

Singing Lyrics to Life: Melody and Lyrical Meaning in Recent Indie Music

by

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A thesis accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in Music Theory

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University of Oregon

Spring 2024

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## THESIS ABSTRACT

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In popular song genres (and across song genres), melody plays a vital role in delivery of sung lyrics; it contributes an essential aspect of lyrics' affect and meaning. Scholars in the field of popular music have historically preferred to focus on other aspects of lyrics' relationship to its musical setting, such as rhythm, phonetics, and syntax, paying less attention to lyrics' relationship to one of its primary components: melody. In this thesis, I explore the relationship between melodic contour and lyrics' speech intonation (with regards to pitch), syntax, and affect to show how melody inflects lyrical meaning and expression. Drawing on interdisciplinary scholarship from music theorists Allan Moore, Kofi Agawu, linguist Maggie Tallerman, cognitive psychologist Aniruddh Patel, and others, I analyze the contours of melody and the intonational contours of speech. My analyses of recent indie music consider the relationship between these contours from single-word to entire song interactions, providing a deeper understanding of the expressive capabilities of language and music.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank my advisor Stephen Rodgers for his continued support throughout the creation of this project, for helping me define my thesis in its conception, reading my countless drafts, and taking the time and care to dig deep with me into this subject and this repertoire. Thank you as well for encouraging my interests in both theory and composition as an integrated part of my research and musicianship.

I also wish to thank my committee members Drew Nobile and Zachary Wallmark for presenting such engaging topics, theories, and music in their courses, which helped inspire this project. I also wish to thank them for their feedback on this document.

Furthermore, I wish to thank all my professors and instructors at the University of Oregon for helping me grow as a musician and as a person throughout my time as a student here.

Finally, I wish to thank my family, friends, and all the teachers who have supported, encouraged, and believed in my endeavors throughout my life. Thank you to my parents for fostering my love of music from an early age, attending all my performances over the years, and for always being there for me. I also wish to especially thank my partner Keenan for his continued support throughout this project and the challenges of being a graduate student. His continued encouragement has been integral to the development of this thesis and I share with him the excitement of completing this project.

## DEDICATION

I wish to dedicate this project to those artists whose expressive songs are explored in this thesis. Thank you for sharing your music with the world.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
INTRODUCTION .....	17
I. METHODOLOGY .....	29
Analyzing Melody .....	36
Analyzing Lyrics .....	37
Interaction of Music and Lyrics .....	48
II. SMALL SCALE MELODIC-CONTOURS.....	54
Syntactic Relationships: Emphasis Through Motivic Repetition & Phrase Structure .....	54
Overall Affect/Contour: Emphasis Through Melodic Character, Contour, & Harmony .....	59
Analysis: Billie Eilish, “when the party’s over” (2019).....	61
Analysis of Melody .....	62
Analysis of Lyrics.....	68
Relationship Between Melody and Lyrics.....	72
Analysis: Keaton Henson, “Sweetheart, What Have You Done To Us” (2013).....	82
Analysis of Melody .....	83



Chapter	Page
Analysis of Lyrics.....	86
Relationship Between Melody and Lyrics.....	90
Analysis: Loney Dear, “Hulls” (2017).....	97
Analysis of Melody .....	98
Analysis of Lyrics.....	101
Relationship Between Melody and Lyrics.....	107
III. LARGE SCALE MELODIC-CONTOURS.....	115
Section-to-Section Relationships.....	116
Changes in Melodic Contour .....	116
Changes in Register .....	125
Analysis of an Entire Song: Loney Dear’s “Hulls” (2017).....	139
CONCLUSION.....	170
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	180

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Olivia Dean’s “Dangerously Easy,” melody of the first refrain with its melodic high-point.....	37
2. Olivia Dean’s “Dangerously Easy,” lyrics of the refrain with different speech-intonational contours.....	40
3. Examples of Pitch Contour in Falling and Rising Intonational Pitch Patterns.....	41
4. Graph showing the hierarchical pitch patterns of an intonational phrase, drawn from Patel .....	44
5. Olivia Dean’s “Dangerously Easy,” lyrics from the bridge.....	47
6. Olivia Dean’s “Dangerously Easy,” lyrics and melody from the refrain with emphasis on the word “dangerously” shown in the lyrics and melody.....	50
7. Olivia Dean’s “Dangerously Easy,” the re-composed refrain now emphasizes the word “easy” .....	53
8. Phoebe Bridgers’s “Emotional Motion Sickness,” melody from chorus with both intra-phrase and inter-phrase repetition and elaboration .....	56
9. Phoebe Bridgers’s “Emotional Motion Sickness,” lyrics of the chorus.....	57
10. Phoebe Bridgers’s “Emotional Motion Sickness,” melody and lyrics of the chorus with the interaction between melodic and lyrical syntax shown both within the phrase and between phrases .....	58
11. Loney Dear’s “Hulls,” melody of first verse.....	59
12. Loney Dear’s “Hulls,” lyrics of the first verse .....	60
13. Loney Dear’s “Hulls,” melody and lyrics of first verse .....	61

Figure	Page
14. Billie Eilish’s “when the party’s over,” melodic transcription of first four phrases of the verse with chord symbols in lead sheet notation .....	64
15. Billie Eilish’s “when the party’s over,” diagram showing melodic motion in relation to musical forces.....	66
16. Billie Eilish’s “when the party’s over,” lyrics of the first four phrases of the first verse.....	69
17. Billie Eilish’s “when the party’s over,” first line of lyrics with different possible pitch accent placements.....	70
18. Billie Eilish’s “when the party’s over,” transcription of the first four phrases of the first verse with lyrics.....	74
19. Billie Eilish’s “when the party’s over,” lyrics shown with slash marks corresponding to points of melodic oscillation .....	76
20. Billie Eilish’s “when the party’s over,” lyrics shown with slash marks corresponding to points of melodic oscillation, correspondences with lyrical syntax are highlighted in blue.....	77
21. Billie Eilish’s “when the party’s over,” comparison between original melody of the first line and re-composed version without oscillation .....	79
22. Billie Eilish’s “when the party’s over,” comparison between original melody of the first line and re-composed version without oscillation <i>or continued ascent</i> .....	81
23. Keaton Henson’s “Sweetheart, What Have You Done To Us?” melody of the first verse with chord symbols in lead sheet notation.....	84
24. Keaton Henson’s “Sweetheart, What Have You Done To Us?” melodic contour of the first verse, with colors and arrows indicating similar downward motion between the first two phrases and similar pitch content between the end of these phrases and the tag.....	86

Figure	Page
25. Keaton Henson’s “Sweetheart, What Have You Done To Us?” lyrics of the first verse.....	87
26. Keaton Henson’s “Sweetheart, What Have You Done To Us?” different possible stress patterns of Line 1 .....	87
27. Keaton Henson’s “Sweetheart, What Have You Done To Us?” different possible stress patterns of Line 3.....	88
28. Common pitch-intonational shapes in wh- questions.....	89
29. Keaton Henson’s “Sweetheart, What Have You Done To Us?” lyrics of the first verse; color highlights indicate repetition within the verse.....	90
30. Keaton Henson’s “Sweetheart, What Have You Done To Us?” melody of the first verse with lyrics.....	91
31. Keaton Henson’s “Sweetheart, What Have You Done To Us?” lyrics of the first verse with musical emphases .....	91
32. Keaton Henson’s “Sweetheart, What Have You Done To Us?” melodic low and high points emphasize specific words in the lyrics to suggest unique inflections of the same question .....	94
33. Keaton Henson’s “Sweetheart, What Have You Done To Us?” comparison of melodic contour between the same lyrical question in Line 1 and Line 3.....	95
34. Keaton Henson’s “Sweetheart, What Have You Done To Us?” re-composition of the final line of lyrics to remove emphasis on “you,” shifting emphasis back to “done” .....	95
35. Loney Dear’s “Hulls,” melody of the first verse with chord symbols in lead sheet notation.....	99

Figure	Page
36. Loney Dear’s “Hulls,” synthesizer and bass transcription of the first verse with chords shown in lead sheet notation (bass line octave-adjusted for ease of reading) .....	102
37. Loney Dear’s “Hulls,” chord progression the first verse, parts A & B .....	102
38. Loney Dear’s “Hulls,” lyrics of the first verse .....	103
39. Loney Dear’s “Hulls,” narrative points of view in the first verse .....	104
40. Loney Dear’s “Hulls,” melodic transcription of the first verse with chord symbols in lead sheet notation.....	109
41. Loney Dear’s “Hulls,” lyrics of the first verse with implied musical emphases .....	110
42. Loney Dear’s “Hulls,” re-composition of the first verse with reduced leaps and increased stepwise motion.....	114
43. Billie Eilish’s “when the party’s over,” melody and lyrics of the first four phrases .....	118
44. Billie Eilish’s “when the party’s over,” melody and lyrics of new song material.....	120
45. Billie Eilish’s “when the party’s over,” lyrics of the first two song sections .....	122
46. Highasakite’s “God Don’t Leave Me,” melody and lyrics of the first section .....	127
47. Highasakite’s “God Don’t Leave Me,” melody & lyrics of the second section .....	128
48. Highasakite’s “God Don’t Leave Me,” melody & lyrics of the third section .....	129

Figure	Page
49. Highasakite's "God Don't Leave Me," lyrics of the first four song sections .....	130
50. Highasakite's "God Don't Leave Me," melody and lyrics of the first four song sections with chord symbols in lead sheet notation .....	134
51. Loney Dear's "Hulls," lyrics of verses 1 & 2 .....	141
52. Loney Dear's "Hulls," melody and lyrics of the first two verses with chord symbols in lead sheet notation.....	141
53. Loney Dear's "Hulls," formal diagram showing similarities between verses 1 & 2 .....	143
54. Loney Dear's "Hulls," melody and lyrics of mm. 35–42 with chord symbols in lead sheet notation.....	144
55. Loney Dear's "Hulls," formal diagram of the first two verses and new song section.....	146
56 Loney Dear's "Hulls," lyrics of the third song section with chord Symbols shown in lead sheet notation.....	148
57. Loney Dear's "Hulls," melody and lyrics of mm. 43–54 with chord symbols in lead sheet notation.....	150
58. Loney Dear's "Hulls," formal diagram of the first four song sections .....	151
59. Loney Dear's "Hulls," melody and lyrics of mm. 55–62 with chord symbols in lead sheet notation.....	156
60. Loney Dear's "Hulls," formal diagram of the first cycle.....	156
61. Loney Dear's "Hulls," melody and lyrics of mm. 35–62 with chord symbols in lead sheet notation.....	158
62. Loney Dear's "Hulls," melody and lyrics of mm. 64–79 with chord symbols in lead sheet notation.....	160

Figure	Page
63. Loney Dear’s “Hulls,” formal diagram of the third verse .....	160
64. Loney Dear’s “Hulls,” melody and lyrics of mm. 80–88 with chord symbols in lead sheet notation.....	162
65. Loney Dear’s “Hulls,” melody and lyrics of mm. 89–99 with chord symbols in lead sheet notation.....	162
66. Loney Dear’s “Hulls,” melody and lyrics of mm. 100–107 with chord symbols in lead sheet notation.....	166
67. Loney Dear’s “Hulls,” formal diagram of the second cycle .....	166
68. Loney Dear’s “Hulls,” formal diagram of the entire song.....	168

## LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Three Primary Levels of Melodic Inflection of Lyrics. ....	36
2. Narrative arc in the first four song sections of Highasakite's "God Don't Leave Me" .....	138



## INTRODUCTION

In song, language and music combine, each contributing their own expressive capabilities. Language, with its nuance of lexicon, grammar, and syntax, can express a multitude of semantic meanings, and the combination of words and phrases into sentences and sections can craft dramatic narratives. Music also expresses meaning and structure using different instrumentations, textures, rhythms, and timbres, as well as pitches and their combination into various harmonies. In music that incorporates language, all these aspects contribute to its expression, both separately and in combination. Exploring this complex layering of meaning and expression can help us understand those musical traditions that combine language and musical sound.

