Created Sick, Commanded to be Sound:

Point Counter Point's Self-Referential Wordmusic

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On October 21, 1926, Aldous Huxley wrote to his father, Leonard:

> I am very busy preparing for and doing bits of an ambitious novel, the aim of which will be to show a piece of life, not only from a good many individual points of view, but also under its various aspects such as scientific, emotional, economic, political, aesthetic etc. The same person is simultaneously a mass of atoms, a physiology, a mind, an object with a shape that can be painted, a cog in the economic machine, a voter, a lover etc. etc. I shall try to imply at any rate the existence of the other categories of existence behind the ordinary categories in judging everyday emotional life. (*Letters* 274-5)

While Huxley had initially referred to the novel as *Counterpoint*, by May 1, 1928, in a letter to C. H. C. Prentice, Huxley had changed his mind. He had focused the title but remained discontent with what it conveyed:

> Would it be very serious if I changed the title? *Point Counter Point* doesn't really get all I want to express; I have found a poem (quoted in 'How the Days Draw In' in *On the Margin*) the very thing I want.
>
> O wearisome condition of humanity!

Born under one law, to another bound;
Vainly begot and yet forbidden vanity;
Created sick, commanded to be sound.
What meaneth Nature by these *diverse laws*?
Passion and reason, self-division's cause.

Diverse Laws is just what I want: and I'll quote the stanza on the title page. Or possibly *These Diverse Laws*? (*Letters* 296)

In the end, Huxley did use the poem as the novel's opening epigram but gave his novel about the musicalization of fiction the title *Point Counter Point*, referring to a specific way of composing music. J. J. Fux first codified this technique of writing music point against point in *Gradus ad Parnassum*. The Socratic dialogue describes how to replicate Palestrina, the great master of 16th-century counterpoint. Fux's musical treatise on counterpoint has been studied by everyone from J. S. Bach to Haydn to Mozart to Beethoven to undergraduate music majors enrolled in 16th-century counterpoint. Fux's methodology centers on learning to write first a single line, following exacting rules of style, and then adding to that line, note by note, point by point, the perfect contrapuntal line. As lines are added the rules multiply, and the possibility of creating a hideous mistake looms ever near. Such mistakes that a former counterpoint professor of this author deemed them "the burp in church," the kind of aesthetic guffaw that instantly stamps the offender as *Other*. Fux establishes not only aesthetic norms but also defines a compositional standard applied to most music after the Renaissance. *Point Counter Point* is Huxley's attempt to apply contrapuntal music theory to narrative.

The plot of *Point Counter Point* is fairly complex and worth reviewing before

discussing the way Huxley uses music in the novel. In general, the novel is a satiric portrait of London intellectuals and members of English upper-class society during the 1920s. The book includes frequent allusions to literature, painting, music, and contemporary British politics, often making it difficult for 21st-century audiences to follow. The story is hard to condense because it contains many plots occurring at the same time with dramatic scene changes that contrast different viewpoints and often contain digressions, flashbacks, and stream-of-consciousness thoughts. And amid all this, there is music.

Two musical scenes frame the book: the first a performance of J. S. Bach's *Suite No. 2 in B minor*, BWV 1067, and the second a phonograph recording of Beethoven's *String Quartet No. 15 in A minor*, Op. 132. The first performance occurs at a musical soiree held at the Tantamount house, where aristocratic intellectuals, writers, and artists have gathered. Bach's music, contrapuntal in nature, is performed as Huxley gives the attendees' thoughts and affective responses to the music. This scene helps define the characters and context of the book. The second musical performance occurs near the book's close at the apartment of Maurice Spandrell, a shadowy figure obsessed with vengeance and with performing a gratuitous act.[1]

Three families comprise the main action of the book: the Bidlakes, the Quarles, and the Tantamounts. Walter Bidlake works for a literary magazine in London. At the opening of the novel Walter lives with Marjorie Carling, who, although married to another man, is carrying Walter's child, which in "good society" was a sin of th most mortal kind that could damn a woman to be ostracized; thus, this is her great sacrifice

[1]André Gide's *Lafcadio's Adventures* is often remembered for its "gratuitous act," a deed done without motivation and purpose, in which the protagonist, Lafcadio, pushes a man from a train for no reason. In this act Gide explores, as did Dostoevsky in *Crime and Punishment*, moral boundaries.

for the sake of keeping Walter's love. Walter, however, is in love with Lucy Tantamount, the daughter of Lord Edward Tantamount, a chemist/biologist Huxley presents as the quintessential Victorian scientist. Walter's father, John Bidlake, is a famous painter who, now in old age, has terminal cancer. Walter's sister, Elinor, is married to Philip Quarles, an aspiring novelist whose notebook, excerpted in Chapter XXII of the book, reveals that he, like Huxley, is writing a novel of ideas whose aim is the musicalization of fiction.

