other worlds is downwards. In fact, the story climaxes just after the narrator finishes reading the “Mad Trist,” as a supernatural storm gathers by finding root in the “miasma” that arises from the tarn itself. Upon Madeline’s rise from the tomb and reunion with Roderick, the narrator flees from the house. Roderick’s madness speaks of “other worlds,” but those that exchange the heavenly for the hellish, that move from electrical storms and sound to darkness and silence, perversions of the madness associated with Tristan. Roderick Usher is a continual inversion of the themes evident in the legend of Tristan, particularly these, but Roderick Usher’s musicality, his “ballad” and his “speaking guitar” (404, 408), especially illustrate the importance of his reversal of the legend of the musical harpist Tristan.
“The Fall of the House of Usher”: The Guitar and the Ballad

The ties between Roderick, Tristan, and stringed instruments are present from the story’s outset. Poe adapts from the poem “Le Refus” the epigraph for the tale: “Son coeur est un luth suspendu; / Sitôt qu’on le touche il résonne,” which Mabbott translates “His heart is a hanging lute; as soon as it is touched, it responds” (397, 417). Poe never uses lutes in his prose tales, although they figure in his poetry, most notably in “Israfel” (1831), who is described as an angel whose “heart-strings are a lute,” a lute that ultimately parallels the poet’s “lyre within the sky” ([G] 2, 51). This again speaks of an inversion of Scott’s Tristrem and Ysolt, as Tristrem is a “perfect master of the harp” to the pleasure and enchantment of all (Sir Tristrem cvi), but Roderick Usher is another kind of musician altogether.

Roderick Usher’s inclination toward stringed instruments is subtly indicated before he ever picks up his guitar, as his mental illness takes form in a “morbid acuteness of the senses,” so that “there were but peculiar sounds, and these from stringed instruments, which did not inspire him with horror” (403). J.O. Bailey (1964) posits that Roderick’s “horror of all sounds except those of stringed instruments seems natural for anyone who senses the presence of a demon. Poe often associates stringed instruments with angelic forces” (454). While maintaining that Poe continually connects stringed instruments with angels, Roderick Usher’s circumscription to tolerating only the sounds from stringed instruments, rather than pointing to his desire to be near the angelic, inversely points to his sensing a demonic presence. This inversion ties back to the series of inversions of the Tristan legend that Poe’s tale invokes; Roderick’s madness speaks of
“other worlds” of damnation, rather than purification. Poe’s use of Roderick’s ‘music’ continues to illustrate this reversal.

In Roderick’s separation from Madeline, he passes his time in artistic endeavours with the narrator of the story (404). The narrator describes the days following Madeline’s sequestering: “I listened, as if in a dream, to the wild improvisations of his speaking guitar. And thus, as a closer and still closer intimacy admitted me more unreservedly into the recesses of his spirit, the more bitterly did I perceive [...] a mind from which darkness [...] poured forth” (404). This is the first time that Roderick’s guitar is mentioned in the text, and prefaces a lengthy discussion of his musicality.

Returning to the definition of real world music from the last chapter as a framework for interpreting this introduction of Roderick’s “speaking guitar” reveals the ways in which Roderick’s ‘performances’ differ from those of the fictional Lalande and the young girl from “The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether.” Firstly, real world music must be experienced as “sound via the sense of hearing” (Leppert 64) by a character, specifically recognised as a heard sound; the narrator fulfils this definition, saying he “listened” explicitly to Roderick (404), but his qualification that he “listened, as if in a dream,” complicates his experience of Roderick’s “improvisations” as a heard sound. If the reader must be able to imagine that sound as it could be reasonably experienced in the real world, this instance is also a bit more complex than the examples in the previous chapter in that, although one could reasonably imagine hearing a guitar, the phrase “wild improvisations of his speaking guitar” does not relate to a commonly defined or understood real world experience. Secondly, real world music must be experienced by a character as a “sight,” a definition that this story also complexly fulfils; the narrator is
present with Roderick during his “improvisations,” but he describes listening “as if in a
dream,” rather than seeing him.

Thirdly, to fulfil the definition of real world music, the character must perform
music that either refers to real world “notated ‘instructions,’” or has the potential to be
notated in nineteenth-century Western tonal tradition. This third definition is
complicated in Poe’s tale as the narrator continues:

I shall ever bear about me a memory of the many solemn hours I spent alone
with the master of the House of Usher. Yet I should fail in any attempt to
convey an idea of the exact character of the studies, or of the occupations, in
which he involved me, or led me the way. An excited and highly distempered
ideality threw a sulphureous lustre over all. His long improvised dirges will ring
forever in my ears. Among other things, I hold painfully in mind a certain
singular perversion and amplification of the wild air of the last waltz of Von
Weber. (405)

The “last waltz of Von Weber” was believed in Poe’s time to be Von Weber’s last
composition, composed just a “few hours before his death” in 1826, even though it was
written by Karl Reissiger (Mabbott, Tales 418). Roderick’s “perversion and
amplification” of the piece resonate with their inescapability, or their entrapping both the
narrator and Roderick Usher between the realms of the natural and supernatural. In this
way, all three definitions of real world music are held in limbo in this scene: the narrator
listens to Roderick “as if in a dream” and he implicitly sees Roderick, but the hell-like
“sulphureous lustre” pervades his sight. While a real world piece is named, itself
referring to “notated ‘instructions’” for producing the music, Roderick’s performance
perverts and amplifies it. This portrays Roderick as a liminal character who continually
inverts the characteristics of the madman of the sea as described by Foucault and
expressed through Tristan. While Scott’s Tristrem uses his facility on the harp to obtain
Ysolt’s love, Roderick can only play in Madeline’s distance, and his playing is a “dirge.” While Tristrem’s playing holds a nearly Orphic power, Roderick’s playing is held “painfully in mind” as an inverse power that lends itself to the “dream,” to the “otherworldly,” in a way that conveys pain and darkness, creating the hellish “sulphureous lustre” that pervades his space. These themes expand in another example of a tale in the story, the inset “ballad” of “The Haunted Palace.”

The narrator of “The Fall of the House of Usher” continues to describe Roderick’s “speaking guitar” as he introduces an inset poem “The Haunted Palace.”

Poe included poems in a few of his tales: “The Conqueror Worm” (1843) appears in “Ligeia” from 1845 onwards (318-19), “To One in Paradise” appears in “The Assignation” from its inception in 1834 (162-63), and “A Catholic Hymn” appears in the first manuscript of “Morella” in 1835 ([A] 227-28). However, apart from the “Latin Hymn” published in “Four Beasts in One” as discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, “The Haunted Palace” is the only inset poem that ties into the frame narrative as “verses” that accompany what might be played music. Unlike the “Latin Hymn” from “Four Beasts in One,” however, “The Haunted Palace” is never called a ‘song.’ Poe goes to great lengths to never name it as such, even if critical consensus interprets it as a song: Roderick “composes and sings ‘The Haunted Palace’” (Bailey 456), or as Michael Hoffman argues in his 1965 article, the “clue to the narrator’s strange reactions to the House of Usher lies in the song” (160). Christopher Rollason (2009) argues that “Roderick in ‘The Fall of the House of Usher,’ presented as a poet and musician, [...]”

20 I will refer to “The Haunted Palace” as a poem for simplicity’s sake, and because it is published separately as a poem, but it should be noted that the tale carefully avoids calling it a poem just as much as it does calling it a song.
may be seen as a prototype of the singer-songwriter whose practice within the text
uncannily anticipates early Dylan” (45). Rollason implies that “The Haunted Palace,”
the printed poem that the narrator of the story writes that Roderick performs, is a song,
at least in the context of the story itself, yet the narrator describes it otherwise:

It was, perhaps, the narrow limits to which he thus confined himself upon the
guitar, which gave birth, in great measure, to the fantastic character of his
performances. But the fervid *facility* of his *impromptus* could not be so
accounted for. They must have been, and were, in the notes, as well as in the
words of his wild fantasias (for he not unfrequently accompanied himself with
rhymed verbal improvisations), the result of that intense mental collectedness
and concentration [...]. The words of one of these rhapsodies I have easily
remembered. [...] in the under or mystic current of its meaning, I fancied that I
perceived, and for the first time, a full consciousness on the part of Usher, of the
tottering of his lofty reason upon her throne. The verses, which were entitled
‘The Haunted Palace,’ ran very nearly, if not accurately, thus: [...] I well
remember that suggestions arising from this ballad led us into a train of thought
[...]. (406, 408)

Roderick Usher’s “speaking guitar” was previously described as producing “wild
improvisations,” which now become “performances” with “fantastic character,”
“impromptus” with “fervid facility,” “rhapsodies” accompanied with “words,” and “wild
fantasias” which may refer to the “rhymed verbal improvisations” or the guitar itself.
When referring only to the words, they become “verses” and, together with Roderick’s
performance, a “ballad.” This is far removed, as were the performances of the previous
chapter, from that notion of song as “the mythical union of a lower reality embodied in
language and a higher one embodied in music” (Kramer, *Music* 2). The narrator
continually describes the “notes” as separate from the “words” of the performances, and
when the two become indistinguishable, it is when he describes “The Haunted Palace”
as a “ballad.” Crucial to Poe’s use of this term is that Roderick’s “ballad” is just printed
in the text without accompanying music.
This depiction of “The Haunted Palace” as a “ballad” invokes crucial references in the story. Tristan the harpist takes the role of a minstrel character in the legend, which becomes self-referential in that the legend itself might have been sung. The fact that legends, from the Greek myths to the medieval romances, were meant to be sung, would not have escaped Poe’s attention. Scott himself notes in his edition of Sir Tristrem:

several of the romances bear internal evidence that they were occasionally chaunted to the harp. [...] It is evident, indeed, that the minstrels, who were certainly authors of the French romances, and probably of the English also, could derive no advantage from these compositions, unless by reciting or singing them. Some traces of this custom remained in Scotland till of late years. [...] Within the memory of man, an old person used to perambulate the streets of Edinburgh, singing, in a monotonous cadence, the tale of Rosewal and Lilian, which is, in all the forms, a metrical romance of chivalry. (286)

Scott also famously published his own version of a collection of “Historical and Romantic Ballads” in his Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border (1802). The obvious connection between Scott’s collection of ballads and the metrical romances he describes in the above note is the fact that the accompanying music is either lost or unprinted.

When Tristan plays his lays on the harp, he represents the minstrel who performs his romance, but Poe writes his tale when only the words of the ballads and romances remain, without the music. As Daniel Chua (1999) writes of music in the broader historical context of the movement toward absolute music, “modernity, by disenchanting the world, divides it. Modern music is therefore divided. One of the first signs of this division is the expulsion of music from language,” and thus “music’s future becomes a matter of recovery; its drive towards the new is haunted by an idealised past” (23, 31). Setting aside for the moment the possibility of music’s “drive towards the new” in Poe, the two themes that are beginning to emerge in this thesis are music’s division from
language as a result of a disenchanted world separated from an “idealised past” and traces of that “idealised past” itself haunting the text. Poe’s perverse Tristan, Roderick Usher, cannot marry his “rhymed verbal improvisations” and his “speaking guitar” in anything but a “wild fantasia” that directly relates to neither. The “ballad” itself becomes a poem transmitted through the memory of the narrator rather than through Roderick himself, a “ballad” that points back to Roderick’s madness, the “tottering of his lofty reason upon her throne” (406). Poe only uses the title of “ballad” for three other poems: “Bridal Ballad” (1837), “Ulalume — A Ballad” (1847), and “Annabel Lee — A Ballad” (1849). This following section will use two of these ballads to establish commonalities between poems Poe describes as “ballads,” returning to “The Haunted Palace” by way of conclusion.

The Case of the Ballad

The use of the term “ballad” in relationship to poetry published without musical score is not uncommon in the nineteenth century: Wordsworth’s and Coleridge’s Lyrical Ballads at the turn of the century and Scott’s collection of ballads are only two famous examples of the word’s proliferation. Poe’s “ballads” differ from Scott’s by not explicitly engaging with a historical framework of minstrelsy or singing. Poe’s “ballads” also refuse to engage with poetic depictions of real world music. The use of the title “ballad” both engages with and differs from what Terence Hoagwood (2010) describes as the use of musical terminology in poetry of the Romantic period, arguing:

Two sorts of pseudo-songs proliferate in the Romantic period: those that, like many of the lyrics by Burns and Clare, are sold as if they were songs when they
are entirely scriptorial or typographical objects; and those that refer to music and use rhetorical resources to conjure imaginary musical effects, without pretending to be, really, music. (4-5)

Both of Hoagwood’s notions of the Romantic “pseudo-song” work on some level with Poe. In the following chapters, this thesis will be in an on-going dialogue with the second kind of “pseudo-song” Hoagwood mentions, those that refer to music “without pretending to be, really, music.” For the purposes of this chapter, Hoagwood’s description of “lyrics” that are “sold as if they were songs” corresponds with some critical interpretations of Poe’s “ballads.”

Burton Pollin (1992) argues that many of Poe’s later poems, including his ballads, were intended for publication with music. He argues that there were “reasons other than the philosophical or aesthetic for Poe’s veering toward the lyrics of song and thinking of himself as a ‘song writer’ in his ‘latter years.’ First, there was a powerful economic motive: the high emolument paid to song writers, far greater than to magazine poets” (“Poe as a Writer” 61). The idea that poems written as ‘ballads’ must be set to music or somehow use musical techniques intended to evoke real world music is a common one, although not representative of all critical viewpoints on the matter. As Hoagwood argues regarding Letitia Landon’s poetry,

Landon’s pseudo-songs exemplify common features of the genre in the Romantic period. Coming late as they do in that period, they also help to illustrate the progression that the genre undergoes historically. In the poetry trade, music often disappears under its typographical simulation. The imaginarness of the music is part of its charm, its sales appeal. While bringing about this evanescence of actual song — the turn from song-sheets to entirely letterpress commodities — the pseudo-songs of Moore and Byron make a theme of their own emptiness and absence, treating lyrically the emptiness and absence in their narrative situations; so too do Landon’s pseudo-songs, both with and without musical scores. (138-39)
As Hoagwood observes, the “genre” of the song or the ballad goes through a real historical transformation in which the music associated with the lyrics disappears, and that “imaginariness of the music” becomes part of its economic appeal. This chapter will explore the notion that the “imaginariness of music,” whether or not part of the economic appeal for Poe, has another appeal altogether. The “imaginariness of music” in the case of the ballad points back to a kind of “idealised past” as Chua describes in which music and lyrics were united (Chua 31).

The ballad may have had two important and opposing historical attributes for Poe, the first typifying associations with real world music described in the first chapter and the second illustrating associations with music described in this chapter. First is the association with the “ballad-monger,” the lower form of balladeer, and the second is the association with a mythical lost art that brings together history, superstition, and mythology. The first type of ballad exists as commodity that united public performance of lyrics and music. As Michael Bristol (1991) observes,

ballad-mongers were small-time entrepreneurs or sub-contractors who earned their livelihood selling mechanically reproduced entertainment to a mainly lower-class buying public. Ballads were wares or commodities, and the ballad-monger was a kind of pitchman who found his market at the edges and interstices of organized economic activity. (163)

This definition of the ballad hearkens back to the public performance of music in the previous chapter, and is a definition that continues nearly to Poe’s time. Rather than representing the mythical unification of lyrics and music, it represents public performance that places economic value on song as a hawked ware. Exemplifying this definition, the narrator of Poe’s “The Man of the Crowd” (1840) describes the crowd of the title in one extraordinarily long sentence extending to an entire page. The description
ends with: “organ-grinders, monkey-exhibitors and ballad mongers, those who vended with those who sang; ragged artisans and exhausted laborers of every description, and all full of a noisy and inordinate vivacity which jarred discordantly upon the ear” (510). This concept of the “ballad monger,” tied to the clashing juxtaposition of “those who vended with those who sang” implies that there is nothing more than a motley, “discordant” outcome to placing economic value on a “ballad,” or “those who sang,” by positioning them in a public sphere, rendering them grotesquely materially present.

This first kind of ballad from “The Man of the Crowd” does not occur in Poe’s poetry. Rather, Poe’s poetic “ballads” position themselves in relation to a second type of ballad. In his *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, Scott paints a picture of the Scottish ballad setting of the middle ages, that the “tales of tradition, the song, with the pipe or harp of the minstrel, were probably the sole resources against ennui” (44). He goes on say that the more “wild the state of society, the more general and violent is the impulse received from poetry and music. [...] Verse is naturally connected with music; and, among a rude people, the union is seldom broken. By this natural alliance, the lays, ‘steeped in the stream of harmony,’ [...] produce upon his audience a more impressive effect” (45). This “union” between “poetry and music” that is “seldom broken” in the romanticised “wild” Scotland of the middle ages has already come undone by Poe’s time, even though the essential relationship between ballad and public performance continues for the next few centuries. Hoagwood argues of Sir Walter Scott’s *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, “As influential and widely admired as Scott’s *Minstrelsy* has been, the work joins a long history of printed simulations of folk songs, works that are forgeries in two senses: editors feign authentic folk origins for their own writing or for
other modern works, and they pretend that literary texts are ‘songs’” (25). Unlike Scott, Poe does not preface his poetry with folk origins, but like Scott’s “ballads,” Poe’s are also not songs.

As Maureen McLane (2001) writes of the English and Scottish Romantics, they had to consider “the fate of poetry as a cultural project set adrift from its imagined origins in speech and gesture […]. Scott derived his own poetic genealogy from minstrels who, he maintained, served the Scottish ‘National Muse’ even as Homer served that of the Greeks” (423). This idealised ballad again opposes what Steve Newman (2007) describes as the ballad one could see and hear: “from 1728 [the ballad is] […] a ‘song commonly sung up and down the streets.’ For those attracted to the ballad, ‘commonly’ signifies in two ways. […] the ballad lacks the prestige of high genres, […] But this very lowness makes the ballad attractive to elite authors” (2). Newman continues that, as the eighteenth century progresses, the “music of the ballad broadens its reach and intensifies its grasp on an audience […] [and] even those who do not write songs for musical performance […] draw on the communal orientation intimated by the ballad’s ontology as song” (3). Whatever the given critical reason for using the term ‘ballad,’ often acknowledged as either economically motivated or motivated by audience, the key factor is that real world music is not necessary for its production and is detrimental to its significance as hearkening back to an idealised past.
“Ulalume — A Ballad”

In addition to not being printed with music, Poe’s ballads also do not necessarily use musical terminology. “Ulalume — A Ballad” does not use musical imagery or music as a subject at all. Neither condition stops critics from interpreting the poem in terms of its relationship to music, as it is evoked by the title. Daniel Hoffman (1972) writes,

Not until I took seriously the full title of the piece — ‘Ulalume — A Ballad’ — did I recognize what he was up to. A ballad has incremental repetition, tells its story in song. Poe’s tale can’t move any faster than the music, the music is more important than any of the words. Poe even scores his words for a particular composer — for who is Auber but Daniel-François-Esprit Auber, whose piece ‘Le Lac des Fées’ was in the popular repertoire at the time. […] So I have to conclude that Poe, setting his scene with the help of a faëry ballet and a wispy painting, […] is already in an ideal landscape imaginable only to artists and bereaved lovers. (70-71)

There are two issues with Hoffman’s argument. The first issue is that Poe’s ‘ballad’ does not tell “its story in song” more than any of his other poems. Whatever his rhythmic and sound effects, the poem’s music, in a real world sense, does not exist. Moreover, his argument that Poe “scores his words” from his short poem for Auber’s extended ballet-opera seems rather unlikely. Going so far as to call the speaker of the poem “Edgarpoe’s melancholy ballad-singer” (70), Hoffman makes an error akin to that which Hoagwood describes:

Often in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, readers and writers apparently confuse textual and typographical products with actual music. My point is not that commentators have been mistaken about the poem, but rather that […] his [Shelley’s] poem ‘Music, when soft voices die’ is an especially clear example of a printed text which, internally, is about the absence of music, but which, externally, becomes an apparently convincing illusion of the music whose absence it declares in plain English. (Hoagwood 5-6)
Poe’s “Ulalume — A Ballad” does not explicitly make music its subject in the way that Shelley’s poem does; however, Poe’s invocation of the title ‘ballad,’ rather than invoking ‘song’ in a real world sense, highlights music’s absence, whether or not it “becomes an apparently convincing illusion of the music whose absence it declares in plain English.”

The second issue with Hoffman’s argument is his assumption that if the Auber of the poem is related to the composer of the same name, Poe explicitly calls upon the reader’s musical memory. Firstly, as was the case for La Sonnambula, it is difficult to say to what performances Poe was ever actually exposed. Mabbott notes that Auber’s opera-ballet was “presented at the Olympic Theater, New York, on December 1, 1845” (Poems 420), at the same time that Poe lived in New York. There is, however, no historical evidence available to suggest he attended. He may have known it through reviews. For instance, “Auber and His New Opera” was printed in The Evergreen in New York in 1840 (“Auber” 86). Secondly, even if Poe called upon his musical memory in the poem, the idea that the reference was used to somehow summon the ghost of real world music is nonsensical. The poem begins:

The skies they were ashen and sober;
The leaves they were crispéd and sere —
The leaves they were withering and sere:
It was night, in the lonesome October
Of my most immemorial year:
It was hard by the dim lake of Auber,
In the misty mid region of Weir: —
It was down by the dank tarn of Auber,
In the ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir. (1-9)

No musical terms describe the “dim lake” or the “dank tarn” of Auber. If the “dim lake of Auber” does indeed relate to the composer Auber’s “Fairy Lake,” the connection is
one of imagery reversal, as in the inversion of the Tristan legend in “The Fall of the
House of Usher.” Like the “Mad Trist” pointing to the Ushers’ perversion of the myth of
Tristan and Isolde, the “dim lake of Auber” or the “dank tarn of Auber” is anything but a
“Fairy Lake”; it is a lake haunted by ghouls. Described in nearly identical terms to the
body of water upon which the Usher house is situated, the situation of the poem on
Auber prefigures that perverse madness evident in Poe’s tale — the madness that points
not to worlds beyond, but to worlds underneath.

There is one interpretation of the poem’s setting, including the lake Auber, which
ties together the subject of the poem and the title. As Eric Carlson (1963) summarises,
building his argument upon James Miller’s (1955) article “‘Ulalume’ Resurrected,” the
unreality of the opening scene, for instance, is intentional: the panel of images
(ashen skies, leaves crisped and sere, Auber, Weir, etc.) reflects the speaker’s
torment of frustration. The first stanza functions as a part of a non-logical,
impressionistic sequence […]. As such, in Miller’s words, it ‘underscores the
abnormal or dream-like state of mind of the speaker.’ (“Symbol” 26)

The interpretation of the poem as reflecting or ‘underscoring’ the “abnormal” or the
“dream-like mind of the speaker” is crucial; Miller’s relation and opposition of the terms
“abnormal” and “dream-like” highlights a relationship between madness and a liminal
positioning that works parallel to that described in “The Fall of the House of Usher.”
Carlson quotes Miller as arguing that the poem’s “hypnotic effect, emphasizes the non-
rrational state of the speaker’s mind where the real and the unreal intermingle and
become indistinguishable. It is a point midway between waking and sleeping, sanity and
insanity” (26). In describing this liminal positioning, Carlson makes a passing
observation that the poem’s “very vagueness or ‘indefinitiveness’ makes for a desirable
artistic delay” (29). In describing the poem’s subject and texture as that of a liminal
madness, Carlson appropriates a term invented by Poe, “indefinitiveness,” but does not proceed to explain the context of his use of the word.

Yet Poe’s only famous use of the term “indefinitiveness,” a word he invents (Pollin, *Poe, Creator of Words* 5-6), is in relation to music. In his published “Marginalia” (1844), Poe leads into his use of the term “indefinitiveness” by way of Tennyson:

I am not sure that Tennyson is not the greatest of poets. […] Other bards produce effects which are, now and then, otherwise produced than by what we call poems; but Tennyson an effect which only a poem does. […] There are passages in his works which rivet a conviction I had long entertained, that the *indefinite* is an element in the true ποιησις. (1331)

Before Poe uses the term in question, he sets it up by using Tennyson as an example of a truly great poet. He then argues that poems have the capacity to “produce effects” that other works of art do not. He appears to qualify this particular kind of poetry as the “true ποιησις” and that a crucial element of it is “the indefinite.” Heidegger describes the Greek term ποιησις as “‘making’ that which is not yet; what is ‘made’ is not the poetized — for the inceptuality, only truth procures a *making one’s way* to and for” (279). In Nikolopoulou’s (2012) explanation of the term, it is translated as ‘poeisis,’ where poiesis and praxis [are] two mutually exclusive modes of production — creating or making versus doing or operating. Agamben writes, ‘In the *Symposium* Plato tells us about the full original resonance of the word ποιησις: “any cause that brings into existence something that was not before is ποιησις.” Every time that something is pro-duced, that is, brought from concealment and nonbeing into the light of presence, there is ποιησις, pro-duction, poetry.’ (74)

Poe’s use of the term ποιησις, rather than ‘poetry,’ is important. Poe does not refer so much to the finished product of a poem, but relates poetry to a larger concept of bringing something “from concealment and nonbeing into the light of presence.” The “*indefinite*"
is then an element of a poetic production in a God-like manner of creation, the “true ποιησις.” Poe continues:

Why do some persons fatigue themselves in attempts to unravel such fantasy-pieces as the ‘Lady of Shalott?’ As well unweave the ‘ventum textilem.’ If the author did not deliberately propose to himself a suggestive indefinitiveness of meaning, with the view of bringing about a definitiveness of vague and therefore of spiritual effect — this, at least, arose from the silent analytical promptings of that poetic genius which, in its supreme development, embodies all orders of intellectual capacity. I know that indefinitiveness is an element of the true music — I mean of the true musical expression. Give to it any undue decision — imbue it with any very determinate tone — and you deprive it, at once, of its ethereal, its ideal, its intrinsic and essential character. You dispel its luxury of dream. You dissolve the atmosphere of the mystic upon which it floats. You exhaust it of its breath of fāery [sic]. It now becomes a tangible and easily appreciable idea — a thing of the earth, earthy. It has not, indeed, lost its power to please, but all which I consider the distinctiveness of that power. (“Marginalia” 1331)

Poe smoothly moves from the premise based on Tennyson, that “the indefinite is an element in the true ποιησις,” or of what might be described as poetic production, to the notion that “indefinitiveness is an element of the true music,” which he again qualifies as the “true musical expression.”

Much of the description Poe associates with indefinitiveness has to do with the idea of the ‘ventum textilem,’ which a few of Poe’s editors have traced to Isaac D’Israeli (1791) as a most likely source. Mabbott claims “Poe might have found […] [the term] in D’Israeli’s Curiosities of Literature” (Mabbott, Tales 917). In the original source, D’Israeli writes: “Apuleius calls those neck-kerchiefs so glassy fine, (may I so express myself?) which, in veiling, discover the beautiful bosom of a woman, ventum textilem; which may be translated woven air. It is an expression beautifully fanciful” (132). D’Israeli associates the term with Apuleius, but not directly with the story of Cupid and Psyche. Poe does, however, associate the two in “The Spectacles,” an association that
critics have not fully explored. When the narrator mistakenly takes in the sight of Eugénie Lalande and falls in love with her, he says, “The head, of which only the back was visible, rivalled in outline that of the Greek Psyche, and was rather displayed than concealed by an elegant cap of *gaze éerienne* [sic], which put me in mind of the *ventum textilem* of Apuleius” (324). In both D’Israeli and in Poe, the *ventum textilem* or the *gaze éerienne* represents that which, in attempted concealment, paradoxically reveals. This association will return in “Ulalume.”