The relationship between text and music has been well-explored in the field of music theory, covering language and music in a variety of musical traditions, from early history to the modern day. (The scholarship in this field is so broad that I will not be able to summarize it in its entirety here; however, in the following chapter I will discuss those scholars who have influenced my work the most.) In the study of art song, many scholars have explored text-music relationship from a variety of angles. Kofi Agawu, Lawrence Kramer, Lawrence Zbikowski, and others have offered broad methodological frameworks for considering how text and music interact and combine

in the medium of song.<sup>1</sup> Others have considered how rhythm and meter of a text interact with its musical setting, such as Harald Krebs, who compares the regular rhythm of stresses in a text to those of its musical setting to illuminate their similarities and differences.<sup>2</sup> On a larger scale, Yonatan Malin identifies potential relationships between the syntax of poetic couplets and the syntax of their musical setting.<sup>3</sup> Stephen Rodgers, Matthew BaileyShea, and others have attended to the sound of words in their enunciation and the expressive capabilities of phonation in song, especially when paired with other musical qualities such as melody and rhythm.<sup>4</sup> Much of this scholarship contributes to a deeper understanding of song in general, regardless of song genre.

In recent years, the field of popular music studies has contributed its own scholarship on the topic of text and music, considering how lyrics of popular songs interact with their musical setting. Allan Moore, Simon Frith, Lori Burns, and others have studied aspects of lyrical persona, address, and delivery, and how changes to

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<sup>1</sup> Kofi Agawu, *Music as Discourse: Semiotic Adventures in Romantic Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 61–73; Lawrence Kramer, *Song Acts: Writings on Words and Music* (Leiden and Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2017); Lawrence Zbikowski, *Foundations of Musical Grammar* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017), 167–200.

<sup>2</sup> Harald Krebs, “Fancy Footwork: Distortions of Poetic Rhythm in Robert Schumann’s Late Songs,” *Indiana Theory Review* 28, no. 1–2 (2010): 67–84.

<sup>3</sup> Yonatan Malin, “Modulating Couplets in Fanny Hensel’s Songs,” in *The Songs of Fanny Hensel*, ed. Stephen Rodgers (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021), 171–194.

<sup>4</sup> Stephen Rodgers, “The Fourth Dimension of a Song,” *Music Theory Spectrum* 37, no. 1 (2015): 144–53, <https://doi.org/10.1093/mts/mtv002>; Matt BaileyShea, *Lines and Lyrics: An Introduction to Poetry and Song* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021), 9–31.

these aspects can create or reinforce narratives through the course of a song.<sup>5</sup> Matthew BaileyShea has explored lyrical phonology, the pattern of vowel and consonant sounds that make up a sung lyric, and how these sounds can reinforce or contradict other sounds in their musical setting.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, he has studied the relationships between metrical accents in lyrics, accents in their spoken equivalents, and those in musical rhythm.<sup>7</sup> Victoria Malawey also discusses elements of vocal prosody in the singing voice, noting that “although prosodic elements of singing differ from those of speech in several ways including speed of delivery, meanings listeners ascribe to popular song recordings are similarly contingent upon a singer’s prosody.”<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, she notes how “singing voices fuse the domains of speech and music, resulting in at least three different streams of information—semantic meanings implied by lyrics that are sung, metaphorical meanings resulting from musical content, and analog, non-semantic meanings conveyed by prosodic properties through vocal delivery.”<sup>9</sup> Malawey focuses mostly on prosodic factors like phrasing, fluidity, and articulation, and their effects on meaning. Malawey and others have also examined how the timbre of a singer’s voice as

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<sup>5</sup> Allan Moore, “Delivery,” in *Song Means: Analysing and Interpreting Recorded Popular Song* (London: Routledge, 2016), 91–101; Simon Frith, *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996), 183–202; Lori Burns, “Vocal Authority and Listener Engagement,” in *Sounding out Pop: Analytical Essays in Popular Music*, ed. John Covach and Mark Spicer (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 154–166.

<sup>6</sup> BaileyShea, *Lines and Lyrics*, 9–31.

<sup>7</sup> BaileyShea, 43–53.

<sup>8</sup> Victoria Malawey, *A Blaze of Light in Every Word: Analyzing the Popular Singing Voice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 70.

<sup>9</sup> Malawey, *A Blaze of Light in Every Word*, 70.

they deliver sung lyrics impacts their expression and can communicate aspects of identity and culture.<sup>10</sup> In her study of these particular qualities of vocal prosody, Malawey focuses less on how prosody of the singing voice is affected by more “fixed musical content—melodic structure, form, and lyrics.”<sup>11</sup> This leaves questions about how aspects of this fixed content (as Malawey calls it: “the *what* that is sung”) can affect perception of vocal prosody itself.

Despite the plethora of work on text and music, as mentioned above, the relationship between lyrics and one of its essential components—melody—remains relatively underexplored. Scholars have studied the expressive capabilities of lyrics and melody separately (to be discussed more below) and have explored the relationship between lyrical meaning and melodic structure more generally. Carl Schacter, David Lewin, and others have examined how melodic material, in both the structural foreground and background, can express textual meaning.<sup>12</sup> Heather Platt explores how melodic contour and register can affect the expression of a text and its dramatic narrative, drawing examples from Brahms’s *Lieder*.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, Stephen Rodgers discusses the relationship between textual meaning and the use of various theme-types,

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<sup>10</sup> Malawey, *A Blaze of Light in Every Word*, 94–125.

<sup>11</sup> Malawey, 70.

<sup>12</sup> Carl Schacter, “Motive and Text in Four Schubert Songs,” in *Engaging Music: Essays in Music Analysis*, ed. Deborah Stein (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 110–121; David Lewin, “Schubert, ‘Auf Dem Flusse,’” *19th Century Music* 6, no. 1 (1982): 47–59.

<sup>13</sup> Heather Platt, “Dramatic Turning Points in Brahms *Lieder*,” *Indiana Theory Review* 15, no. 1 (1994): 69–104.

such as periods and sentences, charting how melodic and musical syntax interacts with deeper textual meaning and structure.<sup>14</sup> While these authors provide a comprehensive study of the relationship between broader musical syntax and textual meaning, less attention has been paid to the direct note-to-word relationship between text and melody and attention to a text's grammatical, linguistic, and speech-intonational characteristics.

This thesis contributes an exploration of the understudied comparison between pitch contour and syntax of melody on the one hand and patterns of pitch contour and syntax of speech on the other, to better understand their expressive combination in the medium of song. I posit that, although a sung lyric is not a spoken one, we can enrich our knowledge of a lyrics' expressive capabilities by understanding how the shapes and patterns of a lyric's melody relate to the intonational, syntactic, and affectual patterns of speech. Literary scholar Adam Bradley suggests that "in song lyrics, words can be emotionally shaded in many ways ... [including] through melody, harmony, and rhythm of the singing, rapping or speaking."<sup>15</sup> I propose that melody can *inflect* lyrics just as speech intonation can *inflect* words, through a simultaneous, embodied perception of language and melody, and that the interaction of these *inflections* contributes to a song's meaning. I consider such questions as: how does the act of

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<sup>14</sup> Stephen Rodgers, "Sentences with Words: Text and Theme-Type in Die Schöne Müllerin," *Music Theory Spectrum* 36, no. 1 (2014): 58–85, <https://doi.org/10.1093/mts/mtu007>; Stephen Rodgers, "Schubert's Idyllic Periods," *Music Theory Spectrum* 39, no. 2 (2017): 223–46, <https://doi.org/10.1093/mts/mtx016>.

<sup>15</sup> Adam Bradley, *The Poetry of Pop* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 48.

singing lyrics to a melody reinforce or contradict linguistic patterns? In the absence of “speech” as a means for communicating through pitch variance, how does melody fill in for, alter, or reinforce the contours and patterns of linguistic communication? And, how do these interactions help articulate formal structures throughout song sections and entire songs?

Cognitive psychologist Aniruddh Patel also explores “how [the musical melody of song] relates to the pitch pattern of ... spoken lyrics,” citing “numerous points of contact between musical and linguistic melody in terms of structure and processing.”<sup>16</sup> His research examines the correlations between native languages of composers such as Elgar, Vaughan Williams, and Debussy, and the melodic rhythms they used in their compositions.<sup>17</sup> Patel’s work also discusses different avenues of investigating speech-melody correspondences using tools such as a *prosogram*, which shows pitch shape graphically, and linguistic theories such as autosegmental-metrical theory, noting the ripeness of this topic for further study.<sup>18</sup> In this thesis, I pose similar questions in my comparison of melody and speech intonation, adopting an interdisciplinary approach that incorporates both music-theoretical and linguistic analytic methodologies.

To do so, this project integrates scholarship from art song (mentioned above), popular music studies, and linguistics. To analyze melodic contour, I draw on

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<sup>16</sup> Aniruddh D. Patel, *Music, Language, and the Brain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 216, 238.

<sup>17</sup> Patel, *Music, Language, and the Brain*, 164–165.

<sup>18</sup> Patel, 206–207, 281.

scholarship that considers the character and motion of melody. At the smallest scale, I examine a melody's motion from one note to the next, drawing on Steve Larson's conception of musical forces (such as melodic gravity and melodic magnetism).<sup>19</sup> I use Allan Moore's melodic contour shapes (such as rising, falling, and level) to determine phrase-wide character of motion.<sup>20</sup> I also apply Kofi Agawu's concept of melodic high points to identify the dramatic high points of melodic phrases.<sup>21</sup> Between and within phrases, I note instances of melodic repetition or contrast, drawing on Jeremy Robins's categorization of melodic patterning and theories of phrase structure such as antecedent and consequent relationships.<sup>22</sup> I also reference David Temperley's treatment of melodic motive and repetition.<sup>23</sup> Across song sections, I consider the overall contour and register of melody, again applying Agawu's concept of melodic high points to recognize larger-scale formal melodic shapes.<sup>24</sup> I also draw on work by Brad Osborn, Drew Nobile, and others in their discussion on popular song form, which I use to discuss the structure of

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<sup>19</sup> Steve Larson, *Musical Forces: Motion, Metaphor and Meaning in Music* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2012), 82–109.

<sup>20</sup> Moore, "Delivery," 91–101; Larson, *Musical Forces*, 82–109. This thesis considers melodic contour as a melodic shape made up of specific, individual pitches, rather than representing contour numerically, such as in musical contour theory developed by Michael L. Friedmann, Robert D. Morris, Rob Schultz, and others; Rob Schultz, "Normalizing Musical Contour Theory," *Journal of Music Theory* 60, no. 1 (2016): 23–50, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00222909-3448746>.

<sup>21</sup> Agawu, *Music as Discourse*, 61–73.

<sup>22</sup> Jeremy Robins, "Formal Functions of Melodic Patterns in Popular Music" (Conference presentation, American Musicological Society & Society for Music Theory 2023 Joint Annual Meeting, Denver, CO, November 11, 2023).

<sup>23</sup> David Temperley, "Melody," in *The Musical Language of Rock* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 87–108.

<sup>24</sup> Agawu, *Music as Discourse*, 61–73.

melodic contour across entire songs.<sup>25</sup> Altogether, I apply these methods (and more, to be discussed below) to identify the expressive and formal structures of a song's melodic line.

To analyze the content and syntax of lyrics, my project draws on existing work studying the linguistics of lyrics in the fields of both music theory and linguistics. I consider how the individual words of the lyrics themselves, their semantic meanings and associations, and arrangement all influence their communication. To discuss lyrical syntax, including clausal arrangement and word order, I draw on scholarship from linguist Maggie Tallerman and others, to be discussed more below.<sup>26</sup>

Crucially, I expand upon existing scholarship on the study of lyrics by contributing a close study of the linguistic characteristics and expressive capabilities of lyrics in their *spoken* form. In spoken language, the use of pitch intonation (changes in the pitch of one's voice as they speak) is a vital component of delivering a spoken message; speech, just like song, has "melody." The use of intonation in speech can help communicate a speaker's mood, their intended meaning, and the syntax, or structural relationship, of their utterances. In song, the words that make up a line of lyrics can be expressed in different ways through varying vocal intonations, stressing different

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<sup>25</sup> Brad Osborn, "Subverting the Verse-Chorus Paradigm: Terminally Climactic Forms in Recent Rock Music," *Music Theory Spectrum* 35, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 23–47; Drew Nobile, *Form as Harmony in Rock Music*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190948351.001.0001>; Drew Nobile, "Teleology in Verse–Prechorus–Chorus Form, 1965–2020," *Music Theory Online* 28, no. 3 (2022).

