

AN INTERSECTION OF ARTS: MUSICALITY IN THE

POETRY OF LOUISE BOGAN

By

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A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department of English

May 2010

Winston-Salem, North Carolina

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to thank my thesis advisor, Dr. Mary DeShazer, for her professional guidance, unrelenting persistence, moral support, and acute attention to detail. Her efforts made this project enjoyable throughout, even during the difficult times. I greatly appreciate all aspects of her involvement and could not have accomplished this project without her. I would also like to thank my parents for their love and support. They gave me the necessary skills to succeed that extend so much farther than academics. I am truly grateful for these important gifts. And a special recognition goes to my dear friend, Andrew Jenkins, without whom I may never have completed this thesis. Thank you for your daily support, gracious care, and above all patience, that allowed me to keep my sanity, stay positive and focused, all while enjoying some of the best things life has to offer. To all of you- thank you, sincerely.

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INTRODUCTION

Despite her prolific professional career, modernist poet Louise Bogan never acquired widespread recognition. As both a writer and critic of poetry at *The New Yorker* from 1931-1969, however, she perfected her craft, gaining respect from the literary community as a professional poet. As many critics have agreed, a major component to her success in writing poetry is a strict formal structure¹. She observes the technical requirements of forms such as ballads, sonnets, and rondeaus with perfection, and she exerted much effort in attempting to revive traditional poetic forms. My thesis serves as an unconventional approach for interpreting Bogan's poetic form, in which her poems can be read as a synthesis of music and poetry. I will consider the poems in her last volume, *The Blue Estuaries* (1968), as an intersection of music and poetry that attempts to approximate the sonal and aesthetic purity of music through the medium language. The aesthetic construction of Bogan's poetry, according to my research, has received very little critical treatment up to this point, and an examination of the musicality in Bogan's poetry will contribute to a more thorough understanding of her oeuvre.

Music became a central part of Bogan's life beginning in early childhood. The daughter of Daniel and May Bogan, Louise grew up in a number of New England cities. Common to all her locales, however, was the prominence of music. From her quasi-autobiography, *Journey Around My Room*, we learn that Bogan first learned to play music while she, her parents, and brother Charles, temporarily resided with the Gardner family

¹ See Elizabeth Frank: *Louise Bogan: A Portrait*, Jacqueline Ridgeway: *Louise Bogan*

of Ballardvale, Massachusetts. Bogan recounts “Mr. Gardner’s flute lay on top of the piano, in a worn black leather case; and there was a music cabinet with a small marquetry design on its doors. It was delightful to play five-finger exercises in these surroundings. But when we first came to the house I could not read anything—neither letters nor musical notes” (14). Bogan’s illiteracy indicates her young age, which her biographer, Elizabeth Frank, winner of the Pulitzer Prize for *Louise Bogan: A Portrait*, identifies as six or seven (18). Frank also suggests that May Bogan “sang and played the piano, often accompanied by Charles... Music was bred into New England life” (18).

The traditional inclusion of music in the New England way of life is evidenced by Louise Bogan’s passion for music that did not cease until her death. Indeed, she filled her journal pages with impressions of concerts, favorite composers and their works, and played piano faithfully throughout her life. A trip to Vienna in 1922 first piqued her interest in Mozart’s music that proved lifelong; while in Salzburg with her daughter Maidie in 1933, Bogan visited Mozart’s home and wrote in a letter to Edmund Wilson:

Last night I heard the first concert of the Festspiel. It was given in the courtyard of the Residenz, the bishops’ townhouse, exactly as it was when Mozart wrote it... the church bells struck the hour and the quarters and the exquisite-delicate intricate music went on undismayed, displaying its wit and continual surprises and whimper of strings and accents of oboe and horn and double-bass. I really think it the purest and loveliest music in the world. Here was the seed from which Beethoven sprang,—so exquisite, so amusing, so amorous and melancholy, so clear that not a moment of fakery could creep in, so mathematically constructed that it could stand beside Euclid unashamed. (Frank 177-78, taken from Yale Rare Books collection).

Her training in childhood and experience as a young woman developed her sensitive ear—one adept enough to discriminate subtle differences in the timbres of specific instruments, and ultimately, the aural topographies of her poetry. The “delicacy” to which she refers and “whimper of strings” are exact images that appear in her poems and

suggest a strong intersection between music and language in her creative energies. Additionally, Louise Bogan became a skilled pianist during her lifetime, confirming an advanced knowledge of music from a technical perspective. She often accompanied while Maidie sang, though admittedly, she was not skilled enough to pursue musicianship on the professional level. Ever the perfectionist, she confessed, "I am a terrible accompanist, I may add, especially for Strauss and Debussy songs which have eight or nine sharps or flats, and interpolated measures in 5/4 time. But it is more fun than writing" (*JAMR* 123-24). Clearly, Bogan's modesty or self-frustration masks the level of her proficiency. At the very least, she possessed knowledge of mixed meters, in which composers interrupt the established time signature with a foreign one. Moreover, the later years of her literary career were plagued by writer's block or a delay in motivation, and she often perceived music as an escape from the pressure to produce poetry. Bogan's comment about the pleasure of music is thus a reference to her continuous struggle with the creative process.

Bogan's temptation to accompany Maidie rather than concentrate on writing poetry stems from their long history of duets; similar to Bogan's own childhood, she filled the house with music. She and Maidie often played piano together or the family listened to Philharmonic concerts on the radio (Frank 144, 106). Such exposure led Maidie to study vocal performance at The Juilliard School, continuing the family lineage of musical fervor. Louise Bogan also "cherished vocal music" and listened intently while Maidie rehearsed, which led to her poem "M., Singing" and thirteen other poems designated as "songs" (Frank 152). Some titles specify a singer such as "Juan's Song,"

“Spirit’s Song,” or “Little Lobelia’s Song,” whereas others are intended for a particular time or place. “Song for a Lyre” and “To Be Sung on the Water,” for instance, indicate the lulling mood the poetry is supposed to evoke. The titles, therefore, initiate the poem’s purpose prior to its opening line. The frequency and variety with which Bogan labels her poems as “songs” invites critical interpretation about the conceptual possibilities of the titles. The notion of “song” is not taken literally in Bogan’s poetry, but rather can signify a personal story or anthem representative of the titled speaker. In “Song for a Slight Voice,” for instance, Bogan treats the title ironically, in that the words of the “slight voice” are aggressive and threatening in the poem, not meek as one would expect. Thus, the titles become particularly significant to the poem as a whole, often previewing—sincerely or falsely—the succeeding context.

Numerous other poem titles also pay homage to music including “Musician,” “The Drum,” “Sub Contra,” “Train Tune,” and “Chanson Un Peu Naïve.” These headings are indicative of Bogan’s formal knowledge of musical technique and the prevalence of musical imagery throughout her poetry. Poems such as “The Drum” make this fact explicit, whereas an understanding of “Sub Contra,” a scale in the bass clef, requires a certain proficiency from the reader as well. The title, moreover, greatly complements the intensity of the body in “Sub Contra,” yet may go overlooked by a reader less versed in music. “The Drum” demonstrates Bogan’s use of specific instruments in her poems, which span almost every section of a full symphony orchestra. She includes brass, strings, and percussion instruments with frequent repetition of strings, in particular. This emphasis may be due to her own piano training or the ability of lyric poetry to best

represent the delicacy of the sound produced by strings. In either regard, Bogan's inclusion of a wide variety of instrumental references displays the integration of music into poetry on the most accessible level—imagery. Her diction with its specific allusions to music, lays the foundation for the synthesis of music and poetry structurally through rhythm and sound. This kind of multi-layered construction is one I hope to explore in a new way of reading Bogan's poetry.

There has been some critical attention to the musicality in Bogan's poems, however, though with limited depth and length. Critic Carol Moldaw is one scholar who has addressed this interpretation. In her essay "Form, Feeling, and Nature: Aspects of Harmony in the Poetry of Louise Bogan," Moldaw informs us that "Music was one of Bogan's great loves... the titles reflect this: twelve poems are called songs" (181-82). Moldaw considers Bogan's work through a musical lens, in which she specifically explores harmony in the poems. She suggests Bogan creates harmony through regular, patterned matrices of meter and rhyme: "Sub Contra, which uses as metaphors the techniques and forms of music, expresses the desire for a pattern that will fulfill passionate demands. The poem exists in an aesthetic vacuum, without a surrounding world" (182). Moldaw is concerned with uncovering musical patterns in the poetic form though she discovers they are somewhat irregular, that is, something is "left to be desired." My interpretation diverges from Moldaw, however, in her assertion that Bogan's reliance on music is for its metaphorical effect rather than aural texture. As we will see, the metaphorical and aural realms become one in the same in Bogan's poetry, in that one

continually complements and informs the other. Bogan creates a synthesis of musical rhythm, sound, image, and theme. It is precisely this union which I hope to illuminate.

Critic Jacqueline Ridgeway in her 1984 book, *Louise Bogan*, also references the parallels in Bogan's poetry to music, suggesting that "the fact that for her rhythmic elements constituted form, and that they served to express the otherwise inexpressible, ties poetic form very closely with musical form. Bogan often used musical terms and metaphors in her poetry...she thought some of her lyrics as being accompanied by music" (1). Ridgeway's phrase "the otherwise inexpressible" refers to Bogan's aim to evoke linguistically the emotion that music performs aurally. While this analysis is valid, Ridgeway does not consider Bogan's poems collectively or music's relationship to the aesthetic quality of the poems more generally. That is to say, in her poetry, Bogan attempts to create aesthetic purity similar to that of music. This endeavor, however, is complicated by the limitations of language in its ability to color diction with connotation and association. Bogan's treatment of language proves significant in the ability of her poems to create a pure emotional experience similar to music.

As an extension of previous scholarship, I propose that Bogan integrates music and poetry in order to achieve a pure aesthetic experience. In my first chapter, I will start with the foundation of her poetry: rhythm. I focus on how Bogan builds the pace of a poem in her treatment of meter and beat. She is extraordinarily adept at creating tempos in her work, often with multiple rhythms occurring in a single poem. Elizabeth Frank writes "her mastery of the art of substituting metrical feet for variety and emphasis is paralleled in American poetry only by Robert Frost; her sense of the texture of sound,

through consonants and vowels, magnificent” (56). Bogan thus develops various tempos, time signatures and employs cadences throughout her verse, mimicking the fundamentals of musical composition. I will survey three poems in this chapter, each of which exemplifies a different rhythmic patterns, and will affirm Bogan's insistence “that the basis of all poetry is rhythm, and that rhythm as we first experience it lives within heartbeat, pulse, and breath” (Frank 310). Indeed, during her brief teaching positions she instructed students “to read with their ear as well as their eye. Her approach to teaching poetry corresponded to her practice as a poet in being physical and intuitive before it was conceptual and analytic” (Frank 345). The “physicality” of poetry, of course, refers to its underlying rhythm and urges an emotive connection to verse that conventional analysis overlooks. Through Bogan’s use of lyrical repetition, she allots to her poetry a distinct vitality and movement that I will explore at length in the first chapter.

Chapter two, moreover, will examine Bogan’s manipulation of sound. Building off the first chapter’s discussion of meter and rhythm, I will analyze the ways Bogan develops harmony and melody through consonance, assonance, and rhyme scheme. She often selects particular sets of consonants and vowels and weaves them in intricate patterns within poetic lines. In “Train Tune,” for instance, there is cyclical repetition of the hard *c*, the short *s*, and the vowels *a* and *o*. When ordered as Bogan does, “Back through clouds / Back through clearing / Back through distance / Back through silence,” her words reenact the repetitive sound of the train’s engine (*B.E.* 118, lines 1-4). I discuss this kind of aural design in other poems including “Song for a Lyre” and “To Be Sung on the Water.” Finally, the third chapter will consider the recurring images of the musician

across Bogan's poetry. In "Musician" Bogan fuses the instrument and the performer through synecdoche: the instrument known by its strings and the musician by his hands, thumb, and finger. She extends the use of metonymy to "Sub Contra" as well, in which the musician's hands exert complete control over the instrument. In this way, Bogan treats the instrument as emblematic of creative potential and artistic revival. The differing dynamics between music and musician across the poems offer much material for critical evaluation and have yet to be explored in this way by traditional scholarship.