Unravelling a poem unweaves the ‘*ventum textilem,*’ and depriving the poem of indefinitiveness deprives it of its ‘ethereal’ character, the ‘atmosphere’ upon which it ‘floats,’ its ‘breath of fäery.’ Dispelling a poem’s indefinitiveness dispels it of its “true musical expression,” which is only described in terms of the ethereal, or the air woven. To return once more to the division between the music of the ancients and modern music, such that “modernity, by disenchanting the world, divides it” and thus modern “music is therefore divided” (Chua 23), “In the enchanted world of the ancients, music was an airy substance, it did not occupy space, it was its very essence” (Chua 52). As one looks toward that idealised past, represented as linked to the otherworldly, music becomes intrinsically tied with notions of ether, atmosphere, and breath. The opposite of the “true musical expression” is a “tangible and easily appreciable idea” that Poe crucially describes as “a thing of the earth, earthy.” Any attempt to divine what Poe means by the “true musical expression” will be deferred for a while. For now, the division between the “thing of the earth, earthy,” and the “indefinitiveness” associated with the ethereal that characterises the “true musical expression” is crucial to return to Carlson’s interpretation of “Ulalume — A Ballad.”
When Carlson describes the poem’s “very vagueness” as “indefinitiveness” (“Symbol” 29), he invokes the context described, implicitly using a term that summons Poe’s description of the key element of the “true musical expression,” whatever it may be, and a term which Poe elsewhere associates with the myth of Psyche and Cupid. Thus, returning to the Auber connection, Miller argues that “it is important that there not be any geographical locations of Auber and Weir except in the imagined world of the narrator” (qtd. in Carlson 29), as both the poem’s setting and the narrator’s consciousness separate themselves as much as possible from the “earth, earthy,” to use Poe’s phrase. If the composer Auber’s “Fairy Lake” is invoked, it is in title only, as his real world music is neither mentioned, nor is music in a real world sense ever suggested. Rather, music remains a few steps removed from the poem. As Hoagwood argues of other Romantic poems, “the speaker’s references to music foreground its unreality or illusions, its comforts and pleasures not really being there. In all of these texts, there is no music, but only reference to it. It is the absence that counts” (8). If Poe’s lake Auber is meant to invoke the composer in any sense, it is to highlight the absence of the music anywhere but in the title’s suggestion as much as it illustrates the perversity of the ghoul haunted tarn opposing the composer’s “Fairy Lake.” Moreover, Carlson’s recognition of its “indefinitiveness” highlights the vital link between the poem and Poe’s description of the “true musical expression”: that of the relationship between the earthy and the ethereal in the liminal setting.

After introducing the setting of the poem, the speaker describes roaming the landscape with the mythological Psyche, who he also refers to as his “Soul”:

Here once, through an alley Titanic,
Of cypress, I roamed with my Soul —
Of cypress, with Psyche, my Soul.
These were days when my heart was volcanic
As the scoriac rivers that roll —
As the lavas that restlessly roll
Their sulphurous currents down Yaanek,
In the ultimate climes of the Pole —
That groan as they roll down Mount Yaanek,
In the realms of the Boreal Pole. (10-19)

Akin to the “sulphureous lustre” that pervades the scene in “The Fall of the House of Usher” when Roderick performs his “long improvised dirges” (405), the “sulphurous” is associated with the speaker’s heart in this poem. The speaker describes his heart as “volcanic,” as volcanic as “lavas” that “groan.” Rather than music, one of the only sound descriptors in the poem is the sound of a groan as the heart’s expression. The speaker’s heart, compared to the groaning rivers of lava, opposes his description of Astarte in a following stanza, as the speaker and Psyche watch the rising of Astarte in the sky:

And I said — ‘She is warmer than Dian;
She rolls through an ether of sighs —
She revels in a region of sighs.
She has seen that the tears are not dry on
These cheeks where the worm never dies,’ (39-43)

As Astarte, the goddess of fertility and the sea, becomes synonymous with the star Venus, she also exists in an “ether of sighs,” unearthly opposite to the “groan” that represents the sound of the speaker’s heart. Psyche acts as Astarte’s antithesis in the poem, bringing full circle the Apuleius connection from the ‘ventum textilem’ reference. If indefinitiveness imbues “true musical expression” with its ethereal character, it is notable that ethereality in this poem is associated with the slightest of sounds, the “ether of sighs,” or the “region of sighs.” This duality sets up the narrator’s forthcoming failure to discover for himself the “region of sighs” in telling ways.
The speaker believes Astarte to be a good sign. Journeying with Psyche, he interprets Astarte as an ethereal sign that will “point us the path to the skies — / To the Lethean peace of the skies” (45-46). The falsehood of his hope is inherent in its very description. The “path to the skies” leads to a “Lethean peace,” one not only of forgetfulness, but one associated with the river of the Underworld, the opposite of the mirage of the heavenly ideal towards which the poet looks. Like the tarn of “The Fall of the House of Usher” that pulls Roderick Usher and his house downwards as though to the underside of the world, this poem is situated on a dank tarn that is mirrored in the sky not by a heavenly escape, but by another watery gate to the underworld. This is doubled in the figure of Psyche, who appears in this poem without Cupid, so she exists outside of her mythological context, and is trapped in the point in her story between her fall and her transcendence. Another sign that the narrator’s desire to follow Astarte’s perverse “path to the skies” is inherently flawed is Psyche’s reaction:

But Psyche, uplifting her finger,
   Said — ‘Sadly this star I mistrust —
   Her pallor I strangely mistrust —
   Ah, hasten! — ah, let us not linger!
   Ah, fly! — let us fly! — for we must.’
In terror she spoke; letting sink her
   Wings till they trailed in the dust —
In agony sobbed; letting sink her
   Plumes till they trailed in the dust —
   Till they sorrowfully trailed in the dust. (51-60)

Psyche’s call for escape, “let us fly!,” only highlights their circumscription to the ghoul haunted woodland and the tarn, their inability to escape by sky or sea reiterated as she speaks in “terror” as her wings trail literally in the dust of the world. Despite the supernatural elements surrounding the narrator, his separation from (his own) Psyche,
who warns him with her wings trailing in his world’s dust, only reveals the narrator’s inability to escape the darkness and sorrow of his earthly plight, represented by his heart’s “groan” and his “cheeks where the worm never dies.”

As some critics interpret it, this struggle also embodies the “relation between sensual love and spiritual love” (qtd. in Carlson, “Symbol” 34), which may be the case, but it is more complicated than that. The opposition of Eros and Psyche reframes itself in terms of the myth in its various forms, both Apuleius’s and others, a connection which introduces themes vital to this poem and Poe’s other ballads. As Joel Relihan (2009) explains, Apuleius’s tale begins “with the introduction of the beautiful youngest daughter of an unnamed king and queen; [...] we are told her name, and we are supposed to be startled: So this fairy tale is about Soul?” (xvii). He goes on to explain that Cupid, at first, also is not named, describing him as “Psyche’s demon lover,” who once revealed, disappears as Venus takes up “the role of the tormenter” (xvii). Relihan notes that there are multiple transformations of other renditions of the Cupid and Psyche myth in Apuleius: Psyche is “butterfly-winged” (xvii), implying a connection between her wings and the “human soul” (xvii), Psyche is both tortured and torturing (xviii), and most importantly, in the Platonic tradition, there are two “Aphrodites,” represented as Psyche and Venus, the “Heavenly and Vulgar. There is much talk of multiple Venuses” (xviii). Poe’s poem takes this doubling a step further. Rather than Psyche being the earthly replica of the Heavenly Venus, Venus as Astarte is also both the tormented and the tormenter, the dark iteration of a heavenly ideal that does not exist in the poem. Psyche’s wings neither allow her to fly nor are taken away, but in their connection to the soul only drag in the dust, pointing back to their functional failure.
The doubling of Psyche’s torment and Astarte’s torment, like the dank tarn mirroring the Lethean skies, reflect this concept of a madness trapped in a liminal position; like Roderick Usher, the speaker of “Ulalume” has a madness that points to other worlds, which perversely and paradoxically point back to a demonic loop, to the absolute underworld that reminds him of his fallen nature. Thus, when the speaker of “Ulalume” attempts to follow Astarte, Psyche seems to be aware of her mythological heritage as she remembers Astarte’s jealousy. Only partially taking in Psyche’s warnings, the speaker urges them on, guided by Astarte’s light, but their path leads them to “the end of the vista” where they “were stopped by the door of a tomb — / By the door of a legended tomb: — ” where Ulalume lies (75-77). In his attempt to follow Astarte’s light to the “path in the skies,” the speaker arrives at its complete opposite, a tomb that, like the tarn, moves towards an absolute and dark death.

As the narrator reaches Ulalume’s vault, his voice unites with Psyche’s and ends the poem:

‘Ah, what demon hath tempted me here?’
[...]
Said we, then — the two, then — ‘Ah, can it Have been that the woodlandish ghouls —
The pitiful, the merciful ghouls,
To bar up our way and to ban it
From the secret that lies in these wolds —
Have drawn up the spectre of a planet
From the limbo of lunary souls —
This sinfully scintillant planet
From the Hell of the planetary souls?’ (90, 95-104)

Like Roderick Usher, the narrator is set in an inescapable liminal space that inevitably leads to the tomb. The madness of this narrator and of Roderick attempts the otherworldly, but remains in a demonic infinite loop of seeing only “spectres” of ideals,
“ghouls” instead of fairies, the “Hell of the planetary souls” rather than the ventum textile. More than this, the mad narrator places this infinite loop in the mythological framework that positions vulgar and ideal love in mutual opposition and jealousy of one another, a theme that recurs in “Annabel Lee — A Ballad.”

“Annabel Lee — A Ballad”

Daniel Hoffman posits that there are two types of ballads in Poe’s writing. One set, including “Annabel Lee,” deals “with the putatively successful escape of the speaker from the ‘horrible throbbing / At heart,’ from ‘the fever called living’” (66). The other set of ballads, including “Ulalume,” describes a speaker “desperately trying to burst out of the prison of his passions, but he cannot do so; he is trapped” (66). He argues that, like Poe’s “For Annie,” in which “the speaker has been delivered into the quietude of his death-sleep, freed at last from the torments of passion” (67), the “quest” of the narrator of “Annabel Lee” “is likewise successful although the speaker is still alive” (68). This thesis posits that no such escape is possible, that “Annabel Lee” has the same themes, the same story, as “Ulalume.”

“Annabel Lee” is often compared to “Ulalume.” Both are “ballads,” and both lend themselves to biographical readings of the relationship between Edgar and Virginia. The problem that this creates is that most interpretations of “Annabel Lee” take it at face value; the speaker falls in love with Annabel Lee when they are both children, but to be “the would-be lover, of Annabel Lee, or Annabel Leigh [of Nabokov], is a fate not easily avoided. On the one hand you end up yearning to lie down by her side in a sepulchre: necrophilia! On the other, you can’t get her, can’t get at her” (D. Hoffman
23). Even Hoffman, who in this quote ties together the Annabel Leigh of *Lolita* and Poe’s Annabel Lee, and in doing so implicitly acknowledges that complex themes become intimately connected with the character, does not directly discuss the implications of Poe’s speaker’s liminality:

It was many and many a year ago,
In a kingdom by the sea,
That a maiden there lived whom you may know
By the name of Annabel Lee; —
And this maiden she lived with no other thought
Than to love and be loved by me. (1-6)

He speaks after “many and many a year,” which figures into the madness associated with his liminal position once the reader discovers that every night for “many and many a year” he dreams of her as he sleeps by her tomb on the sea. His solipsism imposes his own will onto hers, that she “lived with no other thought / Than to love and be loved by me.” He continues:

*I was a child and she was a child,*
In this kingdom by the sea;
But we loved with a love that was more than love —
I and my Annabel Lee —
With a love that the wingéd seraphs of Heaven
Coveted her and me. (7-12)

The setting of the poem in the “kingdom by the sea” starts to become foregrounded here, so that the prominent returning image of the poem is that of the sea. Like “Ulalume” and “The Fall of the House of Usher,” the story’s setting is on a body of water, this time in a “kingdom by the sea,” like Tintagel of Arthurian legend. As Foucault writes, the madman “is kept at the point of passage. […] One thing at least is certain: water and madness have long been linked in the dreams of European man” (10-12). For the speaker of this poem, however, he is kept on the water’s edge; associated continually with the
sea, with that space that looks across to other worlds, he is kept eternally as a figure of the shore. Like the narrator of “Ulalume,” he is arrested in a seemingly infinite loop of madness that attempts to look into the world beyond, but perversely returns to a dark and mad earthly plight. This is reiterated through the theme of heavenly jealousy.

Like Astarte of “Ulalume” who was both tormented by and the tormenter of Psyche, the “wingéd seraphs” apparently “went envying” the love of the speaker and Annabel Lee, which figures critically into the poem:

And this was the reason that, long ago,
In this kingdom by the sea,
A wind blew out of a cloud, chilling
My beautiful Annabel Lee;
So that her high-born kinsmen came
And bore her away from me,
To shut her up in a sepulchre,
In this kingdom by the sea.

The angels, not half so happy in Heaven,
Went envying her and me —
Yes! — that was the reason (as all men know,
In this kingdom by the sea)
That the wind came out of the cloud by night,
Chilling and killing my Annabel Lee. (9-26)

As Quinn (1942) writes, the theme of heavenly envy of earthly love in this poem speaks of “spiritual passion that transcended human limits” (123). The transcendence in this case perversely brings the narrator back to a cycle of madness. The narrator maintains that earthly air, a “wind,” kills Annabel Lee, so that instead of there being a ventum textilem that uplifts the speaker and Annabel Lee, an earthly wind kills her. Like the speaker of “Ulalume” who follows Astarte’s light only to arrive at Ulalume’s vault, the tomb of her physical remains, the speaker of “Annabel Lee” sleeps by Annabel Lee’s earthly tomb. He “dreams” of her when the “moon […] beams” (34), and he “feel[s]” the
“eyes” of Annabel Lee as the “stars […] rise” (36), but all that he sees in the heavens, all that the heavens leave him with, is her “tomb by the sounding sea” (41). In this way, when he claims that “neither the angels in Heaven above, / Nor the demons down under the sea, / Can ever dissever my soul from the soul” of Annabel Lee (30-32), the speaker reinforces his liminality.

Neither of these ballads have any musical terminology, but both have nearly identical themes. Poe’s “ballads” are linked by a mad liminality that ties together the impossibility of voyage to the otherworldly, and of an explicitly perverse desire for ideal love that only returns the desirer to an infinite earthly cycle of absolute suffering. Bearing these themes in mind, by returning to “The Haunted Palace,” one can see how this liminal quality tied into this kind of madness affects the expression of musical terminology when it does arise.

“The Haunted Palace”: The Ballad and Music

As mentioned earlier, “The Haunted Palace” in “The Fall of the House of Usher” is a “ballad” that refers to Roderick Usher’s madness, the “tottering of his lofty reason upon her throne” (406). The “ballad” itself becomes a poem transmitted through the memory of the narrator rather than through Roderick Usher himself, but still the generally accepted interpretation of this poem is that it represents, in Poe’s own words (1841), “a mind haunted by phantoms — a disordered brain” (Poe, “Letter 112” 272). As Mabbott explains, the poem “is an allegory, very exact in detail” in which a palace is described as a face: “The protagonist has golden hair and — at first — intelligent eyes,
fine teeth, and lips whence flows intellectual conversation. But madness seizes him, his eyes are bloodshot, and there come from his lips only raving and insane laughter”

(Poems 312). Of the poem’s six stanzas, three explicitly use musical terminology. The third stanza describes the “intelligent eyes” of the subject:

Wanderers in that happy valley
   Through two luminous windows saw
Spirits moving musically
   To a lute’s well-tunéd law,
Round about a throne, where sitting
   (Porphyrogene!)
In state his glory well befitt
   The ruler of the realm was seen. (17-24)

This stanza harks back to the image of the hanging lute from the epigraph of the story. As in that epigraph, the lute is not presented as a played musical instrument. Rather, the lute holds an ideological place as the instrument to whose law “spirits” are “moving musically.” This idea of the “spirits” moving, as opposed to the ghouls of “Ulalume” or even the covetous seraphs of “Annabel Lee,” provides an image reminiscent of the ventum textile, or the “breath of færy” that Poe describes in relationship to “indefinitiveness” as an element of the “true musical expression” (“Marginalia” 1331). Rather than a “thing of the earth” (1331), the “spirit” is tied to the “musical” in this passage. The lute does not play “musically,” but the “spirits” move musically to a “law” of the “lute” that cannot be said to be actually played or to produce a sound, unlike Roderick’s “speaking guitar” which produces “dirges” that the narrator holds “painfully in mind” (405).

As Daniel Chua argues, “Romantics did call instrumental music ‘pure music’, [...] for its purity was deemed to be the essence of music itself [...]”. So for the Romantics
music became equated with Spirit, something too ethereal to have a history and too transcendent to be soiled by the muck of contextualisation” (4). Poe adopts and transmutes this notion of instrumental music as “pure” by substituting instruments that one could hear performed in a concert hall for instruments that take on symbolic, rather than real world, significance. Lutes, lyres, and harps are what “became equated with Spirit” in Poe, giving them the quality of that which is ethereal and transcendent. Poe goes even further, however, to highlight the inescapability of this “muck of contextualization.” That “pure music” associated with the “Spirit” almost instantly disintegrates, devolving into representation in musical imagery of that which is “haunted by an idealised past” (Chua 31).

For Darrel Abel (1949), the “lute’s well-tunéd law”:

symbolizes ideal order in the ‘radiant palace,’ and the whole of that song is an explicit musical metaphor for derangement of intellect. For Poe, music was the highest as well as the most rational expression of the intelligence, and string music was quintessential music (wherefore Usher’s jangled intellect can endure only string music). Time out of mind, music has symbolized celestial order. [...] The derangement of human reason, then, ‘sweet bells jangled out of tune and harsh,’ cannot be better expressed than in a musical figure. (52)

The divine and the demonic implications of music coexist in Abel’s analysis of Poe, the divine being reflected in music in tune, and the demonic (expressed as derangement) being reflected in discordance. The lute’s law acts as a symbol of an “ideal” that is not articulated, a symbol whose inversion falls into the framework of Ophelia’s famed description of Hamlet’s madness, “Like sweet bells jangled, out of time and harsh” (Shakespeare, Hamlet 3.1.158), a comparison that has major implications in Poe’s works. The liminal madness described throughout this chapter finds unarticulated expression in “The Haunted Palace” that Abel chooses not to reiterate in Poe’s terms,
but by appropriating the phrase of “sweet bells” that “jangled” discordantly. Like Bailey, who argues that Roderick Usher’s endurance of only string music (associated with the angelic) perversely points to the presence of a demon, Abel appears to argue that the lute symbolising “celestial order” highlights the mad discordance of “The Haunted Palace” and its echo in the frame narrative.

Richard Wilbur (1959) provides a similar reading of the following stanza, which is the last to illustrate the concordant mind. As when the speaker of “Ulalume” reads the sign of Astarte in a way that foreshadows her falsity, the description of the allegorical mouth in this stanza of “The Haunted Palace” contains within it a prefiguring of the mind’s collapse:

> And all with pearl and ruby glowing
> Was the fair palace door,
> Through which came flowing, flowing, flowing,
> And sparkling evermore,
> A troop of Echoes whose sweet duty
> Was but to sing,
> In voices of surpassing beauty,
> The wit and wisdom of their king. (25-32)

The “wit and wisdom” of this haunted mind communicates through a symbolic singing accomplished by multiple Echoes, both incorporeal and inherently representative of duplication. This is one of two instances in Poe’s poetry in which he uses Echoes in both the plural and formal sense. The other is in “The Coliseum” (1833), and the ways in which he employs the Echoes in that poem sheds light on his use of Echoes in “The Haunted Palace.” On the subject of the coliseum, Kent Ljungquist (1983) argues that, for “Poe in particular, ruins, in their mystery, silence, and desolation, served a prophetic function, offering premonitions, suggestions, and submerged meanings that resisted
representation in ordinary language” (“The Coliseum” 32). Fundamental here is the idea of the ruins as representative of earthly decay. The “submerged meanings that resisted representation in ordinary language” embrace the expression of decay and failure:

These stones — alas! these gray stones — are they all —
All of the famed, and the colossal left
By the corrosive Hours to Fate and me?

‘Not all’ — the Echoes answer me — ‘not all!
‘Prophetic sounds and loud, arise forever
‘From us, and from all Ruin, unto the wise,
‘As melody from Memnon to the Sun.’ (30-36)

“Melody” arises from “Memnon,” which Mabbott explains as an ancient Greek statue which “gave out, when struck by the rays of the morning sun, a sound like the breaking of a harpstring” (Poems 231). Mabbott does not cite his source for this myth,21 but the legend of its sound can be found elsewhere; Robin Dix (1988) gives a thorough account of the legend, citing Pausanias as having said that the “sound which issued from the statue was ‘very like the twang of a broken lyre-string or lute-string’” (289).22 Whether the term “melody” is used to refer to a specific series of notes, or whether it is used to refer to an unspecific series of notes, Poe’s use of the term in this instance defies both.

---

21 As Robin Dix points out, more than one theorist has suggested that the statue could have actually produced this sound, as “when the colossus was damaged [in an earthquake] fissures may have been created in the stone and […] any air trapped in them would be set in motion by a sudden temperature change. […] [A]s the trapped air escaped, a noise would be produced” (289). In other words, the heat of the morning sun could effectively produce the sound.

22 This idea of the sound of the broken harp-string will recur in the second part of this thesis, as Poe also uses the idea of the breaking harp-string in poems such as “[Stanzas].” He does not tie these directly to Memnon; however, Mabbott connects the theme, as well connecting it to Metamorphoses (Poems 78).
“Melody” in this case refers to a “twang,” a hum, or a sound of unspecified pitch and unspecified length.

Moreover, the “morning sun” striking the column to produce the sound ties into the idea that the legend is cited by “Echoes.” In this case, as Hollander (1981) points out, the “stone image was given voice by the light of its mother, Dawn, falling upon it, and thereby parallels Echo, whose body became stone” (*The Figure* 13), providing an image of the paradoxical creation and destruction of sound. This unspecified pitch described as a “melody” is an earthly sound produced by the statue of a man, giving the impression that the statue has a voice when the statue is not actually articulating any words in the way a person would. The “melody” does not represent the “melody” of a specific series of notes, and although it is based upon the idea of a sound, it is ‘unheard’ and unreal in its present context. Like ancient ballads, Memnon’s sound is only legend; while one might imagine that sound, one does not perceive it as articulated melody. Moreover, Memnon’s “melody” is only used as an analogy to the “prophetic sounds” that “arise forever” from the “Echoes.” Thus, not only must these “prophetic sounds” be silent to the listener or “the wise,” but they are paradoxically by definition repetition of previous sounds. The listener is further and further removed from an ancient ideal, but these “prophetic sounds,” akin to “melody,” continually point to an unheard repetition of the ideal past source. Music as the language of decay points back towards its otherworldly roots. Rather than its audible manifestations gesturing towards the ideal itself, they point to the lost idea of the ideal.

Similarly, in “The Haunted Palace,” there is implied repetition of the Echoes, but what they sing, how they sing, and the words they use (if they use words at all) remains
unknown. The “troop of Echoes” may appear to sing in a more audible or articulated sense, but they stem from a mythological character whose voice dissipates, and who is doomed to repeat only the “heard” voices of others. Their ‘beauty’ is undefined, adding an unarticulated and “surpassing” quality to the “singing,” which itself is only a duplication of a non-existent ideal. It should come as no surprise, then that the “flowing” Echoes quickly change to a “hideous throng” in a nightmarish fashion:

But evil things, in robes of sorrow, 
Assailed the monarch’s high estate. 
[...] 
And travellers, now, within that valley, 
Through the encrimsoned windows see 
Vast forms that move fantastically 
To a discordant melody, 
While, like a ghastly rapid river, 
Through the pale door 
A hideous throng rush out forever 
And laugh — but smile no more. (33-34, 41-48)

These lines of the poem reveal the embodiment of “madness,” as “the encrimsoned windows” are the subject’s “bloodshot” eyes. It is in the “encrimsoned windows,” or “bloodshot” eyes of the subject that one sees “Vast forms” that “move fantastically” to the “discordant melody.” Whereas the lute’s law that represented the concordance of the mind acted in a symbolic fashion without being played, the “melody” arising amid the mind’s decay becomes explicitly “discordant.” “Melody” relates to an implicit sound more directly than “music.”

The “melody” may be something to which beings more than mortal, or “Vast forms,” move, but one does not necessarily hear it, or them. Douglas Anderson (2009) argues that their “discordant melody” is not identical to mere discord but to a perpetual flood of ghastly laughter that may signal an embittered wisdom as readily as madness.”
Indeed, the “discordant” quality of the melody conveys a sense of “madness,” but that “discordant melody” cannot be confused with the sound of “ghastly laughter,” as Anderson interprets it. Gerhard Joseph (1973) makes a similar argument, relating the “discordant melody” to “madness”:

the occupation of Thought’s mansion by ‘evil things, in robes of sorrow’ has blasted the lute’s harmony with a ‘discordant melody’ that the story itself shows to be madness, whether of Roderick Usher or of the narrator (if they are not the same kind of ‘doubles’ that Poe brings together in ‘William Wilson’). (422)

Richard Wilbur (1959) writes of this transition to the discordant:

The beautiful Echoes which issue from the pearl and ruby door are the poetic utterances of the man’s harmonious imagination, here symbolized as an orderly dance. [...] As for the mouth of our allegorized man, it is now ‘pale’ rather than ‘pearl and ruby,’ and through it come no sweet Echoes, as before, but the wild laughter of a jangling and discordant mind. (“The House” 262, 263)

Wilbur analyses this scene with straightforward musical association. The sane mind is beautiful, harmonious, and the voice itself is lovely. When the mind becomes insane, the “sweet Echoes” disappear and the “wild” and “jangled” metaphor of the “discordant mind” that Abel articulates re-emerges, but neither the term “jangled” nor bells appear in the poem itself. Yet, it is not without reason that Wilbur and Abel make this comparison. This relationship between the discordant and the “wild” and “jangled” notion associated with the bells parallels the liminal madness associated with bells in Poe’s works as a whole, which will be discussed in the second part of this thesis. Unlike Poe’s other ballads, “The Haunted Palace” uses musical terminology, which reflects the themes presented in Poe’s other ballads as they work inside the mind as they approach the dark space of what cannot be articulated. The tale of “The Haunted Palace” is one of the mind, and music, the concordant but not necessarily played lute that becomes musical as
spirits move to it or the discordant melody to which unknown vast forms move, represents the heavenly and the demonic. But the initial ideal state points ironically to back towards the elements of the demonic that were always present from the start.

“The Haunted Palace” is the only “ballad” ever printed in Poe’s prose tales, and is the only poem apart from “Latin Hymn” that is introduced in terms of music. Unlike the rabble of “Four Beasts in One,” Roderick does not sing the ballad, however. The ballad itself is not necessarily played in the real world sense, itself symbolic of that ballad tradition in which the words remain to a music that is lost. Roderick’s voice, moreover, does not change in the tale from a musical voice to a discordant voice in parallel to the voice of the head of “The Haunted Palace”; rather, his voice changes from a “low [...] murmur” to a “shriek” (416), a parallel that continues throughout Poe’s works in ways that speak to the place of music in his works overall.

**Conclusion**

This chapter explored “The Fall of the House of Usher” as representative of a movement away from real world music to liminal music. Using the possible influence of the legend of Tristan and Iseult on Poe’s story within a story, the “Mad Trist,” to establish a trope which the tale continually inverts, this chapter revealed how the pseudo-mad harpist Tristan, a figure of the sea, becomes the insane Roderick Usher, a figure of the tarn. Instead of his madness being represented by “those unknown highways” across the sea “which conceal so much strange knowledge” (Foucault 12), Roderick’s madness is represented by a dank and stagnant lake whose highway is only
downwards into the abyss: his strange knowledge demonic and absolute. Rather than an Orphic harpist, Roderick performs painful dirges and ballads perversely written without legend or music.

All of Poe’s ballads position themselves as part of this tradition of loss, of perversions of original legends that had music. Internally, their subject becomes one of infinite liminality, in which the subject’s hope for ideal knowledge, pure love, or the attainment of the otherworldly becomes a kind of spiritual transgression that perversely returns him to the tomb, the tarn, or the circumscribed edge of the sea. Neither the heavens above nor the waters below can separate this figure from his eternal madness. Thus, in the only ballad that uses musical terminology, music represents that which cannot be articulated, spirits that move “musically” to a lute that is never played, and vast forms that move “fantastically” to a discordant melody that is never defined. The parallel to the spirits that move musically and the discordant melody of the voice of “The Haunted Palace” is Roderick Usher’s “murmur” and “shriek,” a parallel that continues throughout Poe’s works in ways that speak to the place of music in his works overall.
Chapter Outline

Building on the themes introduced in the first two chapters, this chapter explores voice in Poe’s tales and its relationship to real world music. “The Fall of the House of Usher” (1839), although saturated with musical terminology, never explicitly states that Roderick Usher sings anything. Rather, the story’s narrator interprets his experience as dream-like when listening to Roderick’s “improvisation,” and even though the narrator gives his rendition of the verses of one of Roderick Usher’s “rhymed verbal improvisations,” the ballad “The Haunted Palace,” its qualification as a “ballad” draws attention to the fact that it is printed without its music. Moreover, the voice of Roderick, whom the poem allegorises, finds no explicit equivalent in the poem’s internal separation of the symbolic mouth (“And all with pearl and ruby glowing / Was the fair palace door”) ushering through “Echoes that sing in voices of surpassing beauty” from the “discordant melody” that is embodied as a “throng” that laughs without smiling. Instead, the equivalent of the poem’s singing and discordant melody is expressed in Roderick’s murmuring that turns to shrieking; the relationship between the two will draw out further tension points of real world music in Poe’s tales.