<sup>26</sup> Maggie Tallerman, *Understanding Syntax*, Fifth edition (New York, NY: Routledge, 2020).



syllables or intoning a phrase into a question or statement using pitch variation. This linguistic expression and structure interact with a lyric's melodic setting. To analyze the unique speech-intonational features of spoken English and their meanings, I draw on work by music theorist Robert Snarrenberg, linguists Daniel Buring, Anne Wennerstrom, and others.<sup>27</sup> Through a close analysis of lyrics' linguistic characteristics, I offer a method that directly compares musical and linguistic aspects of a song's expression, to be discussed further in the methodology chapter to follow.

This project draws case studies from songs that use melodic inflection of lyrics as a key expressive tool and that feature speech-like lyrics (rather than lyrics that utilize poetic meter). I analyze songs released in the last 10-15 years by artists such as Phoebe Bridgers, Olivia Dean, Billie Eilish, and Keaton Henson. Overall, the songs I analyze fit stylistically into the genre of indie music, with a do-it-yourself aesthetic. Some songs draw influence from other genres, such as folk (Keaton Henson) and rock (Phoebe Bridgers) Other songs, such as those by Billie Eilish and Olivia Dean, may not fit directly in the genre of indie music but share a different important characteristic with the collection of songs analyzed in this project: a focus on personal address and a sense of self-expression through the vocal delivery of lyrics.

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<sup>27</sup> Robert Snarrenberg, "On the Prosody of German Lyric Song," *Journal of Music Theory* 58, no. 2 (2014), 107; Daniel Buring, *Intonation and Meaning* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Ann K. Wennerstrom, *The Music of Everyday Speech: Prosody and Discourse Analysis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

This sense of self-expression is a key component of a separate but sometimes overlapping genre: singer-songwriter music, a genre that emerged in the 1960s and has grown through the decades, recently incorporating influences from other popular music genres, such as indie music. Songs in this genre also make good use of the expressive relationship between lyrics and melody. Nancy Murphy states that, early in the genre, “most singer-songwriter music features a solo singer with a single accompaniment instrument (usually guitar), lyrical topics of personal significance, and the overall impression that songs are vehicles for personal expression.”<sup>28</sup> Artists such as Joni Mitchell and Bob Dylan set precedence for an expression that “captures the impression that... something of the ‘self’ was being communicated to audiences through performance.”<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, Murphy identifies “four central components of self-expression in 1960s and 1970s singer songwriter music: self-presentation (which shapes the reception of performance persona), personal lyrics, striking techniques of vocal production, and flexible meter”.<sup>30</sup> Murphy focuses on the last of these components: flexible meter, the manner in which artists in the genre use metrical ambiguity as “an essential feature of [their] self-expressive rhetoric.”<sup>31</sup> In this project, I focus on two different components of self-expression: lyrics and vocal production (in this case, the

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<sup>28</sup> Nancy Murphy, *Times A-Changin: Flexible Meter As Self-Expression in Singer-Songwriter Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023), 2.

<sup>29</sup> Murphy, *Times A-Changin*, 2–3.

<sup>30</sup> Murphy, 3.

<sup>31</sup> Murphy, 8.

melody of the singing voice). In songs in which artists put much store in lyrical delivery and self-expression, such as those in this project, the expressive relationship between lyrics and melody is fertile ground for text-music analysis.

The artists featured in this project were selected because their artistic personas express a narrative of self-expression, and because their music has been relatively unexplored in scholarship. Significantly, these artists are not only the main vocalists of their songs but also contributed to the song-writing process as well. I also consider songs from bands where, although more than one person may be responsible for song creation, the sung delivery of a song's lyrics by its lead vocalist communicates a sense of self-expression and is an essential component of the song's overall expressivity. Other band members may contribute through backing instrumentals or in song mixing and production, but in the song's recorded form, their performance persona is not present. In these instances, I chose songs in which the lead vocalists are also credited as having contributed to the songwriting process.

In Chapter 1, I outline my methodology, specifying my process of analyzing melody and lyrics first separately, and then comparing them. I also introduce key linguistic terms and ideas that will be utilized in the following chapters. In Chapter 2, I explore lyric-melody interaction on a small scale, defining three primary levels of melodic inflection of lyrics: through melodic high points, through motivic and syntactic

relationships, and through overall contour. I provide case studies for each of these levels, which serve as the basis for their contribution to larger formal structures. In Chapter 3, I discuss these larger formal structures, providing analyses of entire song sections and, to conclude, an analysis of the relationship between melodic contour and lyrics in an entire song and its articulation of a dramatic formal arc. In this entire song analysis, I provide an in-depth case study of the first verse of Loney Dear's 2017 song "Hulls," in which I show how the interaction of melody and lyrics shapes the song's meaning and affect at the three different levels mentioned above. To conclude, I discuss the possibility of these methods' broader applicability towards other musical genres.

## CHAPTER 1: METHODOLOGY

To more fully understand how melody and lyrics interact in song, I begin by temporarily separating them to determine their individual affects first before comparing them directly. This approach has often been utilized in the analysis of art songs, which generally set pre-existing texts, to evaluate how the lyrics interact with the composer's setting of the text. Lawrence Kramer acknowledges the challenges of classifying text-music relationship in song, stating that "the unfolding of a song is a volatile interplay between two attempts to be heard—that of the music and that of the poem."<sup>32</sup> Scholars such as Kofi Agawu and Lauri Suurpää have both studied and categorized various strategies of analyzing text-music relationship in song that claim varying levels of integration between music and text. Ultimately, Agawu outlines his own strategy for the analysis of song that first explores characteristics of music and text separately, before comparing and interpreting them.<sup>33</sup> This method claims "no necessary relationship between the words and the music of song; the music may support, contradict, or remain indifferent to the text."<sup>34</sup> This produces an analysis that meticulously considers textual and musical elements separately and then interprets their combination in song. One of Suurpää's proposed methodologies, which compares

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<sup>32</sup> Kramer, *Song Acts*, 63.

<sup>33</sup> Kofi Agawu, "Theory and Practice in the Analysis of the Nineteenth-Century 'Lied,'" *Music Analysis* 11, no. 1 (March 1992): 11.

<sup>34</sup> Agawu, "Theory and Practice," 30.

the underlying structures of music and text, also begins by separating them. These broad structural features of text and music, Suurpää claims, “should be analyzed first ... independently, without allowing the interpretation of one to influence the reading of the other.”<sup>35</sup> An understanding of these deeper structures can then help shed light on more local correspondences or conflicts between a song’s text and music. My own strategy is inspired by these models, analyzing music and text separately before interpreting their interactions in song.

There are many significant differences, however, between the genres of art song and popular song, among them being the source and creation of the song’s text or lyrics. In the genre of contemporary popular song, lyrics rarely exist as a pre-existing text, their creation happening in conjunction with the creation of the music itself. In such songs, separating lyrics and music may seem to create unnecessary distance between them, taking the lyrics out of context. I maintain that, even in such instances, it is still crucial to fully understand every aspect of musical and lyrical expression individually, in order to better understand their expressive synthesis when combined in song. In my methodology, my initial separation of music and text aims for a complete and unbiased understanding of each individually first, to then be able to build a more complete understanding of the song as a whole.

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<sup>35</sup> Lauri Suurpää, *Death in Winterreise: Musico-Poetic Associations in Schubert’s Song Cycle* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 37–38.

This separation is also driven by an awareness of the creative and cognitive songwriting process that generates music and lyrics. In this project, I do not explore songwriting in detail or claim a singular songwriting process for all those that write songs. I do, however, wish to acknowledge that songwriters utilize two modes of expression and cognition in their creative process: music and language, each of which comes from their own lived experience of creation through these two mediums. Songs are not created in a vacuum. As musicians, songwriters are versed in musical elements of songs, knowing how to build an expressive melody or chord progression, layer instrumental tracks, and structure song forms. They also use language both expressively and pragmatically, in songwriting and in everyday life. The songwriters whose work is featured in this project are capable English speakers and have utilized their English language skills to craft lyrics in this language.<sup>36</sup> That is to say that their choice of lyrics stem from a desire to communicate not only through the phonetic aspects of language, but through the semantic and syntactic aspects of language as well, just as they would through speech. Therefore, fully examining these musical and linguistic aspects of songs and their interaction helps us better understand the expressive results of choices made by songwriters in the songwriting process.

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<sup>36</sup> Not all the songwriters in this project are native English speakers. Some hail from countries such as Sweden and Norway, but all have a comfortable fluency in English.

My desire to better understand the expressive interaction between language and music in song is driven by my own experience writing songs both in contemporary-art-song and popular-song styles. While my personal songwriting process will certainly not match the creative processes of all other artists, I consider my experience valuable in helping inform my study of lyric-music interactions. For me, lyrics and melody emerge simultaneously in the creation process, often while I am improvising vocal lines which revolve around a general lyrical topic or musical mood. My desire to understand the expressive capabilities and interactions of lyrics and melody thus stems from an impetus to elucidate relationships between the two that, in my own songwriting, are often constructed solely intuitively or subconsciously.

A separate understanding of musical and linguistic materials helps us better understand the expressive and cognitive impressions on *listeners* as well as songwriters. Listeners of song will likely have experience with the musical elements of a song, as well as the capacity to comprehend what the lyrics mean through their grasp of language. Understanding the expressive materials of a song separately first can give a deeper understanding of how these materials then interact, or blend, to layer meaning when perceived together. Larry Zbikowski similarly treats song as a conceptual blend, “in which two correlated mental spaces combine in a third,” utilizing Conceptual Integration Networks (adapted from Fauconnier and Turner) to analyze how musical



parameters and syntax alter the narrative of German Lieder.<sup>37</sup> Other scholars have examined the cognitive and perceptual parameters of sound production and its strong ties to the brain and body. Linguist Patrice Larroque points out that “all utterances or sentences carry an imprint left by the speaker’s mind.”<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, a speaker’s body can also impact their utterances. Musicologist Nina Eidsheim likens the body’s role in sound-making to the role of *terroir* (soil, climate, and conditions) in growing grapes for winemaking.<sup>39</sup> Just as the soil impacts the sweetness and flavor of wine grapes, the body (and mind) shape vibrations of sound as they are created, in speech and in song. *Listener’s* bodies also play a part in their own perception of sound. Music theorist Zachary Wallmark notes that “the perceptual systems that are involved when we listen to sounds made by other people are coupled to sensorimotor acts that we know are involved in the production of those same sounds.”<sup>40</sup> In other words, when we listen to language or music, our bodies activate in the same ways they do if we were to be speaking or musicking ourselves. This work informs my methodology in its consideration of the cognitive and embodied processes involved in comprehending both musical and linguistic expression simultaneously. I consider one’s embodied

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<sup>37</sup> Zbikowski, *Foundations of Musical Grammar*, 167–200.

<sup>38</sup> Patrice Larroque, *An Introduction to Linguistics through Popular Music* (Toulouse, France: Springer International Publishing, 2023), 75, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-24703-3>.

<sup>39</sup> Nina Sun Eidsheim, “The Body as Music’s Terroir” (Presentation, Steve Larson Distinguished Lecture Series, University of Oregon, May 14, 2021).

<sup>40</sup> Zachary Wallmark, “Body and Emotion in the Sonic Act,” in *Nothing but Noise: Timbre and Musical Meaning at the Edge* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), 50, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190495107.003.0002>.

knowledge of how speech “melody” and musical melody create meaning separately to be the *terroir*—the site of cultivation and growth—which effects how these “melodies” are then processed together. Thus, my project stems from a desire to better understand the process of creating and listening to sung lyrics from an embodied perspective.