Music was a central part of Louise Bogan's life, and for this reason, it becomes a central part of her poetry. As a skilled and practiced pianist, Bogan had an advanced knowledge of musical composition and technique, which allowed her to marry music and language in her poetry. She is unapologetic about her passion for music, suggesting in a letter to fellow poet, Rolfe Humphries, "I must say I would just as soon die on the barricades for Mozart's music as not: if someone walked in this minute and said, Louise, if you don't go out and get shot, they'll take Mozart's music and throw it down the drain, I'd put my hat right on and go out and take it" (*WTWL* 125). Indeed, her devotion to music was extensive and provides the site of her creative endeavors—the intersection of music and poetry.

CHAPTER ONE

“To Refresh the Drooping Rhythms”: Louise Bogan’s Use of Rhythm

According to Alex Preminger, editor of *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, rhythm is defined as “a cadence, a contour, a figure of periodicity, any sequence of events or objects perceptible as a distinct pattern capable of repetition and variation... any entity not absolutely unique must be repeated either by itself or among others: if by itself, we speak of iteration; if its opposite or with other entities in an ordered design, then we recognize a pattern” (Preminger 1067). Repetition or the expectation thereof is the basis of all rhythm in both poetry and music. Rhythm establishes recognizable sequences in order to provide a framework in which to guide the reading of the poem. The anticipation of regularity, then, creates pattern which grounds the work and gives it symmetry. A poet’s selection and manipulation of specific rhythmic and linguistic patterns, such as meter and rhyme, determines the architecture of a given verse; it functions as the foundation on which all poetry is built.

Rhythm in formal poetry operates within the confines of four major principles: regularity, variation, grouping, and hierarchy (Preminger 1067). Regularity is the consistency by which “markers” such as stresses are distributed spatially in intervals. When evenly spaced, a poem or song achieves a stable rhythm. Oftentimes, a reader’s ability to anticipate a stressed syllable is more important than the actual presence of a stress. This recognition helps to establish pattern regardless of the precision of the

markers; this concept is known as isochronism. Isochronism helps to bolster rhythmic regularity and contributes a musical overtone to a poem.

Grouping is the subset of rhythm that governs the arrangement of a pattern. Without organization, a poem would lack any sort of rhythm and, instead, consist of an unbroken line of sound. Ordering syllables and stress, however, “requires demarcation, which is the function of stress in Western music and (most) poetic meters” (Preminger 1067). The categorization of meter thus arises from the systematized segmentation of rhythmic events. Music uses notes, rather than syllables or stress, as the markers of rhythm, creating meter known as a time signature. The parallel ways in which music and poetry are structured is a methodology Bogan was both fully aware and makes full use of throughout her work. She demonstrates a mastery of constructing various rhythmic patterns (often within the same poem) in order to heighten the musicality of her verse. She also employs traditional meters and rhythms to showcase her knowledge of poetic formalism and perform a sort of rite of passage into the canon of “professional” poets.

Because the earliest poetry emerged out of song, it is to be expected that the two art forms share a heavy dependence on rhythm. Lyric poetry, specifically, derives from archetypal musical practices such as singing and chanting. The gradual divorce of poetry and music has left many poets to choose free verse or other rhythmically minimal forms over their stricter origins. Bogan, on the other hand, prefers to infuse musicality into her poetry on multiple levels. Indeed, “the musical element is intrinsic to the work intellectually as well as aesthetically: it becomes the focal point for the poet’s perceptions as they are given verbalized form to convey emotional and rational values” (Preminger

713). Carol Moldaw identifies the aesthetic component in Bogan's poetry, discussing the various roles of harmony (musical, natural, etc.) in her poems. She suggests that "to a large extent the poems are about poetry and the aesthetic process. Many images central to the poems are of sound and rhythmical motion, two fundamental elements of poetry which also emphasize its connection with human life" (182). Moldaw identifies the dominance of rhythm in Bogan's poetry and, as we will see, "rhythmical motion" becomes a great source of opportunity and reinvention for Bogan. It serves as the site where she can develop meaning through pattern, sound, and feeling.

Bogan illustrates Moldaw's claims and even articulates their veracity in a number of critical essays. In "The Pleasures of Formal Poetry," a defense of formal structure, she suggests the human being is first and foremost a rhythmic creature who can be translated into music and ultimately, poetry: "He can clap his hands rhythmically and he can stamp his feet rhythmically. Here is the beginning of the dance, of ritual, of drama. Then artifacts began to increase the pleasure of rhythm. The first aids and abettors of human rhythm were undoubtedly percussion instruments" (207). The "pleasure of rhythm" is the acting principle in both music and verse, as Bogan indicates by her reference to percussion. Evidently, she understood the natural gravitation toward regularity and the universal satisfaction derived by the human ear in the form of a consistent rhythmic beat. Bogan also insists that modern poetry has strayed too far from the tradition of formal poetry and ought to be revived through contemporary means. She considers it "the task of modern poets to bridge the division between serious and light forms; to refresh the drooping and weary rhythms of serious poetry with the varied, crisp, fresh qualities of

light verse” (TPFP 205). The tired rhythms of tradition stem, according to Bogan, from an exhaustion of form and the modernist conviction of its confinement (203). Her proposal to revisit the rhythms of serious poetry undoubtedly suggests a return to musicality in verse—though one that is decidedly different than its recitative roots. She argues for the reunion of music and poetry in a way that has been undervalued in early twentieth-century poetry, thus defending traditional form and announcing the aim of her own work: poetry that is “mechanically representational of musical architecture” (Preminger 715).

Indeed, rhythm will prove crucial to the process by which Bogan successfully produces formal structures in her poems. Traditional forms such as ballads and sonnets particularly pay homage to rhythmic consistency and are prominent in her oeuvre. Thus, the presence of multiple rhythms in a single poem, her execution of classic structures, and her precise organization of rhythmic intervals all contribute to her revival of formal poetry through modern rhythmic means, and demonstrate her marriage of music and poetry. Bogan selects “A Tale” to present her aim to “refresh the drooping rhythms” and uses this poem to open almost all her volumes, including her first collection of poems, *Body of This Death* (1923). Written in traditional ballad form, the poem traces the mythic hero’s quest for transcendence and his ultimate discovery of disappointment and disillusionment. In this way, Bogan uses “A Tale” to announce her modernist roots, traditional proclivities, and a progressive approach to combining the two. This poem is also one of Bogan’s most well-known works and thus receives much critical attention.

Deborah Pope, for instance, discusses the significance of the journey motif in her essay “Music in the Granite Hill: The Poetry of Louise Bogan.” Pope, like many scholars, concludes that “the youth” in “A Tale” is the archetypal “Bogan persona” — one that is “characteristically trapped and enclosed.” He seeks relief through a personal and physical journey of discovery and revelation: “Here the metaphoric movement to the interior underlies the literal geographic progression from the sea inland to a rocky desert, signaling the youth’s rejection of the familiar world of time and motion in an attempt to locate a permanent, unchanging self” (151). Pope highlights the theme of transformation and search that permeates the poem and identifies Bogan’s parallel between the infertility of the youth’s quest and the barren landscape. Pope further develops the idea of fertility by reading the poem through a feminist lens. She asserts that encoded in the male protagonist is also “a female persona who ambivalently regards the body, the fertile environment, as an oppressive force and who can only imagine release in terms of an utterly unproductive landscape” (152). Pope’s female persona, then, perceives the landscape as hostile, and serves as a constant reminder of the reproductive purposes of the female body; she understands this relationship to be charged with resentment or antagonism in the poem rather than one that is constructive or symbiotic.

Bogan writes “A Tale” in ballad meter, a form which conventionally uses iambic tetrameter and is also known as hymn meter. Historically, the ballad is “a species of oral poetry with its origins in music” and, for this reason, ballads were often converted to hymns for popular use (Preminger 119). The structure typically consists of quatrains, each with four units of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed one; the rhyme

scheme usually follows an *abcb* or *abab* pattern. There is still scholarly debate as to whether the ballad form fully belongs to the category of accentual verse, which counts stresses and is timed, or to accentual-syllabic verse, which is untimed and only considers the number of syllables per line. Regardless, Bogan's "A Tale," from a structural perspective, is a model for ballad meter and practices a remarkable perfection of form.

The opening lines of the poem develop an audible consistency of rhythm that is not disrupted for almost two full stanzas. Bogan establishes uniformity within the first two lines, thereby triggering the reader's expectation of regularity: "This youth too long has heard the break / Of waters in a land of change. / He goes to see what suns can make / From soil more indurate and strange." (*BE* 3, lines 1-4). The lines follow a strict iambic pattern where the stressed and unstressed syllables are assigned to individual words. By including largely monosyllabic diction, Bogan simplifies the act of decoding rhythm and allows the reader to adopt immediately the intended beat. This technique is evidence of Bogan's understanding of the longstanding tradition of musicality in epic poetry and relies on her musical ear to translate it seamlessly to verse. Monosyllabic diction also gives way to the rapidity of pace, which speaks to the oral origins of ballad meter. The title that precedes the first lines evokes an epic quality confirmed by the opening words "this youth." Bogan would certainly have been aware of the long-standing tradition between epic literature and music, which gives further support to the claim that her poetry is heavily influenced by musical composition.

The syntax and punctuation of the opening stanza also promote the regularity of rhythm. The quatrain mirrors the pattern of spoken or conversational language in the

placement of the two basic components to a complete sentence: subject and predicate. In each poetic line the subjects, “This youth” and “he” begin the line as in everyday speech. What’s more, the main verb of the clause is not far behind—both are in the same line as their subject—so as to be read with the ease and rote of prose texts. This structure minimizes ambiguity for the reader and maximizes the readability of the lines and appropriation of a regular rhythm. The periods that conclude the second and fourth lines also signal a clear pause for the rhythm to rest and cyclically begin anew. Bogan matches the syntactical construction that begins each “sentence” (subject and predicate) with the a logical (and terminal) ending. Like bars in music that frame each measure, Bogan provides visible division and resting points that cumulatively impart metrical coherence.

The second strophe continues in the same manner though with a disruption to the rhythmic fluidity in the stanza’s final line. Bogan again makes the rhythm accessible to the reader with stressed or unstressed syllables that align with a single word, yet she begins to challenge the pattern’s perfection: “He cuts what holds his days together / And shuts him in, as lock on lock: / the arrowed vane announcing weather, / The tripping racket of a clock” (5-8). The fifth line maintains the easy rhythm of the previous stanza with stresses falling on ‘cuts,’ ‘holds,’ ‘days,’ and the middle syllable of ‘together.’ However, Bogan begins to destabilize the rhythm in the sixth line by including a comma at its midpoint and repeating ‘lock’. Until now, each line was uninhibited by punctuation, a technique that allows the beat to flow freely and maintain an even tempo. The comma, however, commands the reader to pause and complicates the uniformity instituted from the beginning.