By teasing out the importance of these in-between sound descriptors of shrieks and murmurs as those which are neither quite utterance nor quite music, this chapter solidifies the importance of other differentiations between utterance and music: questions of audibility and articulation. In doing so, this chapter reinforces the musical
hierarchy of divinity that has emerged in his tales thus far. As shrieks align with earthly, diabolic, heard, vulgar, material elements of musical communication without articulation, murmurs align with unearthly, unknown, unheard, and immaterial elements of musical communication without articulation. Within this hierarchy, Foucault’s language surrounding madness again illuminates a difference between an animalistic and violent madness that voices the vulgarities of life and death and a mystic madness that voices either the divine or demonic aspects of the otherworldly and the unknown. All of this sets the stage for the second part of the thesis, which uses this divide in the terms of a postmythological narrative to reveal its critical significance in Poe’s works: the postlapsarian failure of music perversely becomes that which most acutely points heavenwards.

The Informing Voice: Shrieks and Murmurs

Poe often uses wailing, howling, and shrieking as descriptors that evoke a sense of the earthly, the diabolical, death, and the type of madness described in the first chapter of this thesis: that which “no longer has any value as the sign of a Beyond,” madness “without relation to anything but itself: […] madness in the state of nature” (Foucault 74). The water-lilies of the story “Silence — A Fable” (1838) “shrieked within their beds” after being cursed (197). In “A Descent into the Maelström” (1841), the ocean’s surf “reared high up against it its white and ghastly crest, howling and shrieking for ever” and “sending forth to the winds an appalling voice, half shriek, half roar, such as not even the mighty cataract of Niagara ever lifts up in its agony to Heaven” (579,
The descriptions of shrieking water-lilies and the ocean present personified
synesthetic images of horror that convey an unarticulated “agony.” Moreover, the
flowers and the water are descriptively chained to the material world, the water-lilies
shrieking from “their beds” and the ocean waves, struggling in their emergence from the
body of the sea, forming a “white and ghastly crest.”

In “The Black Cat” (1843), it is a shriek that reveals the murdered corpse:

No sooner had the reverberation of [his] blows sunk into silence, than [he] was
answered by a voice from within the tomb! — by a cry, at first muffled and
broken, like the sobbing of a child, and then quickly swelling into one long, loud,
and continuous scream, utterly anomalous and inhuman — a howl — a wailing
shriek, half of horror and half of triumph, such as might have arisen only out of
hell, conjointly from the throats of the damned in their agony and of the demons
that exult in the damnation. (859)

The narrator depicts this “wailing shriek,” like that of “A Descent into the Maelström,”
as a “voice.” This voice, rendered indefinite in being “half of horror and half of
triumph,” points toward the horrifying physical remnants of death. As Jonathan
Auerbach (1989) observes, “the black cat’s demonic howl is still an ‘informing voice,’
communicating what its owner himself wants to betray all along” (44). The cat’s
revelation is redoubled by the metaphorical expansion of its single “wailing shriek” into
the multitudinous “throats of the damned and of the demons that exult in the
damnation,” which contrasts with the multitudinous sound of the waters in “The Fall of
the House of Usher.” That story ends: “this fissure rapidly widened […] there was a long
tumultuous shouting sound like the voice of a thousand waters — and the deep and dank
tarn at my feet closed sullenly and silently over the fragments of the ‘House of Usher’”
(417). Roderick is enveloped into other worlds below with a sound that adopts
apocalyptic Biblical imagery: “Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great
multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunder-peals, crying out” (*The New Revised*, Rev. 19.6). Lawrence Kramer (1980) describes a similar reference in Wordsworth’s *Prelude*, as with

the ‘fixed, abysmal, gloomy breathing-place’ from which mounts the ‘roar of waters, torrents, streams / Innumerable, roaring with one voice’ […] nature transcends itself literally, with a roar. The nature that imagines and unfolds in this dark cleft […] has found that region in itself which no merely human imagination can find, envision, or subdue. What breathes in its gloomy breathing-place is nothing human, not even a vatic ‘pneuma’ of inspiration; and what rises from its breathing is a voice that has nothing to say to the human mind. The ‘roar of waters … innumerable’ announces a revelation, translating into a ‘natural’ language the divine voice ‘as the sound of many waters’ that reveals itself to John on Patmos […] yet […] nothing at all is revealed. Not, at any rate, to human ears: […]. Wordsworth, already imaginatively superfluous, is merely privileged to overhear the sounds of nature’s creative Word, a sublime Logos neither human nor divine. (“Ocean” 216-17)

The narrator of “The Fall of the House of Usher,” like Kramer’s interpretation of Wordsworth, stands on the edge of the scene, “imaginatively superfluous” and “merely privileged to overhear” that which is “neither human nor divine.” While not all of the elements of Kramer’s interpretation are integral to this thesis’s argument, his association of the “roar” with the “sound of many waters” and with a voice from beyond that translates to a different form are all reiterated in Poe’s works. This thesis will complicate Kramer’s notion that the voice is explicitly “divine,” however, and that “nothing at all is revealed” from this “voice that has nothing to say to the human mind.” Instead, themultitudinous, revelatory, apocalyptic voice announces that which cannot be named, defined, articulated by the human mind, translating to an absolute terror, the terrifying unknown of death. Placed in opposition to this “informing voice” of an incorporeal, more absolute, death, is the black cat’s “wailing shriek […] such as might have arisen only out of hell,” which becomes tied explicitly to the “throats of the damned in their
agony and of the demons that exult in the damnation” (859). Rather, the wailing shriek draws attention to the vulgar, material remnants of an earthly corpse; it ‘informs’ both the characters of the story and the story’s readers of a ghastly and utterly earthly death. Yet, the “voice” is still “informing” in this way without the influence of articulated words.

In fact, in none of these instances does a shriek accompany articulated words. Apart from in “Ligeia” (1838), the only other story in which a character’s shrieks accompany speech is “The Fall of the House of Usher” (1839), and as in the other examples, no musical vocabulary is used in the description of it. In the climax of this story, Roderick Usher renders his confession through a shriek subsequent to the narrator’s reading of the “Mad Trist”:

‘I dared not speak! We have put her living in the tomb! [...] Do I not distinguish that heavy and horrible beating of her heart? Madman!’ — here he sprang furiously to his feet, and shrieked out his syllables, as if in the effort he were giving up his soul — ‘Madman! I tell you that she now stands without the door!’” (416)

Roderick Usher “shrieked out his syllables, as if in the effort he were giving up his soul.” His shriek not only prefigures his own death, but it also metaphorically evacuates his soul, his spirit — his breath. His shriek, and not his utterance, is what informs the narrator of something akin to Roderick’s “giving up his soul.” His words articulate his sister’s position, but his shriek ‘informs’ us of the unarticulated internal state. Like Roderick Usher, after she finishes her “half shriek,” Ligeia too “returned solemnly to her bed of Death” (319). D.H. Lawrence (1919) argues that Ligeia “would rather do anything than die. [...] No wonder she shrieks with her last breath” (118). But she does
not shriek with her last breath; her “half shriek” accompanies her physical movement towards “Death” and towards her horror (or the narrator’s horror) at her physical death.

Rather, Ligeia has a second utterance. As many critics have pointed out, Ligeia is only partially, if at all, mortal (Davis [1970]; Gargano [1962]). Consequently her return “to her bed of Death” produces a different manner of speech prior to her “last breath”: “And as she breathed her last sighs, there came mingled with them a low murmur from her lips. [The narrator] bent to them [his] ear and distinguished, again, the concluding words of the passage” attributed to Joseph Glanvill, including the claim that “Man doth not yield himself [...] unto death utterly,” that also serves as the epigraph of the tale (319). In this second utterance, which is quoted in the text, Ligeia’s “sighs […] mingled with [the words] a low murmur” which the narrator then interprets as he “bent [his ear] to them.” The “half shrieked” ejaculation stands on its own, whereas the “sighs” that combine with “a low murmur” must be distinguished and interpreted by the narrator for the reader.

This use of “sighs” and “a low murmur” also recurs elsewhere in Poe’s tales. In fact, the “low” tone, the “murmur” and the “sighs” arise time and time again. One significant instance appears in “Eleonora” (1841), narrated by a character who describes himself at the outset of the story:

Men have called me mad; but the question is not yet settled, whether madness is or is not the loftiest intelligence […]. They who dream by day are cognizant of many things which escape those who dream only by night. In their grey visions they obtain glimpses of eternity, and thrill, in awaking, to find that they have been upon the verge of the great secret. […] They penetrate, however rudderless or compassless, into the vast ocean of the ‘light ineffable’ and again, like the adventures of the Nubian geographer, ‘agressi sunt mare tenebrarum, quid in eo esset exploraturi.’ We will say, then, that I am mad. (638)
In emphasising his madness, the narrator of “Eleonora” invokes that madness described in the previous chapter, that which is tied to the image of the sea. In the italicised quotation, the narrator quotes Jacob Bryant (1807). In his *A New System; or, An Analysis of Ancient Mythology*, Bryant writes:

> The vast unfathomable abyss, spoken of by poets, is the great Atlantic ocean; upon the borders of which Homer places the gloomy mansions, where the Titans resided. The ancients had a notion, that the earth was a widely-extended plain; which terminated abruptly, in a vast cliff of immeasurable descent. At the bottom was a chaotic pool, or ocean; which was so far sunk beneath the confines of the world [...] Agressi sunt mare tenebrarum, quid in eo esset, exploraturi. They ventured into the sea of darkness, in order to explore what it might contain. (qtd. in Butler 75)

The narrator explicitly associates himself with the sea to best illustrate his madness. As opposed to the material, natural, bestial madness represented by the shrieks of other tales, in “Eleonora” the narrator’s madness is one of the sea. Not an inverted figure of the tarn, like Roderick Usher, this narrator moves back to the image of the sea as a “widely extended plain” which speaks of that “strange knowledge, from that fantastic plain, the underside of the world” (Foucault 12). There still exists in this description the undercurrent of the theme from “Annabel Lee” of “spiritual passion that transcended human limits” (Quinn 123), as if when one travels too far across this plain, it terminates “in a vast cliff of immeasurable descent,” and the sea that one ventures into becomes “the sea of darkness.”

Thus, no shrieks, discordance, nor the harsh and protracted soundscape of the diabolical emerge when the narrator of the story “Eleonora” describes the valley he and

---

23 Kent Ljungquist effectively makes the case for this connection in his 1976 article “Poe’s Nubian Geographer.”
his love (Eleonora) inhabit. Instead, it becomes another liminal space between earth and
the spiritual beyond. In this valley, the narrator

heard the sounds of the swinging of the censers of the angels; and streams of a
holy perfume floated ever and ever about the valley; and at lone hours, when
[his] heart beat heavily, the winds that bathed [his] brow came unto [him] laden
with soft sighs; and indistinct murmurs filled often the night air. (643)

All of these sound-based images are, like the shrieks of the previous section, synesthetic
and otherworldly. The images of the angels and the streams of holy perfume, coupled
with the implied movement of air around a swinging censer and the “indistinct
murmurs” and “soft sighs” of the personified wind “bath[ing]” the narrator’s brow,
imply an unarticulated meaning understood by the narrator alone, a meaning perhaps
delayed for the reader until the rest of the story plays out, much as in “Ligeia” the full
import of Ligeia’s sighs and murmur does not appear until her vampire-like return in the
body of the narrator’s second wife. In this way, the murmur seems to be an “informing
voice” as well. In “Eleonora,” the narrator has not yet interpreted this unarticulated
meaning, but the reader might deduce that it, too, has something to do with death, with
that awaiting “sea of darkness” after their love has transcended human bounds —
Eleonora’s death. Now, however, the death is different. Rather than the material,
horrifying death, this death deals with questions of the beyond, the ethereal.

There is yet another source for a murmur in “Eleonora,” that of a river, another
moving body of water, unlike the dank and stagnant waters of the tarn. The river that
runs through the valley is described as having a “bosom” “out of which issued […] a
murmur that swelled, at length into a lulling melody […] softer than the wind harp of
Æolus and more divine than all save the voice of Eleonora” (641, 643). Poe’s reference
to the ubiquitous Romantic symbol of the Æolian harp is no accident. Not only does the symbol directly correlate the softly sighing wind and the murmuring of the river with music, but the suggestion that the protagonist, through Eleonora’s companionship, recognises the Æolian harp, also connotes his ability to interpret unarticulated meaning in music, nature, and Eleonora’s “voice.” The wind becomes an unnamed otherworldly sound that remains indefinite, becoming even more vague as it is defined through the breath-inspired notion of the river dying away after Eleonora’s death “in murmurs growing lower and lower” (643). That the murmurs dwindle in this way clarifies their previously unarticulated meaning. They, the murmurs, dim rather than disappear, always “informing” the narrator of Eleonora’s death; they begin to subside as his life moves forward. Both the murmurs and Eleonora’s low voice reflect the disappearance of her breath, but the imparted meaning of her voice remains behind for the narrator, so that the association of death with murmurs and the low voice does not create an effect of horror, as shrieks do. The murmurs ‘inform’ the narrator and the reader of some indistinct notion of Death as an absolute ideal, whereas the shrieks ‘inform’ the physical, material remnants of death on earth. Thus, just before Ligeia dies, with her “half shriek” over, her “low murmur” and “sighs” must be interpreted as speech by the narrator, who hears her words emerging from her “bed of Death,” not from her corpse.

The Musical Voice: “Ligeia” and “Morella”

Ligeia imparts unarticulated meaning to the narrator by means other than her murmur and her shriek. The narrator writes of the “thrilling and enthralling eloquence of
her low musical language,” the “dear music of her low sweet voice,” the “almost magical melody, modulation, distinctness, and placidity of her very low voice,” and her “melody more than mortal” (310, 311, 315, 317). In every case, her “melody” and the “music” of her “low voice” work separately from the words of her utterance. The “almost magical melody” of her “voice” is, in the narrator’s interpretation, only amplified by “the fierce energy (rendered doubly effective by contrast with her manner of utterance) of the wild words which she habitually uttered” (315). As her “voice grew […] more low,” says the narrator, he “would not wish to dwell upon the wild meaning of the quietly uttered words”; instead, that to which he “hearkened, entranced” was “a melody more than mortal” (317).

The narrator consistently describes this “voice,” working separately from utterance, in terms of music. The narrator interprets the “melody more than mortal” for his audience, so that this “melody” is equivalent, not to sound, but to “assumptions and aspirations which mortality had never before known,” or rather to unarticulated “assumptions and aspirations” that cannot become articulate (317). As Auerbach notes, Ligeia’s “eloquence,” like that of other characters in Poe, retains some absolute power, imperishable and unmediated, beyond personal identity and the contingencies of interpretation. Aspiring to the condition of music, the voice’s mystical quality depends on its enchanting effects. Yet this buried utterance […] only moves when it is the object of a second kind of utterance, the social voice of the narrating self. (44)

The voice, thus understood, depends on its “enchanting effects” more than on any other quality. Ligeia becomes an embodiment of music without producing any musical sounds, and it is this peculiar “eloquence” that retains “some absolute power” in the
narrative. Although one must add to Auerbach’s formulation the recognition that the voice’s “mystical quality” acts separately from “utterance,” it is true that the reader is privy to neither.

This idea of a “melody” and “music” unheard by anyone but the narrator of the story, and of a half-woman, half-immortal who imparts some dangerous “knowledge” to the narrator, has of course been played out in literature time and time again. It is no surprise that several critics have connected Ligeia to siren mythology. In her 1967 article, Joy Rea interpreted Poe’s “Ligeia” as “the describing of a siren as if she were a reality” (25). In 1981, Maurice Bennett linked the Ligeia of the tale to the Ligeia of Poe’s poem “Al Aaraaf,” noting that “the name Ligeia belonged to one of the sirens who sang to Odysseus” (3).24 In 1983, Daryl Jones justifies reading Ligeia as a siren by arguing, “Poe undoubtedly was acquainted with the lore surrounding the Sirens, as his reference to them in the epigraph to ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue’ clearly attests” (34).25 But although critics repeatedly make this connection and offer textual evidence for it, they do not generally analyse Poe’s framework for the unnamed narrator-cum-Odysseus. Instead, they read the connection thematically, using it, for instance, to argue that the “paradox” implicit in the “‘wild words’ and ‘more than mortal melody’ [...] is like Homer’s paradox in his description of the voices of the sirens [...] these contradictory qualities may be associated with [...] the Greek word for ‘siren’: a savage

---

24 This is not strictly true, as Homer’s sirens are unnamed. Most sources attribute the naming of the sirens to Eustathius and his writing on the Odyssey. As Robert Bell (1993) points out, one of these names, however, is indeed ‘Ligeia’ (Bell 283).

25 This epigraph from that 1841 tale is attributed to Sir Thomas Browne: “What song the Syrens sang, or what name Achilles assumed when he hid himself among women, although puzzling questions, are not beyond all conjecture” (Poe, “The Murders” 527).
person and a divine being” (Rea 25-26). Similarly, Joan Dayan, who analyses the manner of the narrator’s speech instead of Ligeia’s, and who observes that “we never hear Ligeia,” nevertheless focuses on Ligeia’s sirenic power: “Ligeia’ is the feminine of the Homeric Greek adjective ligys, meaning canorous, high-sounding or shrill. Ligeia, then, is a siren; no mere singer, she is a sorceress who enthralls men with her spells” (36).

There are two facts that all of these critics continually evade. One is that Ligeia, like Roderick Usher, is never said to ‘sing’ at all; the word ‘song’ never appears in the text, and as already discussed in detail, the narrator’s interpretation of Ligeia’s tone as “musical” may have nothing to do with music in the real world sense. The other is that she materially evades the narrator. Her communication with him relies upon her distance; it is her contact with him and the concretising of her words that brings about her demise.

These qualities point to another type of siren. In his interpretation of “a key passage from Nietzsche’s The Gay Science,” Lawrence Kramer (2006) describes sirens who do not sing (“Longindyingcall” 203). In teasing out why they do not, he suggests:

Their silence is not a stratagem […], but part of a broader pattern of reversal, or reversion, that endows the Odyssean quester with the sirens’ own character. The quester in this passage is a centered figure, not a voyager; a figure of the shore, not of the ship; and a figure who does not hear, but sees, the object(s) of his desire. In each of these respects, the quester trades places with the sirens. […] The song is enchanting precisely because it must thus be dreamed. It is not the sailor who must elude the sirens, but the sirens who must elude the beached sailor — but who do so precisely so that, paradoxically, in their distance he can be moved by them, in their silence he can hear their song, and more, can, in the very texture of his prose, sing their song. (204)
The narrator of Ligeia, like the “Odyssean quester” Kramer describes, is also endowed “with the sirens’ own character.” As Joan Dayan points out, in “Ligeia” the flow of the narrator’s voice

joins the sirenic cadences of the lady. In fact, […] his sing-song disquisitions and monotonous intonings are ironically mirrored in the mystic lady’s own sonorities. Through the curious colloquy between subject and object, the narrator seems to imbibe a certain talent for muttering obscure, equivocal and unsteady terms. (36)

Indeed, in “Ligeia” we are primarily given the “texture” of the narrator’s “prose,” to adopt Kramer’s terminology. Moreover, the narrator of the story awaits Ligeia’s return on his own metaphorical isle, “habitually fettered in the shackles” of opium, chained to the earth and hoping to set his mind free to find Ligeia once more in his drugged, otherworldly state (323). Although he remains “circumscribed,” as Richard Wilbur (1959) points out, in a circular room that Poe describes in great detail, this room may nonetheless “symbolize a triumphantly imaginative state of mind in which the dreamer is all but free of the so-called ‘real’ world” (“The House” 270). But it is Ligeia who bears the power to leave and to return. Even before she dies and (at the end of the tale) returns through the body of her nominal replacement, Rowena, “the narrator reports that he is subject to alternating moods of great optimism and deep despair. The times he feels most optimistic appear to be when Ligeia is closest to him and he seems nearly able to grasp the wisdom he imagines she possesses” (Davis 173). The narrator is chained to the earth; it is Ligeia who drifts towards and away from him, as if following the waves of the sea. The narrator-cum-quester is, as in Kramer’s reading of Nietzsche, “a centered
figure […] a figure of the shore,” who dreams of Ligeia’s “song” and who imagines and recapitulates it in his own prose and in his own descriptions of her “musical voice.”

As in “The Fall of the House of Usher,” then, the narrator becomes an inversion of the metaphorical sailor; rather than his madness speaking that “strange knowledge, from that fantastic plain” that moves in voyages from the known to the unknown (Foucault 12), he becomes the reverse, a liminal figure that speaks of the “sea of darkness.” Like the false Astarte, the false angels of “Annabel Lee,” and like Roderick Usher’s Echoes that become throngs of horror, the narrator of “Ligeia” fears Ligeia’s physical return at the end of the tale as it becomes a “hideous drama of revivification” that “had chilled [him] into stone” (328, 329), such that the final words of the tale, confirming Ligeia’s hideous resurrection, are “shrieked aloud” (330). Murmurs and music, the unarticulated voice, then, are continually associated with the beyond, death, the otherworldly absolute, but often in a way that foregrounds falsity, or failure to achieve an ideal; in this falsity, however, the failure still points toward the otherworldly, even as it is continually embodied in the demonic.

Much like Ligeia, Morella holds a power over the narrator of her story. When the narrator finds himself “poring over forbidden pages” of Morella’s studies, Morella would “rake up from the ashes of a dead philosophy some low, singular words, whose strange meaning burned themselves in upon [his] memory,” and he lingers beside her to “dwell upon the music of her voice — until, at length, its melody was tainted with terror, — and there fell a shadow upon [his] soul — and [he] grew pale, and shuddered inwardly at those too unearthly tones. And thus, joy suddenly faded into horror, and the most beautiful became the most hideous” (226). In this excerpt, the “music” of Morella’s
voice is intrinsically related to its “melody.” Not only is this “melody” and “music” described separately from her utterance, as in Ligeia’s, but Morella’s “music” in her “voice” holds some power to which the reader is not privy, apart from the fact that it throws a “shadow” upon the narrator’s “soul” as he interprets its implicit terror. The “music” of her voice informs the narrator of what cannot be articulated, something otherworldly and demonic.

Like Ligeia, it is also the concretising of Morella’s words that brings about her demise. She “says,” “I repeat that I am dying. […] thou shalt bear about with thee thy shroud on earth” (233). Once she dies, he writes, “I heard her voice no more” (233). When, like Ligeia who is reborn as Rowena, Morella is reborn in her child, the narrator recognises her “in the sad musical tones of her speech, and above all — oh, above all — in the phrases and expressions of the dead on the lips of the loved and the living, I found food for consuming thought and horror — for a worm that would not die” (234-35). Like the distinction between utterance and voice, between words and music, the “musical tones” of the incarnated Morella’s “speech” refute the “phrases and expressions” that relate to the narrator the image of a “worm that would not die,” gesturing toward horrifying materiality. The only sound associated with utterance in the entire tale comes at the end of the story, when the narrator names their child ‘Morella’:

What fiend spoke from the recesses of my soul, when, amid those dim aisles, and in the silence of the night, I whispered within the ears of the holy man the syllables — Morella? What more than fiend convulsed the features of my child, and overspread them with hues of death, as, starting at that scarcely audible sound, she turned her glassy eyes from the earth to heaven, and falling prostrate on the black slabs of our ancestral vault, responded — ‘I am here!’ Distinct, coldly, calmly distinct, fell those few simple sounds within my ear, and thence, like molten lead, rolled hissingly into my brain. Years — years may pass away, but the memory of that epoch — never! […] The winds of the firmament breathe
but one sound within my ears, and the ripples upon the sea murmured evermore — Morella. (235-36)

The narrator identifies his own perverse “whisper” of Morella’s name with the possibility of a “fiend” within his soul. The reincarnated Morella’s utterance “I am here” in response rolls “hissingly into” his brain such that it holds a painful power over his mind, like the “perversions” Roderick Usher plays hold a power over his narrator’s mind. The liminal spaces of the seas still “murmur” with their perverse promise of the otherworldly, but when that name is uttered by the narrator, it becomes the utterance of the “fiend” of his “soul.”

Conclusion

From “The Spectacles” to “Morella” this thesis suggests a pattern and a hierarchy in music. In “The Spectacles,” real world music, although still problematised as a ‘seen’ production, is continually associated with words in a way that is intimately tied to removal from the original performance: there is a narrative insistence on comparing the fictional Lalande’s singing performance with “utterance” and “words” in a way that opposes the theoretical idea of song as what Lawrence Kramer describes as “the mythical union of a lower reality embodied in language and a higher one embodied in music” (Music 2). Simpson’s description of Lalande’s vocal range remains separate from the words she utters, and Poe’s plagiarism of the review and of himself highlights this separation by further emphasising the words and by emphasising their falsity as replicas of an original performance. Nowhere in this tale does madness come into play, but once a certain type of madness affects real world music, the madness of the
animalistic, the bestial, and the public, real world music begins to transform to the cacophonous, the discordant, all this while maintaining some association with words, with utterance.

Once tales begin to take up a more liminal setting, such as “The Fall of the House of Usher,” a similarly liminal kind of music begins to appear. Madness begins to communicate death in a shadowy, demonic, and a terrifyingly unknown fashion. Music, then, becomes heard and seen as though in a dream, perversions of that voice which cannot be articulated, while maintaining the associations of movement away from an original ideal, integrating Echoes and ballads as part of a mythology that once united words and music in a way it no longer does. Murmurs and shrieks parallel unarticulated music and discordance that speak to a split between the otherworldly and the earthly elements of death.

In stories such as “Ligeia” and “Morella,” musicality becomes completely separated from real world music; the characters become embodiments of musicality without ever performing music, their musical voices never singing songs. They continually invert expectations and inform the narrator of spiritual transgression. Yearning for any ideal love, understanding of the beyond, unification with the unknown, points back to death and the tomb; music becomes a failure that perversely points heavenwards. All of these themes come into play in Poe’s poetry, which takes this trajectory further from the diabolical and demonic unknown to the heavenly, beautiful unknown. Real world music is automatically problematised in Poe’s poetry, and the following chapters will construct the connection between liminality and the otherworldly beautiful and demonic with stronger and deeper implications. As with Poe’s tales, the
best way to position his poems in terms of this emerging trajectory is by beginning with the instances closest related to a real world musical understanding, instances of song and singing.
Part Two: Poems
4. Earthly Music: Humans and Birds

Chapter Outline

The first part of this thesis described an emergent pattern and hierarchy in music that moves from real world music, associated with words and utterance, to a musicality that becomes completely separated from real world music. The second part of this thesis parallels the first in both structure and theme, building upon the ideas introduced thus far. This first chapter begins by discussing Poe’s musically titled poems, “Song” (1827), “The Bells — A Song” (1849), “Eulalie — A Song” (1845), “Serenade” (1833), and “A Pæan” (1831), in terms of real world music and how they are largely unaffected by madness and death, just like “The Spectacles.” While at first revisiting the notion that some critics interpret Poe’s musically titled poems as real world songs, the chapter will go on to reintroduce and expand upon the connection between the breath, the soul, and music as it was mentioned in the second chapter in connection with Psyche and the ventum textile and alluded to in the third chapter in the context of shrieks and murmurs. The second part of the chapter then goes on to discuss the vocal music in Poe’s poetry as it is tied to bird song, showing how this particular image in Poe’s works introduces the paradoxical birth and death of music in ways that reconfigure the separation between utterance and the musical voice. In doing so, this chapter will position Poe’s use of bird song in terms of both a Romantic and mythological framework. All of these themes together will provide the basis for the exploration of music in otherworldly settings with supernatural beings, as the subsequent chapters will analyse.
Humans and Song: Titles that Refer to Vocal Music

Nowhere in Poe’s poetry does he take on the parlour music setting, or the human performance, as a subject. Erland Anderson (1975) writes about Romantic poetry concerned with the writer’s “own experience of music in the concert halls and private salons of the period […] [such as] the poem, ‘To the Rev. W.J. Hort while teaching a Young Lady some Song-tunes on his Flute’” (4-5). This kind of poetry would copy the themes of “The Spectacles,” or stories in which real world music is evoked in terms of played, parlour performance. Nowhere in Poe’s poetry is there an equivalent to a poem like this with an explicit reference to real world music, and as discussed in the second chapter of this thesis, none of his poems is set explicitly to music.