Although this thesis explores the cognitive aspects of expression and meaning, both for songwriters and for listeners, it does not claim to prescribe a singular “true” meaning to song material. Each person who encounters a song will respond differently based on their own experiences and their own bodies. Furthermore, the analyses that follow stem from my own personal interpretation of linguistic and musical meaning; this project is not meant to be a scientific study that categorizes a comprehensive corpus of musical-linguistic interactions. Similarly, I wish to acknowledge the complex relationship between artist, singer, and song persona, especially in songs that values “self-expression” or perceived authenticity. Allan Moore describes three distinct levels of singer identity: performer, persona, and protagonist.<sup>41</sup> In the delivery of sung lyrics, each of these identities simultaneously contributes to a song’s perceived meaning. Lori Burns and Drew Nobile have taken these levels of expression further to explore song narrators’ perceived proximity and sincerity, as indicated not only by the text but by

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<sup>41</sup> Moore, “Delivery,” 181.

how it is delivered.<sup>42</sup> While a close examination of these identities in relationship to lyrics and melody is beyond the scope of this project, I do acknowledge the influence their interplay has on the perception of lyrical and melodic expression. Overall, this project aims to provide a better understanding of the complex relationship between lyrics and melody and provide new tools and methodologies to describe and analyze this nuanced relationship.

Throughout this thesis, I consider how music and text interact at three different levels: within a single phrase (for instance, emphasizing a single word in that phrase), between phrases (encompassing song sections), and between sections or stanzas of music (and across entire songs), as shown in Table 1. Breaking my analysis into these three levels allows me to methodically consider every aspect of text-music interaction, as well as to consider how the evolution of interactions at smaller-scale levels may inform interaction at larger scale levels. Chapters 2 and 3 analyze text-music interaction at the small-scale and large-scale levels, respectively. I begin my analyses with smaller-scale examples to set the foundation for the larger-scale analyses to follow.

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<sup>42</sup> Burns, "Vocal Authority and Listener Engagement," 154–166; Drew Nobile, "Alanis Morissette's Voices," *Music Theory Online* 28, no. 4 (December 1, 2022), <https://mtosmt.org/issues/mto.22.28.4/mto.22.28.4.nobile.html>.

**Table 1.** Three Primary Levels of Melodic Inflection of Lyrics

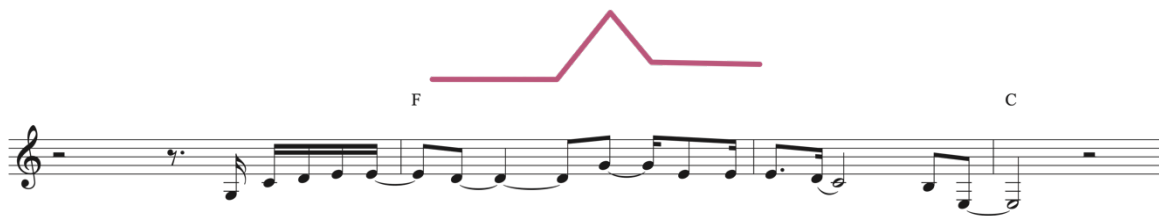
<b>Melodic Characteristic</b>	<b>Potential Inflection of Lyrics</b>
Melodic high-points (and possibly low-points)	Contextualizing a line of lyrics by emphasizing a specific word or words
Motivic repetition/syntactic structure	Syntactic structure of lyrics
Overall melodic shape	Overall affect and meaning of lyrics

### **Analyzing Melody**

In my analyses, I begin by studying the expressive contours and structures of a song's melody. In my analysis of melodic contour, as mentioned previously, I consider melodic motion from note to note, between phrases, and across song sections, attending to leaps, stepwise motion, overall rising or falling motion, and other melodic characteristics. In my study of larger-scale melodic shapes, I draw on my previous analysis of smaller-scale melodic shapes to show how the changing smaller-scale aspects of melody within a song can contribute to larger-scale formal shapes.

To further elucidate this process, let us take the refrain of Olivia Dean's 2023 song "Dangerously Easy" as an example of noteworthy text-music interaction at the smallest scale level: the single-word level. This segment of melody, shown in Figure 1, features a contour that begins on G3 below the staff, rises an octave higher, and then

descends to below where it started. Whereas the melody utilizes mostly stepwise motion, it does feature leaps at its beginning, middle, and end. Perhaps the most notable of these is the leap from D up to G in the middle of the phrase: the melodic high point of the phrase, creating a significant emphasis on this note, after which it descends, following Larson’s concept of melodic gravity—the tendency of a melody to descend after an ascent.<sup>43</sup> As we will see in the continuation of this analysis below, this leap to the melodic high point of the phrase has the potential to create an expressive emphasis on the corresponding lyrics, contextualizing their meaning.



**Figure 1:** Olivia Dean’s “Dangerously Easy,” melody of the first refrain with its melodic high-point

### Analyzing Lyrics

In my analysis of lyrics, I also consider different levels of meaning and expression.

While I do consider the lexical content of the lyrics—i.e., what each individual word means—I focus more attention on the different ways these words are contextualized or

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<sup>43</sup> Larson, *Musical Forces*, 83.

can be contextualized through choice of word order or potential speech-intonational patterns. By speech-intonational, I refer to the natural contour of pitch that occurs in spoken English and can give a word or phrase additional meaning and context. In this project, I focus solely on English intonational features; these outlined methodologies may need to be modified to analyze lyrics in different languages. In my analyses, I start at the level of a line or phrase of lyrics, identifying how different speech-intonational shapes in English can give the phrase different contextual meanings.

One of the most straightforward and small-scale ways in which this context can be built is through the use of single-word emphasis, termed *focus* in the field of linguistics.<sup>44</sup> This method of expressing linguistic meaning is utilized widely in English, and other spoken languages, to draw special attention to a particular word or syllable based on the speaker's communicative intentions and the context of their utterance. Linguist Daniel Büring states that "the main correlate of perceived [speech emphasis] in English is what intonational phonologists call *pitch accent*:" the raising of pitch to create a prominence, or high point.<sup>45</sup> Pitch accents can give an utterance meaning that is contextual, and non-lexical.<sup>46</sup> In other words, this kind of speech intonation depends entirely on context that we can't fully determine from just the words themselves. It is as though we are overhearing a snippet of conversation and trying to guess its contextual

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<sup>44</sup> Büring, *Intonation and Meaning*, 9–10.

<sup>45</sup> Büring, 1.

<sup>46</sup> Büring, 10.

background just from the intonation of one statement. Consider, for instance, the sentence, “she wants an ice cream”; the typical, unmarked utterance of this sentence would likely place pitch accent on the “ice” of “ice cream” (“She wants an *ice* cream”). But what if the speaker was just asked *who* it was that wanted the ice cream? In this instance, the speaker would likely emphasize, or *focus* (to again borrow a term from linguistics), the word “she” to make it clear that “*she* wants an ice cream.”<sup>47</sup> In this way, pitch intonation can emphasize, or *focus*, different words in a spoken statement, changing their perceived meaning and context. In this project, I consider how the use of speech-intonational *focus* can contextualize a line of lyrics, specifying the lyrics’ lexical content and meaning through its pitch contour when spoken.

To continue our earlier example, consider the lyrics of the refrain of Olivia Dean’s song “Dangerously Easy”: “You make it look easy, dangerously easy, you do.” This line can be read in multiple different ways, using *focus* on different words to contextualize it. For instance, pitch accent on the word “easy” would emphasize this word in the listener’s perception, drawing attention to the adjective and its meaning. This reading of the text reinforces the lyrics’ repetition of the word “easy” with a speech-intonational focus, furthering its emphasis semantically (You make it look *easy*, dangerously *easy*, you do”). In contrast, pitch accent on the syllable “*dan*” of “*dangerously*” instead draws attention to the adverb as it qualifies the meaning of the

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<sup>47</sup> Buring, *Intonation and Meaning*, 9–10.

adjective “easy.” An emphasis on this word underscores the addition of the word *dangerously*, clarifying the narrator’s statement that “you make it look *dangerously* easy,” not just *sort of* easy. Considering the different speech-intonational possibilities of this line of lyrics helps reveal the possible nuances of meaning of this line when sung (shown in Figure 2).



**Figure 2:** Olivia Dean’s “Dangerously Easy,” lyrics of the refrain with different speech-intonational contours

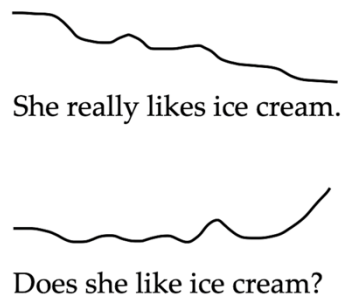
Within a single line or phrase of lyrics, I consider how the overall speech intonational contour the line can influence its perceived meaning. Music theorist Robert Snarrenberg explains how

the most significant segment of tonal [pitch] contour in an intonation unit is the so-called *core span*, which begins with the nuclear [pitch accent] and extends to the end of the



intonation unit. There are three tonal patterns that a speaker can select for the core span of an intonation unit: falling, rising, and level. The endpoint of the pitch movement is a crucial aspect of the intonation pattern: falling patterns end low and remain there, while rising and level patterns end in the middle to high range.<sup>48</sup>

Essentially, the segment of a phrase following its final default accent (which often falls at the end of the phrase) provides important communicative information about the overall meaning of the phrase. Figure 3 shows a diagram of the two most common of these pitch-intonational patterns: falling and rising.



**Figure 3:** Examples of Pitch Contour in Falling and Rising Intonational Pitch Patterns

Crucially, the three different speech-intonational pitch contours—*falling*, *rising*, and *level*—directly correspond with different effects on the perceived meaning of the intonational unit and, like marked pitch accent discussed above, are not reliant on lexical meaning. In other words, they are dependent not on the words themselves, but

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<sup>48</sup> Snarrenberg, "Prosody," 107.

on context and the intentions of the speaker. These different pitch contours could thus be utilized to speak the same phrase with several different meanings. Snarrenberg further describes the character of these pitch contours:

The falling nuclear pattern makes the utterance seem self-sufficient, as if the speaker has concluded. The falling pattern is hence characteristic of self-contained utterances such as assertions, requests, demands, exclamations, and questions that seek information.

The rising nuclear pattern generally means that the speaker is inviting or challenging the listener to respond in some way to what the speaker has said, hence implying a continuation of the discourse by the listener. The rising pattern is characteristic of questions that require the listener to make a yes-or-no decision.

The level nuclear pattern communicates incompleteness and lack of finality, as if the speaker has more to say. Although used independently for polite responses and other short utterances, level inflection is typically used for intonation units that are nonfinal.<sup>49</sup>

Therefore, the pitch contour of the end of a phrase or line has great effect on its perceived affect, an aspect that is reliant on the communication of the speaker, not necessarily inherent in the text itself. At the phrase level, I consider how these different contours, *rising*, *falling*, or *level*, can impact the reading of a line of lyrics.

At a slightly broader level, I consider the linguistic syntax of a line or lines of lyrics, noting how repetition, phrase order, and contrast create syntactic structure.

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<sup>49</sup> Snarrenberg, "Prosody," 143.

Maggie Tallerman explains how

speakers manipulate sentences in all sorts of ways because they're trying to convey different meanings. Syntax allows speakers to express all the meanings that they need to put across. In the simplest cases, this might mean altering the basic word order of a sentence, to emphasize or downplay a particular phrase, or to ask a question, or else grouping words together in different ways to modify meaning.<sup>50</sup>

Furthermore, Patel demonstrates that “research on prosodic [phrase] boundaries reveals that salient pitch events can serve as grouping cues in speech, just as they can in musical melodies.” In other words, both speech and melody delineate phrase groups using pitch contour. In speech intonation “at the most local level,” Patel explains,

pitch movements are combined nonrandomly into ‘configurations’ (i.e., the linking of certain kinds of rises and falls). At the next level, configurations are linked together to form “contours” spanning a single clause.<sup>51</sup>

Figure 4, drawn from Patel, shows this phenomenon of a rising-falling pitch “motive” being used successively in the clauses “Alan’s in Cambridge” and “studying botany.”

The two similar contour shapes, taken together, make up the entire spoken phrase.