The third and fourth lines of the quatrain also introduce an abundance of polysyllabic diction into an otherwise monosyllabic poem, which further interrupts the effortlessness in its reading. Here, Bogan relies on the reader's expectation of regularity that she carefully crafts in the first five lines of the poem. Because the iambic pattern has already been ingrained, there is more rhythmic flexibility. In the stanza's closing line, for instance, Bogan preserves the unstressed-stressed design though in way that is not obvious: "The arrowed vane announcing weather / The tripping racket of a clock" (7-8). Unlike the first stanza, the language and the stresses are not synchronized. Aurally, these lines do not sustain the rhythmic perfection but instead resemble direct repetition; the easy give-and-take of the iambs becomes subverted. Nevertheless, the iambic rhythm is still intact and continues, unharmed, for the rest of the poem. The clock imagery further contributes to the concept of regular timing. Although Bogan refers to its tick as a "racket," its steadiness speaks to the pattern she attempts to replicate.

The poem concludes with a single couplet, which serves as a kind of coda that withholds complete resolution. All four quatrains preserve the iambic tetrameter of ballad meter flawlessly throughout "A Tale." However, Bogan departs from the traditional form with the insertion of the final couplet, writing "Where something dreadful and another / Look quietly upon each other" (*BE* 3, 17-18). Although these lines are also written with the same metrical pattern, the placement of stress has graduated from one stress per syllable to multiple rhythmic units sharing a single word. The accessibility of the rhythmic pattern has been made less obvious yet nonetheless successful. An ending couplet is unorthodox for ballad form and is instead more customary to the

Shakespearean sonnet. Bogan, no doubt aware of this fact, merges aspects of the two forms to leave the reader with a final thought. In doing so, she works toward her goal “to refresh the drooping and weary rhythms of serious poetry with the varied, crisp, fresh qualities of light verse” (TPFP 205). This fusion offers a “fresh” approach to ballad meter while remaining in the confines of its metrical mandates. The ambiguity and sense of disillusionment also contribute to the modernist overtones of the final couplet. Bogan saturates much of “A Tale” with thematics of fruitless search and discouragement; the couplet “Where something dreadful and another / Look quietly upon each other” provides no relief from the distress of its preceding lines. Rather, this addition capitalizes upon the disappointment experienced throughout.

In “The Drum,” similarly, Bogan employs monosyllabic diction and rest-inducing punctuation that not only establishes rhythm but mimics an actual drumbeat. She manipulates poetic and linguistic rhythm to simulate the percussion instrument. In doing so, Bogan exercises a superior knowledge of musical beat and sound that delivers an innovative (and imitative) approach to “serious rhythms.” The poem consists of five quatrains, each measuring roughly four syllables each. The line lengths are also exceedingly short with the longest containing five words and most lines having only four. Despite the consistency of the lines, Bogan does not include a regular stress pattern, instead designing a structure that encourages total uniformity of pitch and pulse. “The Drum,” therefore, exemplifies Bogan’s preference of rhythm rather than meter when attempting to coat the poem with musicality. These first two stanzas depict the visual brevity of the lines as well as the ease of adopting their rhythmic pattern:

The drum roars up.
 O blood refused,
 Here's your answer.
 The ear is used.

A miss and a beat
 The skin and the stick
 Part and meet,
 Gather thick.

Bogan first establishes a definite rhythmic pattern through the use of monosyllabic diction. Every word in the first line, “The drum roars up.” is comprised of a single syllable, and this line immediately initiates the slow, regular pulse of a drumbeat. She creates a dichotomy between sound and silence that replaces the stress variation of accentual verse. Rather than the alternation of stressed and unstressed, we hear beat and no beat (silence). Every word of the line represents the beat of the drumstick striking the taut skin; the spaces between each word signify the silence when the drumstick is pulled away from the instrument. Thus, Bogan’s diction works collectively to represent the drumbeat and does so effectively due to each word’s short auditory lifespan.

Because the lines in the first stanza consist of four syllables and generally of four words, they closely resemble the four-four (or 4/4) time signature in music known as “common time.” Abbreviated with a capital “C” its name indicates the frequency with which this meter is used in musical composition. It is also one of the most stable rhythms and therefore can handle the most variation. In common time each measure is comprised of four beats with the quarter note representing one beat. As seen in “The Drum,” the most basic notation of 4/4 time is four quarter notes to total four beats. This kind of rhythmic grouping (the ratio of one to one) while extremely rudimentary, is also central to the drum in that it is the first rhythm mastered when learning to play the instrument.

All percussive rhythms build off the steady beat-silence alternation pattern established in the first line of the poem.

The constancy of the drumbeat, moreover, is often its defining characteristic and for this reason, several stanzas in the poem include lines of exclusively monosyllabic words. In the second stanza, for example, three out of four lines follow this design: “A miss and a beat / The skin and the stick / Part and meet, / Gather thick” (*BE* 31, 5-8). Bogan’s insistence on homogeneity replicates the drumbeat and maintains a consistent rhythm throughout. In these lines, particularly, Bogan gives special attention to time signature in the specific diction selected. The fifth line contains five words rather than four, which disrupts the 4/4 time signature because of the extra syllable. Cleverly, Bogan accounts for the addition by writing “and a” between “miss” and “beat,” which is almost identical to the linguistic mode to read eighth notes aloud in common time. In a 4/4 measure that consists of three quarter notes followed by two eighth notes, the rhythm is read as “1- 2 - 3 and 4” with the “and” signifying the extra beat. The sixth line, reading “The skin and the stick,” takes advantage of the same structure with the musical delineation “and” beat falling rhythmically on the word “the” between the third and fourth beats, “and” and “stick,” respectively. These lines of “The Drum” demonstrate Bogan’s clear understanding of musical composition and its principles of rhythm. She dissects the rhythmic patterns of drumbeats and transcribes them linguistically into poetry through monosyllabic diction and rigid pacing. The strict beat-silence pattern is easily adopted when an individual beat falls on a single word so as to mimic the short and decisive strike against the drum’s membrane.

In “The Flower of the Mind,” Morton Zabel, critic and contemporary of Louise Bogan, analyzes this kind of success in developing rich non-visual imagery. He claims, “Instead of employing irrelevant pictorial devices or garnishing a poem with elaborate ornaments and decorations, she carves the image out of the concept with scrupulous care. The poems finds substance in the mind and its shape grows around the symbol which the mind selects from experience” (Zabel 35). Zabel suggests that Bogan works from the inside-out by utilizing the reader’s prior experience of a particular image, rather than attempting to merely impart or dispense externally the same intensity through poetic language. “The Drum,” then, builds on the mind’s experience of rhythm to recreate a drumbeat. Bogan does not appeal solely to the reader’s visual experience of a drum through description of its skin and stick; rather, she employs another empirical sensation, the aural realm, to recall the rhythmic experience of a drumbeat. In “The Pleasures of Formal Poetry,” Bogan defines a human being as primarily a rhythmic creature, and therefore plays on his or her instinctive inclination toward the regular and repetitive pulse of the drum. In doing so, she illustrates Zabel’s assertions about the navigation and direction of experience. Furthermore, just as the regular appearance of monosyllabic diction keeps a steady beat, the punctuation Bogan includes in the poem guarantees crucial moments of silence. Without a rhythmic rest, the drumbeat could not as accurately be reproduced. Within the first stanza, the first, third, and last lines all end in a period. More terminal than a comma, a period instructs the reader to stop rather than simply pause. Bogan, inferably, includes three periods in the first stanza to routinize the

alternation between beat and silence. Such punctuation would eliminate any ambiguity for the reader and establish an aural pattern to be recycled throughout the poem.

The punctuation also indicates a self-contained thought just as musical bars that segment all measures. For example, in the fourth stanza, Bogan interrupts the line's fluidity with commas that separate and highlight each image individually: "Use up the air / To the last drop, / To the last layer, / Before you stop." (13-16). Bogan revisits the one-to-one syllable-word ratio nearly creating a temporally flawless stanza. All lines (the last two loosely) follow common time with the punctuation providing a visual (and performative) barricade between one line and the next. Structurally, the comma organizes each four-syllable line into distinct units that resemble a measure in sheet music. Thematically, the comma after the second line requires reflection about "us[ing] up the air / to the last drop," (*BE* 31 13-14). Bogan does not, of course, offer a comma after the first line because it would be misplaced syntactically and distort its meaning. The consumption of all the air speaks to the intensity the speaker wants to derive from the drum and perhaps herself as operator of the instrument; the commas serve to escalate that intensity. After deliberation, the speaker moves on "to the last layer," as if to signal the final moments before the onset of conclusion. In this case, punctuation serves dual functions: as a partition thematically and as a forced rest rhythmically. Both the commas and periods scattered generously throughout lend support to the idea of Bogan's writing poetry with musical composition in mind. By employing the tools of grammar to recreate rhythmic rests at regular intervals, she successfully develops and sustains an audible drumbeat in "The Drum."

Conversely, in “Chanson Un Peu Naïve,” Bogan returns to the structures of accentual verse by displaying multiple meters within the poem. As defined by Frank Chambers, author of *Old Provençal Versification*, a chanson is a lyric song originating in France during the eleventh century that was used, primarily, for setting poetry to music (Chambers 1-2). The earliest chansons appeared in the poetic structures known as *formes fixes*: the rondeau, ballade, and virelai; these structures were commonly translated into songs or simply accompanied by music. Each form regulates the rhyme scheme and narrative progression of a poem. The rondeau, furthermore, consists of three stanzas, 15 lines each, contains a binary rhyme scheme, and characteristically involves a refrain. The rhyme scheme is *ABaAabAB* with capital letters indicating repeated text and lowercase letters representing new text. Some rondeau varieties assign the refrain to “B” lines while others include a separate refrain signified by “C” within the rhyme scheme. English language rondeaus usually include a separate “C” refrain and were the speciality of Algernon Charles Swinburne, who modified the form to include only nine lines, with the refrains appearing only after the third and last lines (Chambers). Bogan, aware of the form’s evolution, drew on aspects of multiple rondeau varieties, ultimately developing a modernist version in “Chanson Un Peu Naïve.”

The troubadours employed the chanson for their poems of “courtly love” and frequently did so through an idealized lens. Scholar Linda Paterson defines love as it relates to the court in her article “*Fin’amor* and the Development of the Courtly *Canso*.” The canso was the predecessor to the chanson form, which varies slightly in structure but maintains its traditional content—love. She writes that “*Cortesia* or ‘courtliness’ means

having the civilized qualities and refined manners appropriate to life at court, as opposed to the roughness or baseness attributed to the peasant or *vilan*... In the canso it is usually said to arise from love and to be impossible without it” (Paterson 34-5). Paterson thus constructs binaries between public and private, upper and lower classes, and refinement and coarseness that define and separate a Medieval class structure. The kind of love experienced amongst the gentry was viewed culturally as superior and itself more refined than its lower class counterparts. She also suggests that love precipitates *cortesia* presumably because the act of loving requires tenderness and benevolence. Yet, these are precisely the characteristics Bogan targets in “Chanson Un Peu Naïve” to invert and complicate. In her modernist chanson, Bogan depicts love that is strained and destructive, a stark contrast from its romantic origins.

Moreover, like all classic chansons, Bogan’s poem is comprised of three identical stanzas, though she shortens their length significantly writing in sestets rather than the traditional 9 or 15 line strophe. Her decision to condense is perhaps symptomatic of the modernist tendency to pursue obscurity and highly compressed language. In doing so, Bogan begins to build a new interpretation of the chanson form, first from a purely structural perspective. As with most of her work, she weaves technical and thematic elements of modern poetry into the formal skeleton of traditional verse. The result, of course, works toward her larger goal of resurrecting the “drooping rhythms of serious poetry” through contemporary techniques.