However, some of his poems were at one point or another published with titles that tied them to musical pieces, for example: “Song,” “A Pæan,” “Eulalie — A Song,” “The Bells — A Song,” and “Serenade.” As alluded to in the discussion of ballads in the context of “The Fall of the House of Usher,” the titles have led some critics to believe that Poe intended the poems to function as lyrics to musical scores. Some critics believe that even without the titles, the word music and subject of music in the poems conveys Poe’s intention that they function as lyrics to music. Burton Pollin (1992) argues that Poe’s poems were originally intended as songs to be sung, going so far as to contend that Poe actually went to great lengths to publish them with sheet music. Using the argument that Poe’s “To Iaunde in Heaven,” also titled “To One in Paradise” (1834), was included in George Pope Morris’s anthology National Melodies in America (reviewed by Poe in 1839), a volume that Morris prefaced with the notion of the included “lyrics” being
“adapted to music,” Pollin argues that Poe’s inclusion in the volume was “obviously not
[as] a ‘potential’ song, but a published piece” (“Poe as a Writer” 59). Pollin remains
undeterred by his self-described “problem” with his own claim, that “problem” being his
difficulty in finding the absent musical score itself:

for in the book there is no hint of the composer or even of the exact date [...] I searched through all the possible titles in every prominent music collection and catalogue, sought the help of all the resources in the music section of the Library of Congress, and looked through all the copyright registration volumes (kept now in Washington) for New York and Philadelphia for the last half of the 1830s. I have examined lists of all the music of major song writers of the period and of major music publishers. All in vain! (59)

Throughout the article, Pollin remains convinced that Poe wrote many of his poems, especially this one, as songs with specific music in mind; Pollin argues this despite the fact that Pollin’s own enormous efforts, seeking “the help of all the resources in the music section of the Library of Congress,” were fruitless in finding any musical score attached to the songs. Pollin admits he could not find any musical evidence in score form of Poe’s poems being songs, yet he remains assured of the existence of published musical scores originally accompanying the poems by reasoning through possible motivations for Poe to publish songs instead of poems.

Apart from Pollin’s reasoning, as discussed in this thesis in the second chapter, that “there was a powerful economic motive” for Poe’s publication of his poems as songs (61), Pollin turns to a textual argument, defining twenty-two of Poe’s poems as “lyrics” to songs because he claims that they “show strong tinges of either a song inspiration or a song projection. All bear the word ‘song’ or its equivalent in the title or are unmistakably a song in their language, aim, and purpose” (61-62). Pollin assumes that the title “song” or the word’s incorporation in a poem might mean that the poem is
meant to be a song published with sheet music. Pollin does not elaborate upon his reasoning for the poems being “unmistakably” songs in their “language, aim, and purpose,” apart from implying that certain prosodic elements necessitate reading them as such. He claims that the understanding of certain of Poe’s poems as songs:

helps to explain his extraordinary stress — almost an obsession — on repetition in prosody: the refrains [...] the chiming and echoing of rhymes [...] the imagined or assumed music will both blunt the weakness and carry along the effect of the rhyme to the uncritical ear of the listener. This view explains the simplicity of the conveyed thought, the slow accretions of development, as in the traditional ballads, and gaps in the sequence of logic. It also explains the use of invented or warped names, almost meaningless otherwise. (62)

Pollin implicitly defines song by “repetition,” “refrains,” and “rhymes.” He then reintegrates this “imagined or assumed” music into his argument, maintaining that it will “blunt the weakness” of Poe’s poetry, bringing together the contentious elements of Poe’s versification into one category that “imagined or assumed music” would rectify. Pollin bases this argument on the assumption that “Poe’s prosodic writings [...] all [manifest] a poet who hoped or even longed for collaboration with a composer or some arrangement with a publisher of music” (63), but apart from Pollin’s own interpretation of Poe’s “hope” for collaboration, he gives no real evidence for this.

Rather, like Poe’s ‘ballads,’ Poe’s ‘songs’ cohere in subject rather than anything else. The two that maintain the title, “Song” (1827) and “Eulalie — A Song” (1845), are love stories, but with happy endings that are otherwise rare in Poe. In “Song,” the narrator describes seeing a woman on her “bridal day” (1), and although there is some implied jealousy on the speaker’s part, ultimately “happiness” around the woman “lay, /

26 Poe’s “A Pæan” is a singular and more complex example of a poem with a musically themed title, and will be discussed in the context of “The Bells” in the sixth chapter of this thesis.
The world of all love before” her (3-4). In “Eulalie — A Song,” Eulalie marries the speaker, and “Doubt — now Pain / Come never again” (15-16). Neither contains musical terminology. “The Bells — A Song” consists of only eighteen lines. Split into two stanzas, the first describes the “merry wedding bells” ([C] 2) and the second describes the “heavy iron bells” ([C] 9) that contain the germ for the full version of the poem into which Poe expands these lines soon after. Within a year, Poe develops these into their full 112 lines that become a completely new poem from this earlier edition. In doing so, the poem moves far beyond real world associations of love and happiness and sanity, and thus loses the title of ‘song.’ These complexities will be discussed in the section of this thesis on “The Bells” in the sixth chapter.

“Serenade” (1833), however, takes this same theme, a simple narrative of earthly love, and introduces musical terminology in the body of the poem in ways that impact its shift in subject and meaning. The perspective is explicitly that of a man in love, and like in Poe’s other ‘songs,’ the woman he loves still lives. Poe gives this poem the title of a piece of played or sung music often “given at night in the open air, […] such as a performance given by a lover under the window of his lady” (“serenade”). Presumably the title implies that the poem itself is the serenade, as the words are those of a lover addressing his love “Adeline” as she sleeps (17). The poem begins:

So sweet the hour — so calm the time,
I feel it more than half a crime
When Nature sleeps and stars are Mute,
To mar the silence ev’n with lute. (1-4)

Tying the body of the poem to its title, the speaker sets the scene with the image of the lute, one of the few instruments that recur in Poe’s poetry. Apart from bells, it is only
lutes, lyres, and harps that arise in his poems. The three function relatively interchangeably in Poe, and the combination of the stringed instruments Poe invokes draws upon a number of poetic traditions, traditions which John Hollander (1961) describes when he writes,

The ‘lute-harp-lyre’ constellation, uniting the contemporary string instrument with those of David and Orpheus, for example, represents no capricious substitution of one term for another. Rather, it depends upon a constant habit of figurative association of the instruments and what they stand for. (*The Untuning* 45)

Hollander describes a more modern substitution of the lute (played more recently) for the lyre (associated with the ancient) that unite into a similar symbolic image. Even though it is more modern than the lyre, however, the lute was nearly obsolete by Poe’s time, its actual employment relegated primarily to the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries (Partridge), so Poe uses neither the lute nor the lyre to represent musical instruments that he and his contemporaries would have commonly heard. Rather than “uniting the contemporary string instrument with those of David and Orpheus,” Poe unites the absence of any played “contemporary string instrument” with the mythological remembrance of “David and Orpheus.” Hollander goes on to explain, “A metonymic use of the lute (for the lyre) to represent poetry as well as music is a familiar one; occasionally a harp will be used in a similar context to refer to a religious muse” (46). Poe draws upon the dual notion of the lute as a symbol for poetry and the lute as symbol for music in these lines, drawing attention to the double nature of his “Serenade” as imagined music and as poem. He complicates this symbol, however, by giving the surrounding “silence” primacy — even his symbolic “lute” would “mar” it.

This silence sets the scene for the poem’s ending with the following lines:
But list, O list! — so soft and low
Thy lover’s voice tonight shall flow
That, scarce awake, thy soul shall deem
My words the music of a dream.
Thus, while no single sound too rude,
Upon thy slumber shall intrude,
Our thoughts, our souls — O God above!
In every deed shall mingle, love. (18-25)

Initially, this particular instance of “music” appears to be connected with utterance. “Music,” in this case, at first seems to be the speaker’s “words,” drawing upon the poem itself being a “Serenade.” Upon first glance, it might appear that the speaker’s “words” are “the music of” Adeline’s “dream” as she sleeps. Yet, the “music” of the speaker’s “words” is not heard or listened to in the real world musical sense, as experienced as “sound via the sense of hearing” (Leppert 64), but is responded to by a communication with Adeline’s “soul.” Adeline might receive the sounds as she sleeps, but it is her “soul” that “shall deem” his “words the music of a dream.” More than this, the speaker’s “voice” is “soft and low,” and “no single sound too rude” should “intrude” upon Adeline’s “slumber,” emphasising the lowness, the softness, of the voice, adding to the obfuscation of the “Serenade” being heard as music. The musical quality of the speaker’s voice relies upon the interpretation of her soul, rather than any inherent quality.

This ability of Adeline’s soul to render the poet’s “words” the “music of a dream” reflects a comment Poe made on Art in his “Marginalia” (1849): “Were I called on to define, very briefly, the term ‘Art,’ I should call it ‘the reproduction of what the Senses perceive in Nature through the veil of the soul.’ […] The naked Senses sometimes see too little — but then always they see too much” (1458). A few fundamental elements to
this claim correspond with the trajectory of this chapter. Firstly, Poe describes the
capitalised ‘A’ Art, the idea of Art in an ideal, rather than in a practical sense. Secondly,
rather than being purely mimetic, Art necessitates a filtering through what Poe calls the
“veil of the soul.” Poe does not elaborate upon what the “veil of the soul” may be, but
his use of the phrase reintroduces themes already emergent in this thesis. Returning to
the connection introduced in chapter two between Psyche and the ventum textilem, as it
was summarised in “The Spectacles” (1844), the narrator remarks, “The head, of which
only the back was visible, rivalled in outline that of the Greek Psyche, and was rather
displayed than concealed by an elegant cap of gaze äerienne, which put me in mind of
the ventum textilem of Apuleius” (324). In comparing the elder Lalande’s outline to
Psyche, the narrator describes her cap, illustrated as the ventum textilem, as displaying,
rather than concealing, her Psyche-like profile. This leads to another interpretation of the
soul as it is evinced in “Serenade.” If the woven air of Apuleius is intimately related to
Psyche (the Soul), then the soul in other contexts (i.e. the “veil of the soul”) can take on
a dual incarnation as breath. Nicky Losseff (2004) has argued of other pieces of
literature: “The physical means of expelling the voice from the ‘soul’ is the breath, and
the relationship between soul, breath and voice has formed the focus of an enormously
wide range of spiritual discussion,” including the consideration of the “voice to be
articulated and controlled by our inmost soul, the central Spirit located in the heart” (7-8).
Both claims are reminiscent of Chua’s notion that for Romantics “music became
equated with Spirit” (4). Poe goes further than this, though, as the spirit, the soul, the
breath and music begin to merge into a single undefined symbol, like that of the “lute-
harp-lyre constellation,” that must continually escape articulation.
When Adeline’s soul takes the speaker’s words and interprets them as seeming like “the music of a dream,” there is an implied communication between souls, so that which is attempted through song is interpreted through the soul. Although in Losseff’s argument this relates directly to the “physical means of expelling the voice,” in Poe this expulsion works along a hierarchy: the more symbolic the expulsion, the more distinctly musical. As in “Ligeia,” in which utterance is depicted in diabolical terms whereas unarticulated voice is described with musical terminology, there exists in Poe’s works a continual separation between heard sounds in a real world sense, often connected with words, shrieks or hisses, and that which is musically voiced, which is experienced through the “soul,” or through interpretation. This rift between audible sounds and unarticulated music will continually arise throughout the rest of this thesis in connection with the spirit, the soul, the breath, and the voice.

**Birds and Song: Subjects that Refer to Vocal Music**

None of Poe’s other poems invoke the word “song” or its equivalent in the title, but a few of them implicate it in their subject. The most explicit example comes in Poe’s “Eldorado” (1849), in which a knight is described as “singing a song” (5). This is the only poem in Poe’s body of work in which a human sings a song, and will be taken up later in this thesis; the only other earthly creatures, the only other non-supernatural creatures, who sing or who are associated with song in Poe’s poetry are birds. The poem “To —” (1829) begins:

The bowers whereat, in dreams, I see
The wantonest singing birds,
Are lips — and all thy melody
Of lip-begotten words — (1-4)

This poem is set in that liminal space of “dreams,” returning to the setting that relates to a tension point between the earthly and the otherworldly. Rather than hearing the “melody” in the scene, the speaker sees a possible visible source of melody in his subject’s lips as “bowers,” and immediately recognises that the melody he has interpreted is only of “lip-begotten words.” Whereas so often in Poe’s tales the visibility of music’s source is not made explicit, the sight of the lips is clear in these lines, and they are instantly related to a sense of deflation; the speaker realises that “all” the “melody” is only of “lip-begotten words.” As Mabbott argues, the poem “seems to […] reproach the person addressed,” and the “implication is of falsity, mere words” (Poems 133). The next stanza of the poem continues:

Thine eyes, in Heaven of heart enshrined
Then desolately fall,
O God! on my funereal mind
Like starlight on a pall — (5-8)

As in Poe’s ballads in which some sign of a false ideal or some spiritual transgression leads the protagonist in an infinite loop leading back to the tomb, the “melody” that becomes associated with words represents a kind of failure that leads back to the “funereal,” to death. As soon as the source of the melody is realised, is made explicit, the melody becomes a sight of words.

This reference to “singing birds” is only one of multiple references to birds in Poe’s works. Richard Wilbur (1967) points out that “dark and voracious birds are continually associated with time in Poe […] An attentive reader can, in short, compile a small dictionary of symbolic constants which will give some access to Poe’s ‘under
current’” (“The Poe Mystery”). Wilbur only addresses “dark and voracious birds” in this context, but the birds mentioned in this chapter all have some relationship with song, and this idea that one can “compile a small dictionary of symbolic constants” also points towards the multiple possibilities of symbolism inherent in each subject. As Edmund Stedman and George Woodberry (1895) show,

Poe liberally drew upon the rather small stock of pet words, epithets, names, and phrases, which he invented, or kept at hand, for repeated use throughout the imaginative portion of his writings. The ‘albatross’ and ‘condor’ are his birds, no less than the raven [...] It has been pointed out that his familiars are chiefly angels and demons, with an attendance of dreams, echoes, ghouls, gnomes, and mimes, for characteristic service. (xxi)

For the most part, each of these “symbolic constants” is in some sense ethereal or mythological. That is, every single one of these named constants, angels, demons, ghouls, gnomes, mimes, and dreams, is metaphysical or supernatural with the exception of the birds. The birds, on the other hand, exist in the real world. Poe’s birds all have symbolic significance, however: they are all associated with time, as Wilbur argues, but explicitly in the form of death.

“Fanny”: Swan Song

Often, the theme of death is not necessarily explicit, but emerges through a continually musical association with the idea of paradoxical birth in death, or its reverse: death in life. These themes recur in the poem “Fanny” (1833):

The dying swan by northern lakes
Sings its wild death song, sweet and clear,
And as the solemn music breaks
O’er hill and glen dissolves in air;
Thus musical thy soft voice came,
Thus trembled on thy tongue my name. (1-6)
Even more than “To —,” this stanza problematises the three rules for real world music. As opposed to the “wantonest singing birds” that are immediately associated with “lip-begotten words” in “To —,” the swan song is a metaphor for Fanny’s “musical” and “soft voice” and the “name” that “trembled” on her “tongue,” complicating on different levels the concept of music as experienced as a “sound via the sense of hearing” (Leppert 64). In the metaphorical image itself, the mythical swan song that does not exist in the real world paradoxically emerges in the swan’s death, simultaneously being born as its source dies. This unique and bittersweet “song,” or “solemn music” draws upon a larger context that has various implications for music’s ‘solemnity.’ John Hollander explains of the association between music and solemnity that:

Medieval writers would often contrast ‘lewd fiddling minstrels’ with the music of the spheres, the distinction there drawn was primarily between the common-active as opposed to the learned-contemplative models of music. The distinction under discussion here eventually becomes trivialized into one between the serious and the frivolous, perhaps paralleling the change in meaning of ‘solemn.’ An example […] might be seen in the words of ‘Mr. H. Wanley,’ […]: ‘A young man may make a better Minuet or Jigg; but the elder a more sound Service or Anthem. […] that of the latter excites the Devotion, moves the Affections, and raises the Passions of those truly religious Souls, who take pleasure in singing Praises to the Honour and the Glory of His Name, who lives for ever and ever…’ Here the doctrine of the affections is reserved for the solemn music […]. (The Untuning 256)

The concept of “solemn music” and the “anthem” will return in the following chapters in ways that relate to this distinction between the “common” and the “contemplative models of music.” Just as birds are often associated with death in Poe’s works, as in this poem, music’s association with ‘solemnity’ draws upon notions of prayer and the divine. In this instance, the “solemn music” serves as the comparison to Fanny’s voice, who is neither described as speaking or singing, but who acts as the medium for the author’s
name that “trembled.” In fact, the poem “Fanny” is full of paradoxical images that uphold this “musical” yet unheard, sound. The image is indicative in the first sense of a Romantic instance of song in poetry as the reverse of a song text in a real world musical sense: Lawrence Kramer argues that

the poet hears a song that assumes epiphanic power precisely because it is unintelligible, and often at the very point where it passes the threshold of intelligibility. The singer in these poems is usually either a bird […], or a girl […]. The poet’s imagination is initially aroused by the impulse to insert his own words in the linguistic gap opened by the song. Once in place, these words gradually dissolve like the song’s own, leaving the poet mute and transfixed, usually in a posture of intenser listening. (Music 139)

Poe’s poem “Fanny” takes this a step further: not only is the song the poet hears “unintelligible,” it is not even necessarily heard. Fanny’s “musical voice” does not even make a clear utterance, the poet filling this “linguistic gap” with the words of his poem. The metaphor he uses of the swan song, however, further intensifies the image of the song and the musical voice as unheard yet nearly present, leaving the poet in a continual “posture of intenser listening” to what he cannot hear. The swan’s “death song” is not necessarily a song in the sense of a dirge or requiem, or any scored funereal song, but rather is a song that acts as an unarticulated voice that conveys a symbolic paradoxical birth and death of love. The descriptors of “wild,” “sweet” and “clear” conceal as much as they reveal, compounded by the dissolution of the “solemn music” and the comparison to the equivalently ambiguous name trembling on Fanny’s tongue.

“Romance”: Song and Utterance

The implication in this instance is that Fanny’s voice remains musical so long as it does not utter anything definite. Once it becomes utterance and definitely heard, the
musicality dies, as the metaphorical swan song reveals. These themes recur and are elucidated in “Romance” (1829):

    Romance, who loves to nod and sing
    With drowsy head and folded wing,
    Among the green leaves as they shake
    Far down within some shadowy lake,
    To me a painted paroquet
    Hath been — a most familiar bird —
    Taught me my alphabet to say —
    To lisp my very earliest word (1-8)

The poem then ends on an equally musically described image:

    And when an hour with calmer wings
    Its down upon my spirit flings —
    That little time with lyre and rhyme
    To while away — forbidden things!
    My heart would feel to be a crime
    Unless it trembled with the strings. (16-22)

A common interpretation of the poem is of the speaker’s frustration, as Daniel Hoffman argues, “lamenting the loss of that power” he had as a child “and invoking the recurrence of imaginative vision” (50). As Richard Wilbur points out about Poe’s works generally, there is

    warfare within the poet’s very nature. [...] Prior to his earthly incarnation, and during his dreamy childhood, Poe’s poet enjoyed a serene unity of being; his consciousness was purely imaginative [...]. But with his entrance into adult life, the poet became involved with a fallen world in which the physical, the factual, the rational, the prosaic are not escapable. Thus, compromised, he lost his perfect spirituality, and is now cursed with a divided nature. (“The House” 258)

If the poem “Romance” is read in the context of this interpretation, the division discussed earlier in this thesis between “a lower reality embodied in language and a higher one embodied in music” (Kramer, *Music* 2), between utterance and the musical voice, emerges in the poem. This disunion, in turn, which is signified in “the expulsion
of music from language” (Chua 23), demonstrates a modern separation from “the enchanted world of the ancients” (Chua 52). It is crucial, then, that Wilbur’s division between the “purely imaginative” state of childhood and the “physical, the factual, the rational” state of adulthood is described in a metaphor of music. As Daniel Hoffman argues, the poem begins when “Poe has summoned an image at once autonomous and archetypal, a reflection of a shadowy, painted bird — thus already at two or three removes from reality. That bird is one which, when tamed, can speak. And from it he learned ‘my alphabet to say’” (50). Indeed, the poem begins with a bird “at once autonomous and archetypal,” an unreal bird called ‘Romance’ that oddly “loves to nod and sing,” which might be viewed as physical evidence of the point between waking and sleeping as representative of the liminal (reminiscent of “The Raven,” the narrator of which “nodded, nearly napping” (3)). Romance does not speak, does not even sing a specific tune, but nods and sings, such that its singing becomes symbolic of a kind of communication that is unheard. The poet does not see the bird itself, but sees its reflection, which appears to him to sing in its liminal space.

As in “Fanny,” in which the idea that “the poet hears a song that assumes epiphanic power precisely because it is unintelligible” becomes doubled in its obscurity in that the poet does not hear the song at all (Kramer, Music 139), the “autonomous and archetypal” image of the bird of “Romance” is “already two or three removes from reality” (D. Hoffman 50). The bird mutates to an imitation that the poet can see, however, a “painted paroquet,” a “familiar bird” that teaches the poet not even to speak, but to “lisp” his “earliest word.” As for what bird the “paroquet” represents, Audrey Lavin (1991) effectively argues:
Though the Carolina paroquet has been extinct since 1913, dense flocks of these small, raucous, fast-flying birds inhabited the [...] United States in the nineteenth century, from Florida through Virginia, giving Poe ample opportunity to sight them. Their range and frequency indicate that Poe could well mean what he clearly says, the ‘painted paroquet hath been — a most familiar bird — ’. With its large, white beak, the Carolina paroquet was a highly ‘painted’ bird whose orange and blue colors bled off into shades of green and yellow. (200)

The Carolina paroquet might have been beautiful, seemingly “painted” in orange and blue, green and yellow, but tied into it is the poet’s sinking realisation that even this bird that borders on a natural work of art is all too familiar, and more disappointingly, a mere replica of an ideal that cannot be accessed. Thus, the poet becomes associated with falsity, with imitation of an ideal, which transmutes the otherworldly singing bird into the worldly lisping utterance of the poet. Moreover, even this division begins to become less clear by the end of the poem, if we consider Kramer’s notion that the poet is “aroused by the impulse to insert words in the linguistic gap opened by the song,” as once “in place, these words gradually dissolve like the song’s own, leaving the poet mute and transfixed, [...] in a posture of intenser listening” (Kramer, Music 139). This dissolution comes into play through Daniel Hoffman’s interpretation that the bird Romance of the first stanza transforms to the lyre of the last.

Hoffman claims that there is a “mixed metaphor” of the bird and the lyre in the poem (51). More specifically, this poem works with a mixed metaphor to confuse the image of the singing bird “Romance” and the poet who “trembled with the strings.” The mixed metaphor of the bird and the lyre obscures the instrument as played and the instrument as “singing” independently of player (or poet). In this instance, “lyre and rhyme” are paired together, and the heart of the poet is compelled to “[tremble] with the strings.” Rather than posing the speaker as sitting and playing the lyre, singing a rhyme,
the speaker’s heart responds to the strings directly, conflating them into one musical signifier that escapes a signified musical sound. Reminiscent of the epigraph to “The Fall of the House of Usher” that compares a heart to a suspended lute, the mixed metaphor of the bird, lyre, and poet in “Romance” anticipates the notion of the ‘heart-strings’ as musical instrument, which Poe adopts elsewhere in his poetry.

This connection draws from a long standing poetic notion of the heart-strings as musical: as John Hollander explains,

A numerological symbol, a particular interpretation of harmonic unity, a sustained conceit here and there, illuminated points of metaphysical and cosmological doctrine. [...] Traditional word-lays helped to sustain and proliferate such images: a pun on *chorda* (‘string’) and *cor, cordis* (‘heart’), [...] became so deeply imbedded in habitual thinking that the very origins of the word ‘concord’ [...] often even today are mistaken for being musical. (*The Untuning* 42)

This speaks to a broad historical background constructed of “various notions of the soul as an instrument, or the body as the instrument upon which the soul plays, or the soul as the melody or chordal effusion of the body’s strings” (Hollander, *The Untuning* 268). Moreover, it reintroduces this mixed metaphor of the song, the lyre, the soul, and the breath in a symbolic image that moves away from heard sound. If the “physical means of expelling the voice from the ‘soul’ is the breath,” then one considers the “voice to be articulated and controlled by our inmost soul, the central Spirit located in the heart” (Losseff 7-8). As mentioned earlier, however, this metaphor does not come into play in Poe’s poetry in terms of the performed song. As in this example, it simply becomes a part of a central mutable, symbolic, and silent image of the bird Romance, who sings an unheard song, metamorphosing to the poet’s lyre as heart, which trembles as by an
unseen wind, at the end of the poem. This association will recur throughout the rest of this thesis.

In the only poem in which the harp or the lyre is associated with sound in Poe’s poetry, it returns to that idea of paradox as in “Fanny.” In “[Stanzas]” (1827) the speaker describes a thought that comes bidden “With a strange sound, as of a harp-string broken / T’awake us — ‘Tis a symbol and a token / Of what in other worlds shall be” (23-25). The “strange sound” of a “harp-string broken” is doubly strange in that it conveys a sound, again used as a comparison to an idea, being made and broken simultaneously, a paradoxical sound whose beginning signifies its end, like the swan song of “Fanny.”

This notion of a single “strange sound,” that which is couched in musical language without ever becoming music, particularly the single note, returns in Poe’s poems (most explicitly in “The Bells”). It voices without articulating “what in other worlds shall be.” Returning to “Romance,” the bird only seems to sing when it exists in an unreal world, and when the poet attempts to imitate it on earth, he can only “lisp” at first and ultimately “tremble with the strings,” held in an eternal posture of making and non-making, of listening and non-listening. The paradoxical making and breaking of a single note becomes that which can imply “what in other worlds shall be” without overly defining it. Returning momentarily to the passage discussed in the second chapter of this thesis in which Poe argues that “the indefinite is an element in the true ποιησις” (“Marginalia” 1331), Poe appears in his poetry to use music as representative of the poet’s grandest attempts “‘making’ that which is not yet” (Heidegger 279). That of the otherworldly, of the unknown, of the beyond, or even of the ideal, can only be brought
into being if kept away from utterance and definition, and music represents the paradoxical attempt at its communication through words.

“**The Raven**: Orphic Song

These themes are illustrated even more strongly in “The Raven” (1845). Turning, then, from ideal and otherworldly bird figures not obviously allied to death to the common raven and its fatal symbolism, Poe associates the idea of singing with a kind of inversion and explication of the themes so far described:

‘Doubtless,’ said I, ‘what it utters is its only stock and store
Caught from some unhappy master whom unmerciful Disaster
Followed fast and followed faster till his songs one burden bore —
Till the dirges of his Hope that melancholy burden bore
Of “Never — nevermore”.’ (62-66)

“The Raven,” as well as “Fanny” and “Romance,” have as themes the unutterable, visions, questions, and dreams, ethereal and immaterial concepts identified with singing, which itself remains not only undefined, but not described as well. Just as in “Romance,” in which the shadowy and ideal eponymous creature becomes a painted paroquet, its nodding and singing becoming the poet’s lisping utterance, the raven of this poem sits “croaking ‘Nevermore’” (82). The speaker at first assumes the raven had an “unhappy master,” and has repeated that “one burden” caught from the master’s “songs.” Thus, the reader is given “nevermore” as the implicit “burden” of these “songs,” which become synonymous with “dirges of his [master’s] Hope.” In doing so, the raven paradoxically presents “songs” and “dirges” “nevermore” (in meaning, timing and substance).
While critics have written on the subject of repetition and deconstruction in Poe’s poetry, specifically in “The Raven,” Blasing (1987) is one of the rare critics who attempt to tie this into music in Poe’s “The Raven”:

His emblems are birds that rob the poet’s language of transcendent significance or of the possibility of such significance, just as they deprive it of a significant history. [...] Yet Poe’s raven is no golden bird of artifice, either; his croaking song parodies as much a transcendent artifice as the transcendent meanings we are impelled to attach to certain combinations of certain phonemes. (26-27)

Indeed, even the raven’s croaks themselves cannot really be described as songs at all, their transcendence rejected at every level. The raven is described as “croaking ‘Nevermore’” only once, in a stanza removed from that which describes his “songs,” and in neither case is it entirely clear whether the raven croaks the word “Nevermore,” but it is certain that the raven never sings (72, 64). The ‘songs’ neither the reader nor the speaker of the poem ever hear, but the speaker of the poem interprets the heard or unheard ‘Nevermore’ as informed by pre-existing song; in the song’s stead is a ‘burden’ whose relationship to the songs is unclear, and this burden (‘Nevermore’) is croaked. Like the bird Romance who appears to the speaker of that poem to sing, whose real world incarnation can only teach the poet an alphabet, and to lisp his first words, the speaker of this poem imagines an assumed original song that has condensed into a word that can only be croaked. Again, the subject is immaterial, and the phrase “dirges of his Hope” says less than it evades, namely, questions of mortality paralleled in questions of what the listener actually hears.