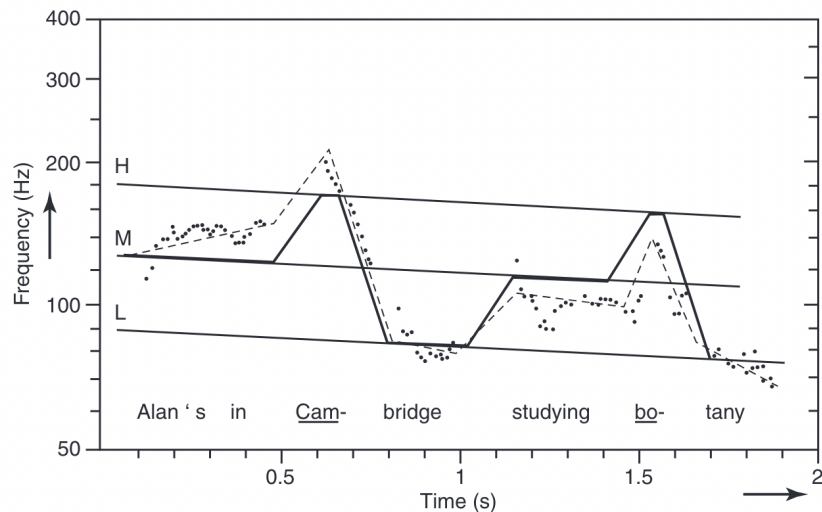
Readers can experience this phenomenon for themselves by speaking the statement aloud, or by simply taking note of the patterns of pitch contour they use when speaking

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<sup>50</sup> Tallerman, *Understanding Syntax*, 19.

<sup>51</sup> Patel, *Music, Language, and the Brain*, 213–214.

in everyday conversation. Thus, in both spoken and sung “melodies,” patterns of pitch help break apart longer phrases into smaller syntactic groups in meaningful ways.



**Figure 4:** Graph showing the hierarchical pitch patterns of an intonational phrase, drawn from Patel<sup>52</sup>

In examining the syntactic qualities of the lyrics, I also consider how the specific order of words and phrases in a line of lyrics influence their meaning, potentially emphasizing certain semantic information. For instance, the hypothetical line of lyrics “She fed the cat” forefronts the word “she” in the phrase construction as the subject of the sentence; this is known in linguistics as an *active* construction.<sup>53</sup> The syntax of this

<sup>52</sup> Patel, *Music, Language, and the Brain*, 214.

<sup>53</sup> Tallerman, *Understanding Syntax*, 23.

phrase can be altered into a *passive* construction by demoting the subject of the sentence, “she,” to the object position instead: “The cat was fed by her.” In this construction, “the cat” is now in the position of the statement's subject, placing it at the forefront of the phrase and of the listener’s or reader’s attention. In my methodology, I consider how choices like active and passive constructions and other word order choices influence perception of meaning.

I also consider how semantic meaning is built or implied through an entire phrase of lyrics, or between several phrases of lyrics. In linguistics, successive statements or clauses can build coherence in different ways, for instance through “parallelism (similarity), contrast, ... elaboration ... [and] cause and effect.”<sup>54</sup> In other words, information communicated through discourse can be structured in different ways depending on how successive statements relate to each other, building meaning and establishing syntax. Musical phrases can relate to each other in the same ways, building cohesion through repetition, contrast, and elaboration. In my analyses, I examine the syntactic relationship between lines of lyrics to later compare them with their melodic syntax.

For instance, the lyrics of a song may reference more than once a particular person, event, or action that is central to the song’s story. Take, for instance, the lyrics from the bridge of Olivia Dean’s “Dangerously Easy,” shown in Figure 5. Considered

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<sup>54</sup> Patel, *Music, Language, and the Brain*, 337–340.

together, these lyrics tell the story of the narrator's struggles to change. We understand that each successive line all relates to the first line, "I'm still stuck in my own way." The narrator elaborates on what being "stuck in [their] own way" feels like to them: "choosing the hard way," "try[ing to] take it easy" "every time" even if they don't believe in themselves. In this project, I consider instances such as these in which lines of lyrics share meaning through implied reference, or context. I also examine instances in which two lines of lyrics (a couplet) imply a syntactic relationship, such as the last two lines of the lyrics in this section, in which the conjunction "but" is not stated but implied ("I try taking it easy, [but] I don't even believe me"). In his analysis of Fanny Hensel's songs, Yonatan Malin considers how couplets in the text can be either syntactically independent or dependent based on their implied connection and syntax.<sup>55</sup> Malin then considers how Hensel's musical setting of the text interacts with or realizes this syntactic connection. In this project, I similarly examine implied syntax between lyrical lines in order to later compare them with their musical setting.

I also consider the possibilities of intonational shapes of lyrics more generally, corresponding with different affectual and emotional states of the speaker. Patel notes that "spoken language mixes affective and linguistic intonation in a single acoustic channel"; speech intonation communicates not only linguistic information, but also the

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<sup>55</sup> Malin, "Modulating Couplets," 171-194.

But I'm still stuck in my own way  
Always choosing the hard way  
It feels like every time  
I try taking it easy  
I don't even believe me

**Figure 5:** Olivia Dean's "Dangerously Easy," lyrics from the bridge

speaker's emotions and mood.<sup>56</sup> Linguist Theo van Leeuwen explores the shared expressive meaning between contours of speech pitch and contours of melodic pitch by noting contour shapes that to him represent emotions such as joy, tenderness, and surprise.<sup>57</sup> Other studies have found that "musical context [can influence] the perceived affective valence of lyrics": their overall positive or negative impression.<sup>58</sup> In this project, I also consider the relationship between musical melody and possible speech "melodies" on a broader affectual and emotional level.

Finally, at larger-scale levels, I consider linguistic and speech-intonational expressions that relate to the lyrics of entire song sections or between song sections. I consider possible intonational alterations that could contextualize sections of lyrics in

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<sup>56</sup> Patel, *Music, Language, and the Brain*, 205–206.

<sup>57</sup> Theo van Leeuwen, "Melody," in *Speech, Music, Sound* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; London: MacMillan Press Ltd, 1999), 92–124.

<sup>58</sup> Patel, *Music, Language, and the Brain*, 343.

relation to each other, and how changes in the overall manner of speech intonation between sections can add context and meaning to a song.

### **Interaction of Music and Lyrics**

After analyzing the expressive content of melody and lyrics separately, I then compare their individual aspects to understand them in context. In doing so, I aim to illuminate “correspondences as well as non-correspondences between text ... and music,” as recommended by Agawu.<sup>59</sup> Matthew BaileyShea follows a similar process in his analysis of musical and textual rhythm, in which he explores how “the accent patterns of ... music and the accent patterns of ... language interact with varying degrees of conflict and correspondence.”<sup>60</sup> In his methodology, BaileyShea compares three different types of accents in song: real accents (musical accents, e.g. through duration), virtual (anticipated) accents (related to the musical meter), and linguistic accents (accents in the text’s metrical pattern). In this process, BaileyShea first makes note of the accents in a song passage in each of the three categories, then compares them. In doing so, he systematically analyzes a song’s use of accent by comparing how this shared parameter functions in both music and in text, and how these accents interact to expressive effect. Similarly, my project explores the shared parameter of pitch contour

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<sup>59</sup> Agawu, “Theory and Practice,” 12.

<sup>60</sup> BaileyShea, *Lines and Lyrics*, 44.



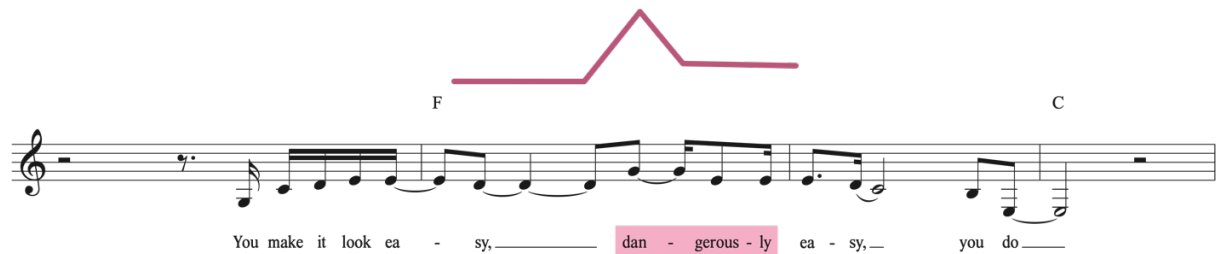
between music and lyrics and aims to systematically consider the conflicts and correspondences between pitch contour and syntax of melody and (intonational) pitch contour and syntax of lyrics.

To complete the example introduced earlier, let us now realign the melody and lyrics of Olivia Dean's song "Dangerously Easy" to reveal how the lyrics interact with and are inflected by the melody's contour. In the lyric, "you make it look easy, dangerously easy," the syllable "dan" of "dangerous" is emphasized by the melody's melodic high-point on G (shown in Figure 6). Melodic high points are a particularly important shape in "comparing melody in music and speech," Patel notes, because "contour peaks ... can be identified in both musical melodies and in [speech] intonation contours."<sup>61</sup> If understood using the mechanism of speech intonation, emphasis on the word "dangerous" would suggest a clarification that the narrator is drawing attention to the adverb "dangerous" as it qualifies the meaning of the adjective "easy." In this way, the melodic high point reinforces or mimics the speech-intonational emphasis one would put on the word "dangerously" if spoken aloud. A removal of this melodic emphasis could downplay the adverb, shifting focus back onto the adjective "easy," and strengthening our perception of the metrical emphasis on the second "easy" as it aligns with the downbeat. Thus, through melodic high or low points such as the one in this

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<sup>61</sup> Patel, *Music, Language, and the Brain*, 203.

example, melody can inflect single-word emphasis in a similar manner to the emphases present in speech intonation.



**Figure 6:** Olivia Dean’s “Dangerously Easy,” lyrics and melody from the refrain with emphasis on the word “dangerously” shown in the lyrics and melody

A key analytical tool I use in the final stages of my analytical process is the method of re-composition: re-composing musical aspects of an established work. The act of re-composing a passage of music has been used by theorists as a method of analysis to reveal new insights into the music being re-composed. For example, Harald Krebs uses this analytical method to compare the rhythmic setting of lyrics in Schumann songs to a re-composed version of the lyrics that takes its rhythm from poetic aspects of the text itself. By contrasting the original text setting with his own re-composed text setting, Krebs reveals how Schumann chose to rhythmically alter the poetic meter of lyrics in his musical settings for expressive affect.<sup>62</sup> This comparison

<sup>62</sup> Krebs, “Fancy Footwork,” 67–84.

between a hypothetical re-composition of song and its original offers insights into the composer's specific compositional choices and their unique expressive affects.

BaileyShea states that re-composition offers a new "bright[ness]" to analytical comparisons of different text-settings: "the music speaks for itself. The analysis informs the music; the music is an analysis."<sup>63</sup> Stephen Rodgers likewise states that one of the strengths of re-composition is that it "can help us to specify exactly why a given musical 'interpretation' of a poem works the way it does."<sup>64</sup> Although the lyrics of the songs in this project do not exist separately as poems, their musical setting in song nonetheless colors their linguistic intonation and emotional affect and can be altered through re-composition to illuminate these relationships.

In this project, I utilize re-composition in my analysis to explore the specific emotional inflection of lyrics in song by comparing their melodic shape to various re-composed renditions with different melodic shapes. In my analysis, I follow Philip Tagg's use of "hypothetical substitution" to strategically re-compose different melodic contours using processes of melodic inversion, transposition, and retrograde.<sup>65</sup> This method allows me to consider possible alternatives of melodic contour that could have

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<sup>63</sup> Matt BaileyShea, "Filletted Mignon: A New Recipe for Analysis and Recomposition," *Music Theory Online* 13, no. 4 (2007): 2, <https://doi.org/10.30535/mto.13.4.5>.

<sup>64</sup> Stephen Rodgers, "Recomposing Two Musical Settings of Goethe's 'Ein Gleiches' in Romantic Style," *Collateral* 9b (October 2017), <https://collateral-journal.com/index.php?cluster=9>.

<sup>65</sup> Philip Tagg, "Analysing Popular Music: Theory, Method and Practice," *Popular Music* 2 (1982): 51-53, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/852975>.

been used to express certain lyrics and contrast their distinct expressive qualities with those of the original. Overall, I use this process to elucidate the often-abstract coordination of lyrics and melody in song by utilizing a tool that makes these relationships more concrete and aurally accessible.