Bogan opens the first stanza with a question so as to prepare the reader for the ambiguity to follow. The speaker asks, “What body can be ploughed, / Sown and broken

yearly?” followed by the reply: “She would not die, she vowed, / But she has nearly:” (*BE* 23, 1-4). The speaker inquires about the survival of another woman following the trauma, physical or otherwise, brought about by a dysfunctional romantic relationship. “Ploughed” implies a kind of sexual transgression experience by the woman in which a general callousness or even violence from her partner characterizes the relationship. Yet, “ploughed” from its association with land cultivation could also indicate the woman’s perennial state of pregnancy. The second line, “Sown and broken yearly?” further supports this reading suggesting the cyclical process of conception, pregnancy, childbirth, and recovery. Bogan attributes a sense of exhaustion to the woman and of concern from the speaker who tells her story.

Ultimately, the poem presents the theme of surrender and the idea of settling on acceptance of what cannot be changed and the importance of inner strength. In the final stanza, Bogan writes “So from strength concealed / She makes her pretty boast: / Pain is a furrow healed / And she may love you most” (13-16). Clearly, Bogan presents a woman whose “pretty boast” does not mirror her inner anguish. Instead, the woman appears defeated and resolves to maintain an image of harmony regardless of its reality. Her ambivalence, however, is made clear with the oxymoronic conclusion that “pain is a furrow healed.” A furrow, of course, literally refers to the groove in the land made by a plow; metaphorically, Bogan suggests the kind of emotional scars that endure long after a disturbing or traumatic event takes place. Thus, the paradox begins to take shape. Because a healed or healthy body does not have wounds that inflict pain, the woman is overtly a victim of perpetual suffering, a notion antithetical to the original chanson.

Thematically, then, Bogan introduces modernist irony to a form that historically tells of courtly love and blossoming relationships between the noble and the wealthy. Bogan, instead, uses the *chanson* to portray a woman consumed and nearly destroyed by love.

Despite Bogan's unorthodox approach to the love poem, she is sure to include a crucial stylistic element of the *rondeau*—the refrain. Because the *chanson* was written for the purpose of setting to music, the repetition of the refrain serves to regulate and stabilize rhythm. In addition to its rhythmic advantages, Bogan employs the refrain to contrast the desperation of survival with the freedom of hope; it acts as the only relief within "Chanson Un Peu Naïve." The speaker commands eagerly, "Sing, heart, sing; / Call and carol clearly," then in the second strophe "Fly, song, fly, / Break your little tether" (5-6). The speaker's positivity is apparent and eagerly dispensed, as if she attempts to persuade the trapped woman or appeal to her heart directly. The intensity of these lines reveals the desperation of the woman's situation from the speaker's perspective. The woman's heart has become so consumed with pain that even the weight of song has become too heavy. Urgently, the speaker calls to the heart for its song and spirit to resurface. Bogan, in doing so, establishes music as the opposite of pain and perhaps even attributes the power of salvation: song will rescue the heart. She attaches this idea to both the first and second stanzas, though the final refrain resumes a modernist bleakness in which song cries rather than flies, possibly over the last fleeting traces of hope.

Structurally, Bogan thus complies with two key requirements of a *chanson*: a refrain and three stanzas all of equal length. The discussion of her modification to the

form, then, as been mostly thematic up to this point. Yet, her chief variation of the chanson lies in her manipulation of the rhyme scheme. If she were to replicate the medieval pattern in sestets it would appear *ABaAab* with the final “*AB*” omitted from the original scheme. Instead, she carefully substitutes a metrical pattern that mirrors the aforementioned design in which *A* stands for iambic trimeter and *B* represents trochaic trimeter. Indeed, Bogan alternates iambs and trochees from line to line rather than merely trading end rhymes. In order to best demonstrate the oscillation, the first and second stanzas are included in full:

What body can be ploughed,
 Sown, and broken yearly?
 She would not die, she vowed,
 But she has, nearly:
 Sing, heart, sing;
 Call and carol clearly.

And, since she could not die,
 Care would be a feather,
 A film over the eye
 Of two that lie together.
 Fly, song, fly,
 Break your little tether.

Scansion reveals that the first stanza opens with iambic trimeter with the stresses on the keywords, the first syllable of “body” and “ploughed.” In the next line, Bogan reverses the pattern so that a stressed syllable begins rather than ends the line. The stresses on “Sown,” and the first syllable of “broken” and “year” confirm the alternation. The third line returns to iambic trimeter and then, unexpectedly, the fourth perpetuates the iambs rather than symmetrically repeating trochaic meter. Bogan’s abandonment of this expectation suggests her special attention to a prescribed order rather than arbitrary fluctuation. Indeed, the rondeau form of a chanson strictly adheres to a *ABaAabAB* rhyme scheme, though would be transcribed and abbreviated to *ABaAab* if it were written in

Bogan's sestets. Bogan then, as if using trace paper, lays down a metrical arrangement that also follows *ABAACB*. Of course, the final "a" of the rhyme scheme is replaced by a "C" due to the introduction of spondaic meter that will be discussed momentarily. This replacement "C" speaks to Swinburne's inclusion of a separate "C" refrain within an English language rondeau. Thus, Bogan experiments with the rondeau form and replicates its structure through an entirely different approach from Swinburne. Rather than simply imitating the troubadour's chanson, she reinvents it by exchanging rhyme for meter while maintaining an almost identical rhythmic pattern.

Bogan's decision to write the refrain in multiple meters adds further complexity to the poem. After "nearly," Bogan includes a colon as if to signal the forthcoming of the speaker's plea. The following line, "Sing, heart, sing;" is written in spondaic trimeter with a stress falling on every word without the interruption of an unstressed syllable. The even and sustained stress speaks to the emphasis or urgency in the speaker's command as well as distinguishes the refrain structurally. The indentation and grouping of spondees represent Bogan's treatment of a rondeau's defining characteristic, the refrain. While this, of course, disrupts the *ABaAab* pattern, it does not, arguably, detract from the quality or effectiveness of Bogan's experimentation with form. In fact, it could be read as actually strengthening the poem by contributing another layer of intricacy. The last line of the refrain, "Call and carol clearly," returns to trochaic trimeter, completing the *ABaAab* pattern and rounding out the stanza as a whole. This alternation at once fulfills the scheme as dictated by the rondeau form and recalls the thematic ambivalence of the poem.

The resurrection and culmination of the medieval rondeau in “Chanson un Peu Naïve” clearly works toward Bogan’s larger goal of the renegotiation of rhythm in formal poetry. Indeed, in this poem, Bogan revives a verse form of the Middle Ages and early Renaissance though she awakens it through heavy modernist irony and experimental treatment of the structural trajectory. Despite the modifications, her modern chanson appeals to both her proclivity for formalized verse and musical rhythm; Bogan thus delivers a new and creative variation on a classic.

Each of the three poems examined, “A Tale,” “The Drum,” and “Chanson un Peu Naïve,” demonstrates Louise Bogan’s dedication “to refresh the drooping and weary rhythms of serious poetry.” In “A Tale,” for instance, she uses ballad meter to reveal her technical ability and official knowledge of poetic structures. Her precise execution of form recognizes the merit of formal poetry she defends yet reinvigorates the ballad with modernist themes. The exploration of transcendence thwarted by defeat and despair is a hallmark of Bogan’s work as well as modernist poetry at large. Nevertheless, Bogan is careful to balance the thematic weight of the poem with the rhythmic ease of its musicality. She proposes that “the varied, crisp, fresh qualities of light verse” are the solution to updating tired rhythms (TPFP 205). In “A Tale” she performs this task with exceptional efficacy and success. Perhaps this explains her decision to open almost all her poetry collections—*Body of This Death* (1923), *Poems and New Poems* (1941), *Collected Poems 1923-1953* (1954), and *The Blue Estuaries: Poems 1923-1968* (1968)—with “A Tale”. Bogan chose this poem as a statement piece in which she previews what is to come.

Furthermore, it is without doubt that Bogan clearly produces poetry with musical composition in mind; that is to say, she wrote musically. Both the ballad and chanson (rondeau) have origins in song that evolved into the modern-day hymnal and the rondo. She drew upon her knowledge of such classic musical forms to influence her sense of tempo, rhythm, and cadences. Her organization of rhythmic intervals in “The Drum” exemplifies the musical foundation that grounds her work. Indeed, in her poetry Bogan aims to revive the union between music and poetry in order to achieve the highest aesthetic purity. The rhythmic regularity combined with the vehicle of modernist verse allows Louise Bogan to reach this goal and rejuvenate the notion of poetry as an intersection of arts.

CHAPTER TWO

The Matrix of Oral and Aural: Bogan's Manipulation of Sound

Sound, as a conveyor of aesthetic quality and linguistic meaning, is the focus of a variety of art forms. Technically, sound can be defined as “a waveform which passes through (organizes) air (or any medium) from a source to a receiver. Sound, then, cannot exist without its performative counterpart; it is realized in a medium, so is composed of that medium, of course, but in itself is wholly form” (Preminger 1172). The study of sound, therefore, operates under the premise that sound is largely form: all evaluations on the nature or dimensions of sound is necessarily an examination of that carrier medium. Sound, as it relates to poetry, is of particular interest in oral or lyric poetry. Through the marriage of meter and rhyme, a poet can craft sonal patterns which achieve a variety of specific effects. The vocal component to poetry is the basis for sonal study and its abundant effects on verse, both structural and thematic.

A proper study of poetic sound must first consult the three primary phenomena central to its ontology: articulation, acoustics, and audition. Articulation concerns the pronunciation of words from a mechanical perspective. Consonant and vowel charts of modern linguistics diagram the various classes of phonemes, the sounds that comprise syllables, and their place of articulation within the human mouth. Vowels are determined as being high or low, open or closed, or located front to back; consonants are assigned a specific place of articulation (dental, bilabial, velar etc.) and designated as voiced or voiceless. Consonants such as *p*, *s*, and *t*, for example, are all voiceless because during

production the vocal chords do not vibrate and there is a steady airstream through the mouth without obstructions. Acoustics involves the quality of a sound, and considers frequency (pitch), amplitude (volume), timbre (tonal color), duration (length), and intensity (stress) during evaluation (Preminger 1174). This set of five characteristics functions as the basis for all sonal patterns to be determined by the poet. Pitch, stress, and duration are the three most utilized acoustic qualities in verse, primarily due to their accessibility in most languages and threshold for variation. In languages such as English, where speech sound can occur loosely in iambic pentameter, the systemization of stress in meter can even appear natural. Finally, it is worth noting that acoustics cannot assess a sound itself, but rather the medium through which it is realized; a human voice singing a given note inherently emits different sonal characteristics than a stringed or brass instrument that performs the same pitch. A sound's "[acoustic] quality is thus paralinguistic not linguistic" because the brain cannot convey through language, what is fundamentally extra-linguistic—sound (Preminger 1175). Regardless of a medium's verbalization, then, sound is twice removed from the language system and therefore retains an essence that is purely nonlinguistic.