Freedman (1996) argues that, “as a Coleridgean fusion of contraries, as the speaker of a single repeated sound, the raven seems to figure the ultimate ideal of poetic unity: the dissolution of its component oppositions, indeed of all content, into a single
ethereal utterance” (29). While the argument is that this “fusion of contraries” results in the “dissolution [...] of all content,” the remaining “single ethereal utterance” still voices, or informs as a token of the otherworldly. That is not to say that there is ever a direct connection between the “songs” and the utterance of the raven itself. Moreover, the utterance of the raven, rather than “ethereal,” continually draws attention to its own falsity and repetition, which opposes the fleeting idea of the “song” that neither the reader nor the speaker ever hear.

David Hirsch (1990) argues that, instead “of calling on the singer out of Greek mythology [the nightingale], melancholy or happy, Poe turns, rather, to the biblical scavenger bird symbolising the ‘carnal heart.’ Poe’s disjunctive imagination exchanged the Romantic metaphors of flight and Dionysian song for metaphors of stasis and monotony” (197). Hirsch goes on to argue that, in “place of a lushly singing ethereal bird there is a croaking, fluttering, black raven that is all too physically present. Instead of a speaker who wants to dissolve himself so that he can fuse with the song of the bird, we have a speaker who is possessed by the bird which will not release him” (199).

Hirsch posits Poe as the inverse of the Romantic poetic notion, as Kramer describes it, of the poet whose words are inserted into “the linguistic gap opened by the song” and “gradually dissolve like the song’s own, leaving the poet mute and transfixed” (Music 139). For Hirsch, the implication of this transformation of the Romantic image of the poet results in a mythological decline in “the orphic power of song” in Poe’s works (202). Instead of “winning his way to the underworld on the wings of song, [the subject of “The Raven”] finds that an apparent messenger from the underworld breaks in on his consciousness” (202). For Hirsch, the paradoxical “song” of the poem is empty, devoid
of meaning, representing only a continual decline in the power of “song” from mythology. Hirsch maintains that “Orpheus, charming his way into the underworld, almost overcomes death. Keats’s nightingale chants a powerful music that almost charms his speaker into immortality. But Poe exchanges nightingale for raven, real or illusory song for real or illusory croak” (202). Although Hirsch’s interpretation of Poe’s raven as a kind of inversion works on multiple levels, his series of substitutions implicitly negates the possibility that Poe might be engaging more directly with Orphic myth than Hirsch admits.

Indeed, the power of the Orphic myth is not that Orpheus “almost overcomes death,” it is precisely that he cannot. There is no room for his “almost” doing so. As Peter Dayan (2006) explains in terms of Barthes’s relationship to the myth,

Orpheus represents literature because he does not speak, he sings; and he sings of what he cannot see, of a ghost, of one who returns, of a ‘reniament’. Barthes never names Eurydice. He never even genders as feminine the shade that follows Orpheus up from the underworld; that shade is simply defined as what Orpheus loves or desires. And that lack, or rather erasure, of a name and gender seems to me to embody the Barthesian twist to the Orpheus myth. For Barthes, what follows Orpheus is not to be called Eurydice. It is what he loves, and what he sings; and what we love and sing must remain, in Poe’s words, ‘Nameless here for evermore.’ The moment at which Orpheus turns and sees her is the moment (unspoken by Barthes) in which the shade would turn into a woman, and acquire a name; at that same moment, literature would die. To sing well is to avoid that naming. (Music Writing 97)

What Dayan interprets as the “Barthesian twist to the Orpheus myth” has resounding implications in Poe. As mentioned in the first part of this thesis, Poe himself professes to “know that indefinitiveness is an element of the true music — I mean of the true musical expression” (“Marginalia” 1331). The bird “Romance,” once seen, becomes a “painted paroquet” rendered in all too specific words. In “Fanny,” the swan song becomes
emblematic of the unheard musical voice that cannot utter a name. In “The Raven,” the croaked “Nevermore” is all that remains of the dirges, the songs unknown and unsourced, imagined by the speaker; moreover, as Dayan points out, the speaker himself mourns the loss of “the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore” who is “Nameless here for evermore” (11-12). In these poems, as in Dayan’s interpretation of the Barthesian Orpheus, that “moment” when what the poet or speaker or subject “loves, and what he sings” is seen, the moment it would “acquire a name,” is the same moment the musical terminology, the singing or the song, dies. As Dayan goes on to argue,

> Underlying this Barthesian myth is a perfectly clear (and quite traditional) opposition between two types of language. On the one side, the side of both life and death, we have the ordinary use of language, which names, which gives a signified sense, a named sense, a sense of the real, a sense of that which can be seen and possessed. On the other side, on the side of the ‘revenant’ not clearly alive or dead, doubtless moving from death towards life but never simply arriving there, we have literature. Literature, the ‘parole juste’, is identified with music, ‘le chant’; it allows us to lead that which we love out of obscurity; but only for so long as we continue not to name it, not to look at it. (Music Writing 98)

Setting aside for the moment Dayan’s defining ‘literature’ as the opposite of the “ordinary use of language,” the key component of this argument lies in the separation between the “ordinary use of language” and that which is “identified with music.” The liminal settings, the reiteration of madness, the “angels and demons, with an attendance of dreams, echoes, ghouls” (Stedman and Woodberry xxi) all reflect in subject this idea of the “‘revenant’ not clearly alive or dead,” and in this stage we find continual terminological associations with music. As Poe argues, “Give to it any undue decision — imbue it with any very determinate tone — and you deprive it, at once, of its ethereal, its ideal, its intrinsic and essential character. [...] It now becomes a tangible and easily
appreciable idea — a thing of the earth, earthy” (“Marginalia” 1331). Thus, the threads tying together in Poe music, indefinitiveness, the ethereal, the ventum textilem, the breath, the soul, the murmur, and the unheard begin to continually and unequivocally oppose language, definitiveness, the earthly, the shriek, the diabolical, the loss of the soul, and the explicitly heard, or that which can be named. These themes and the reiteration of their tension will come continually into play in the remaining poems discussed in this thesis in ways that will be positioned in terms of the ideal or the divine demonic and heavenly, the falsely ideal or the imagined divine, and the earthly.

Conclusion

Beginning with poems that take on musical titles, this chapter approached the concept of real world music in Poe’s poetry with an assessment of song in his verse. For the most part, the creatures most clearly associated with song in ways that move toward real world music are birds, and Poe’s use of bird song reiterates and expands upon themes that have been building throughout this thesis. Leading these themes is the growing division between music and language, which also mirrors a few other crucial ruptures in Poe’s works. That “mythical union between a lower reality embodied in language and a higher one embodied in music” remains mythical in Poe’s poetry (Kramer, Music 2), and highlights the split between the lower reality of language and the higher one of music. In a continual hearkening back to an idealised past that unified the two, Poe’s poetic imagery continually reveals the failed earthly rendering (lisping, uttering, croaking) of an ideal unheard singing or symbolic mutation of lute, lyre, or
swan song. Through this divide, Poe plays upon the notion that in “the enchanted world of the ancients, music was an airy substance, it did not occupy space, it was its very essence” (Chua 52); Poe’s works associate spirit, soul, and breath with symbolic musical imagery. Opposing these are croaking, groaning, and discordance, which represent a disruption of that ideal. These themes will be reiterated and furthered in the next chapter, which moves from liminal and dream settings to the explicitly otherworldly.
5. Otherworldly Music: Spirits and the Music of the Spheres

Chapter Outline

Picking up on the division expressed in the previous chapter between the “ordinary use of language” and that “identified with music” (P. Dayan, Music Writing 98), this chapter moves away from the “ordinary” and towards and exploration of the otherworldly in Poe’s poetry. Beginning with “Tamerlane,” the first section reiterates the disruption of real world music in Poe’s poetry and establishes his conceptualisation of the ‘music of the spheres’; the concept of the ‘music of the spheres’ reiterates the separation between an ancient idealised past and a modern fallen present. This separation reveals how Poe connects the ethereal, the otherworldly, and a sense of the spiritual realm with a higher, more silent, form of music, while the material, and the non-spiritual are circumscribed to the earthly and connected with a lower, more audible, form of music. The following analyses of “Al Aaraaf” (1829) and “Israfel” (1831) will develop the notion of inaudible music as depending on “the presence of reference to music, of an evocation of music which will resonate with the audience; and the careful removal of our ability to be sure of what might have been the sound of that resonating music” (P. Dayan, Art 83). In doing so, this chapter will recapitulate themes of paradox, breath, soul, spirit, and the stringed instrument. The iteration of the unheard, the synesthetic, and the indefinite in Poe’s poetry will cohere in ways that speak to a divide in Poe’s works, from his tales through his poetry, between music in the ordinary, real world sense, and music that relates to the ideal, the otherworldly, and the beyond.
The Music of the Spheres

One can trace the origin of some of Poe’s more complex uses of music all the way to some of his earliest poems. Poe’s first published book of poems begins with “Tamerlane” (1827), a long narrative poem spoken in Tamerlane’s “dying hour” (1).

Tamerlane soliloquises:

O, human love! thou spirit given,  
On Earth, of all we hope in Heaven!  
Which fall’st into the soul like rain  
Upon the Siroc-wither’d plain,  
And, failing in thy power to bless,  
But leav’st the heart a wilderness!  
Idea! which bindest life around  
With music of so strange a sound  
And beauty of so wild a birth —  
Farewell! for I have won the Earth. (177-86)

As he dies, Tamerlane does not bid farewell to “human love” itself, which “leav’st the heart a wilderness,” but he bids farewell to the “Idea” of the ideal form of “love,” presumably to move toward the actual ideal form of that love itself in heaven.

Once “love” is an “Idea,” rather than a defined human emotion, all of “life around” comes together with “music of so strange a sound / And beauty of so wild a birth.” The connotation of both the “music” and the “beauty” is not that of “the Siroc-wither’d plain”; rather, the “Idea” has unifying, ‘binding’ properties, although these are left undefined. The “life around” is bound with “music” and “beauty” as offshoots of an “Idea”: they are both associated with the “Idea” of “love,” but the “music of so strange a sound” is unarticulated and unspecific. That the “beauty” is “of so wild a birth” does not add any definitive audible meaning for music. This reiterates a distinction in Poe’s
works between different types of music, a distinction parallel to that which Peter Dayan (2011) finds in the works of Mallarmé:27

Mallarmé makes an absolutely clear, rigorous and rigid distinction between two types of music: the audible kind, that exists in physically present sound, created, for example, by the instruments of the orchestra; and the silent kind, which may be produced by poetry. (Note that he is careful to exclude the actual sounds of words from the latter. Mallarmé’s Music is not to be confused with the audible qualities of verse. It has no physical existence accessible to any of the five senses.) (Art 98-99)

Dayan goes on to explore the relationship between the “silent kind” of music and “Greek Music,” or what he later describes as “the paradigm of the music that cannot be heard” (99). Dayan also adopts in this quotation the distinction that Mallarmé and other artists make between music and Music: music can allude to audible, real world music, and Music can allude to inaudible music, silent music, which Dayan describes in an interart context of depending “on two things: the presence of reference to music, of an evocation of music which will resonate with the audience; and the careful removal of our ability to be sure of what might have been the sound of that resonating music” (Art 83). Inaudible music, that which evokes musical imagery without explicitly becoming identified with music in a real world sense, takes up even more associations in poetry. Dayan illustrates these associations again in an interart context by quoting Braque as his words are remembered by André Verdet, arguing that this “music [...] in accordance with the great tradition of the representation of music by the poets of the interart appeal, going back to Keats and Mallarmé, [is] silent. ‘To reach that higher silence where music itself can no

27 As the literature review of this thesis showed, although the influence of Poe on other poets is beyond the scope of this thesis, it is worth noting that the influence of Poe on Mallarmé continually arises in criticism. Carl Dahlhaus (1978) posits that “Poe’s ‘The Philosophy of Composition’ represents to a certain extent the charter of poésie pure, and historical influence on Baudelaire and Mallarmé can be traced back to Poe” (147).
longer be heard because it is silence, that mute fervour of space’” (Art 83). Thus, Music, associated with silence or the inaudible, takes a hierarchical position over music, associated with heard music in the real world sense. That “higher silence,” or Silence, becomes associated with “that mute fervour of space,” the plane that in some contexts draws from the mythology of the music of the spheres.

This connection between silence, Silence, and the music of the spheres has been historically established for a number of reasons. John Hollander (1961) explains one of these by describing a few versions of the music of the spheres myth: the Pythagorean, the Socratic, and the Aristotelian. In the Pythagorean, “Certain intervals, such as the octave, fourth and fifth, were shown to result from dividing the string in the most ‘perfect’ ratios, such as ½, ⅔, etc.” (The Untuning 28). He goes on to explain that,

Up through the Renaissance and even later, the harmony of the parts of the cosmos, on the one hand, and of the parts of the human psyche, on the other, were seen as the basic elements of the same universal order. [...] In terms of this ‘harmony,’ the old myth of the music of the spheres as representing the sounds of heavenly perfection could be reinterpreted as a metaphysical notion, characterizing not only the order of the universe but the relation of human lives to this cosmological order. (28)

The experimentation with ratios, directly related to real world music, has resonances in two directions: into the human soul and outward through the universe. This then develops into more illustrative myths of the universe, including that which “describes the heavenly spheres bearing ‘on the upper surface of each’ a siren, [...]. The singing siren that produces the tone on each sphere, of course, becomes beautifully adaptable, eventually, to membership in a Christian angelic choir” (29). In this perfect universal tuning from the soul to the outer reaches of the cosmos, the music of the spheres still becomes associated with the inaudible: in “answer to the objection that no mortal had
ever heard that music [of the spheres], it was often retorted that the constant droning of
the noise deadened the ears of earthly inhabitants by custom alone, and that because it
was so constant, it was inaudible” (The Untuning 29). While in Poe, this notion of
silence or inaudibility becomes more complex, inaudible not due to “constant droning”
but due to Silence’s inaccessibility, as this chapter will show, this association between
Greek music and the inaudible has a few implications in Poe’s poetry.

Poe himself directly addressed this “Greek Music” in a couple of his works. In
“The Colloquy of Monos and Una” (1841), two spirits hold a dialogue with one another
in being “born again” after the end of the material world (608). In this dialogue, Monos
speaks “in regard to man’s general condition at this epoch” of the world’s demise (609).
In his speech regarding this era, Monos laments: “But alas for the pure contemplative
spirit and majestic intuition of Plato! Alas for the µουσική which he justly regarded as
an all-sufficient education for the soul! Alas for him and for it! — since both were most
desperately needed when both were most entirely forgotten or despised” (610-11). Poe
introduces as “education for the soul” the term “µουσική,” which refers in Plato’s The
Republic to the term ‘mousikē’ in the sense that “Instrumental music [...] directly
accompanied or otherwise complemented song, chant and declamation rather than being
developed for its own sake. The single word mousikē can therefore denote
accomplishment in both music and poetry” (Ferrari 61). Or as John Hollander explains,
like “the folk balladeer’s identification of the notions of ‘song’ and ‘story,’ the Greek
word mousike designated neither a linguistic nor a tonal art but the craft of composing
song, considered as a unified entity” (The Untuning 13). Taking these descriptions of
‘mousikē’ into account, we can see that Poe integrates into his tale the theme that the
modern world has lost the ancient, primitive, unification of words and music, and now is left in a state of failure that can no longer unify the two. Poe draws attention to this with a footnote to the quotation from “The Colloquy of Monos and Una” just cited:

‘It will be hard to discover a better (method of education) than that which the experience of so many ages has already discovered; and this may be summed up as consisting in gymnastics for the body, and music for the soul.’ — Repub. lib. 2. ‘For this reason is a musical education most essential; since it causes Rhythm and Harmony to penetrate most intimately into the soul, taking the strongest hold upon it, filling it with beauty and making the man beautiful-minded ... He will praise and admire the beautiful; will receive it with joy into the soul, will feed upon it, and assimilate his own condition with it.’ — Ibid. lib. 3. Music (µουσική) had, however, among the Athenians, a far more comprehensive signification than with us. It included not only the harmonies of time and of tune, but the poetic diction, sentiment and creation, each in its widest sense. The study of music was with them, in fact, the general cultivation of the taste — of that which recognizes the beautiful — in contra-distinction from reason, which deals only with the true. (611)

This tale was, according to Mabbott, “probably written in May or June 1841” and was published in August 1841 (Tales 607), which means that it was written just after the publication of an article in The American Eclectic entitled “Education of the Intellect, the Taste and the Imagination, in English Public Schools” (“Education” 428). Although Poe would have been familiar with the classics in more than one form, this translation bears particular resemblance to this article, which appears to be a possible source, or to draw from the same source, for Poe’s translation of Plato:

‘What shall be our method of education?’ asks Plato, in the outset of his Republic. — ‘It will be hard to discover a better than that which the experience of so many ages has already discovered; and this may be summed up as consisting in gymnastics for the body, and music for the soul.’ *Plat. Repub. lib. 2. Music was a word of more extensive signification in Athens than with us. It comprehended the ideal creations, the sentiments, the representations and the diction of the poet, as well as the harmonies of time and tune. [...] ‘For this reason,’ adds Plato, ‘is a musical education (rightly conducted) most essential, because it makes Rhythm and Harmony to settle most deeply into the inner soul, and take the strongest hold of it, carrying with them comeliness, and
making the man comely-minded. Also because one so nurtured will have the quickest perception of all faults and imperfections in art or nature, and regarding them with a just aversion will praise and admire the beautiful; this he will receive with joy into his soul, will feed on it, and assimilate his own nature to its beauty — will learn to censure and hate deformity even in early youth, while yet incapable of understanding the reason why, and when the reason comes will embrace it gladly, and recognize it as a familiar thing.’ *Plat. Repub. lib. 3. (“Education” 437-38)

Poe appears to take this translation almost verbatim, as he did with the description of Maria Malibran’s performance from the memoirs. As in that previous example, he makes a few key changes, which reveal more than they conceal. The first excerpt remains essentially identical to the source this thesis proposes. In the second excerpt from Plato, however, Poe’s “Rhythm and Harmony penetrate most intimately into the soul,” whereas the anonymous original writer posits “Rhythm and Harmony to settle most deeply into the inner soul” (Emphasis mine). Poe then changes the “comely” from the original article to the “beautiful,” a change to which his own emphases draw attention. Crucially, Poe then deletes every reference in the original source to the importance of a “just aversion” to the “faults and imperfections in art or nature” or to the need to “censure and hate deformity.”

Poe writes elsewhere that the “pure imagination chooses, from either beauty or deformity, only the most combinable things hitherto uncombined; [...] Even out of deformities it fabricates that beauty which is at once its sole object and inevitable test” (Rev. of Prose 278). For Poe, there is only the deepest, most intimate connection between higher forms of music, Rhythm, Harmony, the soul, and the beautiful, and none of these require an aversion to perversity, to deformity, or to imperfection. Certainly, this has some connection with μορφική, which the article in The American Eclectic this
thesis posits is a possible source introduces with this insight: “We are thus brought to the inquiry, whether there is any thing in the system which we possess corresponding to the \( \mu \nu \sigma \kappa \eta \) of the ancients [...]? Music, in our own more limited sense of the word, we do not cultivate as the ancients did” (“Education” 439). Indeed, for Poe, perversity, deformity, faults and imperfections are part and parcel of this “limited sense of the word” in which we, in our modern condition, can only comprehend it.

Poe discusses the term in once again in his “Marginalia.” He writes:

> The phrase of which our poets, and more especially our orators, are so fond — the phrase ‘music of the spheres’ — has arisen simply from a misconception of the Platonic word \( \mu \nu \sigma \kappa \eta \) — which, with the Athenians, included not merely the harmonies of tune and time, but proportion generally. [...] By the ‘music of the spheres’ is meant the agreements — the adaptations — in a word, the proportions — developed in the astronomical laws. He [Plato] had no allusion to music in our understanding of the term. (1457-58)

Indeed, for Poe, the “music of the spheres” becomes inextricable from \( \mu \nu \sigma \kappa \eta \), both of which for Poe indicate an ancient unification of music and poetry, of words and song, as well as of an ancient universal harmony. However, this “music of the spheres” becomes that in which, in “our understanding,” we cannot participate. Tying the history of the idea of the music of the spheres into the historical development of the concept of absolute music, Daniel Chua argues that what “the Romantics discovered as absolute music was a mere shadow of what Pythagoras formulated two thousand years earlier, for the absolute music he bequeathed to humanity was not so much a music to be composed as a music that composed the world” (15). Chua elaborates:

> In Plato’s account of creation, music tunes the cosmos according to the Pythagorean ratios [...], and scales the human soul to the same proportions. This enabled the inaudible sounds of the heavens to vibrate within the earthly soul, and, conversely, for the audible tones of human music to reflect the celestial spheres, so that heaven and earth could be harmonised within the unity of a well-tuned scale.
So music, as the invisible and inaudible harmony of the spheres, imposed a unity over creation, linking everything along the entire chain of being. (15)

The ancient image of music acting like “a ‘taut string’ stretched between heaven and earth, [...] able to conceptualise the unitary structure of the entire cosmos” (Chua 77) gives rise to Poe’s idea of “a strange sound, as of a harp-string broken / T’awake us — ‘Tis a symbol and a token / Of what in other worlds shall be” (“[Stanzas]” 23-25). That Pythagorean notion of the “taut string” becomes “a strange sound, as of a harp-string broken,” and the music of the spheres becomes a “mere shadow,” as Chua posits, of its former self, silent and wholly separated from the fallen modern condition. More than the Romantics, however, for whom “the absolute was an ‘infinite yearning’ for the ‘spirit realm’” (Chua 22), Poe recognises in his yearning the totality of separation between the earth and the ethereal, the present and the mythological past, music and words.

Thus, returning to Peter Dayan’s point that in the works of Mallarmé one can find a “rigorous and rigid distinction between two types of music: the audible kind, that exists in physically present sound [...] and the silent kind, which may be produced by poetry” (Art 98-99), one can find a similar distinction arising in Poe, with a number of consequences. In his tales, the real world music discussed at the very beginning of this thesis highlights the ways words and utterance are continually related as failed renderings of once-performed audible music, audible public performances of music associated with madness and gore become harsh, dissonant, and protracted, and liminal music oscillates between the audible sound and the inaudible music. Poe’s poetry, while drawing on similar themes, does not take up real world music, does not describe that
which can be described as harsh and dissonant, but moves towards attempting to convey a kind of silent music.

“The Sleeper”: Inaudible Music

Returning to “Tamerlane,” that “music of so strange a sound” that “bindest life around” cannot fall under the “audible kind” of music. It is neither “physically present sound, created, for example, by the instruments of the orchestra,” nor is it definably related to the “audible qualities of verse,” to adopt Peter Dayan’s phrase (Art 99). This “music” in “Tamerlane” “has no physical existence accessible to any of the five senses” because it remains unarticulated and synesthetic (99). That the “sound” is “strange” is complicated by the idea of the “music” “bind[ing] life around,” approaching the idea of silent music.

Similarly, in “The Sleeper” (1831), the setting of the poem is “midnight” in a “universal valley” into which an “opiate vapour” “steals […] musically” (8, 3, 7). The “universal valley” houses Irenë, “The Sleeper,” or “the fair lady who will never awaken” (Mabbott, Poems 180). As in “Tamerlane,” Poe sets the poem on the cusp of life and death, in this case also in a liminal space representing the meeting point of the earthly and the otherworldly. An earthly “valley” becomes “universal,” and the speaker calls for a “chamber changed for one more holy” as Irenë would “lie / Forever with unopened eye, / While the pale sheeted ghosts go by!” (42-44), bringing together her material existence on earth with her possible spiritual existence beyond, resulting in a haunted otherworldly landscape reminiscent of “Ulalume” (1847). The poem opens:

At midnight, in the month of June,
I stand beneath the mystic moon.
An opiate vapour, dewy, dim,
Exhales from out her golden rim,
And, softly dripping, drop by drop,
Upon the quiet mountain top,
Steals drowsily and musically
Into the universal valley. (1-8)

As in “Tamerlane,” the word “musically” does not describe audible, articulated music. In fact, in the following stanza, the speaker describes the scene as “all solemn silentness” (36), detaching any sound from the image of the “musically” moving “vapour” altogether. It also draws upon that context of “solemn music” described in the context of “Fanny,” that which resonates with the “music of the spheres,” the “learned-contemplative” models of music as opposed to the “common-active” models (Hollander, The Untuning 256).

William Hunter (1948) argued that the “opiate vapour” references Macbeth, becoming a “virus lunare” (57), a point which Mabbott (1949) responded to with the explanation that “the drop is thought of as very powerful and beneficent (though witches might seek it for bad uses) and that the irony of Poe’s poem depends on the idea the drop came too late for the lady” (“Poe’s ‘The Sleeper’” 340). The moon “exhales” from its “golden rim” this powerful and enchanting “opiate vapour,” again tying in breath with unarticulated meaning, at an ineffectual moment for Irenë. Indeed, the “opiate vapour” is a failure, and “steals” to the valley “musically” as a failed rendering of a heavenly promise. This “musically” moving “opiate vapour” reflects the “Idea! which bindest life around / With music of so strange a sound” in “Tamerlane,” in that the music points towards an undefined heavenly promise or ideal that fails on earth. Yet, this failed rendering still points heavenwards by continually referring to an undefined, enchanting,
and divine otherworldly idea. This idea of the failed rendering that still points heavenwards relates back to Poe’s use of Plato and the “music of the spheres.” Poe excises from the translation of Plato anything that finds fault with deformity, with the perverse. Instead, Poe embraces the concept of the inherent failure of earth, and harnesses it. In this way, music in Poe’s poetry approaches silence such that it communicates an inherent inability to be assimilated to any ancient understanding of the “music of the spheres”; still, the further references to music move towards attempting to convey Music, the less related to the audible and the more silent they become.

“Al Aaraaf”: Spiritual Music and Echoes of Mortality

Tying together the Platonic, music, and ideals, Maurice Bennett (1981) explains the central images of Poe’s “Al Aaraaf”:

Objectively, poetry is a Platonic ideal beyond the reach of mortals. This inaccessibility is expressed in the figure of the star [...]. To contemplate this star is to arouse those vague and inexpressible longings that most resemble the reaction to music. Considered as a syllogism, music, the star, and a beautiful woman become nearly equivalent metaphors. Unable to define the inexpressible, Poe becomes subjective, and he redefines poetry as effect, as that which most intensely arouses man’s metaphysical aspirations. (2)

For Bennett, poetry and music become interlinked. If poetry is a “Platonic ideal beyond the reach of mortals,” whose power of inaccessibility resembles a “reaction to music,” then music and poetry are both defined as “effect” and as the expression of the longing for them. Music is both the medium for transcendence and, in a way, the description of that transcendence itself. Although Bennett’s connection between poetry and music as that which is “beyond the reach of mortals” fits in the framework described in this
thesis, his use of “Al Aaraaf” as the star that in some ways parallels a Platonic ideal proves false. Like other poems of Poe’s, “Al Aaraaf” takes place in an explicitly otherworldly landscape, but unlike those poems, “Al Aaraaf” is the only one that overtly takes place in a spiritual limbo. Poe (1829) describes the setting as taken from “the Al Aaraaf of the Arabians, a medium between Heaven and Hell where men suffer no punishment, but yet do not attain that tranquil and even happiness which they suppose to be the characteristic of heavenly enjoyment” (“Letter 12” 26). On an imagined continuum from earth to the divine itself, Al Aaraaf falls between them. As Floyd Stovall (1929) explains:

The underlying plan of Al Aaraaf might be illustrated by a chart of the stellar universe, with three slight modifications: increasing the relative size of the Earth, adding a prominent star […], and localizing God and Heaven in the region without and above the material universe, visible but unapproachable. Through the added star, which is Al Aaraaf, rays of influence flow from God to all parts of the cosmos. The poem is thus a representation, mainly pictorial, of the relation of God to the whole universe, but to the inhabitants of Earth and Al Aaraaf in particular […]. (“An Interpretation” 107)

If the earth might be imagined as furthest from God, fallen, then Al Aaraaf falls somewhere between the fallen earth and heaven, closer to heaven yet not a part of it. When critics such as Daniel Hoffman argue that Al Aaraaf is the “evanescent terrain of the ideal, and the only resemblance to human life on Al Aaraaf is the presence, among certain inhabitants, of that impure passion, love” (38), they are not taking into account that, although nearer to the divine than the earth, Al Aaraaf is simultaneously distant from the ideal, as well. Al Aaraaf, then, cannot be “a breathing-into-being of a realm of the ideal” (38), as Hoffman argues. As Hoffman later points out, those who “pass for persons” on the star, Michelangelo (Angelo) and Ianthe, “are, on that distant star,
doomed not to know true Heaven because they love one another” (42). Even though Al Aaraaf is closer to “true Heaven” than is the earth, Angelo and Ianthe are “doomed.”