Most of the characters are introduced at the Tantamounts' musicale in Chapter II. Mark Rampion , an artist, and his wife, Mary, are introduced at Sbisa's restaurant, a gathering place for London's aristocratic intelligentsia. Raised as a member of the lower working class, Mark Rampion maintains an objective view of the perverse members of the group, and his life philosophy and belief in humanity beyond social codes serve as foils to the other worldviews Huxley offers.

At the beginning of the book Elinor and Philip Quarles are traveling abroad and have left their son in the care of Elinor's mother.[2] Upon returning from India, Philip and Elinor Quarles resume their London lives: Philip plans a novel and Elinor renews her friendship with Everard Webley, the leader of the British Fascist movement who has been in love with Elinor for quite some time. Elinor feels a rift in her relationship with Philip, whom she views as inattentive and unresponsive, and seeks solace in Everard. Amidst all of the social occasions, literati discussions, and extramarital affairs lies a bitter hatred between Maurice Spandrell, a diabolical, cynical figure, and Webley. Knowing that Webley is planning to visit Elinor, Spandrell lures Elinor out of the house with a telegram informing her that her son has a grave illness. When Webley arrives

[2] Philip's father, Sidney Quarles, while aspiring to write a history of democratic government, spends most of his time seducing women or working newspaper crossword puzzles.

Spandrell attacks and kills him, dragging his body into a car and carrying it away to an undisclosed location. Meanwhile, Philip, after being informed by Spandrell that Philip's son is ill, arrives at the Bidlake home to find Elinor nursing their child, who has contracted spinal meningitis. After several days their son dies.

Haunted by his murder of Webley, Spandrell holds lengthy philosophic talks with Rampion. In the novel's dramatic climax, Spandrell invites the Rampions to his apartment to listen to a recording of the Beethoven *String Quartet No. 15 in A minor*, which Spandrell believes proves the existence of God. While the three listen, the British Freeman, who were led by Everard Webley, arrive and shoot Spandrell, who has sent a note telling the Fascists that Webley's killer is located in Spandrell's apartment. The novel ends with not only Webley's and Spandrell's murders but also with Denis Burlap's seduction of Beatrice Gilray and their bizarre bath-taking playtime.[3]

Although Huxley said relatively little about how he applied the term, there are many ways to see imitative counterpoint as the novel's musicological muse. Huxley contrasts characters and ideas throughout the novel in a contrapuntal play, structuring the book around contradictory ideas and impulses that the book's epigram outlines. Counterpoint, in addition to the musical meaning of multiple takes on similar themes, also implies the book is a *roman á clef* with worldly counterparts for each of the characters, real-life correspondences that match the characters line by line, note by note.[4] The term "counterpoint" also describes how the music in the book mirrors the

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[3] Walter Bidlake makes regular contribution to Burlap's financially unsuccessful, pretentious literary magazine even though Burlap pays him very little money. Burlap desires Beatrice Gilray, who fears men since being molested by her uncle in a taxicab. Near the novel's close, Burlap seduces Beatrice; the final scene in the book depicts the two of them splashing like children in a bathtub. Thus, the novel, in addition to being framed by musical performances, is bookended by illicit affairs. Interestingly, a description of John Bidlake's painting "The Bathers" foreshadows the novel's closing scene.

[4] Mark Rampion is an artist espousing a Nietzschean life philosophy. As in Nietzche's *Also Sprach Zarathustra* and in *On the Genalogy of Morals*, Rampion centers his philosophy on "life-afirmation," which

novel's narrative technique. Furthermore, counterpoint aims for a Platonic ideal, a form that can capture the ineffable, transcendence. Huxley uses musical counterpoint as a structuring principle, an aesthetic convention borrowed from music and translated into narrative, and also as an expression for varying worldviews and ways of investigating: artistic and scientific exploration, scientific versus religious belief. In doing so Huxley creates a parody of the artistic process as a search for truth. The novel ironizes the forms it employs through the box within a box within a box aesthetic that Quarles describes. It is simultaneously a Modernist work of great beauty and also a parody of High Modernist aesthetics. Thus, the search for truth and all of our attempts to limn truth in art, however absurdist they become, form life's comic rhythm, its glimpses of greatness and our awareness of mortality. To create this expansive vision, Huxley uses music.