The brain's complex processing of sound, furthermore, is the study of audition, the third phenomenon in vocal sound. The brain differentiates sound and absorbs it equally and simultaneously in its two hemispheres:

The analysis and interpretation of language sounds is (in right-handed people) a left-brained activity, the same hemisphere responsible for cognition, motor activity, and rational thought. At the same time, musical sounds are interpreted in the right brain. Complex aural stimuli such as vocal song, where words and music are delivered simultaneously, are processed on double tracks. Poetry, too, which is coded into sonal patterns which are both lexical-semantic as well as prosodic (e.g. meter, rhyme, assonance), is processed by both hemispheres simultaneously, the former sounds being interpreted by one side of the brain as linguistic and the latter sounds by the other as aesthetic (Preminger 1174)

In terms of cognitive function, audition is the facet of sound study that distinguishes linguistics and aesthetics as separate entities. This concept particularly applies to Louise Bogan's work, as many of her poems can be read as an attempt to present the linguistic as the aesthetic. That is to say, she develops a multitude of euphonious and "expressive sounds" so as to blur the distinction between language and music from a performative and aural perspective. Euphony is the term to describe sound that appears pleasurable and pleasing to the human ear. Scholar Lloyd Bishop has identified the existence of concrete patterns for the construction of euphonic sound. First, proximity concerns the order of articulation for vocal sounds. It is thought that one experiences articulatory pleasure when the origins of the sounds are localized to the same general area within the mouth. When sounds progress from one to another in a smooth transition, a feeling of ease and resolution ensues. Conversely, more exertion during modulation can clog a poetic line and risk difficulty when reading aloud. Identity, a second principle of euphony, encompasses the literary tropes that involve repetition such as alliteration, chiasmus, and anaphora. It is unclear as to what drives the effectiveness of repetition but researchers conclude "whether repetition satisfies a deep-rooted intellectual thirst for unity, or the sheer aesthetic pleasure of recognition itself... one thing is certain: it works" (Preminger 390). Finally, progression extends phonetic analysis from a single word, syllable, or phoneme to the larger context of the poem or line as a whole. This kind of examination explores the "melodic" flow of a text by judging instances of cadence, caesura, and poetic resolve. In general, the study of progression gauges the poem's holistic treatment of balance and movement.

Expressive sound refers to the branch of study that suggests sound itself can be expressive of meaning, and appears in four forms: onomatopoeia, kinesthetics, synaesthesia, and morphosymbolism. Onomatopoeia, the most well-known of the set, refers to any word whose sound is said to contribute directly to its meaning. Additionally, “mimetic sounds are not, therefore representational, but presentational: they add to lexical meaning the enactment of that meaning” (Preminger 1176). Kinesthetics suggests that the movements of the facial muscles or shape of the mouth may contribute to a sound’s meaning. This notion is related to articulation in that it takes into account manner, mode, and place of articulation within the vocal apparatus. Kinesthetics uniquely considers the semantic implications of sound, and opens new possibilities for the role of sonority in poetry. Synaesthesia is defined as “the phenomenon wherein one sense modality is felt, perceived, or described in terms of another, e.g. describing a voice as velvety, warm, heavy, or sweet, or a trumpet-blast as scarlet” (1259). Music’s sonal patterns are portrayed with adjectives that are typically associated with geography and topography such as thin, steep, dark, gloomy. Synaesthesia is particularly useful to lyric poetry in its larger capacity to discuss language as the medium for aural textures. Its common vocabulary, though it still remains inadequate, serves as a kind of bridge between linguistic and nonlinguistic sound. Finally, morphosymbolism explores the relationships at work between words in a given language. In *Essays on Linguistic Themes*, scholar Yakov Malkiel has shown “that words have not only rich and complex diachronic lines of affiliation but equally extensive relationships synchronically, so that at any point in time, some words are exerting a gravitational pull on others, influencing

them lexically (semantically), in sound shape and even orthographically” (Preminger 1177). Evidently, sound, when absorbed through language, may be the product of an entire system of attraction and repulsion. This process would certainly influence the entire matrix of sound created in a given poem, as well as drive a poet’s construction of sonal patterns.

Thus, the four terms that comprise expressive sound, onomatopoeia, kinesthetics, synaesthesia, and morphosymbolism, sort out the ways sound can influence, or even produce meaning. In her poetry, Louise Bogan is particularly concerned with the aural experience, especially sound’s overall quality so as to shape the musicality of the lines. She designates particular phonemes that illuminate aurally, what rhyme and repetition hope to convey semantically. In a letter written to Theodore Roethke in September 1937, she stresses the phonic component to her poetry and her intention behind its design: “I’m going right back to pure music: the Christina Rossetti of our day, only not so good. My aim is to sound so pure and so liquid that travelers will take me across the desert with them” (*WTWL* 163). Thus, Bogan identifies her passion for sound, particularly sound that is fluid and flawless. The “purity” for which she strives refers to the concept of euphony and its principles may be found extensively throughout her work. Finally, it is also significant that Bogan insists on going “back to pure music,” which reveals her passion for music as well as shows she considers music to be the source of sound that is pure and liquid. This letter explicates Bogan’s hopes to create lyric poetry that emphasizes its origins. That is, she hopes to create a heightened sense of musicality in verse that actually approaches pure music.

In doing so, Bogan's lyric poetry challenges the distinction between linguistic and aesthetic sound as separate, though dually processed entities. She understands that poetry, by virtue of its linguistic presentation, can never be fully absorbed by the brain as aesthetic. Nonetheless, she utilizes the principles of euphony and expressive sound in order to destabilize the lingo-aesthetic binary. By weaving strategic sets of consonants and vowels, she creates in her poems a musical *effect* which, in turn, integrates visual language and aural musicality. This synthesis allows the brain to *perceive* the poem as euphonious or "melodic," ultimately layering her medium, language, with a musical quality. It is clear, though, that Bogan's manipulation of sound is not an effort to merely recreate music in poetry; rather, her approach attempts to circumvent the limitations of language (syntactic and semantic) by emphasizing musical sound and therefore the aesthetic experience in her poetry.

Bogan's early poem "Song for a Lyre" exemplifies her coalescence of language and music that results in a dreamy, delicate aural texture. As the title indicates, Bogan creates this lulling sonority to mimic the lyre's sound and echo its association with courtly love poetry. "Song for a Lyre" is one of Bogan's only love poems, and the title announces this subject matter implicitly. The changing seasons and the night prompt a memory of the speaker's lover; she finds comfort in the natural world and its ability to inspire personal remembrance. The tone is therefore fond but indistinct, as if the speaker were trying to bring a distant memory into focus. Bogan includes three stanzas, the first two of which appear uniform, whereas the third diverges from its predecessors. While the initial two are sestets written in an *ababcc* rhyme scheme, the third is a heptset that

rhymes irregularly, *abccdda*. Rather than using a consistent meter, Bogan varies it throughout the poem, which represents aurally the vague experience of night and dreams. The impressionistic quality of the poem directly parallels the illumination of the aural patterns through language.

Bogan develops the poem's impressionistic imagery by withholding contextual information and replacing it with generalizations about changing seasons. In the first stanza, the speaker does not provide any time or place other than "The landscape where I lie, / Again from boughs sets free Summer" (*BE* 90 1-3). The time of year is made explicit, but this is the only deducible fact. Bogan refuses any defining characteristics such as the landscape's topography, general condition, or proximity to any recognizable locales. It lends a certain accessibility to the poem in that Bogan waives the reader's responsibility to interpret context. Instead, one can simply absorb the poem from an aural perspective with few semantic distractions. The omission of a working context sets a precedent for succeeding lines in which the speaker, too, assumes a rather vague identity and almost blends into the background of the landscape. In the second stanza, the speaker depicts "Soon, the pictured night, / Returns—as in a dream / Left after sleep's delight — / The shallow autumn stream: / Softly awake, its sound / Poured from the chilly ground" (1-3). In this instance, Bogan only provides "the pictured night" for setting, which could stand for the ideal night or the material of dreams. Both interpretations, however, suggest a reality submerged in fantasy that allows the speaker to reunite with her lover, if only in mind.

Furthermore, Bogan weaves soft, dewy aural tones in order to perfect the correlation between sonal architecture and lexical understanding. She introduces soft consonants which contain a whispered, dreamlike consistency that parallels their linguistic meaning. In the first stanza, for instance, Bogan includes almost exclusively nasals and voiced consonants: “all night must fly / In wind’s obscurity / The thick, green leaves that made / Heavy the August shade” (3-6). The initial use of nasal sounds *m* and *n* in words such as “green,” “night” and “made” traps sound within the nasal passage, thereby limiting its amplitude. This amplitude will ensure a hushed effect when reading the poem and dulls any sharpness in its overall sonority. The voiced plosives, *b* and *d*, in “boughs,” “made,” and “shade,” also have a quieting effect because they obstruct the soundstream during pronunciation. Furthermore, because the sonal and articulatory contrast between the nasals and plosives is subtle rather than stark, it appears more pleasing to the ear. It is precisely this elusion of sharp definition that Bogan attempts to produce both semantically and phonetically in “Song for a Lyre.” The minimal use of harsh, voiceless consonants such as *t* and *k* produces a soft timbre which Bogan sustains throughout the poem. Indeed, the pronunciation of most consonants in the first stanza—*l w n f s d*—occurs in one of two places of articulation, dental or alveolar. This exemplifies the principle of euphonic proximity in which a speaker derives pleasure from producing sounds that are all located in the same vicinity. Thus, Bogan reinforces a subdued tone by coupling aural with articulatory pleasure.

The prevalence of high vowels in the first stanza additionally contributes to the poem’s calming sonority. The high, closed pronunciation of *e* in “free,” “obscurity,”

“green,” and “leaves,” has a soothing effect because the tongue can linger on the stable, extended *e* sound. The vowel does not feel constrained, but rather floats above the tongue and can be sustained through a steady airstream. Its repetition throughout the first sestet promotes the airy and delicate tone at work within the poem because the lines glide over air suspended in the mouth. The second stanza provides new layers of intricacy in the alternation of high and low vowels as well as the introduction of the *o* phoneme to the sonal design. The final three lines, “The shallow autumn stream: / Softly awake, its sound / Poured on the chilly ground” oscillate between the high *a* vowel in “shallow” and a low *a* in “softly.” While the elevated version allows for more airflow and keeps the breath light and airy, the shallow vowel creates a long and narrow shape, which relaxes the mouth and extends the sound. The echoes heard in the last syllable of “shallow,” “poured,” “sound” and “ground,” complete the sonal framework of the second stanza. This vowel is easily accessible, articulated in the mid-to-low central part of the mouth and augments the poem’s elegant flow. Significantly, the *a* and *o* phonemes are both rounded vowels, which allows the mouth to modulate seamlessly during articulation. Euphonic proximity helps to decrease contrast between phonic shapes, which provides pleasure for the articulator and intensifies a soothing sonority. The combination of nasal consonants and central vowels thus allows for the purity and harmony that Bogan hopes to accomplish. Elizabeth Frank suggests this poem’s effectiveness is transformative even, “as though the speaking voice had become music. The imagery seems to awaken to the soft sound of time itself passing,... the lyric elements of ‘memory and desire’ meet in a landscape belonging both to nature and to the inner world, and rise in a crescendo of

reconciliation” (269). Frank suggests the “melody” of the poetic lines rivals that of pure music, which helps the speaker to gather inspiration from the surrounding landscape. The accumulation of nature’s strength escalates throughout the poem, ultimately reaching a climax with the lover’s realization. Frank’s assertion of reconciliation is the culmination of the speaker’s commune with nature to lead to the reunion with her lover.

Bogan also conveys this reconciliation aurally, through the development of euphonic progression in the third stanza. She indicates a temporal shift in the beginning of the stanza writing, “Soon fly the leaves in throngs;” which suggests the transition from mid-fall into early winter. Elemental associations with winter—hibernation, stillness, frigidity—foreshadows a gradual movement towards closure. The semi-colon at the line’s end also signals conclusion and segmentation to the reader both syntactically and semantically. The speaker then begins an apostrophe to her lover, who has been fully realized through memory after the first two stanzas: “O love, though once I lay / Far from its sound, to weep / When night divides my sleep, / When stars, the autumn stream, / Stillness, divide my dream” (13-18). The speaker expresses a series of conditional statements; something unnamed occurs when night or stars “divide my sleep.” The grammatical construction prepares the reader for an explanation in the final line, where the speaker elucidates, “When night divides my sleep... Night to your voice belongs.” (19). Hence, Bogan concludes the poem at a logical point syntactically: the speaker calls to her lover in the night. Likewise, the poetic resolve mirrors the grammar, which provides the reader with a sense of satisfaction in ascertaining the missing information. While the final line is abstract, it is conclusive and signals completion.