The spirits’ and mortals’ very existence on that star is an inherent failure. Rather than proceeding to heaven, those on Al Aaraaf are more divinely fallen than those on earth, closer on a continuum towards the ideal, but not part of some ideal itself. Poe also footnotes the setting on Al Aaraaf with the notion that a “star was discovered by Tycho Brahe which appeared suddenly in the heavens — attained, in a few days, a brilliancy surpassing that of Jupiter — then as suddenly disappeared, and has never been seen since” (Poems 99), making it a setting at once real and mythological, reiterating its liminal quality. In a letter, Poe wrote, “those who make choice of the star as their residence do not enjoy immortality — but, after a second life of high excitement, sink into forgetfulness and death —” (“Letter 12” 27), such that even this more heavenly world presents the looming danger of mortality.

In the first part of the poem, Poe describes the star and introduces Nesace, the “presiding spirit of a star” (Mabbott, Poems 115). The first stanza of the poem sets the scene:

O! nothing earthly save the thrill
Of melody in woodland rill —
Or (music of the passion-hearted)
Joy’s voice so peacefully departed
That like the murmur in the shell,
Its echo dwelleth and will dwell —
[…]
Adorn yon world afar, afar —
The wandering star. (I. 5-10, 14-15)

This stanza reveals that “nothing earthly” adorns Al Aaraaf, with the exception of what the speaker expresses in two distinct musical images. The first is the “thrill” of
“melody,” but not the “melody” itself, that stems from a stream, or “woodland rill.” Attached not to utterance, but to the natural landscape as a heard sound of unarticulated pitch, this image uses the “melody of woodland rill” as a distant metaphor for an undefined “thrill” existing on the star. The second is the “music” that is compared to the departure of “Joy’s voice,” existing only by its absence. In other words, rather than describing the “voice” or the “music,” the speaker describes their absence, comparing “Joy’s voice,” and “music” in turn, with the “murmur in the shell” that seemingly has no origin apart from the symbolic notion of it as the voice of the sea, echoing those distant notions of madness introduced in the first part of this thesis. The concept of the “echo” arises, moving the shell’s “murmur” further and further away from any originating sound. This murmur acts as a metaphor for the departure of “Joy’s voice,” itself unheard and undefined; it also parallels those murmurs of “Eleonora,” in which they imply an unarticulated meaning, informing the narrator of ethereal, otherworldly implications of death. Crucially, these two musical images of the “melody of woodland rill” and the “murmur in the shell” describe all that reminds the speaker of the “earthly,” revealing the ways in which music conveys, still, a sense of the beyond, of the impending failure of the present inhabitants of the star to conceive of the ideal beyond them. Rather, the echoes, the murmurs, although so distant they almost prove silent, still voice a reminder of mortality.

Similarly, at the beginning of the second part of the poem, the poet describes a temple, which the spirit Nesace enters:

But what is this? — it cometh — and it brings
A music with it — ’tis the rush of wings —
A pause — and then a sweeping, falling strain
And Nesace is in her halls again. (II. 48-51)

The “music” in this instance is “the rush of wings,” an audible sound. Yet this is complicated as the line moves from the compressed image of the “rush of wings” to a “pause,” indicating soundlessness, and again to “a sweeping, falling strain” that may relate to the “rush of wings” or to something else entirely, moving it away from the heard and toward the silent. The term “strain” plays upon a musical term. By being tied to the “rush of wings,” the “strain” might indicate the stress of movement. By being tied to “music,” however, the “strain” might indicate a section of music, or a melody, akin to the ‘dying fall,’ reminiscent of Twelfth Night: “If music be the food of love, play on — / [...] / That strain again! It had a dying fall” (Shakespeare, The Oxford 1.1.1-4). As well as this subtle evocation of mortality, of dying, this “strain” is attached to an image (“rush of wings”) that is also comprised of indefinite pitch and undifferentiated rhythm.

Implicit in this image is music’s expression of the meeting of the spirit Nesace with the temple of her planet, the “falling strain” representing her fall to her star.

In the stanza just following Nesace’s arrival to her “halls,” the setting is described:

Young flowers were whispering in melody
To happy flowers that night — and tree to tree;
Fountains were gushing music as they fell
In many a star-lit grove, or moon-lit dell;
Yet silence came upon material things —
Fair flowers, bright waterfalls and angel wings —
And sound alone that from the spirit sprang
Bore burthen to the charm the maiden sang: (II. 60-67)

Rather than being associated with specific utterance, melody is that which flowers whisper, and fountains gush music, both reflecting the beginning of the poem, of those
images that use music to convey a sense of unarticulated meaning. Subsequent to
Nesace’s “falling strain,” she prepares to sing a “charm,” which silences the surrounding
landscape, revealing a hierarchy in music: Nesace overtakes the music of the
surrounding world. Moreover, her voice is complexly described. Arising in the silence of
the surrounding world, “sound alone that from the spirit sprang,” reminiscent of that
relationship between spirit as breath, the soul, and song, or the consideration of the
“voice to be articulated and controlled by our inmost soul, the central Spirit located in
the heart” (Losseff 7-8). Like the “one burden” interpreted by the speaker of “The
Raven” as being borne by the songs of some imagined master being condensed into the
raven’s “nevermore,” this breathing in song of Nesace “bore burthen” to her charm in
some indefinite sense unreachable by the reader.

Thus, when the “charm the maiden sang” is printed in the text in the lines
following, they become a step removed from the “sound alone that from the spirit
sprang”; the words themselves move it away from its original incarnation. In the charm,
Nesace invokes Ligeia. The second stanza begins:

    Ligeia! Ligeia!
    My beautiful one!
    Whose harshest idea
    Will to melody run,
    [...
    Ligeia! wherever
    Thy image may be,
    No magic shall sever
    Thy music from thee.
    Thou hast bound many eyes
    In a dreamy sleep —
    But the strains still arise
    Which \textit{thy} vigilance keep —
    The sound of the rain
    Which leaps down to the flower,
And dances again
In the rhythm of the shower —
The murmur that springs
From the growing of grass
Are the music of things —
But are modell’d, alas! — (II. 100-03, 112-27)

This poem was written long before the tale “Ligeia,” the only definitive connection between the two Ligeias being their musicality. She presides over the “music of things,” which is described in natural imagery. The “sound of the rain” may be a readily imagined sound, but always with indefinite pitch and undifferentiated rhythm. This is compounded by the description in this stanza that the “sound of the rain” then “leaps down to the flower, / And dances again” in the “rhythm of the shower,” conflating the ideas of sound and image into a continuous motion rather than a specific sound. The murmur of the “growing of grass” similarly ties movement with the slightest idea of sound, the murmur, also indicating unarticulated meaning; Poe adds a footnote to this murmur: “I met with this idea in an old English tale, [...] ‘The verie essence and, as it were, springheade and origine of all musiche is the verie pleasaunte sounde which the trees of the forest do make when they growe’” (Poems 110). His reference has not been discovered, and is almost certainly invented, but the implication that the “music of things” approaches silence, the “sounde” that the trees make when they grow, reiterates this continual notion in the poem that the music of Al Aaraaf, although closer to silent than the music of earth, is still based on heard sound, which is inherently indicative of falsity, or failure, or death. Ligeia, the presiding spirit of music, still sees “strains” that “arise” in the “music of things” which are “modell’d,” on an ideal, or are themselves a failed rendering of the divine, “alas.”
Floyd Stovall (1929) argues that in “Al Aaraaf”:

The divine harmony […] descends from God to men not in its original purity, but as made intelligible to the terrestrial senses […], just as the absolute silence of God’s voice is first translated into the material silence of Nesace’s spiritual song, and then further translated into the audible music of Ligeia. (“An Interpretation” 126)

Stovall follows the idea discussed in this thesis that the “absolute silence of God’s voice” as the heavenly or the divine does not translate to the fallen realms “in its original purity.” Audible music, following this logic, is the most fallen, the most earthly of music, which is “made intelligible to the terrestrial senses.” Ligeia’s music on Al Aaraaf is not so audible, as Stovall argues her “melody” truly cannot be determined; it does not relate to ‘real world’ or ‘heard’ earthly ‘melodies.’ Indeed, Nesace invokes Ligeia in the poem, and Nesace controls the description of Ligeia’s melody; Ligeia herself remains absent. Nesace ends her invocation of Ligeia with the plea:

Go! breathe on their slumber,
All softly in ear,
The musical number
They slumber’d to hear — (II. 144-147)

Just after describing “the music of things” as “modell’d,” Ligeia’s invocation is for a “musical number,” reiterating the dual nature of Ligeia’s implicitly powerful “music” (later described as a “spell” (II. 152)) and that powerful “music” being fallen from its divine ideal. Indeed, that “musical number” refers to the music of the spheres, the “number” parallels the Pythagorean intervals, those that reflect the ancient image of music acting like “a ‘taut string’ stretched between heaven and earth, […] able to conceptualise the unitary structure of the entire cosmos” (Chua 77). More divine than the music of the earth, yet still fallen from the divine, this music can only be described in
terms of “breath,” such that the merest of sounds, the breath alone, dictates this more heavenly music as it moves towards silence.

Even when the sense of hearing is directly invoked, it is only to draw attention to the notion of failure. Subsequent to Nesace’s “song” within the poem, the speaker asks

What guilty spirit, in what shrubbery dim,
Heard not the stirring summons of that hymn?
But two: they fell: for Heaven no grace imparts
To those who hear not for their beating hearts. (II. 174-77)

In a kind of reverse positioning from earlier examples, the higher music is silent to the fallen “guilty” spirits who cannot access it “for their beating hearts.” In other instances in the poem, songs that function as hymns are continually unheard, synesthetic, and otherworldly. The speaker addresses “Fair flowers, and fairy! to whose care is given / To bear the Goddess’ song, in odors, up to Heaven,” rendering a synesthetic image of the “song” that “flowers” and “fairy” “bear” in “odors” to heaven (80-81). In speaking of how Poe uses synaesthesia, Daniel Hoffman writes:

In ‘Al Aaraaf’ Poe had to depend upon his own imaginative distortions, through synaesthesia, of common objects (like flowers, stars, and meteors) in order to make tangible his wholly imaginary world. So his flowers sing hymns, his silences speak, the twilight murmurs as it falls (II, 40-41) [...]. In certain of his later poems, Poe creates a landscape [...] so little like any sensible objects, because apprehended by no sensations already known to the reader. This is a course at once heroic and hazardous for a poet, since it debars from his art practically all of the experiences of mankind and makes his poetry completely self-defining, self-limiting, solipsistic. (45)

Hoffman does not note why all three common objects he gives transform sound in some capacity; they all describe sounds that one cannot hear and that one cannot truly imagine hearing (flowers singing, silences speaking and twilight murmuring). To take Hoffman’s argument further, it is not that Poe “creates a landscape” through synaesthesia, but he
attempts to create a landscape primarily through composites of sound-based images that create a wholly imaginary landscape. This inaudible music depends, to return to Peter Dayan’s conceptualisation of it, “on two things: the presence of reference to music, of an evocation of music which will resonate with the audience; and the careful removal of our ability to be sure of what might have been the sound of that resonating music” (*Art 83*).

These elements of inaudible music arise also in “The Lake — To —” (1827). Mabbott gives the background for “The Lake — To —” as “founded on fact, recording a visit near sunset to a place reputedly haunted by the ghosts of two lovers, neither unfriendly nor truly unhappy. The place is the Lake of the Dismal Swamp” (*Poems 83*). Neither of these “lovers” nor their “ghosts” make their way into Poe’s poem, however. Rather, the haunted quality of the poem is implicit in the tension that results between the “tremulous delight” the speaker feels and the “Death” that “was in that poisonous wave” of the lake (14, 18). This poem, like the others we have analysed, takes us to the meeting point of the earthly, and the otherworldly. The first stanza describes the speaker’s love for the swamp, a love for the “lovely […] loneliness” of the lake (4). In the second stanza, the tone changes as “Night” arrives:

```
But when the Night had thrown her pall
Upon that spot, as upon all,
And the mystic wind went by
Murmuring in melody —
Then — ah then I would awake
To the terror of the lone lake.
Yet that terror was not fright,
But a tremulous delight —
A feeling not the jewelled mine
Could teach or bribe me to define —
Nor Love — although the Love were thine. (7-17)
```
That the “mystic wind” would pass by “Murmuring” parallels the “whispering” flowers of “Al Aaraaf,” and the two examples together correspond to those from “The Coliseum” and “The Haunted Palace.” “Murmuring,” like “whispering,” indicates indistinct or faintly audible speech. Once again, “melody” is tied to an unarticulated meaning, to meaning without specified words. Moreover, the combination of the arrival of “Night” and the wind “Murmuring in melody” is what awakens the speaker to a “terror” of “a tremulous delight” that nothing can “teach” or “bribe” him “to define.” Although melody works similarly to songs in multiple ways in Poe’s poetry, it continually implies unarticulated meaning as well as unarticulated sound. While music itself may be based in sound (whether or not imaginable) or based in silence, and while it may encompass melody, melody itself is based in whispers, images, prophetic sounds, twangs, and murmurs. Melody is thus more often tied to the earthly or the landscape, indicative of the fallen earthly state that still points towards its ideal opposite.

“Israfel”: A Recapitulation of Themes

Both the themes of the implicitly fallen and the divinely otherworldly arise in “Israfel” (1831) in ways that tie together the themes so far discussed. The poem foregrounds its musical terminology, beginning “In Heaven a spirit doth dwell / ‘Whose heart-strings are a lute’” ([G] 1-2). These first two lines establish the lute as a

---

28 Although Poe frames this phrase as a direct quotation from the Qur’an, it is not: “Poe must have derived his quotation and description from a source or sources other than the Koran, for nothing of the kind can be found in it” (Davidson 152).
representation of Israfel’s heart, rather than a separate musical instrument upon which he plays. This lute-as-heart, the “spirit” Israfel’s central organ, creates a complex image when one takes into account the connections between the lute and the Æolian harp, Psyche and the ventum textilem, the soul and the breath. Daniel Hoffman argues that the “suspended lute is of course an Æolian harp, that favorite image of the Romantics for the songs made by the breath — that is, the spirit — of Nature herself” (52). In the first part of this argument, Hoffman designates the lute as, “of course,” an Æolian harp. In the second, he describes the products of this Æolian harp as “songs,” “songs” moreover “made by the breath [...] of Nature.” In doing so, Hoffman’s argument reveals the dual nature of this “favorite image” of the Romantics by inferring that it at once produces real “songs” produced from an actual Æolian harp itself and that it produces “songs” in some symbolic sense, produced from the Æolian harp as an idea. Hoffman characterises the wind used to create these “songs” as the “breath [...] of Nature” personified. This accords with the schema described by Losseff: “The physical means of expelling the voice from the ‘soul’ is the breath,” and the voice itself is “controlled by our inmost soul, the central Spirit located in the heart” (7-8). However, this interpretation seemingly implies that the song is a heard musical product, suggesting a duality in Daniel Hoffman’s interpretation of Israfel as poet and the “song” as poem: “Israfel’s lyre! Poe would, if he could, have always smitten those angelic strings. Poetry, to him, is song” (52). In fact, Poe himself has now become more or less synonymous with Israfel in some critical writings.\(^{29}\)

\(^{29}\) For instance, one of the early critical biographies of Poe is Israfel: The Life and Times of Edgar Allen Poe [sic] by Hervey Allen, published in 1927.
By combining the metaphor of the Æolian harp and the “song” as a poem, Hoffman mixes distinct and complex definitions of “song.” In the first sense, he approaches the Romantic definition of song already discussed a few times as Kramer describes it, that “the poet hears a song that assumes epiphanic power precisely because it is unintelligible, and often at the very point where it passes the threshold of intelligibility [...]. The poet’s imagination is initially aroused by the impulse to insert his own words in the linguistic gap opened by the song” (Music 139). In the second sense, Hoffman approaches what Kramer describes as “song” in “its traditional definition,” or as “a form of synthesis. It is the art that reconciles music and poetry” (Music 125). Both of these definitions oppose, for instance, the way Burton Pollin approaches Poe as a writer of “songs.” By merging the first two descriptions of “song,” Hoffman undercuts the second description that he otherwise appears to privilege, assuming that once the poet’s words are in place, they “gradually dissolve like the song’s own, leaving the poet mute and transfixed” (Kramer, Music 139).

Looking more closely, then, at these “musical” images, it seems that in the context of the poem it is the angel’s “heart-strings” which comprise the lute, and the instrument upon which he plays is not the lute, but the lyre:

And they say (the starry choir
And the other listening things)
That Israfeli’s fire
Is owing to that lyre
By which he sits and sings —
The trembling living wire
Of those unusual strings. ([G] 16-22)

Firstly, the poet only knows of Israfel because of what “the starry choir and other listening things” “say” to him, reminiscent once more of the departure from the myth of
the music of the spheres: “stars no longer sang, and scales no longer laddered the sky” (Chua 21). Secondly, the image of a played instrument, or the “lyre / By which [Israfel] sits and sings,” is directly connected to “The trembling living wire / Of those unusual strings,” which refer back to Israfel’s “heart-strings,” conflating the two such that they are impossible to distinguish from one another (emphasis mine). Instead of music acting as “a ‘taut string’ stretched between heaven and earth” (Chua 77), Israfel’s heart-strings position themselves in silent confusion, separate from the speaker-poet.

In fact, Poe altered this section from its first edition in a way that makes Israfel’s “lute,” heart-strings, and the lyre upon which he plays as indistinguishable as possible. In the first published edition of “Israfel,” Poe writes “That Israfeli’s fire / Is owing to that lyre / With those unusual strings” ([A] 14-16). In the latest edition, however, whether Israfel’s “fire” is owed to the instrument “By which” he sings or the actual “living wire” of his heart is impossible to tease out, made even more complex by version [C], in which it is “That trembling living lyre” (21). While both the lute and the lyre may in this case be related to the Æolian harp in its form as an actual musical instrument, they also move into the context described earlier, constructed of “various notions of the soul as an instrument, or the body as the instrument upon which the soul plays, or the soul as the melody or chordal effusion of the body’s strings” (Hollander, The Untuning 268). Rather than representing actual “heard” instruments, these instead construct a complex mutable image; there is no “real world” equivalent for this combination.

Just as there is no real world equivalent also to the “starry choir” that listens to Israfel’s singing, and therefore the musical image resulting from it is imaginary rather than experiential, the poet does not use the lute and the lyre to refer to a reader’s musical
experience. The idealised nature of these instruments is again compounded by their context: “And the giddy stars (so legends tell), / Ceasing their hymns, attend the spell / Of his voice, all mute” ([G] 5-7). The angel Israfel, rather than playing to a mortal or earthly audience, plays to an audience of personified stars that then relate this image of Israfel to the poet. Israfel’s playing is thus a few steps removed from that which can be named or defined. While the stars are “mute” and “attend” Israfel’s “voice,” his “voice” is described as a “spell,” a scene that mirrors the aforementioned image of the Romantic “listener/poet [...] mute and transfixed” once “his own words [...] gradually dissolve like the song’s own” (Kramer 139). This Romantic image is again complicated in Poe, however, as in doing so, the stars attend the power produced by Israfel’s voice, rather than the sound of the “song,” per se. Certainly the poet reiterates his posture of listening, but there is nothing that can be defined that he actually hears.

Separately, the speaker addresses Israfel, “With the fervour of thy lute — / Well may the stars be mute!” ([G] 38-39). That the stars must be “mute” and “listening” implies that they await a “heard” song, yet rather than describe a “heard” song, the speaker only portrays the “fervour” that surrounds it. In other words, as in previous examples, there is no “music” and no actual “words” to “dissolve.” Steven Frye (2010) responds to the “mute” and “listening” stars attending Israfel in terms of a merged literal and metaphorical music:

‘Israfel’ speaks of an angel of music whose heart-strings are those of a lute. The poet sings in praise of the angel Israfel’s song, which embodies a transcendence intimated by the heart but which is imperfectly rendered in our world, through the dark, refracted murmur of human language. [...] Poe knows that the power of the angel’s song is beyond the reach of words. But in all of his work, his hope is to still the stars and to lift the soul to reverie. (7)
Frye allows the images presented by the poem, “Israfel,” his “heart-strings,” the “lute,” his “song,” to merge, but their imitation in “words” still hold some kind of “hope” for transcendent power for the reader, however rendered through “refracted […] language.” Yet, Poe’s Israfel, if an “angel of music,” is an angel of music that does not embody “transcendence,” but represents an ideal form that the human cannot clarify, hear, or define. Although Frye correctly acknowledges the division between the “dark, refracted murmur of human language” as the mortal opposite of the angelic music, he does not go far enough to acknowledge its silence. More than being “beyond the reach of words,” the “soul” cannot be lifted “to reverie” but is inevitably cut off from this ideal. That notion of “a ‘taut string’ stretched between heaven and earth” that represented the “unitary structure of the entire cosmos” in the myth of the music of the spheres has broken (Chua 77), leaving an unbridgeable gap between mortality and immortality, but musical terminology voices that unknowable beyond without articulation, in its failure pointing heavenward.

References to the lute and the lyre, to the voice and to song, fuse into a mutable image that is associated with music, yet resists a traditional musical description. Ultimately, the poem ends with the idea that, should Israfel and the poem’s speaker trade places:

He might not sing so wildly well
A mortal melody,
While a bolder note than this might swell
From my lyre within the sky. ([G] 48-51)

The mortal song is described as “melody,” reflecting the “lip-begotten words” of “To —” (4), thus reintroducing a division rather than a “mythical union between a lower
reality embodied in language and a higher one embodied in music” (Kramer, *Music* 2). Moreover, a “note” alone will “swell” from the speaker’s “lyre within the sky.” Crucially, this implies that one note alone is still earthly, but “swells” heavenwards, resembling that idea of the “harp string broken” in “[Stanzas]” that is a symbol of what “in other worlds shall be,” such that the single note, moving toward silence while still incorporating musical symbolism, conveys the otherworldly in an unarticulated sense. The idea of the “note” as music will continue to be discussed in greater detail and traced through Poe’s works in chapter six of this thesis, beginning with the analysis of “The Bells.”

This poetic uncertainty does not deter critics such as Glen Omans (1990), for instance, from arguing that the poem “creates the experience in which the reader is made aware of these parallels [the earthly poet to the heavenly singer], ‘Israfel’ itself may be said to be a poem-symbol that makes possible the perceptual leap from real to ideal, from descendent to transcendent” (5). For Omans, the poem embodies the same power, however undefined, that Israfel’s singing does. In fact, he argues that the poem “makes clear” that “the artist’s endeavor is to envision the ideal through its symbols and then re-embbody the ideal in a work of art. […] As symbol, the work of art has the capacity to lead other, less perceptive viewers to a vision similar to that originally experienced by the artist” (5). Omans maintains a position opposing Frye’s; rather than human language being a “refracted murmur” of the power of Israfel’s singing, human language can actually “re-emboby the ideal in a work of art,” thereby allowing the reader to “envision the ideal,” however undefined that is, as well.
The same duality evinces itself in another poem that cites “Israfel.” In the two years before Poe died, he composed and edited “To — — —” (1848). The poem is more directly personal than some of his others, as he takes the role of the speaker openly, writing:

Not long ago, the writer of these lines,
In the mad pride of intellectuality,
Maintained the ‘power of words’ — denied that ever
A thought arose within the human brain
Beyond the utterance of the human tongue;
And now, as if in mockery of that boast,
Two words — two foreign soft dissyllables —
Italian tones made only to be murmured
By angels dreaming in the moonlit ‘dew
That hangs like chains of pearl of Hermon hill’ —
Have stirred from out the abysses of his heart,
Unthought-like thoughts that are the souls of thought,
Richer, far wilder, far diviner visions
Than even the seraph harper, Israfel,
Who has ‘the sweetest voice of all God’s creatures,’
Could hope to utter. And I! my spells are broken. (1-16)

As Mabbott notes, Poe “published a story called ‘The Power of Words’ in 1845,” but the first few lines of this poem may refer instead “to a passage in ‘Marginalia,’ number 149, published in Graham’s for March 1846: […] ‘so entire is my faith in the power of words, that, at times, I have believed it possible to embody even the evanescence of fancies such as I have attempted to describe’” (Poems 408). In that passage, Poe claims that, while no “thought, properly so called, is out of the reach of language” (“Marginalia” 1383), that which he calls “fancies,” which “are not thoughts, and to which, as yet, I have found it absolutely impossible to adapt language” are beyond the reach of words (1383). Originally titled “To Marie Louise” (Mabbott, Poems 406), the poem’s “two words” may be the name “Marie Louise” itself: “The foreign dissyllables
are the lady’s personal names, ‘Marie Louise,’ but these are French, and not ‘Italian tones,’ as in the version Poe published” (408). Returning to Peter Dayan’s argument regarding the Orphic myth, “what we love and sing must remain, in Poe’s words, ‘Nameless here for evermore.’ The moment at which Orpheus turns and sees her is the moment [...] in which the shade would [...] acquire a name; at that same moment, literature would die. To sing well is to avoid that naming” (Music Writing 97). Nowhere than here is it more clear that, not only does “the ordinary use of language” oppose that which is “identified with music,” to adopt Peter Dayan’s terminology (Music Writing 98), but also that which cannot be uttered is that which cannot be described in terms of the real, or of “that which can be seen and possessed” (Music Writing 99). In hopes of keeping alive these thoughts he cannot express, he does not define them, but quickly moves them multiple times away from that in which things are named, until they land in the realm of the musical, of Israfel, and beyond. Even with this rapid movement to the liminal, the poet looks at those “Two words” long enough to kill the idea therein: “And I! my spells are broken.”

Returning to “Israfel,” along the same lines, in some critical responses, the poet’s “bolder” note is viewed much more positively than the word alone might signal. Mónica Peláez (2007) argues:

These verses imply that it is the angel’s exposure to the ‘ecstasies above’ that enables him to compose such an unequaled song. The earthbound poet, on the other hand, inhabits a ‘world of sweets and sours.’ [...] The poem [...] [suggests] that the forthcoming bliss hinges on the ability to create a higher form of poetry. If the speaker could play the ‘lyre within the sky,’ he reasons, his ‘mortal melody’ would be transformed into a ‘bolder note.’ This vision of the afterlife as a site of poetic accomplishment complements a tradition that focused above all else on the spiritual qualities of heaven. (80)
Peláez makes an argument for a “sentimental” Poe, a Poe who views death as a solace, a reprieve following mortal struggle. In doing so, she argues that the poet transcended to the afterlife or the poet with the idea of the afterlife in mind may attain a “higher form of poetry” because the “sours” of the world are removed. This still does not answer why Poe’s speaker’s note may be “bolder” than Israfel’s, or what this “bolder” note is, however. In fact, the reverse is implied in Poe’s poem, that mortal struggle adds this “boldness” beyond that of the creature who has only experienced perfect bliss.

In his review of Thomas Moore, Poe (1840) argues of the “Sensitive Plant” and “Undine” that they are the “finest possible examples of the purely ideal” (Rev. of *Alciphron* 337). He goes on to argue that this is the case, because with each note of the lyre is heard a ghostly, and not always a distinct, but an august and soul-exalting *echo*. […] But not so in poems which the world has always persisted in terming *fanciful*. Here the upper current is often exceedingly brilliant and beautiful; but then men feel that this upper current *is all*. No Naiad voice addresses them *from below*. The notes of the air of the song do not tremble with the according tones of the accompaniment. (337-38)

Burton Pollin (1975) ties Poe’s “Naiad” to Undine herself, arguing that “Undine is a Teutonic equivalent of a naiad and comes from under the sea” (“Undine” 65), and that she is “accompanied by three of the four elementals which Paracelus and the whole lore of the Kabbala had evolved as mediators between God and man. […] in addition to the fairy Undine, of the wavy element, the reader meets sylphs or spirits of the air and goblins (or kobolds) of the earth” (65). Pollin’s positioning of Poe’s Naiad interestingly returns us once more to the sea or to water as that hallmark of liminality. Poe’s musical metaphor, that with “each note of the lyre is heard a ghostly […] *echo*,” resonates only by being lowered to the liminal, but not by being to fallen as to meet with the earthly.
Conclusion

This chapter began by analysing Poe’s conceptualisation of the ‘music of the spheres’ as epitomising Music associated with the divine and with Silence, inaccessible in our fallen, modern condition. In doing so, this ‘Greek Music’ set the stage for an analysis of music approaching the inaudible in Poe’s “Al Aaraaf” and “Israfel,” which relied upon “the presence of reference to music, of an evocation of music which will resonate with the audience; and the careful removal of our ability to be sure of what might have been the sound of that resonating music” (P. Dayan, Art 83). This chapter thus recapitulates and expands upon those divides this thesis has exposed in Poe’s works: the real world and the otherworldly, the heard and the inaudible, music and Music.