Huxley follows a contrapuntal style in *Point Counter Point.* His work pits differing ideas against each other in polyphonic play. On the surface the characters seem to be flat replications of each other, caricatures of a pseudo-intellectual class who fill their lives with philosophical discussions, social events, and a great deal of libidinous activity. Yet the novel contains a parody of its own making, a character who is writing a novel while attempting to create a contrapuntal form of the life he lives. On this level, the novel is ironic, a parody of a gross Modernist endeavor: the desire to turn narrative into a mimetic game. Whether parodying James Joyce or Marcel Proust, incorporating techniques from André Gide's *Les Faux Monnayeurs* (*The Counterfeiters*), or merely poking fun at his own aesthetic desires, Huxley places a novelist character at the

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involves questioning repressive doctrine and institutions, however socially prevalent those views may be. Rampion and his wife, Mary, are based on D. H. Lawrence and his wife, Frieda. Other significant characters include, Maurice Spandrell, based on Charles Baudelaire; and Denis Burlap, the editor of *The Literary World*, and his mistress, Beatrice Gilray, whom Huxley based on literary critic John Middleton Murray and Modernist author Katherine Mansfield. Spandrell kills Everard Webley, whom Huxley bases on Sir Oswald Mosley, leader of the British Fascist movement.

center of the book; part of the novel's counterpoint becomes the story of Philip Quarles, the aspiring writer, who operates as a counterpoint to Huxley himself.

As *Point Counter Point* opens Marjorie Carling and Walter Bidlake play a back-and-forth game, a dialogue that resembles the note-against-note exchange of musical counterpoint. Their voices respond to each other; all the while the narrator describes their thoughts and feelings. Their two voices stand in opposition. A similar exchange occurs in the opening paragraph of Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927), published just one year prior to *Point Counter Point* (1928), where a pregnant question hangs in the air. In the Woolf novel Mr. and Mrs. Ramsey respond to James' question, "Can we visit the Lighthouse?," to which Mrs. Ramsey responds, "Yes, of course, if it's fine tomorrow," only to be countered by Mr. Ramsey: "But it won't be fine."

The forlorn, anxious Marjorie and the annoyed, guilty Walter respond to each other while the narrative reveals their interior thoughts and feelings. Standing before a mirror, the two gaze at each other, thinking of the child growing in Marjorie's womb, for her a sign of hope that will bring Walter closer and for him a reminder of his obligation to a woman he does not love. While Marjorie adjusts Walter's white tie the narrator describes the fetus from differing perspectives, which also form a counterpoint: one biological and the other spiritual. As Marjorie implores Walter to stay with her, the narrator shows the counterpoint inside his head, the mixed emotions of remorse and resentment. Walter battles whether to say what he thinks he should say versus what he wants to say. Shame and resentment, two notes played off each other, form the cacophonic music in his mind. Walter is divided not only about Marjorie, but also he is divided about Lucy Tantamount, whom he desires "against all ideas and principles, madly against his own wishes, even against his own feelings—for he didn't like Lucy; he really hated her" (5). When Marjorie pleads, "Stay with me this evening," the

narrator reveals Walter's interior counterpoint: "There was a part of his mind that joined in her entreaties, that wanted him to give up the party and stay at home. But the other part was stronger (5)." Walter's divided self, pulled between passion and reason, embodies the disparate poles the novel's epigram defines, the competing forces that are "self-division's cause."[5]

Walter describes his relationship with Marjorie as "an odious comedy," one in which they act out contrary roles. Yet this painful comedy stands in opposition to Walter's romanticized notions of love and his adoration of Marjorie as a spiritual ideal, a woman idealized for her purity. Philip Quarles enters the novel as a foil for Bidlake. While Walter Bidlake equates art, love, and truth, he remembers that Quarles is quick to point out that truth and art stand in opposition to nature, which is filled with "many other irrelevant things" (7). For Quarles, art is "unadulterated with all the irrelevancies of life"—hiccoughing, bad breath, fatigue, boredom, recollections of unpaid bills or unanswered business letters. Reflecting on Quarles' statements, Bidlake catches himself in his own contradictions, the points and counterpoints that make up his fictionalized world. Walter Bidlake flees from his conscience while quickly moving toward desire and fights his "bad" instincts by repressing them, only to follow them later. His emotions and thoughts and the roles he and Marjorie play can be equated with music, whose seductive charms lure us to feel the kind of tensions and release we know in real life.

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[5] This is the same conflict Thomas Mann explored three years prior in "Death in Venice" (1925), where Auschenbach is torn between Dionysian and Apollonian impulses.