Much like a chord progression in music, the dependent statements of the third stanza moves toward resolution in the last line. They appear as two enveloped couplets with both sets including the same rhyming sound, the high, closed *e* of weep/sleep and stream/dream. Syntax prompts natural inflection to rise on these end words in anticipation of the contextual information to follow. Yet, Bogan repeats the high, closed *e* four consecutive times, thwarting an expectation for a complementary, rather than identical, sound. Thus, when the poem ends with “Night to your voice belongs” Bogan grants syntactical, semantic, and sonal satisfaction at once. She finally relieves the ear with the long, rounded *o* vowel in “belongs” whose aural quality is a welcome variation from the lines that precede it. Its rhyming word, “throng,” further intensifies the stanza’s euphony, in which Bogan creates a kind of sonal chord where the long *o* vowels of the first and last line envelop a string of high, closed *e* rhymes. This euphonic progression, then, provides balance and solidifies the poem’s final resolution.

“Train Tune” further illustrates Bogan’s remarkable ability to manipulate sound for the effect of reenactment. The chief sonal pattern recreates the mechanical cycle of a steam locomotive; selected phonemes circulate the sounds of pressurized air being released and turning wheels. The poem is composed of five quatrains that contain no overt rhyme scheme but, instead, play with other forms of mimetic soundplay including assonance, consonance, and alliteration. There is no clear speaker and all lines, with the exception of three, have the same construction: “Back through” followed by a single end word such as “clouds” or “smoke.” This produces an incantatory effect, in which each line is a short rhythmic phrase repeated uniformly. There is not a single mark of

punctuation in the entire poem, which makes obvious Bogan's intention of a quick and uninterrupted reading. Alternatively, the absence of punctuation may be meant to simulate the train's steady movement on the railway and attribute a regular flow to the poem, structurally and semantically. In regards to its content, the poem deals with reflection at life's end. The speaker travels through personal history as the train travels past geographical landmarks such as "cities and "plains." These images appear to be passing outside the train window and give the illusion of movement. For the traveler, however, the journey ultimately delves into the interior landscape as she faces the old wounds of love and life. In addition to Louise Bogan's use of a travel metaphor, however, it is fruitful to consider the poem's structural and sonal stratagems, for her sense of motion, sound, and their interdependence in "Train Tune" is flawless.

Bogan first selects the phonemes *b* and *k* to mirror the mechanical cycle of a steam locomotive. The opening stanza reads "Back through clouds / Back through clearing / Back through distance / Back through silence" (*BE* 118 1- 4). The *b* phoneme, a voiced, bilabial plosive on linguistic charts, sounds like the train first gaining momentum and starting to turn its wheels. As the steam travels from the boiler to the pistons, it audibly releases pressure, which is channeled through the metal crankpins and rods that are mounted on each driving wheel. When a wheel makes a full revolution it emits a loud "click" sound, which Bogan signifies in the hard *k* sound in "back." Similarly, the repetition of "through" imitates the release of pressurized steam out of the top of the train's chimney. The theta phoneme, or *th* in "through," is a voiceless, dental fricative, meaning that articulation is performed by pushing air into the teeth with the tongue.

Friction with the teeth makes the airstream audible, which sounds like gas and pressure emission from the train. Furthermore, the mouth easily modulates to the airy and rounded *o* vowel that completes the pronunciation of “through.” Two simple adjustments, dropping the tongue and rounding the lips, creates the *o*. The monotonous repetition of “Back through” audibly imitates the locomotive’s reciprocating engine and speaks to the origins of lyric poetry—chant.

Additionally, Bogan uses onomatopoeia in the imitation of the train’s driving wheels, in which she creates an elliptical shape in the mouth during the repeated articulation of “Back through.” The initial sound in each line, *b*, is a bilabial phoneme, which begins the pattern at the front of the mouth and lips. The next sound, *a*, drops the jaw and sound sits on the middle of the tongue. Finally, the *k* that concludes “back” is a velar plosive, which places the sound at the rear roof of the mouth. The soundstream has now traveled from the lips, through the middle of the tongue, and then to the top rear within a single syllable. From this position, the sound returns to the front in order to pronounce theta, a dental fricative. This manner of pronunciation is the mirror image to velar plosives, in that both articulations use the the front of the tongue to push air in an upward motion at the top front and rear of the mouth. The long, closed *o* of “through” ends the pattern with the sound returning to the lips. Though they are rounded at the end, the tongue pushes air through the lips in order to sustain the high *o* sound. Thus, the proximity and progression of these five phonemes reenact the circular motion of a turning wheel. In doing so, they exercise the concept of kinesthetics, where the movement of facial muscle contributes to meaning. The mouth’s elliptical pattern simulates the turning

wheels as well as plays to the large concept of cyclical sound. Thus, in “Train Tune” Bogan develops mechanical mimesis and demonstrates a new level of technical proficiency in sound formulation.

Finally, “To Be Sung on the Water” displays Bogan’s personal attachment to music and poetry, specifically within the realm of sound. For the poet, musical sound is a unique entity that has the ability to connect communities. However, this poem emerges from a context of negation for Bogan and represents the quiet satisfaction of music she feels has been lost by modern society. Bogan localizes this loss in *Journey Around My Room*, in which she verifies that “To Be Sung on the Water” was written out of nostalgia for the music of her childhood and the world in which it was once played:

Music in those days belonged to its own time and place. No can remember with the same nostalgia (my generation is the last to remember) the sound of music on the water (voices and a mandolin or guitar); of band concerts in town squares or in Army parade grounds, in the twilight or early evening, with a string of lights in the distance marking the line of the bay; or under trees in what actually, then, was a romantic “gloaming.” How poignant the sound of piano music, played however inexpertly, along some city street... It is not only the pianos that have vanished (the sound of the pianos along the streets in spring evenings when the windows were opened) but the world in which they sounded, and the young ears they sounded for. I shall never forget how beautiful they were or what they meant to me (121-22)

In “To Be Sung on the Water” Bogan thus attempts to capture both the scenic and aural memories of music. It embodies social harmony and its displacement from everyday interaction, Bogan claims, is proof of societal change. In this poem, then, Bogan strives to recreate her childhood memories and restore the classic beauty of music.

Like “Song for a Lyre,” the poem exudes a lulling timbre that is consistent from beginning to end. The speaker opens both stanzas in an apostrophe, “Beautiful, my delight,” in the first and “beautiful,” in the second. The repetition signals a warm and familiar relationship between the speaker and her receiver. She could be addressing a lover, as some critical interpretations suggest, or Bogan may be referring to music, itself

—the speaker calls to the music (vocal or instrumental) as it gently dances on the water’s surface. The softness that characterizes this address continues throughout the first stanza: “Pass, as we pass the wave. Pass, as the mottled night / Leaves what is cannot save, / Scattering dark and bright.” (BE 105 2-5). Here, the temporal setting is the subtle transition when day turns into night. As the deep reds and oranges of the horizon blend seamlessly into the blues of dusk, the world, for a moment, becomes a quiet and ethereal place. Bogan depicts this time of day with hushed sibilants that hang suspended just above the surface. While sibilants are often associated with malice because of their hissing sound, they have a large (and relatively underutilized) capacity for softness. This is because the vocal chords do not vibrate during production and the sound can be sustained for the duration of the airstream. The unobstructed airflow allows the reader to glide from one sound to the next and emphasize the sibilants in “pass” “scattered” and “saved.” The prevalence of sibilants thus yields a fluidity and fragile flow to the verse that portrays the delicacy of nightfall and the gentility of days past.

In the second stanza, Bogan establishes a soothing timbre through the frequent alternation of voiceless consonants and central vowels. She clearly favors central vowels throughout the poem due to their placid articulation and smooth tonal quality. The soft sonority of sibilants, combined with the “flat” *e* and *o* vowels, minimizes the appearance of harsh sound in the second stanza: “Beautiful, pass and be / Less than the guiltless shade / To which our vows were said; / Less than the sound of the oar / To which our vows were made, / Less than the sound of its blade / Dipping the stream once more.” (105 6-12) Bogan relies on the euphony of her selected sounds—*l m d e o*—to

promote a sense of harmony both aesthetic and linguistic. Fortunately, each of these phonemes functions individually as pleasing to the human ear. When developed collectively, as in “To Be Sung on the Water,” they bloom into their own form of language-based music. Of course cerebrally, this concept is unaccounted for in that the brain differentiates linguistic and musical sound; yet, Bogan’s poetry demonstrates language that approximates “pure music” in aural bliss.

Critic Gloria Bowles, moreover, suggests in *Louise Bogan’s Aesthetic of Limitation* that the sonal architecture of the poem simulates the contact between boat oars and the water. In the second stanza Bogan makes explicit this concept writing “Less than the sound of the oar / ...Less than the sound of its blade / Dipping the stream once more.” Clearly, the setting is a rowboat in the water (or any other steered by oars); Bowles’ argument, however, is concerned with sound as the reenactment of the scene itself. She claims that the “‘s’ and ‘o’ and ‘p’ sounds imitate the sound of moving through water quietly, with slightly lapping oars” (122). These phonemes, according to Bowles, mimic the unique sonority of moving water. Sibilants are meant to signify the oar’s division of water as it breaks the surface. The act of rowing, then, becomes a central image in the poem and reinforces the concept of poetic rhythm—the basis of Bogan’s poetry. It is apparent that the phonemes (especially sibilants) in “To Be Sung on the Water” can represent boating, though their ability to “imitate” is questionable. It is certainly a weaker or less distinct attempt at mimesis than “Train Tune,” though the poem does warrant some degree of onomatopoeia. Her analysis could be more accurate were it to suggest not

that the poem's aural texture is performative of its subject matter, but rather that it is meant to elicit the tranquility of being on the water or has its roots in that effect.

As seen in "Train Tune," "Song for a Lyre," and "To Be Sung on the Water," Louise Bogan complicates the distinction between linguistic form and aesthetic experience that divides the brain's absorption of poetry. She attempts to present linguistic sound as aesthetic by integrating as much euphony, and ultimately musicality, as possible. Expressive sound helps to bridge linguistic and aesthetic sound and to de-emphasize the lingual face of poetry. Her poetry, then, becomes, a truly sound-oriented art form, in which a convincing and effective representation of music in verse is the pinnacle of achievement. The next chapter will explore her musical imagery with less emphasis on the mechanics of music at work in her poems. Instead, I will discuss the artistic relationship between music and musician, asserting that it serves as an analog to poetry and the poet. This analysis will build off the structural elements previously discussed and introduce musicality from a thematic perspective.

CHAPTER THREE

Music and Musician: Bogan's Treatment of the Artistic Relationship

In addition to the definitive rhythms and sonal patterns that resemble “pure music,” Louise Bogan’s poetry is filled with images of musicality. As a result, Bogan develops the presence of music holistically and solidifies it as a primary focus of her work. Indeed, her imagery is diverse and abundant, ranging from vocal and sheet music to images of the musician. When combined with the structural elements of rhythm and sound, music’s cumulative effect in her poetry is poignant. Bogan often includes a catalog of instruments within a poem that creates a rich visual and aural texture. The First Voice in “Summer Wish” commands, “Speak out the wish like music, that has within it / The horn, the string, the drum pitched deep as grief” (*BE* 58 124-125); the speaker in “Song for a Slight Voice” refers to “firm strings,” “the viol,” and the “tambour.” (47, 3-4, 12) The variety of instruments—stringed, percussive, and brass—forms the larger image of a full orchestra that complements Bogan’s extensive use of rhythm and sound. In this way, Bogan maximizes the musicality of her poetry especially through repeated use of the drum and strings; less prominent references include the bell, lyre, and the general “instrument.” Additionally, Bogan frequently makes use of a poem’s title to include an oblique or direct reference to music. The rondeau form implicit in “Chanson Un Peu Naive,” the historical allusion in “Baroque Comment,” and the technical application of “Sub Contra,” a low bass scale, contribute to the multiple layers through which Bogan infuses music into her poetry. Many poems refer explicitly to vocal music as evidenced

by their designation as “songs.” As discussed in the introduction, Bogan’s “songs” span multiple perspectives including a male speaker in “Juan’s Song,” a child in “Little Lobelia’s Song,” and an unknown speaker in “Song for a Lyre.”