The complication with this spectrum that this chapter introduces, however, is the necessity of deformity, failure, perversity, to inversely highlight the ethereal, the more silent and divinely musical. Like that notion introduced in chapter four, in which Poe describes Art as “‘the reproduction of what the Senses perceive in Nature through the veil of the soul’” (“Marginalia” 1458), there appears to be a continual insistence in Poe’s poetry on the liminal as best conveying what the fallen mind can conceive of as the heavenly. The point of paradox best illustrates a higher, more silent form of music, a failed rendering that points heavenwards. The murmur, the mixed metaphor of the heart, the spirit, the soul, and the strings move in between the earthly and the otherworldly, as does the single note, which takes on its own complications in other contexts.
6. Deathly Music: Bells, Notes, and the Shadow

Chapter Outline

This chapter moves towards the conclusion of this thesis by reintegrating Poe’s tales into the discussion of his poetry. Beginning with “Eldorado” (1849), “Sonnet — Silence” (1840), and “Shadow. — A Parable” (1835), this chapter investigates the connection between shadow and music in Poe’s works, both audible and inaudible. By summarising a series of oppositions in Poe’s works, including the heavenly and the demonic, the soul and the body, the ethereal and the earth, madness and sanity, death and Death, and silence and Silence, this chapter assembles the divisions of the themes of this thesis in terms of the spectrum between music and Music.

In doing so, it will also address some singularities in the hierarchy of music this thesis proposes in Poe’s works: the bell and the single note. Unlike the real world music explored at the beginning of this thesis, bells and the single note are not associated with words and with utterance, even though they are or stem from real world musical instruments, as opposed to the more symbolic “‘lute-harp-lyre’ constellation” previously explored in this thesis (Hollander, The Untuning 45). Bells and the single note, acting as this musical singularity in Poe, also most adeptly express the nameless aspects of death. This notion of the single note and bells will be analysed in the contexts of “The Cask of Amontillado” (1846), “The Bells” (1849), “A Pæan” (1831) and “The Masque of the Red Death” (1842) in ways that evoke many of the themes that have emerged in this thesis. It will then recapitulate and expand upon those themes through “The Conqueror Worm” (1843).
“Eldorado” and “Shadow. — A Parable”: Music and Death

While chapter four of this thesis revealed that typically only birds sing songs in Poe’s poetry, drawing upon Lawrence Kramer’s argument that, in certain nineteenth-century poetry, “the singer in these poems is usually either a bird […], or a girl” (Music 139), this chapter explores a singularity in Poe’s poetry, which reveals a completely different type of singer. When Poe finally discloses his only human singer in a poem in his “Eldorado” (1849), that singer takes the form of a man. This singularity in Poe’s works, the only of Poe’s poems in which a song is sung by a human, also evinces this dual level of what Poe calls the “upper current” and the voice “from below” (Rev. of Alciphron 337), or what we have interpreted as a kind of dark liminality:

Gaily bedight,
A gallant knight,
In sunshine and in shadow,
Had journeyed long,
Singing a song,
In search of Eldorado.

But he grew old —
This knight so bold —
And o’er his heart a shadow
Fell, as he found
No spot of ground
That looked like Eldorado. (1-12)

What at first glance appears to be a straightforward example of a knight “singing a song” in a way that allies itself to the idea of real world music quickly reveals itself to be something more complex. The “shadow” of the initial journey “In sunshine and in shadow” does not appear to take on any deep significance; this is earthly shadow, or that which is encountered everyday. But as the knight “grew old,” the “shadow” that fell
“o’er his heart” prefigures another kind of shadow altogether. Moreover, he journeys on to speak to “a pilgrim shadow —” who informs the knight that he must ride “Down the Valley of the Shadow” (15, 21), layering the levels of the knight’s dark liminality in ways reminiscent of the death associated with the protagonists of Poe’s ballads. This twofold shadow is also reminiscent of another of Poe’s poems, “Sonnet — Silence” (1840):

There are some qualities — some incorporate things,
That have a double life, which thus is made
A type of twin entity which springs
From matter and light, evinced in solid and shade.
There is a two-fold Silence — sea and shore —
Body and Soul. One dwells in lonely places,
Newly with grass o’ergrown; some solemn graces,
Some human memories and tearful lore,
Render him terrorless: his name’s ‘No more.’
He is the corporate Silence: dread him not!
No power hath he of evil in himself;
But should some urgent fate (untimely lot!)
Bring thee to meet his shadow (nameless elf,
That haunteth the lone regions where hath trod
No foot of man,) commend thyself to God! (1-15)

We can find in this poem a series of tropes that this thesis has been continually culling from Poe’s works and assembling in terms of their relationship to Poe’s musical vocabulary. The first of these is the “double life” or “twin entity” of the earthly and the otherworldly, that which “springs / From matter and light” and becomes “solid and shade.” The second of these is the parallel “two-fold Silence” of “sea and shore” or “body and soul”; there is earthly silence, “corporate” death that is both natural and inescapable, and there is another kind of silence, the “shadow” of the “corporate” incarnation, that “haunteth the lone regions where hath trod / No foot of man.” Crucially,
the “corporate,” earthly silence has a name, “No more,” while “his shadow” is a "nameless elf" that, like Lenore, is “nameless here for evermore” (“The Raven” 11-12).

Silence and shadow thus become interlinked in ways intimately connected to the terrifying unknown of death. In “Eldorado,” the repetition of the word “shadow” evinces this shift in meaning from earthly shadow, and the body’s death, to otherworldly shadow, and the destination of the soul. Burton Pollin (1973) explores this repetition of “Eldorado” and “shadow,” writing:

In ‘Eldorado’ there is even a trace of a technique used in ‘The Raven’ — the shifting significance of the evocative word ‘nevermore.’ The word ‘Eldorado’ provides a repetend in a changing last line context. Moreover, in the rhyming third line of each stanza, Poe ingeniously tries to accomplish the same feat with ‘shadow,’ for which he furnishes a varying context and meaning: the opposite of sunshine, a dark mood, a phantom, and death. (“Poe’s ‘Eldorado’” 234)

The “song” the knight “sings” is not heard, seen, or defined in a way that aligns itself with real world music, and so the “song” itself becomes of “varying context and meaning,” impossible to pin down, just as “shadow” does in this poem. The “song” in “Eldorado,” a word dropped after the first stanza, becomes another element of Poe’s “indistinct” themes:

Poe peopled his stage with veiled, shadowy figures, with troops of Echoes and ‘evil things, in robes of sorrow’ (‘The Haunted Palace’), with ill angels and ghouls (‘Dream-Land’), and with dim ‘nothings which were real’ (‘Tamerlane’). Even his protagonists or featured characters remain indistinct, like the gallant knight seeking Eldorado. All we know of him is that he started out ‘gaily bedight’; and all we know of the one person he encountered on his way is that he was a pilgrim Shadow. (Fagin 153)

Even if the knight “sings a song,” he is himself “indistinct,” parallel, in Fagin’s response, to the aforementioned “Echoes” and “ghouls,” or to the “terrorless” “shade” of “Sonnet — Silence,” a corporeal representation of earthly death. His “song,” in turn,
becomes an inarticulate notion from an indistinct character, and its twin as a product of
the other, the incorporeal Shadow, remains absent from the poem.

This is the only one of Poe’s poems that explicitly takes up the human singing a
song as a subject, and its unarticulated association with shadow in both senses is
reminiscent of one of Poe’s tales, “Shadow. — A Parable” (1835). As in “Eldorado,”
references to shadows in various forms inundate the text, beginning with the epigraph
(“Yea! though I walk through the valley of the Shadow” (188)) and in the first line: “Ye
who read are still among the living; but I who write shall have long since gone my way
into the region of shadows” (188). This tale of terror and “Pestilence,” that reminder in
disease of death-in-life, is told by Oinos, who sits in a “company of seven” in a
circumscribed chamber:

Black draperies, likewise, in the gloomy room, shut out from our view the moon,
the lurid stars, and the peopleless streets — but the boding and the memory of
Evil, they would not be so excluded. There were things around us and about of
which I can render no distinct account — things material and spiritual —
heaviness in the atmosphere — a sense of suffocation — anxiety — and, above
all, that terrible state of existence which the nervous experience when the senses
are keenly living and awake, and meanwhile the powers of thought lie dormant.
(189)

The room contains a kind of liminal space, then, that which does not give a clear sense
of death or life, all within moving from life to death without clearly arriving there. With
no view of people or the natural world outside the room, the room itself becomes a
darkened dreamlike landscape of which Oinos can “render no distinct account” apart
from the feeling of limbo in having both heightened senses and dormant thought. In spite
of the “terrible state of existence” in which the narrator and his companions are kept,
Oinos writes:
Yet we laughed and were merry in our proper way — which was hysterical; and sang the songs of Anacreon — which were madness; and drank deeply — although the purple wine reminded us of blood. For there was yet another tenant of our chamber in the person of young Zoilus. Dead, and at full length he lay, enshrouded; — the genius and the demon of the scene. (190)

Oinos tells us that the songs “were madness,” weaving in this theme that has been occurring again and again in the tales. As Michael Williams (1988) argues, “although the songs were ‘those of the son of Teios,’ which epitomize the denial of time, his effort is undercut first by the simple fact that they are not his own songs — his voice can only echo those already sung by a man long dead” (58). There is also another layer to the songs of Anacreon and the inescapability of time which John Hollander hints at in a separate context by arguing that the “Anacreontic […] complains of its author’s lyre and how it could only play songs of love, despite his desire to sing epic” (The Untuning 129). Like the tales described in the first part of this thesis that use madness to foreground music’s removal from an original source, a mythological origin that unifies words and music, this tale describes the “songs of Anacreon” as madness because they convey the futile attempt to celebrate life as they sit before a corpse that becomes a “demon” and perversely a “genius.” This corpse, corporate silence, provides the antithesis to the shadow, the “nameless elf.” In another way, the corpse represents life turning to death and the shadow represents death turning to life. Acting in opposition to one another, “Whereas the corpse […] offered a recognizably human form onto which the narrator could project ‘expression’ and significance, the shadow is just shadow, silent and unmotivated” (M. Williams 58), and darkly absolute.

Indeed, as Oinos goes into detail about the singing, something other than the human fear or celebration of life in rejection of bodily death emerges:
But although I, Oinos, felt that the eyes of the departed were upon me, still I forced myself not to perceive the bitterness of their expression, and, gazing down steadily into the depths of the ebony mirror, sang with a loud and sonorous voice the songs of the son of Teios. But gradually my songs they ceased, and their echoes, rolling afar off among the sable draperies of the chamber, became weak, and undistinguishable, and so faded away. And lo! from among those sable draperies where the sounds of the song departed, there came forth a dark and undefined shadow — a shadow such as the moon, when low in heaven, might fashion from the figure of a man: but it was the shadow neither of man, nor of God, nor of any familiar thing. (190)

The “echoes” of the “songs” continue until they “faded away,” but the departure of the “sounds of the song” gives rise to the “dark and undefined shadow.” Whereas “song” in Poe’s poetry is undefined, not necessarily ever sung at all in a way that can be described in terms of real world music, this “song” is more connected to real world music by being compared to Anacreon. As in the other examples in this thesis, those songs are not musically scored, such that Oinos’s songs, once moving into performance in the real world sense, become associated with utterance. However, like in Poe’s poetry, the departure of this specific, worldly, “loud and sonorous” song, continued through its “echoes,” leads to the emergence of something undefined and otherworldly.

Douglas Anderson (1975) explains this scene of Oinos and his peers:

awaiting their own grim fate as they watch over the corpse, attempting in vain to bolster their spirits by singing as loudly as possible ‘the songs of the son of Teios,’ Anacreontic hymns to pleasure and to resignation. Oinos himself almost perversely directs his voice toward the table’s glossy surface, producing a crowd of weakening echoes to which only his dead friend appears to be listening, until a shadow [...] emerges from the same draperies which consumed his last notes. (36)

Anderson also interprets the Shadow’s response as resembling in “composite speech” the “plural echoes that had accompanied Oinos’s desperate song, [...] Its ‘cadences’ are [...] the aggregate utterance of a human multitude: an audible census of the dead that
gives voice to the ‘dead weight’ of sensory life” (37). A certain link between musicality and the aggregate voice of a multitude is indeed in Poe’s assertion that the “tones in the voice of the shadow were not the tones of any one being, but of a multitude of beings, and, varying in their cadences from syllable to syllable, fell duskily upon our ears in the well remembered and familiar accents of many thousand departed friends” (191). The multitudinous tones add to the terror in the scene, and he uses this more than once in his tales, as mentioned in the third chapter in terms of “The Fall of the House of Usher” and “The Black Cat.”

In “A Tale of the Ragged Mountains” (1844), the protagonist, Bedloe, describes a similar soundscape, that precedes the transformation of the landscape: “a low, continuous murmur, like that arising from a full, but gently-flowing river, came to my ears, intermingled with the peculiar hum of multitudinous human voices. While I listened in an extremity of astonishment — [...] a strong and brief gust of wind bore off the incumbent fog as if by the wand of an enchanter” (944). In this case, the murmur and the low sounds arising from the natural world are the earthly opposition to the multiple familiar tones of the “thousand departed friends” that arose in “Shadow. — A Parable.”

In “The Conversation of Eiros and Charmion” (1839), the connection between death and the indeterminate, multitudinous, breathy sound is made even more distinct, in that Eiros no longer hears “that mad, rushing, horrible sound, like the ‘voice of many waters’” after he dies (456). That “voice of many waters,” when tied not to the natural world as in “A Tale of the Ragged Mountains,” but to the dark unknown, as in “The Fall of the House of Usher,” is associated with the “mad,” with the “horrible,” with that which voices the terrifying question of what happens not to the body, but to the soul after death.
Returning then to “Shadow. — A Parable,” as Michael Williams argues, “Confronted by his unmotivated shadow-text, Oinos attempts to place it [...] He hopes that it will speak with a single authoritative voice that will give it unity, but it does not; [...] At this moment of Oinos’s discovery [...], the tale abruptly ceases” (59). In this text, the figure of the shadow itself is an attempt “to give substance to the unknowable — the moment of biological death that is either terminal point or threshold to another condition that is feared, or longed for, or both. To the living, Shadow both marks an absolute secret and, in itself, is indefinite and unknowable” (M. Williams 55). It is only the fact of the Shadow’s existence as an “absolute secret” that allows it to be born from the echoes of Oinos’s song. Returning to Peter Dayan’s argument regarding Orpheus, literature “identified with music” is what “allows us to lead that which we love out of obscurity; but only for so long as we continue not to name it, not to look at it” (Music Writing 98). Yet in Poe’s case, that “which we love” and which we lead “out of obscurity” transforms as well and more powerfully into that which we fear, so long as it represents what one “cannot see, of a ghost, of one who returns, of a ‘revenant’” (Music Writing 97).

“The Cask of Amontillado”: Bells and the Single Note in Poe’s Tales

“The Cask of Amontillado” (1846) is also a tale of doubling, as a number of critics have effectively argued in varying ways (see, for instance, D. Hoffman, Rodriguez, Sweet). The narrator, Montresor, parallels his nemesis, Fortunato: “Montresor. Fortunato. Are these not synonymous? [...] But has not Montresor walled
up himself in this revenge?” (D. Hoffman 218-19). Moreover, the story takes place on “one evening during the supreme madness of the carnival season” (1257). As Peter Burke (1978) explains, “Carnival was an enactment of ‘the world turned upside down’ [...]. There was physical reversal [...]. Also represented was the reversal of the relations between man and man, whether age reversal, sex reversal, or other inversion of status” (Burke 268). The image of the “world turned upside down” positions this tale; Montresor tells us that Fortunato “was a man to be respected and even feared,” but when Montresor meets him on the night of his revenge during carnival, “the man wore motley. He had on a tight-fitting parti-striped dress, and his head was surmounted by the conical cap and bells” (1257).

Indeed, the only real characterisation of Fortunato is as a fool for the entirety of the tale, a characterisation that hinges upon the bells of his costume. Rodríguez points out, “The sounding bells of Fortunato’s cap will recur many times throughout the pilgrimage to his immolation, as a reminder of mortal and contrapuntal parodic accompaniment” (44). As they make their way into the catacombs, Montresor realises that “the bells upon [Fortunato’s] cap jingled as he strode” (1258), and when Fortunato stops to drink some wine, he “paused and nodded to [Montresor] familiarly, while his bells jingled’” (1259), and the “wine sparkled in his eyes and the bells jingled” (1260).

Returning once again to Foucault, there is another kind of madman he describes: “the character of the Madman, the Fool, or the Simpleton assumes more and more importance. [...] he stands center stage as the guardian of truth — [...]. If folly leads each man into a blindness where he is lost, the madman, on the contrary, reminds each man of his truth” (Foucault 14). That truth ultimately deals with the “theme of death,” shifting it
from the notion of that “from which nothing escapes” to “mockery of madness [that] replaces death and its solemnity” (15). From here on, “Death’s annihilation is no longer anything because it was already everything, because life itself was only futility, vain words, a squabble of cap and bells. Madness is the *déjà-là* of death” (16). What “death unMASKS was never more than a mask [...] when the madman laughs, he already laughs with the laugh of death; the lunatic, anticipating the macabre, has disarmed it” (16). This is a madness closely akin to that explored throughout this thesis, a madness that expresses the underside of the world, the tomb or the dark absolute; through the recognition that bodily death “is no longer anything because it was already everything,” this madness, the “*déjà-là* of death,” surpasses the corporeal and terrifyingly echoes the fears of “The Shadow. — A Parable,” in that it is one in which ordinary language does not suffice to voice the unknown counterpart of death, and instead the bell takes its place.

Although Foucault claims that “life itself was only futility, vain words, a squabble of cap and bells,” surely if the madman “already laughs with the laugh of death,” if he has “disarmed it,” then his bells voice a more absolute, Deathly theme. Thus, returning to “The Cask of Amontillado,” the story’s denouement that rests upon Fortunato’s sad jest, his characterisation as fool, unfolds the permutations of the bells in telling ways. Once Fortunato has been entombed, Montresor describes his reaction:

But now there came from out the niche a low laugh that erected the hairs upon my head. It was succeeded by a sad voice, which I had difficulty in recognising as that of the noble Fortunato.

The voice said — ‘Ha! ha! ha! — he! he! — a very good joke indeed — an excellent jest. we will have many a rich laugh about it at the palazzo — he! he! he! — over our wine — he! he! he! [...] Let us be gone.’
‘Yes,’ I said, ‘let us be gone.’
‘For the love of God, Montresor!’
‘Yes,’ I said, ‘for the love of God!’

But to these words I hearkened in vain for a reply. I grew impatient. I called aloud—‘Fortunato!’ No answer. I called again—‘Fortunato!’ No answer still. I thrust a torch through the remaining aperture and let it fall within. There came forth in return only a jingling of the bells. My heart grew sick—on account of the dampness of the catacombs. [...] In póce recquiescat! (1263)

As in “Eldorado,” in which the repetition of the word “shadow” develops the earthly shadow to the notion of age and bodily death and finally to the incorporeal, terrifying, unknown of the soul’s death, the repetition of the bells in this story marks a similar transition. Indeed, the bells represent an extreme case in the spectrum of types of music in Poe’s work as they most capably voice the unknown of death. In this case, the bells work as counterparts to the associations of folly and of jest, throwing back onto Montresor all the qualities he tries to impose on Fortunato. To reiterate Foucault’s point, “Death’s annihilation is no longer anything because it was already everything, because life itself was only futility, vain words, a squabble of cap and bells. Madness is the déjà-là of death” (16). Fortunato’s body dies, but his physical immolation, although horrifying, does not point to the unknown terror of the beyond. His bells, rather, answering Montresor’s final act, respond with the notion that physical “Death’s annihilation is no longer anything because it was always everything,” and they in turn voice the question of what happens, perversely, to both characters’ souls in that final scene. The terror of the tale arises as the possibility of non-physical death arises in ways that can no longer be articulated with words, the narrator “hearkened in vain for a reply,” and at the moment of Fortunato’s immolation, only a “jingling of the bells” returns to him; Fortunato’s physical death was “always everything” and so is “no longer anything,”
but deeper, darker, and unarticulated questions arise from the bells that point back to Montresor himself.

Bells are continually associated with the meeting of the earthly and the otherworldly, persistently ending in the reminder of death and the unknown in Poe’s works. In his description of the dying process in “The Colloquy of Monos and Una” (1841), Monos “became possessed by a vague uneasiness — an anxiety such as the sleeper feels when sad real sounds fall continuously within his ear — low distant bell-tones, solemn, at long but equal intervals, and commingling with melancholy dreams” (614). The illustration that the “bell-tones” fall at “long but equal intervals” heightens the traditionally human musical element of the sound through similarity to the rhythm of a song, but that does not disguise the fact that the bell-tones do not appear to make any different tonal impression on the listener. They work as music, however, because of the description of their effect, that they possess Monos with “a vague uneasiness,” which describes the effect of the impending other. The sound imparts a subtle, if evanescent implication that leaves the listener with a sense of the undefined beyond. Indeed, the sound creates the liminal space between earth and otherworldly that allows Poe to write with his trademark ubiquitous feeling of madness.

Furthermore, Monos conveys his heightened senses associated with the process of death, describing his awareness that “issuing from the flame of each lamp, (for there were many,) there flowed unbrokenly into [his] ears a train of melodious monotone” (614). The concept of a “melodious monotone” would seem more like an oxymoron than a useful descriptor. However, its place is clear enough in the spectrum of Poe’s music, between melody and the single note. The melodious monotone takes us further along the
musical scale towards the idea of death, as it does not necessitate either rhythm or change in note as in a traditional song, it moves towards silence. Monos describes the process of dying, telling Una: “Thus your wild sobs floated into my ear with all their mournful cadences, and were appreciated in their every variation of sad tone; but they were soft musical sounds and no more” (613-14). Monos goes on to describe the “wild sobs” as issuing “gaspingly, with loud cries” in the real world, but that he perceived them as having “floated” into his ear, of “every variation of sad tone,” and as “soft musical sounds and no more.” As he dies, the theme that has been recurring in Poe’s works is reversed. Rather than the “musical sounds” importing something otherworldly, they are earth-bound, imparting no meaning to the dead. Indeed, Monos describes his reason at this point as “extinct” as he moves from the realm of the rational to the realm of the irrational, or the supernatural. Thus, as Monos moves closer to death, the musicality of Una’s sobs imparts even less anxiety for comprehension, they simply are.

“The Bells”: Music of the Unknown

In “The Pit and the Pendulum” (1842), the narrator also describes that “there stole into [his] fancy, like a rich musical note, the thought of what sweet rest there must be in the grave” (682). The “sweet rest” of the “grave” is compared to the movement into one’s mind of “a rich musical note.” The sound of this “musical note” is not evoked, but the idea of a single “musical note” is always allied with the idea of death. Nowhere is that more clearly indicated then in “The Bells” (1849) itself. The poem begins:

Hear the sledges with the bells —
   Silver bells!
What a world of merriment their melody foretells!
How they tinkle, tinkle, tinkle,
In the icy air of night!
While the stars that oversprinkle
All the Heavens, seem to twinkle
With a crystalline delight;
Keeping time, time, time,
In a sort of Runic rhyme,
To the tintinnabulation that so musically wells
From the bells, bells, bells, bells,
Bells, bells, bells —
From the jingling and the tinkling of the bells. ([G] 1-14)

The poem begins with the speaker demanding the reader to “Hear,” to “hear” the silver bells that typically decorate the front of a sleigh, or sledge. Of course, the reader cannot hear the bells, but can certainly imagine the real world sound of sleigh bells. Returning once more to Leppert’s terminology of real world music, the first two lines fall along a description closely aligned to it. They denote a sound that is called upon to be experienced as “sound via the sense of hearing,” and that has a visible source, and that has the potential of being notated (Leppert 64). Musical terminology does not infiltrate these first two lines, however, and as the stanza progresses it becomes more complex.

The third line introduces a refrain that recurs and changes throughout the poem: “What a world of merriment their melody foretells!” This real world sound of the first two lines takes a sudden shift into the imagined interpretation of the narrator. Firstly, the speaker emphasises the “what” of the phrase, questioning the parameters of the “world of merriment” foretold. Secondly, in doing so, he interprets their sound as “melody,” and it is that interpretation of the sound in musical terminology that leads to the world of merriment foretold. Mirroring the melody of the bells is the twinkling of the stars above, whose twinkling is compared to a “Runic rhyme,” or a kind of incantation or spell, that backs the “tintinnabulation that so musically wells” from the bells, that themselves jingle
and tinkle. Thus, as the stanza continues, it becomes less and less akin to real world music. The music and the melody of the bells stem from their association with an unknown world of merriment foretold; the undeciphered twinkling of the stars in the sky represent that earthly separation from the music of the spheres.

Similarly, the second stanza continues with the same themes, building upon them as it progresses to the crucial third stanza:

Hear the mellow wedding bells —
   Golden bells!
What a world of happiness their harmony foretells!
   Through the balmy air of night
   How they ring out their delight! —
   From the molten-golden notes
   And all in tune,
   What a liquid ditty floats
To the turtle-dove that listens while she gloats
   On the moon!
   Oh, from out the sounding cells
What a gush of euphony voluminously wells!
   How it swells!
   How it dwells
   On the Future! — how it tells
   Of the rapture that impels
   To the swinging and the ringing
   Of the bells, bells, bells! —
   Of the bells, bells, bells, bells,
   Bells, bells, bells —
   To the rhyming and the chiming of the bells! ([G] 15-35)

Whereas the speaker interprets the silver bells as melody, he interprets the golden bells as “harmony,” which foretell of a “world of happiness” that is similarly questioned. Rather than describe this “world of happiness,” the speaker asks and exclaims “What” a world they foretell. Like the bells of the first stanza, the golden bells themselves fit into the framework of real world music, which immediately changes to something else after the third line. They ring a “delight,” rather than a tune, their “ditty” is “liquid,” and
moves to a turtle-dove who gloats on the moon. They build, then, to a “gush of euphony” which cannot be defined, a euphony that dwells on the future, continuing its indefinite image as it builds. That which they foretell seems timeless, outside of the realm of the present, a circumscribed otherworldly bliss to which we have no access. As Paul Williams (1968) suggests, “the third line in each of these stanzas reads that a world of merriment and a world of happiness is foretold. In the third stanza, however, line three brings the terror of the alarm bells into the present world and time. The despair and horror is immediate” (24):

Hear the loud alarum bells —
   Brazen bells!
What tale of terror, now, their turbulency tells!
   In the startled ear of Night
   How they scream out their affright!
   Too much horrified to speak,
      They can only shriek, shriek,
      Out of tune,

[...]

What a tale their terror tells
   Of despair!
How they clang and clash and roar!
What a horror they outpour
   In the bosom of the palpitating air! ([G] 36-43, 52-56)

The stanza expands and reintroduces themes discussed continually throughout this thesis. The “loud alarum bells” describe a real world sound, which mutates in the speaker’s mind not to music, but to the “shriek,” and the listener is not a human, but the “Night.” As in the first part of this thesis, the “shriek” voices that which cannot be articulated, as these bells are “too horrified to speak.” They are described as doing so “out of tune,” or discordantly, to return to that idea of bells ‘jangled out of time and
harsh.’ In this case, however, like the shriek of the black cat, they speak to the material and the demonic earthly components of death, or to the physical horror of death.

This mutates to the death associated with the shadow, the death of the unknown, the underside of the world in the next stanza, in which “the merriment and happiness foretold in stanzas one and two are fulfilled in the poem as that of the king of the Ghouls and his followers. May not the poem be said to state, therefore, that the existence of life foretells the triumph of death, which undercuts mankind’s moments of purest apparent joy?” (P. Williams 25):

Hear the tolling of the bells —
   Iron bells!
*What* a world of solemn thought their monody compels!
   In the silence of the night
   How we shiver with affright
   At the melancholy meaning of the tone!
   For every sound that floats
   From the rust within their throats
   Is a groan.
And the people — ah, the people
   They that dwell up in the steeple
   All alone,
And who, tolling, tolling, tolling,
   In that muffled monotone,
Feel a glory in so rolling
   On the human heart a stone —
   They are neither man nor woman —
   They are neither brute nor human,
   They are Ghouls: — ([G] 70-87)

The descriptions now mutate, bringing in language used in Poe’s ballads. The stanza begins just like the other three, with a call to “Hear” the bells, but now they do not “foretell,” but they “compel” a “world of solemn thought,” forcing their resonance onto the present. That which compels this solemnity is, moreover, described as “monody” and the “meaning” is found in their “tone,” which is in turn compared to the “groan,”
replicating the sound of the speaker’s heart in “Ulalume.” Indeed, the groaning, the monody, and the single tone betoken and call out to the kind of music that lies in-between the real world and the otherworldly, to the powerfully liminal. In positioning the iron bells in this way, the final stanza becomes instantly haunted, like the landscape of “Ulalume,” with ghouls:

And their king it is who tolls: —
And he rolls, rolls, rolls, rolls
    A Pæan from the bells!
And his merry bosom swells
    With the Pæan of the bells!
And he dances and he yells;
Keeping time, time, time,
In a sort of Runic rhyme,
    To the Pæan of the bells —
Of the bells: — ([G] 88-97)

As Paul Williams observes, “the sound of the iron bells is three times called a paean, a song of triumph, which in the poem could only be sung in praise of death. The ‘Runic rhyme’ of stanza one reappears twice in the final stanza, and is described as ‘happy,’ as though its meaning is quite clear to the dancing figures of death” (25). This brings up a crucial connection to another of Poe’s poems, “A Pæan,” which more clearly illustrates the resonances of this “song of triumph” being invoked in the context of death.