As an example, I present a re-composed version of the above melody from Olivia Dean's "Dangerously Easy" with a different melodic contour. The re-composed melody, shown in Figure 7, features a level contour on the word "dangerously" instead of the melodic highpoint of the original. By leveling out the melodic leap to G, this re-composed melody instead features a local high point on E at the end of the phrase, corresponding with the second statement of the word "easy," and reinforcing the metrical emphasis on this word. This melody can thus be perceived as emphasizing the adjective "easy" and its semantic meaning, rather than the adjective "dangerously" as in the original. I encourage readers to sing aloud the original melody and then the recomposed melody to consider how they may experience the lyrics differently in each case. In this project, I use re-composition to explore the complex relationship between lyrical meaning and melodic contour in a way that can be experienced both theoretically and pragmatically.

The image shows a musical score for the refrain of Olivia Dean's song "Dangerously Easy". The score is written on a single staff in treble clef. The lyrics are "You make it look ea - sy, \_\_\_\_\_ dan - gerous - ly ea - sy, — you do \_\_\_\_\_". The word "easy" is highlighted in pink. A red line above the melody shows a pitch contour that rises on the second "easy" and then falls. Chords "F" and "C" are indicated above the staff.

**Figure 7:** Olivia Dean’s “Dangerously Easy,” the re-composed refrain now emphasizes the word “easy”

At this small-scale level, and at other levels (to be discussed further in the following chapters), I analyze melody-lyric interaction to reveal how these interactions communicate expression and meaning in song. In each case, I begin with a temporary separation of melody and lyrics to analyze them first on their own, before considering their expressive combination in song.

## CHAPTER 2: SMALL-SCALE MELODIC CONTOURS

This chapter identifies three primary ways in which melody inflects lyrics: through single-word emphasis (using melodic high or low points), through syntactic relationships (using motivic repetition within a phrase or between phrases), and through overall contour (using overall melodic shape/movement of a line or section). In the previous chapter, I showed how melodic emphasis on a single word of lyrics can inflect the lyrics with new context, using examples from Olivia Dean's 2023 song "Dangerously Easy." In this chapter, I show examples of melody-lyric interactions at the level of syntactic phrases and entire song sections, drawing on examples from artists Phoebe Bridgers and Loney Dear. Next, I provide an analysis of three verses from three different songs: Billie Eilish's "when the party's over" (2019), Loney Dear's "Hulls" (2017), and Keaton Henson's "Sweetheart, What Have You Done To Us?" (2013). As discussed in the previous chapter, I begin by first considering melody and lyrics separately to provide a thorough analysis of each. Then, I identify expressive interactions between melody and lyrics, especially those instances where melody inflects affect and meaning onto understanding of the lyrics.

### **Syntactic Relationships: Emphasis Through Motivic Repetition & Phrase Structure**

Both melody and language have syntax: a structure of relationships between the parts of a phrase or between phrases in a section of material. In song, these melodic and

lyrical syntaxes function simultaneously, interacting with one another. Consider the melody in Figure 8, provided with chord symbols to show harmonic changes. It features repetition both *within* the phrase (as it continuously cycles up and down between D and A, shown in red) and *between* phrases (as its second phrase repeats and elaborates on the first phrase, as shown in purple). David Temperley points out that “nearly all rock songs have some pattern of pitch repetition and rhyme, and identifying this pattern is an important part of analyzing [songs].”<sup>66</sup> If we segment this melodic material following Jeremy Robins’s method of segmenting pop melodies, we can understand it to roughly follow an  $x\ y\ x\ y'$  form.<sup>67</sup> Robins shows that the restatement of a motive (in this case, motive  $x$ ) as the first and third motive in a four-part phrase possibly indicates period structure; indeed, the clear repetition between the first and second phrases and their open-closed harmonic structure tie them together syntactically. This repetition and elaboration establish a kind of musical syntax in this passage as listeners hear the same melodic material revisited in different ways.

An examination of the lyrics of the chorus (shown in Figure 9) reveals two pairs of lines, each made up of two lines that relate semantically. Notice how the first lyrical statement, “I have emotional motion sickness,” and the command that follows, “somebody roll the windows down,” are separate statements, yet can be understood to

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<sup>66</sup> Temperley, “Melody,” 94.

<sup>67</sup> Robins, “Formal Functions of Melodic Patterns in Popular Music.”

The image displays two staves of music in 4/4 time, key of G minor. The first staff, labeled 'Phrase 1', has a blue background and contains six measures. Above the staff, a large bracket labeled 'y' spans the entire phrase. Below the staff, four red rectangular boxes highlight specific melodic segments: the second measure, the third and fourth measures, the fifth measure, and the sixth measure. Above these boxes are labels: 'D♭' above the second measure, 'A♭' above the third measure, 'G♭' above the fourth measure, 'B♭m' above the fifth measure, and 'Fm' above the sixth measure. A label 'X' is positioned above the first measure. An arrow points from the first measure of Phrase 1 to the first measure of Phrase 2.

The second staff, labeled 'Phrase 2', also has a blue background and contains six measures. Above the staff, a large bracket labeled 'y'' spans the entire phrase. Below the staff, four red rectangular boxes highlight specific melodic segments: the second measure, the third and fourth measures, the fifth measure, and the sixth measure. Above these boxes are labels: 'D♭' above the second measure, 'A♭' above the third measure, 'E♭m' above the fourth measure, and 'G♭' above the fifth measure. A label 'X' is positioned above the first measure. A large curved arrow at the bottom of the staff points from the end of the phrase back to the beginning, indicating a return or continuation.

**Figure 8:** Phoebe Bridgers’s “Emotional Motion Sickness,” melody from chorus with both intra-phrase and inter-phrase repetition and elaboration

relate semantically: the first elaborates on the second (i.e., the narrator would rather *not* be sick in the [metaphorical] car, thank you very much). The third and fourth lines of the lyrics are even more closely related, as the third line, “There are no words in the English language” is connected through the implied conjunction “that” to the last line, “I could scream to drown you out.” Following Maggie Tallerman’s syntactic classifications, this kind of grammatical construction can be described as a subordinate clause (the fourth line) embedded in a matrix clause (the combination of lines three and four). The subordinate clause depends on the matrix clause for its meaning, with what



Tallerman calls the *complementizer* “that” acting as a bridge between the two.<sup>68</sup> In other words, these two lines depend on each other for their full contextual meaning; the implied “that” is still syntactically present even though it has been omitted. This pattern of syntax ties the lines together to create a cohesive narrative in the song’s first chorus.

I have emotional motion sickness.  
Somebody roll the windows down.  
There are no words in the English language  
I could scream to drown you out.

**Figure 9:** Phoebe Bridgers’s “Emotional Motion Sickness,” lyrics of the chorus

Let’s now consider the lyrics in combination with their melody to determine how the song’s melodic and lyrical syntaxes interact, both within and between phrases. Within the phrase, the similarity of melodic motion between the melodies of “motion sickness” and “somebody roll” seem to reinforce lyrical syntax that contextualizes the action of “somebody roll[ing]” the windows down to be necessary because of one’s “motion sickness.” Similarly, in the second phrase, the melodies of “English language” and “I could scream to drown [you out],” which feature descending stepwise motion, seem to fill the same syntactic function as the implied conjunction “that” that ties them

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<sup>68</sup> Tallerman, *Understanding Syntax*, 89.

together; melodic syntax fills in the gap, reinforcing linguistic syntax. At the level of entire song section, the periodic nature of the melody's two phrases reinforces the lyrical syntax of the two lyrical couplets, and the section's overall cohesion (shown in Figure 10). In this way, the melody reinforces the contextual link between the narrator feeling sick, in the first line of lyrics, because she can't scream loud enough to drown out the words of her lover, in the second line. All these qualities of linguistic and melodic syntaxes interact to help strengthen the semantic connection between the lyrics in this song section, helping build the narrator's expressive account of having emotional motion sickness.

**Phrase 1**

Chords: G $\flat$ , D $\flat$ , A $\flat$ , G $\flat$ , B $\flat$ m, Fm

Lyrics: I have e - mo - tion - al mo - tion sick - ness, some - bo - dy roll the win - dows down.

**Phrase 2**

Chords: G $\flat$ , D $\flat$ , A $\flat$ , E $\flat$ m, G $\flat$

Lyrics: — There are — no words in — the Eng - lish lan - guage — I could scream to drown you — out —

**Figure 10:** Phoebe Bridgers's "Emotional Motion Sickness," melody and lyrics of the chorus with the interaction between melodic and lyrical syntax shown both within the phrase (in red) and between phrases (in purple)

### Overall Affect/Context: Emphasis Through Melodic Character, Contour, & Harmony

Melody can also inflect lyrics across and within song sections through its overall shape and character. This relationship can be developed in several different ways: through a melody's overall character, through its concluding shape, and through its harmonic inflection. The first of these, melodic character, refers to the overall melodic shape of a phrase or section. For instance, is the melody level or oscillating? Does it move with stepwise motion, or utilize leaps? Is it climbing towards higher registers, or being dragged into lower registers? Consider, for instance, the disjunct leaps of the melody in Figure 11, which Moore might call *terraced*.<sup>5</sup> With each melodic fragment, the melodic line is continually drawn to leap downwards to G and then to F, creating a sense of inevitability.

3 Gm Bb/F

8 EbM7 Bbadd9/D Bb/D

12 Cm Cm7/Bb

16 F7/A Bb (Gm)

Figure 11: Loney Dear's "Hulls," melody of first verse

The lyrics, shown in Figure 12, reveal a disjointed account of a complex relationship between narrator and addressee. As the narrator cycles through several different narrative points-of-view (POVs), a general effect of instability is created. Furthermore, the bitterness and general pessimism of lines such as “you wish they could help you,” “we don’t sleep much,” “we’re looking for trouble,” and “I was your lover” pervades the lyrics with a sense of melancholy.

These people,  
what are your friends for?  
You wish they could help you.  
You better get used to  
  
We don’t sleep much  
We’re looking for trouble  
We saw town sides  
I was your lover.

**Figure 12:** Loney Dear’s “Hulls,” lyrics of the first verse

When melody and lyrics are considered together, as shown in Figure 13, the melody of this verse, from Loney Dear’s 2017 song, “Hulls,” helps inflect the lyrics with

a sense of devastation as the narrator describes their struggles with their lover. Each line is colored with a sense of hopelessness and melancholy by the melody's continuing descent. The overall character of the melody thus plays a vital part in affecting listener's perception of the lyrics' affect and story. This example will be discussed more below, where I will examine how harmonic implications can also interact with lyrics.

The image displays a musical score for the first verse of Loney Dear's song "Hulls". The score is written in 4/4 time with a key signature of two flats (Bb and Eb). The melody is presented on a single staff in treble clef, with lyrics written below the notes. Harmonic annotations are placed above the staff at various points. The score is divided into four systems, each starting with a measure number (3, 8, 12, and 16) and a common time signature (8).

System 1 (Measures 3-7):  
 Measure 3: Gm (G minor)  
 Measure 4: Bb/F (Bb major / F major)  
 Lyrics: These peo - ple      What are your friends for?      You wish they could

System 2 (Measures 8-11):  
 Measure 8: EbM7 (Eb major 7)  
 Measure 9: Bbadd9/D (Bb major add9 / D major)  
 Measure 10: Bb/D (Bb major / D major)  
 Lyrics: help you,      you bet - ter get used to      We don't

System 3 (Measures 12-15):  
 Measure 12: Cm (C minor)  
 Measure 13: Cm/Bb (C minor / Bb major)  
 Lyrics: sleep much,      we're look - ing for trou - ble      We saw

System 4 (Measures 16-18):  
 Measure 16: F7/A (F major 7 / A major)  
 Measure 17: Bb (Bb major)  
 Lyrics: town sides,      I was your lo - ver

**Figure 13:** Loney Dear's "Hulls," melody and lyrics of first verse

### **Analysis: Billie Eilish, "when the party's over" (2019)**

Having outlined three levels of melody-lyric interaction, I will now analyze song sections from three different songs to show how these levels can interact to shape a song section's meaning and affect.