According to Heidegger, Being is experienced in time; time is the fundamental horizon that defines human life.[6] For Heidegger, whenever we understand something or interpret something, we do so with time as our reference point.[7] Time is the Being of beings; time defines human life, forming boundaries and possibilities.[8] Following Heidegger's observation that Being exists in the experience of time, a correlative thought is Susan Langer's, in *Feeling and Form*, that the primary illusion of music is the experience of time:

> Musical duration is an image of what might be termed "lived" or "experienced" time—the passage of life that we feel as expectations become "now," and "now" turns into unalterable fact. Such passage is measurable only in terms of sensibilities, tensions, and emotions; and it is not merely a different measure, but an altogether different structure from practical or scientific time. . . . The semblance of this vital, experiential time is the primary illusion of music. All music creates an order of virtual time, in which its sonorous forms move in relation to each other—always and only to each other, for nothing else exists there. (109)

[6] Heidegger states that "*temporality* [is] the meaning of the Being of that entity which we call 'Dasein' [the human being insofar as he questions Being]" (*BT* 39). *Dasein* is the word that Heidegger uses for human beings, insofar as they question Being. Dasein involves questioning and understanding, the experiences found in seeking, questioning, and analyzing, where human beings wonder what existing (Being) is all about.

[7] Heidegger argues that "whenever Dasein tacitly understands and interprets something like Being, it does so with *time* as its standpoint" (*BT* 39)

[8] As Georgia Warnke comments in *Gadamer: Hermeneutics, Tradition and Reason*, for Heidegger "all understanding is related to self-understanding and self-understanding is thrown projection; this means that it begins and ends outside the subject—in a past it did not create and a future over which it has no control" (40).

In evoking music Huxley draws upon this "lived" or "experienced" time quality. Although the semblance of time that he relies upon is a narrative illusion, it is a necessary illusion for creating the effect of consciousness.

Music exists in time; when we listen to music we feel the movement of time. If we were to add to this realization Heidegger's thesis that we experience Being in time, then we can say that the inclusion of music in narrative helps facilitate a relationship between text and reader, one that encourages the reader's participation in a way that mirrors Being-in-the-world, our pre-reflexive understanding of the world. Langer claims that music makes time audible, granting an intuitive knowledge of time, one that conforms to the experience of time (*kairos*) but does not correspond to clock time (*chronos*). She, like Huxley, focuses on the way we experience time, the "intuitive knowledge of time—that is not recognized as 'true' because it is not formalized and presented in any symbolic mode" (*Feeling and Form* 111). Langer explains how the awareness of time is conditioned upon patterns whose nearest correspondence is in the experience of listening to music::

> Time exists for us because we undergo tensions and their resolutions. Their peculiar building-up, and their ways of breaking or diminishing or merging into longer and greater tensions, make for a vast variety of temporal forms. If we could experience only singly, successive, organic strains, perhaps subjective time would be one-dimensional like the time ticked off by clocks. But life is always a dense fabric of concurrent tensions, and as each of them is a measure of time, the measurements themselves do not coincide. This causes our temporal experience to fall apart into incommensurate elements which cannot be all perceived

> together as clear forms. When one is taken as parameter, others become "irrational," out of logical focus, ineffable. Some tensions, therefore, always sink into the background; some drive and some drag, but for perception they give *quality* rather than form to the passage of time, which unfolds in the pattern of the dominant and distinct strains whereby we are measuring it. (*Feeling and Form* 113)

Susan Langer describes the affective experience listeners have when following music's carefully constructed systems of tensions and resolutions. She argues that duration cannot be grasped with analytical methods, that time can be grasped only intuitively. Langer's argument justifies why many of the High Modernists, especially Aldous Huxley, James Joyce, Thomas Mann, and Marcel Proust, use musical experiences to help convey the thinking process. As Alex Aronson points out, "what, then, the thinking process and the musical experience have in common is their aloofness from chronologically measurable time" (53). While a musical experience lies outside of the strict, imposed order that forms chronological time, two dimensions of time are integral to the study of music and literature. The first is rhythm: how musical movement is ordered in time and how a performer gives shape, structure, intonation, articulation, and voice to music. The second is recollection and repetition: how musical performers bring back the intuitive past in immediate proximity and also create coherence in the present. Huxley, like other Modernist writers, draws upon both of these aspects of time in music, asking readers to perform an intuitive grasping of our struggle in the world of

change—our struggle, like Jay Gatsby's, to turn back the hands of time while creating an immediate, felt experience of time.[9]

As *Point Counter Point* unfolds, Huxley ironizes the characters one by one. Although their individual voices contribute to the work's satirical representation of competing worldviews, each of the individuals believes in the completeness of his or her take on the nature of reality. Lord Edward Tantamount, for example, believes in Victorian science. In Chapter II, before the narrative shifts focus to Lord Tantamount, the narrative points out that "Lord Edward was in all but intellect a child" while "the greater part of his spiritual being had never developed" (19). Lord Edward's perspective is unreliable. Thus, in Chapter II when the viewpoint shifts to him, his thoughts and actions appear as comic. Although he is one of the foremost scientists of his time, he is not connected with life, particularly life as Mark Rampion, the D. H. Lawrence character in the book, describes it. Interestingly, Lord Edward's grand epiphany about "the universal concert of things" comes one chapter after the Tantamount house musicale and places chemistry at the center of the universe, which according to Lord Edward forms a transubstantiating experience like music, all with "harmonies and counterpoint and modulations" (29). Here, far before introducing Philip Quarles' theories on the musicalization of fiction, before Mark Rampion has spoken on life and art, and before Maurice Spandrell has equated a Beethoven quartet with transcendence, Huxley undercuts Lord Tantamount's myopic worldview.