Images of the musician, moreover, signify the centrality of musical themes in Bogan’s poetry. She depicts the relationship between music and musician throughout her poetry, presenting varying degrees of control over music, emotional intensity, and friction between player and instrument. Indeed, the artistic relationship proves to be a central focus in Bogan’s work and can be read as comparable to the process of literary production. That is to say, Bogan includes recurring images of the relationship between music and musician as an analog to poetry and poet. This may be due in part to the personal struggle Bogan faced when writing and attempting to publish poetry professionally throughout her life. Elizabeth Frank confirms that Bogan developed a vexed relationship with writing that resulted in few new poems and infrequent publication by the end of her life. She often struggled with writer’s block and the completion of drafts, which resulted in a seven-year hiatus between 1941 and 1948 (Frank 321). Emotional instability was also a deterrent from composition for Bogan and one of which she was conscious. In a letter to Katherine White, wife of E. B. White, a colleague at *The New Yorker*, Bogan explains, “As soon as I can manage even to peer around the corner of the pretty little emotional cul-de-sac I’ve managed to sew myself into, burning words will again begin to flow from my pen and I’ll send samples on to you” (*WTWL* 77). Thus, Bogan’s relationship to poetry, at times, involved a great deal of tension.

Bogan represents this complexity surrounding the creative process in many of her poems, notably, “Musician,” “Sub Contra,” and “Song for the Last Act.” In these poems Bogan explores the musician’s relationship to music both as its own unique partnership, and as it relates to the poet. Control over the instrument seen in “Sub Contra” is equivalent to the command of language possessed by the poet. Bogan characterizes the dynamic with ferocity amidst delicacy, representing the wide spectrum of timbres audible in music and available to the musician and poet alike. Similarly, the prolonged abandonment of the instrument by its player in “Musician,” represents the difficulties in producing creative substance, through any medium, unimpeded and with consistency. Finally, my interpretation of “Song for the Last Act” also concerns the artistic relationship and for this reason diverges from traditional scholarship. In all three poems, however, I argue that the correlation between music and musician is analogous to poetry and poet or, more generally, creator and craft.

The speaker in “Musician” initially portrays a distanced relationship between music and musician but affirms their interdependence at the poem’s conclusion. The poem consists of four stanzas, three quatrains and a concluding couplet. Each quatrain includes an enveloped couplet, which reiterates the thematic alliance between art and artist. The speaker opens with a question about the musician’s sustained absence from his craft: “Where have these hands been, / By what delayed, / That so long stayed / Apart from the thin / Strings which they now grace / With their lonely skill?” (*BE* 106 1-6). The speaker inquires about what exactly prevented the musician from playing his instrument. Despite the musician’s “lonely skill,” he cannot bring himself to play. Moreover, this

question establishes a clear binary between human hands and “thin strings,” which Bogan expands in the rest of the poem. This central relationship is localized beyond the musician, the man. Rather, his hands and the strings are the two most crucial elements required to produce music. Hence, Bogan focuses on creation, identifying the interconnection between hands and strings from the beginning.

Bogan then initiates a transition in the poem, in which the speaker ultimately finds relief at the reunion between music and musician. Indeed, there is resolution at the musician’s “homecoming” where “Music and their cool will / At last interlace” (106 7-8). “Their cool will” refers to the hands and the final line suggests anticipation on the part of the speaker; the musician’s return to music has been long awaited. “At last” music and musician are reunited in what appears to be an intricate and perfect union. Bogan’s use of “interlace” transforms the hand and string’s association in the first stanza into interdependence. Indeed, the musician would not be such without the music produced from his instrument and, similarly, the strings cannot produce music without the musician’s hands. Critic William Heyen discusses this concept of interdependence in his article “The Distance from Our Eyes.” He suggests that in “Musician,” “Bogan says most about what the poet and poem must be and do... and what is finally created, it seems, is that song that was hidden in the string, the image in the stone that only needed finding. The poet here is as much an instrument as is his instrument” (100). Heyen is correct to identify Bogan’s attention to the creative process and the dynamic between poet and craft; however, his claim that the poet himself is an instrument is questionable. This statement implies a transformation on the part of the artist when, in actuality, it may relate

to creative ability. In this poem, what “Bogan says most” about the artistic relationship concerns partnership rather than search. The “song” of the string may not be hidden as much as readily available and simply awaiting the musician’s attention. The image, therefore, is not one of a musician’s seeking song, but rather of his returning to a sacred and familiar union between hand and string.

Furthermore, this notion of interdependence not only conveys reciprocation, but suggests the idea of destiny as well. That is to say, within the poem, the player is realized as a musician in his return to the strings, and is destined to do so by a higher power. Bogan explores this concept in the third quatrain explicitly, writing, “Now with great ease, and slow, / The thumb, the finger, the strong, / Delicate hand plucks the long / String it was born to know” (9-12). Bogan’s detailed description of each movement builds suspense that climaxes when the musician finally “plucks” or draws sound from the instrument; the wait is over. The commas that fragment the stanza’s second line force a pause but also enrich the image of the musician slowly, and with precision, placing his hands on the instrument. Some critics such as William Jay Smith in “Louise Bogan: A Woman’s Words,” have even proposed that this line resembles aurally the actual plucking of strings (115). While the musician places each finger on the instrument with great ease, the gradual contact indicates a great deal of care as well. The delicacy of his hands illuminates the intensity of his partnership with the strings and the miracle of aesthetic creation. In the final line, moreover, Bogan states that the musician was designed by a higher power for the specific purpose which he currently undertakes. The reference to nativity, coupled with the deliberate hand placement in the preceding lines, demonstrates

the concept of destiny at work in the poem. Thus, liberated from previous anticipation, the musician experiences the perfection of music and fulfills his predestined role. Bogan, therefore, depicts the relationship between artist and craft to be collaborative and a product of fate.

Bogan extends emotional investment in the artistic relationship to the instrument as well. The strings also express a desire to produce music: “And, under the palm, the string / Sings as it wished to sing.” (13-14). Evidently, the string itself awaited the musician’s return and its anticipation is released in song. The literal desire of the string is not Bogan’s theme, but rather the recapitulation of the poem’s central premise—the collective effort of both musician and instrument to produce music. Her inclusion of the string’s desire resists the argument that the musician merely acts upon the instrument or in a non-reciprocal process. Instead, player and instrument share the effort and desire, which is intricately bound and “interlaced.”

While Bogan emphasizes interdependence between player and strings in “Musician,” in “Sub Contra,” she stresses the musician’s total command over the instrument and music’s emotive power. The final couplet of “Musician” implies the player’s control, yet Bogan is careful to maintain reciprocity with a portrayal of the string’s desire: the string sings but only does so “under the palm” of its player. “Sub Contra,” on the other hand, favors the musician’s power completely. There is no clear speaker in the poem; yet, he or she demands an extremely harsh sound and emotional intensity from the instrument. This is first made evident by the title, “Sub Contra,” which refers to a scale in the bass clef that is three octaves below Middle C. Its sound, when

expressed through the concept of synaesthesia, is considered dark, dramatic, and stormy. These characteristics relate to the musical movement “*sturm und drang*” which was developed in the late eighteenth century by German composers such as Mozart. Translated as “storm and stress,” this category of music is often written in minor keys and is intended to evoke emotional extremes. Due to Bogan’s extensive knowledge of Mozart and his contemporaries, she would have been aware of this concept; and for this reason, an argument could be made about the poem’s linguistic recreation of a “*sturm und drang*” musical movement.

Bogan establishes the power of the musician—as the manipulator of sound—in the first lines of the opening stanza: “Notes on the tuned frame of strings / Plucked or silenced under the hand / Whimper lightly to the ear” (*BE* 5 1-3). Like “*Musician*,” Bogan chooses a stringed instrument and uses hand imagery. Although “under the hand” is nearly identical to “under the palm,” in “*Musician*,” there is a subtle difference in that the former phrase connotes more precision and total control, whereas the latter appears milder and less constrained. Bogan also provides the player with choice, in that he may pluck *or* silence his instrument whereas the player in “*Musician*” struggles to play at all. This slight linguistic difference bestows more agency upon the musician of “*Sub Contra*” to determine his choice and produce music, namely the raging sound of a sub contra scale.

In the subsequent lines, Bogan expands from this binary (pluck or silence) to depict more general musical dichotomies regarding the construction or destruction of sound. Just as plucking a string generates music, silencing “under the hand” withdraws it.

As the poem continues, the speaker demands, “Let there sound from music’s root / One note rage can understand, / A fine noise of riven things / Build there some thick chord of wonder” (9-12). The imperatives indicate the production of something concrete, although they are addressed to no one in particular, and according to the speaker, the music produced ought to express the emotional realm of rage. Syntactically, the imperative construction itself signals distress; there is urgency to create. The previous lines foreshadow the speaker’s surge of emotion; that is, Bogan builds tension that releases with the series of commands: “Lest the brain forget the thunder / The roused heart once made it hear,— / Rising as that clamor fell,— / Let there sound from music’s root / One note rage can understand” (6-10). Lines ending in the long dash are incomplete and require resolution in the lines that follow. However, Bogan refuses to fulfill the reader’s expectation in the first construction, which builds suspense and, in turn, a stronger impact of the subsequent imperatives. The seventh line, “Rising as that clamor fell,—” provides visual imagery of climax that releases in the next line. Bogan’s use of “rising,” and its contrast with “fell” reflects the emotional uproar conveyed by the speaker and the larger dichotomies of construction and destruction at work in the poem.

The couplet that ends the poem counters the concept of construction developed in the previous lines, thus finalizing the dark emotional and tonal register. Following the call to “Build there some thick chord of wonder,” the speaker demands, “Then, for every passion’s sake, / Beat upon it till it break” (5 13-14). The intensity of these lines is significant in that the speaker reverses the enthusiasm “to build” and instead, intends to deliberately attack in order to destroy. Literally, if the musician were to play a thick chord

and repeat it at length, the sound and rhythm would inevitably become distorted, either through overexposure or a technical error, making the musician appear obsessed. Bogan's decision to conclude the poem on this note (literally and figuratively) features the ferocity of destruction over the awe of creative production. It is plausible that this range of emotion stems from Bogan's personal experience with writer's block and dissatisfaction with her own poems when writing: her own lack of control yields a speaker, who by contrast, has total control not only to create, but to destroy at will. Regardless, this poem speaks to the power of music and musician alike, although it rests musical authority ultimately in human hands.

A stark contrast to Bogan's depiction of rage in "Sub Contra" is the exquisite and deeply personal poem "Song for the Last Act." One of her most well-known works, traditional scholarship suggests the poem depicts the end of a romantic relationship, in which the speaker experiences deep emotional pain. Critic Paul Ramsey, for instance, in his article "Louise Bogan," explicates the first stanza in terms of this conventional interpretation. Like many scholars, he treats "your face" as that of another person and claims that Bogan presents "a face in a portrait whose frame is darkened by time and itself painted with flowers, by a window which gives on an actual garden" (126-27). In his explication, Ramsey attempts to explain the stanza's context, concluding that the speaker mourns the loss of a relationship while looking at the lover's portrait. He also highlights a temporal transition in which the shift to "now" from the assumed "then" indicates a change in circumstance that redefines the relationship between the speaker and her partner. Moreover, critical treatment concerning music in the poem is usually

reserved for the second stanza, in which Bogan addresses music directly. Frank suggests the second stanza has autobiographical undertones and represents “Bogan’s childhood memory of being unable to read and staring at the printed page in bafflement and frustration. The voice of the loved person (and the voice stands for what the lover says—his very words) is another indecipherable message” (Frank 363). Both critics rightly identify the speaker’s profound suffering in its association with heartache and trace such feeling throughout the poem. It is intimacy and lamentation that become interlaced.