In the first four lines of the first verse of Billie Eilish's 2019 song, "when the party's over," melodic contour helps inflect lyrics at the three levels described above to help craft the song's portrayal of a toxic relationship. These inflections affect lyrical meaning at the level of a single word/syllable of lyrics up to the overall lyrical inflection of entire song segment. First, as we will see below, melodic high and low points emphasize specific lyrics to clarify their inflection, much in the way pitch emphasis in speech intonation clarifies meaning. Second, motivic structures within the melodic line and phrase structures within the verse create and reinforce syntactic relationships between lyrics, also affecting inflection of meaning. Finally, the overall character of the melody, which features oscillation and ascending motion, inflects lyrics with a sense of frustration and uncertainty as Eilish sings about a relationship on the rocks.

### *Analysis of Melody*

First, let us examine characteristics of the melody separately to define its distinctive shape and character. The melody's first line, shown in Figure 14, begins on E3 and then spends some time moving between F# and G#. Allan Moore describes this kind of melodic movement, which "moves between two pitches," as *oscillation*.<sup>69</sup> This melodic oscillation, then, combined with the half note-quarter note rhythmic pattern it accompanies, creates a sense of motivic repetition in mm. 13–15 with F# continuously

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<sup>69</sup> Moore, "Delivery," 97.

functioning as a pick-up note and lower neighbor to G# on the downbeat. The last pitch of the line, however, jumps from G # to B, breaking the narrow-ranging oscillation and giving this line an overall rising melodic contour. The final note of the melody, B3, is also emphasized agogically on beat 2, further disrupting the line's previously established pattern of oscillation. Together, these melodic features shape a melodic contour in this line that begins to ascend but then seems to get stuck, repeatedly cycling between two pitches before finally continuing its ascent up to B at the end of the line, completing the rising contour suggested at the beginning of the phrase. This melodic shape seems to suggest a sense of yearning or uncertainty, as the voice struggles to rise, getting temporarily trapped in a repetitive cycle of oscillation.

This melody can also be described using Steve Larson's concept of musical forces to show how it strenuously resists melodic gravity, melodic magnetism, *and* musical inertia in its melodic shape, adding to its unique expressive quality.<sup>70</sup> Instead of completing its initial ascent in m. 13 with a subsequent descent, the end of the melodic line continues to ascend to B in m. 16, defying the force of melodic gravity. Similarly, the melody first establishes a sense of musical inertia by repeating its oscillatory pattern in mm. 14–15; however, in m. 16 this pattern is abruptly broken by the continuation to

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<sup>70</sup> Larson, *Musical Forces*, 83.

The image displays a musical score for the first four phrases of the verse in Billie Eilish's "when the party's over,." The score is written in treble clef with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a 3/4 time signature. The notes are as follows:

- Phrase 1 (measures 13-17): A (quarter), B (quarter), C#m (quarter), B (quarter), E (quarter), B (quarter), A (quarter).
- Phrase 2 (measures 18-23): A (quarter), B (quarter), C#m (quarter), B (quarter), E (quarter), B (quarter), A (quarter).
- Phrase 3 (measures 24-29): A (quarter), B (quarter), C#m (quarter), B (quarter), E (quarter), B (quarter), A (quarter).
- Phrase 4 (measures 30-35): A (quarter), B (quarter), C#m (quarter), B (quarter), E (quarter), B (quarter), A (quarter).

**Figure 14:** Billie Eilish’s “when the party’s over,“ melodic transcription of first four phrases of the verse with chord symbols in lead sheet notation

B, upsetting both musical inertia and melodic gravity simultaneously.<sup>71</sup> Finally, and perhaps most significantly, this melodic line significantly defies Larson’s force of musical magnetism, which seeks to draw unstable notes to their closest stable neighbors.<sup>72</sup> In m. 16, the bass A would generally imply A major harmony; musical magnetism would suggest the melody would be magnetically drawn to one of the

<sup>71</sup> Larson, *Musical Forces*, 96.

<sup>72</sup> Larson, 88–89.



chord tones of A major: A, C#, or E. In fact, one can imagine the melody easily moving from F# at the end of m. 15 down to E in m. 16, settling on its nearest stable neighbor tone in A major. Or, perhaps, the melody could move from F# and G# on beat one of m. 16 directly to A, using the leading tone G# to move directly to the tonic of this chord. Instead, the original melody defies the strong magnetic pull of tonic, skipping directly over it to B, a non-chord tone.

In the genre of popular song, the use of melodic-harmonic divorce, where melody and harmony act independently, is not an uncommon occurrence. With this in mind, this moment can also be described as an instance of melodic-harmonic divorce; particularly, an instance of what Drew Nobile calls a “hierarchy divorce,” in which “the melody exists at a deeper level of structure than the harmony.”<sup>73</sup> The leap to B from G# can then be understood to be a move from scale degree  $\hat{3}$  to  $\hat{5}$  in the key of E major. The harmonic quality of the melodic-harmonic divorce at the end of the line and the melody’s movements throughout this section contribute to its overall expressive character, as shown in Figure 15.

The second line of the melody of this verse begins in m. 18 on the same pitch as the end of the first line (B3) and features a very similar melodic shape to the previous line; in fact, it is nearly a direct transposition of the first line at the interval of a perfect

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<sup>73</sup> Drew Nobile, “Counterpoint in Rock Music: Unpacking the ‘Melodic-Harmonic Divorce,’” *Music Theory Spectrum* 37, no. 2 (2015): 189–203, <https://doi.org/10.1093/mts/mtv019>.

1. m. 13: The melody begins with an ascent; melodic gravity predicts it will ascend then subsequently descend through the line.
2. m. 14: The melody begins oscillating; musical inertia dictates it will continue.
3. After a melodic ascent, melody continues to B instead of descending, defying melodic gravity and also musical inertia, as its pattern of oscillation is broken.
4. Melodic tones are unstable with the underlying harmony, creating melodic-harmonic divorce and defying the law of musical magnetism, which suggests melodic tones are drawn towards chord tones rather than non-chord tones.

**Figure 15:** Billie Eilish’s “when the party’s over,” diagram showing melodic motion in relation to musical forces

fourth. In this line, the oscillating pitches are B and C#, and the melody ascends to E4, a full octave above the first pitch of the section. Interestingly, Eilish begins to subtly ornament the oscillating pitches by vocally sliding down from C# to B on the second and third oscillation, further emphasizing the melody’s wave-like quality.

Furthermore, similarities between the first and second line of the melody, as well as their harmonic implications, place them in a quasi-periodic relationship; the second line “completes” the openness of the first line. The end of the first line (or phrase) of the

melody implicates a sense of incompleteness due to its lack of descent, melodic-harmonic divorce, and its ending on scale degree  $\hat{5}$ ; as mentioned above, the local harmony indicates A major, whereas the melodic line jumps up to B as scale degree  $\hat{5}$  in E major in m. 16 (implying tonic function, although an ungrounded tonic). The melody of the second line, or phrase, partially fulfills this ungroundedness by coming to an end on the tonic E in m. 22, which is now also a chord tone with the local harmony of A major. Thus, due to melodic similarity and harmonic implications, the first two melodic lines of the verse are tied together syntactically.

This same syntactic relationship is further played out across the next two lines of the verse, which are almost a direct transposition of the first two lines up an octave, continuing the melodic behavior of oscillation and ascension. Noticeable differences include the leap from E up to C $\sharp$  at the beginning of the fourth and final line in mm. 30–31, the largest melodic leap in the verse. Outside of this moment, all other lines have begun on the same pitch as the end of the line before; this leap of a sixth breaks that pattern, emphasizing the verse's continuous registral ascent. This final line of melody concludes with a leap up at E5, the highest pitch of the verse: an entire two octaves from the verse's first note on E3. Significantly, this melodic high point occurs at the end of this section, leaving it without a real sense of internal resolution. This melodic character flagrantly defies Larson's description of melodic gravity: "the tendency of a note to

descend.”<sup>74</sup> Throughout the section, the rising melodic shape of each line, as well as the insistently rising melodic shape of the entire section, contribute to a sense of increasing tension or yearning. This sense is further heightened by the repetitive oscillation of each line, suggesting a sense of frustration or stagnation to the verse’s overall melodic character. These melodic qualities of ascent and oscillation give the melody in this verse a sense of struggling to reach increasingly higher, building tension and yearning towards an unknown goal.

### *Analysis of Lyrics*

Next, let us consider characteristics of the song’s lyrics to illuminate their possible inflections through melody. As discussed earlier, this process draws on linguistic theory to explore different possible intonations of the lyrics with respect to pitch and syntax and to determine how they affect the lyrics’ communication and meaning.

Let us begin by examining the lyrics of the first line of Eilish’s song to ascertain the possible placements of pitch accent (or *focus*), each of which has the potential to change the lyrics’ implied context and meaning (the lyrics of this section are shown in Figure 16). Figure 17 shows several different iterations of marked pitch accent placement for this line, each of which changes not only the general affect of the line, but also focuses attention on different words in the line, potentially changing their semantic

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<sup>74</sup> Larson, *Musical Forces*, 83.

meaning. For instance, a pitch accent on “*I’m*” in the line would draw attention to the *narrator* being “no good” for the addressee (versus a different person, who might be better for them). An accent on “*no good*” instead focuses attention on the narrator’s declaration that her relationship to the addressee is harmful to them rather than helpful. In this way, different words in the first line of Eilish’s lyrics can be *focused* using different non-default pitch accents, implying different contexts and thus, different meanings. These different placements of pitch accents in this line thus have the potential to fundamentally alter its communication.

Don’t you know I’m no good for you?  
I’ve learned to lose you, can’t afford to  
Tore my shirt to stop you bleedin’  
But nothin’ ever stops you leavin’

**Figure 16:** Billie Eilish’s “when the party’s over,” lyrics of first four phrases of the first verse

Let us also consider how changing the overall intonational contour of each line of lyrics (or our impression of its overall contour) can alter perceived affect. Significantly, the first line of the verse, “Don’t you know I’m no good for you?” is a yes-or-no question. As discussed previously, Snarrenberg states above that these sorts of

Don't *you* know I'm no good for you?

Don't you *know* I'm no good for you?

Don't you know *I'm* no good for you?

Don't you know I'm no *good* for you?

Don't you know I'm no good for *you*?

**Figure 17:** Billie Eilish's "when the party's over," first line of lyrics with different possible pitch accent placements

questions are likely to have a *rising* overall intonational shape.<sup>75</sup> If this question rose in pitch at the end, it would indicate uncertainty: the speaker genuinely wanting to know the answer to the question. A *falling* intonational pitch contour utilized on a question such as this would generally indicate it was either rhetorical or that the speaker was already aware of the possible answer; no answer from the addressee is actually necessary. For this specific question ("Don't you know I'm no good for you?"), a rise in intonation would suggest the narrator really does want to know if their addressee is aware she's no good for them, whereas a fall in intonation would suggest the narrator is asking the question rhetorically; she already knows she's no good for her partner but is asking the question anyways, perhaps to draw attention to her own perceived flaws.

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<sup>75</sup> Snarrenberg, "Prosody," 143.

Thus, changing the pitch contour of the end of the line has the potential to significantly change its perceived meaning.

Each line of lyrics can also be analyzed for its syntactical structure, noting its grammatical construction from different clauses. For instance, just like Bridgers's lyrics earlier, the first line can be broken into two separate clauses that are tied together through an implied "that": "Don't you know [that] I'm no good for you?" The remaining lines can also be segmented into subject and verb phrases, and examined for omitted (but implied) syntactical connections: "I've // learned // to lose you, [but] [I] // can't // afford to," [I] // tore my shirt // to stop you // bleedin'," "But nothin' ever // stops you // leavin'."<sup>76</sup> Examining the syntactical structure of the lyrics provides insight into how information is presented as the song's narrative unfolds.