While Tantamount possesses analytical brilliance, his perspective, like everyone else's, is limited. Of course, to attempt to include a group of limited perspectives in

[9] F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* is another modern novel that draws upon musical elements. As the novel ends Nick Carraway equates music and time: "So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past" (189).

hopes of correcting their inadequacies is a flawed enterprise, the comic process of representing diverse perspectives in one art form while following a musical structure such as "counterpoint." Herein lies the book's self-referential genius in which the character most resembling Huxley, Philip Quarles, is placed in an ironic frame, one formed by Philip Quarles' notebook, itself a mirror of the Huxley text.

In Chapter XXII Huxley presents an excerpt from Quarles' notebook. Much like André Gide does in his novel *The Counterfeiters*, Huxley inscribes a writer into his own book. Gide's work, like Huxley's, can be considered a "metafiction": a literary work whose subject, content, and form deal with the nature of fiction. This device calls attention to the artificiality of existence, the way in which human beings, in their individual appropriation of the world, counterfeit reality, creating fictive selves in an unending quest for authentic lives.

Huxley's self-inscribed double warps what he perceives, recording life as a musical comedy. Like Beethoven, he provides changes of mood and transitions that limn "majesty alternating with a joke" (293). Quarles aspires to shift from mood to mood, taking what is "Created sick" in the novel's epigram and commanding it to be "sound." As Quarles describes of Beethoven: "A theme is stated, then developed, pushed out of shape, imperceptivity deformed, until, though still recognizably the same, it has become quite different . . . the whole range of thought and feeling yet all in an organic relation to a ridiculous little waltz tune" (293-4). Quarles imagines that the abrupt transitions will be easy to create while the modulations and variations will be more difficult. The modulation process will involve "reduplicating characters and situations" so that, though seeming to explore different aims, they attempt to solve the same problem, thus creating "variations in any number of different moods." Quarles believes he can assume a "god-like creative privilege and simply elect to consider the

events of the story in their various aspects—emotional, scientific, economic, religious, metaphysical, etc." (294). He worries that this may be " a too tyrannical imposition of the author's will," a problem he remedies by putting "a novelist into the novel." The creative solution enables him not only to warp reality and juxtapose worldviews but also to make aesthetic generalizations. Quarles goes as far as to fantasize:

> Why draw the line at one novelist inside your novel? Why not a second inside his? And a third inside the novel of the second? And so on to infinity like those advertisements of Quaker Oats where there's a Quaker holding a box of oats, on which is a picture of another Quaker holding another box of oats, on which etc., etc." (294).

Quarles calls his would-be-creation a "Novel of ideas" whose chief defect "is that you must write about people who have ideas to express—which excludes all but about .01 per cent of the human race," thus the whole thing becomes "a made-up affair," the antithesis of the 19th-century tradition of verisimilitude.

Interjecting moments where the narrative's artist, Philip Quarles, himself renders the events, Huxley's *Point Counter Point* raises questions about art and interpretation, the increasing awareness that what accounts for aesthetics is the interpretive stance artworks impose. Part of this developing modern aesthetic is indeterminacy, a dizzying intertextual and self-referential play that leaves the reader wondering what is significant: the narrative event itself or the superseding appropriation of the narrative.

Providing fictitious listeners who recollect musical phrases, Huxley places surrogate readers in the text, tempting the actual reader to perform similar musical machinations. A musical narrative that is a narrative about narratives with music,

Huxley's art takes vertiginous turns, collapsing listener and reader, each interpreters of dense, affective prose. James Joyce and Thomas Mann evoke music in a similar fashion, presenting fictitious listeners whose musical experiences reveal their experience of consciousness and time. They, like Marcel Proust, explore narrative modes beyond realist representation. All of their musical narratives form complementary responses to that artistic crisis we refer to as Modernism--enveloping music and literature and art and dance and architecture. In the case of Joyce, music facilitates formal experimentation, the stylistic hallmark of Modernism's innovation. In the case of Mann, music accompanies the exploration of the secular religion of art, the vestige of Modernism's concern with the world's spiritual sickness, its return to the past, and its belief in aesthetics, myth, and symbolism's ability to bridge the sensual and spiritual worlds. In the case of Huxley, music serves as a metaphor for the novel's narrative technique and also as playful sign that ironizes the Modernist project. For all three writers, musical elements and fictitious listeners bring self-reflexivity to the foreground, highlighting the modern preoccupation with literary technique, interpretation, and translation. For Joyce, this makes for comedy; interpretation becomes a dancing musical form. For Mann, this hermetic, self-preoccupied mode is unsettling; it presents a dangerous intersection between aesthetic and ethical worlds. Music enables Huxley to organize his novelistic material, construct his narrative technique, and ironize his own text. Yet all three find in music a vital force, a muse for their literary creations and a tool for engaging readers.