“A Pæan”: Solemn Music

“A Pæan” (1831), which transforms later into the poem “Lenore” (1843), is often considered “a steppingstone to ‘The Raven’” (Poems 330), first published in 1845, in which Lenore is also a character. As with the other poems mentioned, death is a theme, and the words from a musical vocabulary arise in the consideration of the
meeting point of the earthly and the otherworldly. The early version of the poem has a speaker describing the events leading up to the funeral of his beloved, “Helen.” The poem begins:

How shall the burial rite be read?  
The solemn song be sung?  
The requiem for the loveliest dead,  
That ever died so young? (1-4)

Thus, the question at the centre of this poem’s beginning is constructed in a series of parallels, which draw into the notion of the “requiem” the questions “how shall” a “burial rite be read,” and a “solemn song be sung.” This instantly confuses the idea of reading and singing while pulling from the notion of “solemn music” as discussed in the contexts of “Fanny” and “The Sleeper,” which associates solemnity with “learned-contemplative” models of music as opposed to the “common-active” models (The Untuning 256). This divide between what defines the “common” and what defines the “contemplative” forms the thrust of the poem. Moreover, the title adds to this confusion in that a “pæan” differs from any other form of song, and is often attributed to “thanksgiving for deliverance, victory in battle, […] (hence also) a war song invoking such victory” tied to mythology (“pæan,” n.). There is then also a dual notion of the “requiem” and the “pæan” as opposing in remembering death and victory. Additionally, the pæan, in being part of a specifically mythological history, is not anything Poe’s readers will have heard. These connotations to the term illuminate the first few lines of the poem; thus, the title of the poem either asks for or celebrates victory via a communication between earth and the gods, while the first few lines refer to the earthly song in a specifically Christian tradition.
The poem continues:

They loved her for her wealth —
And they hated her for her pride —
But she grew in feeble health,
And they love her — that she died.

They tell me (while they speak
Of her ‘costly broider’d pall’)
That my voice is growing weak —
That I should not sing at all —

Or that my tone should be
Tun’d to such solemn song
So mournfully — so mournfully,
That the dead may feel no wrong. (9-20)

The speaker places himself as the defender of the woman who has died, claiming that her friends “love her — that she died.” These implicitly false “friends” of the deceased argue that the narrator “should not sing at all,” but that if he does sing, the narrator’s “tone” should be “tun’d to “such solemn song” that the “dead may feel no wrong.” They do not name a song he must sing, but rather argue what the speaker’s “tone” must be, implying he should take up the mournful tone of the requiem. The narrator knows, however, that the notion of his “tone” “tun’d” to “solemn song” is inherently problematic: it engenders in the crass, “common-active” mode of heard music the implications of the unheard, “learned-contemplative” prayer, to adopt Hollander’s terms (The Untuning 256). Thus, the narrator rejects the problematic “mournful” “requiem,” and he decides, “I will no requiem raise, / But waft thee on thy flight, / With a Pæan of old days” (38-40). Rejecting the requiem, representative of the modern, readily imagined, Christian funeral, the speaker adopts the mythological pæan. Rather than sing
“Of the dead — dead — who lies / All motionless,” the speaker “waft[s]” her to heaven with a “Pæan.”

When the poem becomes “Lenore” in a later incarnation, these ideas remain and become even stronger, even though the shape of the poem itself changes. In this instance, the poem begins:

Ah, broken is the golden bowl! — the spirit flown forever!
Let the bell toll! — a saintly soul floats on the Stygian river: —

Come, let the burial rite be read — the funeral song be sung! —
An anthem for the queenliest dead that ever died so young —
A dirge for her the doubly dead in that she died so young. (1-2, 5-7)

Beginning in the voice of the false friends of Lenore, this version has them directly and immediately call for the “burial rite” to be read and the “funeral song” to be sung, both iterations of audible and real world music associated with utterance. More importantly, they call for the “bell” to “toll” for her, as her “soul floats on the Stygian river.” Then the lines that began the earlier version of the poem transform here. The speaker of the earlier version of the poem, now the third person Guy de Vere (3), directly responds to the poem’s initial speakers:

‘Wretches! ye loved her for her wealth and ye hated her for her pride;
And, when she fell in feeble health, ye blessed her — that she died: —
How shall the ritual then be read — the requiem how be sung
By you — by yours, the evil eye — by yours the slanderous tongue
That did to death the innocence that died and died so young?’

[...]

‘Avaunt! — avaunt! to friends from fiends the indignant ghost is riven —
From Hell unto a high estate within the utmost Heaven —
From moan and groan to a golden throne beside the King of Heaven —
Let no bell toll, then, lest her soul, amid its hallowed mirth
Should catch the note as it doth float from up the damned Earth!
And I — tonight my heart is light: — no dirge will I upraise,
But waft the angel on her flight with a Pæan of old days!’ (5-9, 20-26)

More than a too wordy, too material, too earthly insult to Lenore’s spirit, the ‘song’ that Lenore’s false friends suggest becomes associated with that which actually impedes her from transcendence. These false friends become “fiends” who control Lenore’s “indignant ghost,” that once freed by Guy de Vere makes the transit from “moan and groan” to “Heaven,” which is conspicuously absent of sound descriptors. The note, then, carries a power in that liminal space that Lenore must pass through; the bell that tolls the single note could be something that Lenore’s “soul” could “catch” in ways that pull her back towards “the damnéd Earth,” a concept that the “wretches” to whom he responds clearly do not understand. Indeed, the narrator has already decided that a return to a more ancient hymn, a “pæan” to Apollo, is the only acceptable memorial for her because its musical signifiers of the “pæan” are also chosen without any sound-based, heard, or traditionally “musical” signification, more directly relating to an ancient idea of the relationship between music and poetry.

This association between the single note and death has reverberations in “The Bells,” as well. Returning to that poem, it ends:

Keeping time, time, time,
In a sort of Runic rhyme,
    To the throbbing of the bells —
Of the bells, bells, bells —
    To the sobbing of the bells: —
Keeping time, time, time,
    As he knells, knells, knells,
In a happy Runic rhyme,
    To the rolling of the bells —
Of the bells, bells, bells: —
    To the tolling of the bells —
Of the bells, bells, bells, bells,
    Bells, bells, bells —
To the moaning and the groaning of the bells. ([G] 98-112)

Martin Roth (1979), who writes about the “peculiar music” of the spondee in Poe’s poetry (16), says that for Poe, metre “continues to develop as a result of the principle of equality and monotonity, insuring beauty’s continued existence in and through a fallen world. The development of metrics is both angelic and perverse, as all poetic acts are in Poe” (15). For Roth, Poe believes that humans are so fallen that they cannot perceive the original, more pure “simple equality” of monotonity, and thus must invent rhythm to allow their fallen ears to perceive beauty at all, but such an act is necessarily a “perversion” from an ideal. Poe’s “poetry represents a wild fling into decadence; it is an expression of the diseased nature of the poet in the present,” such that due to their “music,” his works’ poetic effect is accessible to the reader, but is by nature representative of our fallen state (Roth 16). This is true not just of the spondee, but also of the subject itself of the single note in Poe’s works. John Minahan (1992) describes a parallel use of bells in Keats’s sonnet “Written in Disgust of Vulgar Superstition”:

The music of vulgar superstition — the melancholy tolling, the sermon’s horrid sound — is unusual but ordinary; it exists specifically an other thing, exclusive of the usual form of ordinary life outside the church. By repeating ‘some other’ and ‘more,’ Keats hammers home that sense of not-this-ness. He also demonstrates thereby that this music involves repetition but no finer tone: again and again the bells toll, but they lead only to ‘more dreadful cares.’ This music is the basest rhetoric: like the horrid sermon, the bells are organized sounds calculated to have a particular effect. In this case the effect is not pleasure but its opposite, which perhaps becomes, for those who heed the tolling of the bells, a perverse kind of pleasure. (52)

In Poe, the bells indeed represent a kind of otherness, what Minahan calls a “not-this-ness,” which act like a “horrid sermon” that reminds one of the unknown of the nonmaterial aspects of death. However, in Poe, more than a “pervasive kind of pleasure,”
the bells are a perversion that speaks both of damnation and the ideal from which it falls. They convey a sense of the other, but they do so in an earthly fashion, for if one attempts to ascend to the ideal, as Lenore does, the single note can only pull one back to that sense of terror. Nowhere is this hierarchy more evident than in “The Masque of the Red Death” (1842).

“The Masque of the Red Death”: The Single Note

Poe sets the scene in ways analogous to “The Cask of Amontillado”: “There were buffoons, there were improvisatori, there were ballet-dancers, there were musicians, there was Beauty, there was wine. All these and security were within. Without was the ‘Red Death’” (671). Similar to “The Shadow. — A Parable” in setting, instead of a corpse and the songs of Anacreon, there are “musicians” and “Beauty,” “improvisatori” and “ballet-dancers.” The main object of the story is a clock whose:

pendulum swung to and fro with a dull, heavy, and monotonous clang; and [...] there came from the brazen lungs of the clock a sound which was clear and loud and deep and exceedingly musical, but of so peculiar a note and emphasis that, at each lapse of an hour, the musicians of the orchestra were constrained to pause, momentarily, in their performance, to harken to the sound; and thus the waltzers perforce ceased their evolutions; and there was a brief disconcert of the whole gay company; and, while the chimes of the clock yet rang, it was observed that the giddiest grew pale, and the more aged and sedate passed their hands over their brows as if in confused revery or meditation. But when the echoes had fully ceased, a light laughter at once pervaded the assembly; the musicians looked at each other and smiled as if at their own nervousness and folly, and made whispering vows, each to the other, that the next chiming of the clock should produce in them no similar emotion; and then, after the lapse of sixty minutes, (which embrace three thousand and six hundred seconds of the Time that flies,) there came yet another chiming of the clock, and then were the same disconcert and tremulousness and meditation as before. (672-73)

The human-created, earthly sounds of the orchestra must pause to the “exceedingly
musical” sound of the clock, that single note that literally ‘exceeds’ music. The clock provides an extreme version of personified sound that allows for a cursory glimpse into the beyond; although the partygoers are aware of the plague outwith the palace, the clock’s note points to another lurking form of death. The sound is no longer simply described through the filtration of a narrator, but can only be described through its effect upon the souls of the company at large. Moreover, just as Poe uses breath-like qualities in his other stories to voice that which remains elusive to utterance, Poe here personifies the clock with “brazen lungs.” With that small personification, the clock seems to impart unarticulated meaning to its audience, but the delineation or meaning of that sound remains absent, inferring that the sound exists for its own sake in its definition as a reference to a supernal ideal, in this case, Death. To return once more to the division between the music of the ancients and modern music, such that “modernity, by disenchanting the world, divides it” and thus modern “music is therefore divided” (Chua 23), “In the enchanted world of the ancients, music was an airy substance, it did not occupy space, it was its very essence” (Chua 52). As one looks toward that idealised past, represented as linked to the otherworldly, music becomes intrinsically tied with notions of ether, atmosphere, and breath, which in this case, become darkly liminal in the clock’s “brazen lungs.”

Moreover, this dark iteration of “music” as “an airy substance,” the single note breathed from the ebony clock, takes a hierarchical place over the music of the orchestra in the scene. As Douglas Anderson notes:

[at] first the suite seems to echo the seven unique tones of the musical scale, but ‘disconcert’ rather than harmony arises from its design whenever the gigantic ebony clock in the black apartment begins to strike. Confronted with this fatal
sign of the ‘stricken’ hour not even Prospero’s orchestra can maintain its playing. The clock’s note tolerates no competitor for human attention, much as the layout of the entire suite precludes a comprehensive survey of its extent. (151)

Poe makes the image even more pointed as he continues:

To and fro in the seven chambers there stalked, in fact, a multitude of dreams. And these — the dreams — writhed in and about, taking hue from the rooms, and causing the wild music of the orchestra to seem as the echo of their steps. And, anon, there strikes the ebony clock which stands in the hall of the velvet. And then, for a moment, all is still, and all is silent save the voice of the clock. The dreams are stiff-frozen as they stand. But the echoes of the chime die away — they have endured but an instant — and a light, half-subdued laughter floats after them as they depart. And now again the music swells, and the dreams live, and writhe to and fro more merrily than ever. (673-74)

Poe continues to create part of the eeriness of this passage through the subtle use of breath. The ball-goers, likened to “dreams” in a way reminiscent of the “luxury of dream” in Poe’s “Marginalia” (1331), take on wormlike attributes as they “stalked” and “writhe” and became “stiff-frozen” as the clock chimed. The worm, an agent of death and decay, renders the “dreams,” the waltzers, symbolic of death, darkness, and decay themselves as they “writhe” to the orchestra’s music. The breath of the passage, voicing the unarticulated meaning that controls them all, stems from the “voice of the clock” itself, and the only other example of breath in the passage, the “half-subdued laughter,” remains carefully unattributed as it floats after “them,” the chimes and the dreams, as though existing as an after-effect of the clock’s voice, a partial meaning injected into the scene by the clock itself. Although there can be more than one interpretation of what the “dreams” represent, the chiming of the voice of the clock not only reminds the dancers of their ultimate fate, Death, but reinforces the hierarchy of music established in this thesis and the association of Death with the indefinite meaning of such sounds. That the “wild
music of the orchestra” seems as the “echo of their steps” reveals the humans’ entrenchment with the worldly, that they cannot escape their own frail humanity that drives their every action. That the human orchestra creates sounds that are “wild” pushes it further away from idealised sound than even the breathy voice of the clock that works in a way that creates an undefined spiritual effect upon its listeners. The human orchestra thus becomes a symbolical representation of the imperfect or sinful humans and their constant push away from divinity. The dreams become “stiff-frozen as they stand,” as though they symbolically die a bit every time the clock chimes, and they are even described with the same language as Poe’s “The Conqueror Worm.”

The poem, consisting of five stanzas, is generally interpreted as corresponding to five acts of a play (Lubbers 375). In this framework, it becomes an inversion of the “theatrum mundi by the Elizabeth and Jacobean poetic imagination” (377). That framework, in which the “world was viewed as a theater, the earth as a stage, life as a play from womb to tomb” (377), and in which “the world as a stage had been filled with the Elizabethan scheme of creation from top to middle: God, the angels, man” (378), turns upside down in Poe’s poem. Instead, “the implied scale is destroyed [...]. The angels retain their customary seats but lose their guardian function. The great chain is disrupted, its links are rearranged” (378). The poem begins:

Lo! ‘tis a gala night
   Within the lonesome latter years!
An angel throng, bewinged, bedight
   In veils, and drowned in tears,
Sit in a theatre, to see
   A play of hopes and fears,
While the orchestra breathes fitfully
   The music of the spheres. (1-8)
These opening lines are reminiscent of a number of images that have been recurring throughout this thesis. The “angel throng” is “bedight / In veils,” as though the “gala night” is but a funeral. Moreover, the “veils” hark back to the notion introduced in chapter four, that Poe calls “‘Art,’ [...] ‘the reproduction of what the Senses perceive in Nature through the veil of the soul.’ [...] The naked Senses sometimes see too little — but then always they see too much” (“Marginalia” 1458). The idea of Art in an ideal, rather than a practical sense returns along with the notion of the soul taking on a dual incarnation as breath. Thus, when the “orchestra breathes fitfully,” there is a problematised mutable image of the angels’ interpreting the world through the “veils” of the soul, an interpretation reflected in the fitful breath that does not articulate, but informs or voices struggle. That this fitful breathing is tied to the notion of the music of the spheres resonates with failure of universal proportions. The orchestra, outside the world’s stage, is reciprocally affected by the broken connection to the world, by the earth’s failure. Whereas all the other examples of this thesis that connect to the notion of the music of the spheres focus on the earthly viewpoint, this speaks of the celestial suffering, as well.

**Conclusion**

Beginning by drawing out the set of divisions that this thesis discusses into the growing divide between earthly and otherworldly iterations of various themes, such as shadow and Shadow, death and Death, silence and Silence, this chapter explored a set of singularities in Poe’s works. Starting with “Eldorado,” the only of Poe’s poems in which a human sings a song, the first part of this chapter reiterated the associations between a
dark liminality, death, and a music that, although drawing upon real world musical elements, resists real world musical definition. In doing so, it moved from notions of ‘song’ to bells and the single note as a distinctive instance of music in Poe’s works; although both inhabit the real world in various ways, both insist on rejecting a real world musical definition, and both most capably voice the horrifying unknown of death in Poe’s works. By approaching silence, the bells and the single note inform of worlds beyond this in ways that the fallen can experience them. In this way, the single note, bells, and themes of breath become intricately linked in Poe’s works, all voicing that which cannot be articulated, all taking precedence over that earthly music that is all too associated with that which can be defined, with that which can be named.
Conclusion

This thesis set out to explore a question that the introduction framed in terms of Bloom’s one concession regarding Poe, that he is “inescapable [...]": he dreamed universal nightmares” (xi). Bloom’s agreement with other scholars that “Poe dwells, with the rest of us, in Plato’s Cave but wants, more desperately than most do, to find his way out into the disembodied light” (xi), that he “was a religious writer without a religion,” and that he “had something to say,” even if he had “little skill in saying it” (xii), was tied to the impetus for exploring how Poe envisaged music and its place in his creative works, and whether music in Poe’s works, however it is conveyed, relates the enigmatic “something” that Poe had to say. In doing so, this thesis sought a different approach to the study of Poe and music than exists in current scholarship, instead analysing the contexts and implications of the vocabulary of music that arises in Poe’s creative works. This approach, in turn, untangled a musical spectrum in Poe’s works that works along a hierarchy of divinity.

At the base of this hierarchy is real world music, defined in this thesis through Richard Leppert’s terms as “experienced as sound via the sense of hearing,” as that which “refers to notated ‘instructions’ for producing such sounds,” and that which “is a sight, a richly semantic visual representation” (Leppert 64). Real world music becomes associated in Poe’s works with words, with utterance. When that which is best described as akin to real world music appears without the theme of madness, it is only in earthly love stories, such as in “The Spectacles” and Poe’s poetic “songs” “Eulalie” and “Song.” When that which is best described as akin to real world music appears with the theme of
madness, as in “The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether” and “Four Beasts in One,” music maintains its association with words, but also becomes harsh, discordant, representative of the “animal in man” who “no longer has any value as a sign of a Beyond [...] madness in the state of nature” (Foucault 73). Liminal music, however, begins to separate words from music. While yearning for an ancient mythological past that unified the two, Poe’s liminal protagonists can only move beyond the too earthly implications of real world music by separating utterance from that which is musically voiced. As they move further and further away from real world music, utterance begins to dissipate, and the reader is only left with a narrative interpretation of that which is enigmatically musically communicated. In doing so, that which is musically voiced becomes less and less describable in terms of the audible; music becomes more and more silent. Yet, Poe’s characters cannot continue to indefinitely ascend along this hierarchy towards the Silent, the Musical, in terms of that ancient chain of being that moved from earth to God. Humans are fallen, the chain has broken, and as we ascend we are less able to perceive Silence in our states; instead, that which incorporates deformity, darkness, a more liminal and fallen music, becomes a perversity that still points heavenwards.

In his “Marginalia,” Poe alludes to music in the real world sense as being distinguished from the other types of music this thesis explores: “In speaking of song-writing, I mean, of course, the composition of brief poems with an eye to their adaptation for music in the vulgar sense” (1435). This quotation leads into one of the passages that convince those like Burton Pollin to believe that Poe wrote his poems to be adapted to music in the real world sense, but the ways in which Poe transforms the term
‘music’ are inherent in this single line. Music “in the vulgar sense” is that which is associated with the real world, the heard, the playable, or all that which is allied with this thesis’s definition of it via Leppert. A similar divide between music “in the vulgar sense” and other forms of music arise in Poe’s reviews in ways that reflect the themes tied to real world music in this thesis. In one of his reviews of others’ poetry, Poe argues that “the ‘thunder-drum of Heaven’ is bathetic and grotesque in the highest degree — a commingling of the most sublime music of Heaven with the most utterly contemptible and common-place of Earth” (Rev. of *The Culprit Fay* 529). That “thunder-drum” cannot represent the heavenly because it is too associated with the real world, with the force of sound, whereas Poe’s conceptualisation of “the most sublime music of Heaven” must remain inaudible. Poe uses a similar comparison between the “lewd fiddling minstrels” and a higher kind of musician in his “Marginalia,” in claiming that “indefinitiveness [is] recognized by every musician who is not a mere fiddler, as an important point in the philosophy of his science — as the *soul*, indeed, of the sensations derivable from its practice — sensations which bewilder while they enthral — and which would *not* so enthral if they did not so bewilder” (1435).

In this way, liminality presents a more complex case in Poe. Moving beyond the notion of real world music as the base of Poe’s musical hierarchy, or “music in the vulgar sense,” that music which arises in narratives in which madness represents “strange knowledge, from that fantastic plain, from the underside of the world” (Foucault 12), or in which characters are caught between the earthly and the heavenly as a divine unknown, takes on paradoxical status that points towards the divine. Returning to the anecdote of Maria Malibran singing for a patient, the complexities that arise when
music in Poe’s works is less representative of real world music are formulated in the story:

Madame Malibran approached a piano which stood in the chamber, and ran her fingers over the keys. In an instant the poor maniac was all attention. She sang the romance in Otello. ‘Is this divine?’ exclaimed the young man, and he appeared violently excited. ‘No,’ he added, ‘this is the voice of a woman:’ then bursting into tears, he threw himself into a chair and sobbed aloud. (Merlin 214)

This story resonates deeply with Poe's notion that “when music affects us to tears, seemingly causeless, we weep not, as Gravina supposes, from ‘excess of pleasure’ but through excess of an impatient, petulant sorrow that, as mere mortals, we are as yet in no condition to banquet upon those supernal ecstasies of which the music affords us merely a suggestive and indefinite glimpse” (“Marginalia” 1313). Thus, in stories such as “The Fall of the House of Usher,” or in poems such as “Tamerlane,” Poe complicates and obscures music, rendering it less allied with real world music, to voice without articulation the divine that “mere mortals” cannot access. This inaccessible beyond constructs itself with both demonic and heavenly implications: the beyond is both the terrifying unknown associated with death and the hope of the heavenly hereafter.

The mystery of the otherworldly arises from the context of the music of the spheres. That, in Daniel Chua’s terms, what “the Romantics discovered as absolute music was a mere shadow of what Pythagoras formulated two thousand years earlier, for the absolute music he bequeathed to humanity was not so much a music to be composed as a music that composed the world” (15). The “‘taut string’ stretched between heaven and earth, [...] able to conceptualise the unitary structure of the entire cosmos” (Chua 77) has broken in Poe’s oeuvre, a rupture that paradoxically gives birth to a number of tropes that, in their failure, point to the beyond, such as bells, breath, and the single note.
In this way, when Baudelaire described Poe as having “uttered the ardent sighs of the fallen angel who remembers heaven” (126), his description of Poe’s utterance as “ardent sighs” alone in the context of “fallen angel who remembers heaven” reflexively ties together the absence of articulation in the stead of breath, which itself voices a failure that paradoxically points heavenward. Rather than the music of the spheres being silent to human ears due to their continual drone, the music of the spheres have been Silenced, forced into a separate realm of the Timeless, the Divine, or the Musical. Separately, the earthly has been made more audible, re-circumscribed into its own realm of time, the fallen, and the vulgarly musical.

Despite its failings, the presence of Music as an idea becomes Poe’s tool most closely allied with his conception of higher art literature. Returning to Peter Dayan’s notion of the Barthesian Orphic myth, the literary is closely associated to the Musical, as that the “moment at which Orpheus turns and sees her is the moment […] in which the shade would […] acquire a name; at that moment, literature would die. To sing well is to avoid that naming” (Music 97). For Poe, poetry becomes a kind of metonym for literature in its highest form. Poe writes,

Poetry has never been defined to the satisfaction of all parties. Perhaps, in the present condition of language it never will be. Words cannot hem it in. Its intangible and purely spiritual nature refuses to be bound down within the widest horizon of mere sounds. But it is not, therefore, misunderstood — at least, not by all men is it misunderstood. Very far from it. If, indeed, there be any one circle of thought distinctly and palpably marked out from amid the jarring and tumultuous chaos of human intelligence, it is the evergreen and radiant Paradise which the true poet knows, and knows alone, as the limited realm of his authority — as the circumscribed Eden of his dreams. (Rev. of The Culprit Fay 509)

This description of poetry is closely allied to those qualities of the Musical described throughout this thesis. The additional notion that Poe reveals in this quotation is key to
understanding why; Poe argues that there is a “circumscribed Eden” of the poet’s “dreams,” a “evergreen and radiant Paradise which the true poet knows, and knows alone.” Poe never describes the poet conveying this “circumscribed Eden” in words, but rather couches it in a description of poetry that refuses to “be bound down within the widest horizon of mere sounds.” Indeed, the sounds themselves would engender a failure. This mirrors another interpretation of Music in terms of this Orphic myth, as Peter Dayan posits: “True love is the love of a shadow that is always only in the process of coming to life, and can never be named; music, the discourse which cannot name, is the proof of its possibility. Literature, although the musical analogy permits its existence as an art, is always threatened by the possibility of naming” (Music 98). Going on to quote and translate Barthes, Dayan elaborates:

‘This Mallarmean language is Orpheus who can only save what he loves by renouncing it, and who nonetheless turns round just a little; it is Literature brought to the gates of the Promised Land, which is to say the gates of a world without literature, to which it would nonetheless be the duty of writers to bear witness.’ Why should the promised land be a land without literature? Because […] it would be a land of full and immediate presence; the truth would be there, before us; it would need no translators or interpreters. In this land, each name would be perfectly adequate and transparent to its sense. [...] Literature uses music to prove the possibility of a discourse that signifies without naming; music needs literature to articulate that proof, without which (as was generally the case before the nineteenth century) listeners might happily allow themselves to believe that music did indeed convey a meaning. Between them is ‘le chant’: the voice not as a vehicle for communicating a message, but as the material presence of the signifying process itself. (99)

Just as Dayan argues in this context that true “love is the love of a shadow that is always only in the process of coming to life,” that which moves beyond into the realm of the otherworldly, either through death or through a failure from an ancient unity, becomes a “shadow” or a shade that can take up either demonic or heavenly associations.
Moreover, it becomes that which is “always only in the process of coming to life” through Music as a signification “without naming,” much in the same way that Poe argues that the “indefinite is an element in the true ποιησις” (“Marginalia” 1331), or the “‘making’ that which is not yet; what is ‘made’ is not the poetized” (Heidegger 279). Thus, when Poe directly ties the indefinite to the Musical, asking, “Why do some persons fatigue themselves in attempts to unravel such fantasy-pieces as the ‘Lady of Shalott?’ As well unweave the ‘ventum textilem.’ […] I know that indefinitiveness is an element of the true music — I mean of the true musical expression” (“Marginalia” 1331), he ties together a continual sense of “making.” Just as in Dayan’s context “love is the love of a shadow that is always only in the process of coming into life,” in Poe’s works, Music continually “makes” the sense of the “shadow,” the beyond, the Silent otherworldly that can never be fully brought into definitive being. The weaving of the “ventum textilem,” the woven air that conflates notions of the soul, the breath, the spirit, with Music, the music of the spheres, becomes so central to Poe because it symbolises the continual “process of coming into life” of that which cannot be understood by any of the five senses, that which cannot be definitively pinned to the real world.
Works Cited


Dayan, Joan. “Poe, Locke and Kant.” Fisher 30-44.


Pahl, Dennis. “Sounding the Sublime: Poe, Burke, and the (Non)Sense of Language.”


---. “A Descent into the Maelström.” 1849 [C]. Mabbott, Tales 577-94.
---. “The Lake — To —.” 1845 [F]. Mabbott, Poems 84-86.


---. Rev. of Memoirs and Letters of Madame Malibran, by the Countess de Merlin.


---. “[Stanzas].” 1827. Mabbott, Poems 77-78.