While I agree with the assertions of conventional scholarship and do not challenge its validity, I propose an alternate reading that reads the poem as a metaphor for music. Indeed, a musical approach suggests that “Song for the Last Act” depicts a private and long-standing relationship between music and musician. The poem is comprised of three stanzas and a clear refrain, in which each stanza explores a particular facet of music such as its appearance on the page or its ability to evoke strong emotion. Visually, Bogan separates the stanzas and refrains in much the same way as in “Chanson Un Peu Naïve.” There is clear segmentation between stanzas with the refrain serving as a bridge from one to the next that provides cohesion. Thus, this unusual reading offers a new way to understand “Song for the Last Act” that remains consistent with the musicality of her poetry at large. She opens the first stanza with a refrain whose construction remains consistent throughout the poem. The setting is in a garden, yet the poet metaphorically refers to the general appearance of music: “Now that I have your face by heart, I look / Less at its features than its darkening frame / Where quince and melon, yellow as young flame, / Lie with quilled dahlias and the shepherd’s crook. / Beyond, a garden... / Now

that I have your face by heart, I look” (*BE* 119 1-5, 9). In my interpretation, the opening line, or the refrain, refers to the speaker’s perception of sheet music; the “face” is its physical appearance on a page. The speaker indicates that she has committed this appearance to memory or “by heart.” She does not have to concentrate on the music’s features or specific notes in order to play, but can observe its general characteristics: the “darkening frame” signifies the yellowing of the page over time and the flowers, particularly the shepherd’s crook, echo the physical shape of the bass clef. Shepherd’s crook is a type of orchid in which the flower droops towards the ground at maturity and resembles the curvature of the crook; its arc is almost identical to that of the bass clef. The dahlias are shaped like perfect spheres and are similar to the circular notes on the page. These parallels give support to a metaphorical reading of sheet music although it departs from traditional scholarship.

Like the first stanza, the second is about visual absorption though it refers to music explicitly. The speaker repeats the refrain almost verbatim, stating, “Now that I have your voice by heart, I read / In the black chords upon a dulling page / Music that is not meant for music’s cage, / Whose emblems mix with words that shake and bleed.” (119 10-13). “Voice” represents the music’s sound, in which memorization of the melody allows the speaker to see beyond the page and hear the music with more depth. Bogan’s choice of “read” is ironic in that music played by heart is not read at all; rather, is it drawn from memory. Thus, while the speaker indicates in the first stanza her visual memorization, she indicates her aural memorization in the second. Bogan attributes the relationship between music and musician with another dimension—sound. Moreover, in

the third line, “Music that is not meant for music’s cage,” the speaker protests that notation is an inadequate representation of the art. Music’s essence cannot be fully captured on a page and can only be realized through sound. In this case, the music accompanies “words that shake and bleed” or emotional intensity. The ferocity of the music is implicit, and therefore, cannot be accurately conveyed through standard transcription. This passion ultimately becomes too great, however, and leads the speaker to lose control of pace and precision: “In a double dream / I must spell out the storm, the running stream. / The beat’s too swift. The notes shift in the dark” (15-17). The “double dream” can refer to a dream within a dream, in which the speaker cannot keep abreast of the rhythm or determine the exact notes. In this way, Bogan complicates the power dynamic between music and musician, in which the player does not exercise control over music due to his or her emotion.

The third stanza of “Song for the Last Act” extends this concept of emotional connection between music and musician that concludes in a heightened understanding of the artistic relationship by the speaker. Bogan continues with the dream-like abstraction from the second stanza, in which she depicts images of an antiquated shipping port: “Now that I have your heart by heart, I see / The wharves with their great ships and architraves; / The rigging and the cargo and the slaves on a strange beach under the broken sky” (18-22). Literally, these lines portray a time of geographical discovery and exploration. “Slaves on the strange beach” suggest a separate time and place than the twentieth-century America of Bogan’s time. Metaphorically, however, the phrase in the refrain, “heart by heart,” signifies the speaker’s understanding of the *essence* of music or

its heart, its spirit. With this knowledge comes spiritual freedom and liberation of the imagination; the speaker can perceive the wharf with its bustling commerce and activity. The musician reaches transcendence through music, which achieves the deepest and most profound artistic relationship. Bogan confirms this insight in the poem's final lines: "O not departure, but voyage done! The bales stand on the stone; the anchor weeps / Its red rust downward, the long vine creeps / Beside the salt herb, in the lengthening sun. / Now that I have your heart by heart, I see." The completion of the voyage, lowered anchor, and setting sun convey the journey's finality and the speaker's sense of resolution; she has gained a newfound perspective on the essence of music as an emotional or spiritual form. Therefore, in the final refrain, "see" does not indicate visual absorption but intellectual conclusion and so the relationship between music and musician achieves new heights.

Thus, "Musician," "Sub Contra," and "Song for the Last Act" address, in their own way, the relationship between music and musician. More broadly, however, Bogan signifies through the musician, the poet, who too experiences the magnificence and tribulations of the creative process. Her use of metonymy emphasizes this notion of craft, in which the artist actively, and with purpose, generates his craft. Specifically in reference to "Song for the Last Act," Frank suggests Bogan constructed the poem with the limitations of her own creativity in mind. The poem was written during the time of Bogan's "poetic decline" and thus the concluding images—dropped anchor, setting sun—represent Bogan's own resignation as a professional poet. The "bales unloaded" signify that the whole of her creativity that has been released in thought, presented in poetry, and published in various volumes. Despite the veracity of this assertion, it is certain that

Bogan possessed a certain amount of insight into her own creative abilities and could identify with the struggling player in “Musician” or the emotions in “Sub Contra.” Her unrelenting standards demanded excellence as evidenced by her small volume of published poems, with *The Blue Estuaries* containing only 105. Regardless, Bogan channeled her creativity through the medium of language with impeccability; her poetic lines sound like music to our ears.

CONCLUSION

A consideration of music and its influence on the poetry of Louise Bogan reveals that music's principles of rhythm and sound greatly inform her work. She controls the pace of each poem with the inclusion of complex metrical variations and engenders an aural design through emphasis on alliteration, assonance, onomatopoeia, and internal and end rhyme. In each chapter, the focus on technical or thematic musicality demonstrates a strong connection between music and the poetry. The first two chapters dissect Bogan's rhythmic and sonal constructions, which survey her range and ability to manipulate both elements effectively. She crafts these two fundamentals to present the sensory qualities of music and grant the poems fluidity of movement. The technical analysis provides a foundation for discussion of the thematic implications of musical imagery, thereby completing a comprehensive study of Bogan's musicality. Chapter three, finally, focuses on the central relationship between music and musician as an analog to the poet. In this way, the poetry resists the argument that the musical elements are merely structural and supports the claim that the musicality of her poems is holistic. Indeed, a full-length discussion of this kind contributes to a more thorough understanding of Bogan's poetry and confirms music's systemic prevalence in her poems.

As discussed in the introduction, the role of music in Bogan's poems partially stems from the larger role of music in her life. She surrounded herself with music a result from upbringing and passion alike, taking pleasure in music's aural beauty, metrical stability, and inherent complexity. In a letter to William Maxwell, near the end of her life,

she even jokes about music's ability to alleviate her writer's block writing, "I'm taking piano lessons, and perhaps some lyricism will come out of a close association with Bach's 2 and 3 Part Inventions etc. My teacher is v. good indeed. He quotes Schnabel and Debussy to me" (*WTWL* 307). While Bogan's statement cannot be taken literally, there is no doubt she understands intuitively a connection between music and the production of lyric poetry. Because music transcends any language system, it endows the listener with sheer aestheticism and emotional purity of feeling. Bogan was also insistent that lyric poetry has its origins in emotion, in such way that intensity yields creativity. Thus, her "close association with Bach" can create an emotional experience that, as a poet, she hopes to articulate in verse.

Bogan makes explicit the emotional foundation of poetry during her years of teaching, often advising her students to reserve emotions for poetry and channel them through the writing process. Between 1949 and 1964, she served as a visiting instructor at the University of Washington, Brandeis University, University of Chicago, and New York University from 1954 into the early 1960s (from Chronology in *Journey Around My Room* pg. xxxv). She also headed a night class at a local New York City YMHA, in which her fellow poet, Marianne Moore, was enrolled (*JAMR*). In all her years of teaching, Bogan remained consistent with her message on the tenets of formal poetry: it is to be supremely *felt* and ought to engage in formal structure. That is to say, emotion necessarily precedes poetry, which becomes realized through the organization of rhythm, rhyme, and meaning. Poet Gloria Oden, a former student of the YMHA class, recounted Bogan's motto to "Keep your *abstract* thought for the prose, your *emotions* for the poetry" (Frank

346). Prose and poetry, therefore, retain specific purposes with regards to content and expression, in which prose is the site for the mind's intellect, and poetry, the heart's feeling. Oden's italics emphasize this distinction and suggest it is a highly specific and concrete division for Bogan. In a journal entry, she even suggests that strong emotion became a necessity for the act of writing, rather than an aid: "My inability to write poetry comes to this: that I can write now only when in a rage (of anger or of hatred), or in a state which I can only describe as malicious pity. And the emotion that writes tender and delicate poetry is so much akin to the emotion of love that it *is* love to all intents and purposes" (*JAMR* 74). Thus, her creativity became dependent on her emotions, which ultimately interfered with productivity.

Louise Bogan turned to other art forms for relief from writer's block and newfound inspiration, which became central to her poems. It is important to note, however, that Bogan perceived the integration of other arts into literature as beneficial and necessary in order to sustain a level of excellence. She discusses this assertion explicitly in an unfinished letter, advocating for "writing with a full measure of insight into life, society, culture, at large... [an] interpretation of one art with another; the relation of them all to the actual moment and the actual situation. —I find much more of this kind of wholeness in books concerned with painting and music, than I do in books devoted to literature as such" (*WTWL* 238). The "wholeness" of which Bogan speaks, I interpret to mean the larger concept of aestheticism and art, which may come in the form of poetry, music, painting, or any other design-inspired medium. She urges a departure from the detached or removed relationships between art forms in order to allow them to work

together to form a more complete presentation of writing and subject matter. This perspective warrants fruitful possibilities for future research on the poetry of Louise Bogan. While formalism, psychoanalysis, and historical study have been traditional approaches toward interpreting Bogan's poems, these viewpoints are lending fewer and fewer opportunities for original ideas. For this reason, studies that extend Bogan scholarship to the principles of the fine arts will widen the scope for study and offer fresh interpretations. A comprehensive study of the artist in Bogan's poetry, for instance, can expand my claims about the musician and the poet to prevalent images of the painter or sculptor. There are numerous possibilities available within visual and performative arts that only become available when viewing Bogan's poetry in this way. Because, ultimately, as Bogan suggests, she possesses an essential connection to music—one that contributes to the perception of her identity. In *Journey Around My Room*, she describes herself as "The egotist who looks upon herself with joy. Like scales, cleanly, lightly played, myself rises up from myself" (*JAMR* 57). Thus, in the poetry of Louise Bogan we are allowed to see literature, poetry, music, art, and the poet resonate beneath the surface of lyric poem and musical song at once.

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