Weaving intricate narratives that contain references to music, music theory, and music history, and that imitate musical effects and forms, Huxley, Joyce, Mann, Proust, and a host of other Modernist writers share an affinity with organized patterns of sound. Their musical narratives reflect their astute critical awareness and their life-long

exploration of beauty. To say that understanding Modernism helps us appreciate their works, however, misses a foundational observation. It overlooks that Modernism is not so much a movement to which these writers belong but a movement that we understand through their narratives. In exploring them we sense Modernism's purpose, its necessity, its mission, and its translation of traditional art forms—the way in which Modernist artworks put diverse modes of expression into play. While Proust's seminal use of music pioneers a way in which the intangible experience of remembering, moving through time, and becoming aware of consciousness can be mirrored in narrative, Joyce and Mann define Modernism's experimental and secular religious poles. Conversely, Huxley satirizes both the desire for new forms to supplant failed meaning-making systems and also the desire to use art as an alternative to religion.

As Huxley does in *Point Counter Point*, many Modernist writers appeal to music and evoke its sensual, aesthetic charms. They often do so to create a much-described mimetic mode: the experience of interiority, a representation of the thinking self. No doubt part of a turn-of-the-century *Zeitgeist*, the idea of consciousness prominently figures in Ludwig Feuerbach's theory of reality as a projection of the mind and ultimately in Sigmund Freud's theories of the unconscious and how it affects the experience of projection. Paralleling these thinkers, Edmund Husserl, in *The Idea of Phenomenology*, articulates what might be called the modern obsession, the fascination with an all-embracing form of perception that defies scientific knowing, one that is available to the individual—consciousness:

> No longer is it a commonplace and taken on face value that *the absolutely given* and the *genuinely immanent* are one and the same. For that which is universal is absolutely given but is not genuinely immanent. *The act of*

> *cognizing* the universal is something singular. At any given time, it is a moment in the stream of consciousness. *The universal itself*, which is given in evidence (*Evidenz*) within the stream of consciousness is nothing singular but just a universal, and in the genuine (*reellen*) sense it is transcendent. (6–7)

As in Husserl's description, the idea of consciousness bears with it a radically new affirmation of individual perspective. Life moments afford windows to the transcendent. Particulars enshroud the universal. As with the aesthetic theory developed by Stephen Dedalus in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, a theory that is parodied by Buck Mulligan in the opening of *Ulysses* and parodied by Huxley in his characterization of Maurice Spandrell, the representation of consciousness in modern art blurs distinctions between art and religion. Modern art bears the weight of an otherworldly form of perception. This "mode of being" is connected with time and yet attempts to transcend historical context, especially the tumultuous first quarter of the century. To create the transcendent experience, the epiphanic moment, Modernist authors often use music.

Huxley, Joyce, and Mann allude to contrapuntal music and to the *Ars Nova*, whose musical scores involve performers in visual games (*Augenmusik*). These common references indicate all three authors' knowledge and appreciation of the long-standing modern tradition, one sparked by the Enlightenment's shift to reason and subjectivity and by Renaissance humanism's deification of the artist. Their use of music pays homage to this tradition from which they draw inspiration, but it also locates their reliance on the past. All three writers have an anxious awareness that the Romantic

concept of originality and the myth of genius have become obsolete. If the artist is not the incarnational presence mitigating the Divine, then one must invent a radically new paradigm. Placing the former image of the artist under erasure while creating a new role for the post-Romantic artist becomes part of Modernism's mission, and Huxley, Joyce, and Mann are its music-loving literary emissaries. For them creating means borrowing, translating, supplanting, and interpreting— the precipitous stuff of which theory and self-reflexivity are made. With the loss of originality comes also the loss of the author. To lose authority, however, does not mean relinquishing creative force, notoriety, historical significance, or fame. It means transforming narrative into process, a musical game. Doing so, they relinquish a great deal of semantic control, granting their narratives seductive power. Associating words with musical allusions and sounds, they offer listening as a narrative talisman, enticing readers to come to center stage and to listen and to perform. To do so is to accept an artistic challenge, a form of meaning-making where reader and text meet.

Listening for music in books is a vigorous undertaking. *Point Counter Point* demands interpretive feats. Huxley's work asks readers to juxtapose words and sounds, to enter the narrative, to become an instrument and to perform. Like a juggler or a tightrope walker, the reader risks uncertainty and dizziness. Mindful, yet suspended in the world of the imagination, we enter a self-conscious game, one that demands all the cognitive powers we can muster, commands all the emotional responses we can bear, and challenges us with the maximum level of disjunction we can tolerate. In this experience, by bringing dead marks to life, we create wordmusic—imaginative, spontaneous performances where self-projection and whimsy roll in the theater of the mind. This experience is a back and forth movement, a transaction where the self meets its dividing lines and the social world's boundaries, exploring them as pliable fictions.

Responding to the seduction of sound, readers move towards that "unknown, ignored and strange" point that Maurice Blanchot calls narration, during which an "unpredictable movement" provides "the space where this point becomes real, powerful and appealing" (*The Sirens' Song* 62).

Examining music in narratives is one way of understanding, and, in the age of ideological criticism, of recovering the aesthetic experience's dynamism, the complex interplay of voluntary involvement, cognitive selection, and affective response that occurs in High Modernist, if not all, forms of art. While music may serve a metaphorical and even pseudo-critical function in *Point Counter Point*, describing or inscribing the process of art making, the experience of reading and narrating, and the phenomenon of understanding, music also serves a narrative function. It engages readers on a practical level, offering a familiar experience: the experience of listening and responding to sound. Viewed from this perspective, music evokes shared experiences; it lures readers to bring a sense of the *Other* to fabricated forms. Arousing this *Other*-seeking desire we yearn to listen, to know and to be known—that tenuous, utopian longing for communion that art often arouses. While this longing is never fulfilled, narrative does, however, create an opening where the radical disjunction between self and *Other* that all analytical systems suppress is known. This opening, as Blanchot suggests in the *Unavowable Community*, is an interruption from which nothing (and everything) can follow, an interruption "without future, therefore without present: in suspension as if to open time to a beyond of its usual determinations" (*Unavowable Community* 31).[10]

[10] In *The Writing of the Disaster*, Blanchot describes how writing (the disaster) "obliterates (while leaving perfectly intact) our relation to the world as presence or as absence; it does not thereby free us, however, from this obsession with which it burdens us: others (120).

For Huxley, reading and listening share similar modes of understanding. Both require self-projection, the active participation of the perceiver. Following the 19th-century's grandiose aesthetic legacy, music is often associated with the will to live and is often viewed as a universal form of communication, a form transcending language's limitations. While ethnomusicologists often comment on the ways that music is a culturally bound form of communication, one which is just as much the bearer of ideology as language is, early modern writers dwell on music's universal appeal and its connection with passion and the emotions. These notions can be traced through the philosophic tradition back to Aristotle but take on poetic power in the writings of late 19th-century aestheticians, notably Arthur Schopenhauer and Walter Pater. Schopenhauer, in his essay "On Aesthetics," describes music as a universal language, one that speaks to the heart:

> Music is the true universal language which is understood everywhere, so that it is ceaselessly spoken in all countries and throughout all the centuries with great zeal and earnestness, and a significant melody which says a great deal soon makes its way round the entire earth, while one poor in meaning which says nothing straightway fades and dies: which proves that the content of a melody is very well understandable. Yet music speaks not of things but of pure weal and woe, which are the only realities for the *will*: that is why it speaks so much to the heart, while it has nothing to say *directly* to the head and it is a misuse of it to demand that it should do so, as happens in all *pictorial* music, which is consequently once and for all objectionable, even though Haydn and Beethoven strayed into composing it: Mozart and Rossini, so far as I know, never did. For

> expression of the passions is one thing, depiction of things is another. (*Essays and Aphorisms* 162)

We can assume here that by "pictorial" Schopenhauer means program music: music that attempts to express nonmusical ideas, images, or events. While recent musicology has examined how virtually all music is programmatic, how all music stems from concrete, historical situations, to Schopenhauer and to many thinkers and writers a "pure" music was possible, one that roused the passions and represented an elemental life-force: the will to live.

Calling music the condition toward which "all art constantly aspires," Walter Pater, in his 1877 essay "The School of Giorgione," states that the critical standard for all aesthetic judgments lies in how they achieve music's principle (109). For Pater music is "the true type or measure of perfected art" (109) one that becomes a "matter of pure perception" (108) in its "consummate moments" where "the end is not distinct from the means, the form from the matter, the subject from the experience" (109). Music most fully delights the senses and most fully kindles the "poetic passion, the desire for beauty, the love of art for its own sake" (190). Only music remains pure; only it proposes "frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for the moment's sake" (190). Pater personifies This 19th-century dream of consummating the moment as the condition of music. Here sensual aesthetics and Husserl's phenomenology intersect. Each seeks transcendence in immanence, the elevation of experience, and the universal in the singular. Playing with these ideas and all of their ramifications—their validity, their unbelievability, their utility, their ability to seduce readers and to weave fantastic narrative forms from them—becomes a modern aesthetic obsession, generating non-realistic representational forms,

associational images, stream-of-consciousness, *style indirect libre*, and the preoccupation of describing music, appealing to music, and evoking its sensual, aesthetic charms. Huxley, Joyce, and Mann evoke these familiar associations. They employ musical elements to engage readers in ornate presence-seeking narrative forms. In their music-laden narratives, we enter the narrating process as musical performers, translating words on a page into sounds. But we also confront, in these self-reflexive moments, the seductive nature of the performances we have helped create, and, by analogy, the seductive nature of all sensual aesthetic forms.

In *Point Counter Point*, Huxley links musical performances with the passing of time. Thus, the temporal dimension of reading, listening, and understanding is inscribed in reflective musical moments, opportunities for us to contemplate our mortality. Becoming aware of temporality is often painful; it reminds us of our weakness, our inability to control or stand outside of change. For Gabriel Conroy in Joyce's "The Dead" and for Leopold Bloom as he leaves the Ormond hotel in *Ulysses*, a poignant musical performance conjures thoughts about those who have gone before him: "all the living and the dead" (*Dubliners* 204). Both Joyce, at the end of *Dubliners*, and Mann, in *The Magic Mountain*, describe falling snow and the sound of music as their characters ruminate on mortality and the passing of time. For Philip Quarles, like Huxley, the musicalization of fiction is a means to represent at once the thinking self and the creative process. For Maurice Spandrell at *Point Counter Point*'s close, performing music means knowing the intimate and intricate connection of music, love, and death. The reader of these self-referential narratives mirrors fictitious listeners confronting the world of change and meeting the daunting task of transformation, the daily ritual accompanying life's feast. Drawn into a close narrative space, we, as readers, are also aesthetic communicants, fellow sufferers seeking solace in a forgotten

song, one inscribed in dead narrative sheets and revived as we perform it, all the while overhearing ourselves.

But let's imagine that this collision is not accidental, that it acknowledges a framework, an ultimate horizon or boundary (death) that reading, listening, narrating, interpreting, and understanding share. And let's also imagine that writing is, as Blanchot tells us, the "disaster, depriving us of that refuge which is the thought of death" and that writing is "related to forgetfulness" (*The Writing of the Disaster* 3). This disaster holds the power to supplant, to eliminate, to calcify, and to erase. Part of its paradoxical power is that once it is exercised—once writing ends and narrative forms—then interpretation begins. Whatever dwells in writing retreats as it becomes narrative. To bring it back means relying on another. As Blanchot notes, only in "reading, in its repetition" can the death writing makes "be done and undone" ("The Ease of Dying" *Blanchot Reader* 316). Understanding this quandary, Huxley presents music, an invitation for the reader to perform—to make and remake what his narratives bind. For Huxley this rupture is comic, reflecting both our finitude and our power to create. It also remains hauntingly paradoxical, filled with erotic, Dionysian energy, ethical and moral dangers, and philosophical seductions. These perspectives are afforded by an awareness of time, the ever-moving world of change whose end is death, the one thing that we can never escape. As Blanchot says, "If to live is to lose, we understand why it would be almost laughable to lose life" (*The Step Not Beyond* 134). In these narratives, the reader is invited to see theorizing and narrating as process, the weaving and unweaving whose reciprocal relationship reading and writing form.

Point Counter Point's music invites us to play. The game we enter lies beyond the printed page and cannot be described in terms of what it means or produces. At stake is understanding, an experience that only a clever and deceptive game can begin to

convey. Like art-making, reading, discovering, and living, this game may raise more questions than it answers. When Huxley's book is open and we are actively reading, we experience what Josipovici calls a "momentary freedom from imprisonment" (*The World and the Book* 308). Here the ordinary limits of our lives and the deadly limits of writing intersect in the spiraling circle of interpretation, the hermeneutical encounter between reader and text. This movement, as Blanchot observes, is "indeed a dance with an invisible partner in a different space" (*The Sirens' Song* 255). To enter this movement is to experience what words cannot express—the very real and awe-inspiring way life presents itself, impresses its joys and pains upon us, forces us to keep moving to survive, and sets before us the many things we feel and experience and talk about and are not able to talk about—the ineffable contingencies forming a matrix of closeness and estrangement: the dance of intimacy played out in the world.

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