Finally, considering the four lines of this section together reveals syntactic relationships between them: they can be grouped into two couplets. The first line "Don't you know I'm no good for you?" is answered by the second line "I've learned to lose you, [I] can't afford to." The placement of these statements together suggests that the reason that the narrator is "no good" for the addressee is *because* she's "learned to lose [them]" and she "can't afford to." The third and fourth lines of lyrics are tied even more closely by the conjunction "but" between them; Yonatan Malin would possibly consider this a moment of opposition between the two lines, in which the second line

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<sup>76</sup> Tallerman, *Understanding Syntax*, 41.

opposes the statement of the first.<sup>77</sup> Indeed, the narrator states that “[I] tore my shirt to stop you bleedin’/ but nothin’ ever stops you leavin’.” Thus, the lines are united not only by their adherence to the overall theme (presumably a challenging or toxic relationship), but also by the link between line pairs, crafting a sense of narrative as the narrator lays out her grievances in the relationship. These aspects of the verse, as well as all the potential pitch intonations of each individual line, have the possibility to help inflect the verse’s meaning and affect in unique ways.

#### *Relationship Between Melody and Lyrics*

Finally, let us compare the findings from the analysis of melody and lyrics to determine how this particular melody interacts with and inflects these particular lyrics, building the story of the narrative through oscillation and rising melodic contours. Recall that these inflections are being examined at three different levels: through single-word emphasis (using melodic high or low points), through syntactic relationships (using motivic repetition within a phrase or between phrases), and through overall contour (using overall melodic shape/movement of a line or section).

Let us first consider the most minute scale of melody-lyrics relationship: the single word or syllable. This relationship considers those instances in which melody inflects or accents a particular word or syllable through melodic high points or melodic

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<sup>77</sup> Malin, “Modulating Couplets,” 173.



low points (in conjunction with other accents, such as agogic or metrical accents). Over the course of this section, multiple melodic features emphasize some words over others (see Figure 18). The rising nature of each line's melody creates a natural high point on the last syllable of each line: "*you*," "*to*," "*bleedin'*," and "*leavin'*." Within each line, the oscillating nature of the melody also creates single syllable accents on a smaller scale. Notice the particular pattern of stresses these oscillations inflect upon the lyrics in the first line: the words "*don't*," "*know*," and "*no*" on the downbeats of mm. 1–3 are all accented agogically, metrically, and tonally (as local high points and as chord tones). In the final measure of the first line, there is also a strong metrical accent on "*for*" and an accent on "*you*" as the melodic high point of the phrase, as mentioned above. These accents support a reading of the lyrics that emphasizes these words: "*Don't* you *know* I'm *no* good *for you*?" This pattern of accents suggests a unique lyrical interpretation that seems to focus more on the actions of the phrase ("*knowing*" and being "*no* good"), rather than the subject of the phrase, "I." Listeners' perception of the accent patterns of this phrase, and accent patterns in general, will likely differ based on the individual. For instance, one may hear the metrical emphasis on "*for*" at the end of the phrase as overpowering the agogic and melodic emphasis on "*you*." In any case, listeners must consider how their own perception of accent patterns interacts with lyrics to contextualize their meaning. The same process can be explored for each line of lyrics in

this section to determine which words or syllables are accented within the line, and how this changes our consideration of lyrical affect and meaning.

13 A B C#m B E B A  
 Don't you know I'm no good for \_\_\_ you?

18 A B C#m B E B A  
 I've learned to lose \_\_\_ you, can't \_\_\_ af - ford to

24 A B C#m B E B A  
 Tore my shirt \_\_\_ to stop \_\_\_ you bleed - in'

30 A B C#m B E B A  
 But noth - in' ev - er stops \_\_\_ you leav - in'

**Figure 18:** Billie Eilish’s “when the party’s over,” transcription of the first four phrases of the first verse with lyrics

Another way in which the relationship between melody and lyrics can create lyrical inflection is through syntactic relationships. This occurs when aspects of melodic syntax interact with aspects of lyrical syntax. Matthew BaileyShea discusses this relationship as existing on a spectrum between line-oriented versus syntax-oriented

settings of text, depending on to what degree the musical setting reinforces either the text's perceived lineation or its syntax.<sup>78</sup> In popular music, lyrical lines are transcribed with their musical setting in mind, taking into account melodic phrase structure and features like end rhymes.<sup>79</sup> Nevertheless, the musical setting of popular lyrics can still either emphasize or obscure aspects like syntax, rhyme, and repetition.

In this particular song section, the oscillating melodic line, whose repetitions suggest a sort of motivic ornamentation, inflects the syntax of the lyrics by emphasizing its grammatical structure. These melodic oscillations create a sense of subdivision in the lyrics where each oscillation occurs, shown below in Figure 19. This relationship is especially apparent in those instances where melodic syntax corresponds with and thus reinforces lyrical syntax. For instance, in the first line, the melodic repetition of the second F# and G# of the oscillation corresponds with the beginning of the subordinating clause "I'm no good for you," pitting it in direct relationship to the preceding clause, "Don't you know," and creating a melodic link that takes the place of the omitted conjunction "that." This relationship is further cemented by the rhymes between homophones "know" and "no," which occur at the same point in the oscillation "cycle," on beat 1 of mm. 14 and 15.

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<sup>78</sup> BaileyShea, *Lines and Lyrics*, 99–102.

<sup>79</sup> BaileyShea, 101.

Don't you know // I'm no // good for you?

I've learned // to lose // you, can't // afford to

Tore my shirt // to stop // you bleedin'

But nothin' // ever // stops // you leavin'

**Figure 19:** Billie Eilish's "when the party's over," lyrics shown with slash marks corresponding to points of melodic oscillation

In the other lines of lyrics in this section, the melody's oscillation at the beginning of each phrase also corresponds with clausal subdivisions in the lyrics' syntax. For instance, the melodic fragment that begins in m. 6 with the words "I've learned" is repeated in the next measure with the words "to lose," reinforcing the syntactical relationship between these two lines as the subject and verb of the phrase (What have "I learned" is "to lose.") In fact, the beginning of each pattern of melodic oscillation in the first three lines (and the second oscillation in the last line) corresponds to a syntactical subdivision in the lyrics, shown highlighted in blue in Figure 20. Through oscillation, the melody reinforces existing syntactic relationships in the lyrics of each line, bolstering the perception of their structure.

Additionally, the repetition of melodic material between the paired first and second melodic lines (and paired third and fourth melodic lines) also acts on the lyrics, creating an inflection of meaning. In the first pairing, the statement of the second line of

Don't you know // I'm no // good for you?  
I've learned // to lose // you, can't // afford to  
Tore my shirt // to stop // you bleedin'  
But nothin' // ever // stops // you leavin'

**Figure 20:** Billie Eilish's "when the party's over," lyrics shown with slash marks corresponding to points of melodic oscillation, correspondences with lyrical syntax are highlighted in blue

lyrics is situated as a direct completion of the question posed in the first line of lyrics due to the melodic lines' quasi-periodic relationship. The second melodic pairing inflects the last line of lyrics, "But nothin' ever stops you leavin'," as a direct completion, or consequence of, the third line, "[I] tore my shirt to stop you bleedin'." This oppositional relationship is heightened by the melodic leap at the beginning of the fourth line from E up to C# in m. 18 before the delivery of the final repetition. The E, on the lyric "but," is the same pitch that began line 3, tying it registrally to the previous line in which the narrator confesses the lengths she went to preserve the relationship. In my analysis of the text, I discussed how these two lyrical lines semantically oppose each other due to the conjunction "but."<sup>80</sup> In contrast, the melodies (and harmonies) of these lines melodically *complete* each other. Taken together, this lyrical opposition and

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<sup>80</sup> Malin, "Modulating Couplets," 173.

melodic completion create a sense that the opposition is, perhaps, an unavoidable outcome; despite the narrator's best efforts, and in fact maybe *because* of them, her loved one "never stops leavin'." This relationship between melodic syntax and lyrical syntax contributes to the unique expression of this verse.

Finally, the relationship between melodic contour and lyrics also operates at a more general level, as the overall shape and characteristics of each melodic line inflects the lyrics. Earlier, oscillation was discussed for how it inflects certain words or syllables in a line over others. It can also function on a more general level to convey a sense of stagnation or of being trapped in a narrow space. Throughout this section, the melody spends most of the time oscillating between notes only a whole step apart. This mood or affect, applied to the lyrics of this section, can re-enforce their sense of stagnation in which the narrator simultaneously "can't afford to lose" their loved one, but has "learned to lose [them]" anyways.

Consider the re-composition of the first line in Figure 21, which has been adjusted to maintain the melody's pentatonicism but entirely eliminate its oscillation. Without the repetition of the oscillation, the line could be interpreted as having a much more hopeful or uplifting affect as it now ascends unimpeded. We must also consider other ramifications of removing the oscillation; without it, the melody no longer reinforces the syntactic relationship between "Don't you know" and "I'm no good for you" or the homophones "know" and "no," and the final measure of the line (with the

lyrics “for you”) reach C# and E, no longer creating the same melodic-harmonic divorce with between B and A major as in the original. All of these aspects in the recomposed version contribute to a different, perhaps more positive affect, coloring the persona of the narrative as more hopeful that her relationship will persist. In contrast, the original comes across as hopeless and desperate, perhaps even cynical.



**Figure 21:** Billie Eilish’s “when the party’s over,” comparison between original melody of the first line and re-composed version without oscillation

Another important aspect of the melody gleaned from the earlier melodic analysis was the perpetual rising motion at the end of each line, a trend that facilitates a section-wide melodic ascent spanning an entire two octaves. This melodic characteristic also imparts a sense of yearning or rising tension. Additionally, this rising motion can affect the communication of each line of lyrics individually, in the way a rising intonational pattern in speech affects the meaning of individual phrases. The first line,

the yes-or-no question, “Don’t you know I’m no good for you?” was projected to have a terminal upward contour; the melody fulfills this role by continuing its ascent in the final measure of the line to inflect the question with what can be interpreted as a genuine sense of inquiry. Significantly, the other lines of lyrics (the statements) are *also* inflected upwards, where they were instead predicted to be inflected with a speech-intonational falling contour, signaling finality or assertion. The rising melodic contour implies a rising intonational contour on these lyrical lines, suggesting “the speaker is inviting or challenging the listener to respond in some way to what the speaker has said.”<sup>81</sup> Thus, because of the rising melodic contour in the section of the song, questions and statements alike are inflected with a sense of genuine uncertainty, yearning, or striving towards great height or tension.

To elucidate this phenomenon, consider the re-composed melody of the first line of the verse in Figure 22, which de-emphasizes the pitch accent on the last syllable of the line (“you”) by removing it as a melodic high point and eliminating the continuing melodic ascent. This recomposed version instead includes a melodic accent on the word “*no* [good]” (Don’t you know I’m *no good* for you?). Instead of emphasizing how bad the narrator is for “*you*,” the addressee specifically, this re-composed stress instead emphasizes how *bad* (“*no good*”) she is for her partner. Also, like the previous re-composition, this line also blurs the oscillating pattern of the original, creating a much

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<sup>81</sup> Snarrenberg, “Prosody,” 143.



more neutral expression of the question “Don’t you know I’m no good for you?” Thus, the unique relationship between various melodic accents (in this case, high points) and lyrics gives the lyrics a particular inflection, painting them a specific emotive color and clarifying their communicative meaning as the song’s narrative unfolds.



**Figure 22:** Billie Eilish’s “when the party’s over,” comparison between original melody of the first line and re-composed version without oscillation *or continued ascent*

As the melody of this section continues to rise across all four phrases, a melodic high point is created on the very last line of the section, on the word “leavin’.” This creates the sense that the melodic contour of this entire section is leading to this one point; narratively one can imagine that the narrator’s loved one departing is the catalyst for the entire expression of this melodic material. This global melodic character is also unique in that it resists melodic gravity, as mentioned above with reference to the melody of the first line. As each line climbs ever higher, the entire section’s resistance to

the impulse to descend imparts it with a unique sense of climbing tension or unfulfilled yearning. In his analysis of Schubert's "Auf Dem Flusse," David Lewin describes the "rising tessitura of the vocal line ... which persists continuously throughout the entire song from its beginning ... as the mimesis of a giant structural question mark."<sup>82</sup> In this segment of Eilish's song, the continually rising melodic contour echoes a deeper lack of resolution referenced in the text: the narrator's distress at her lover's absence. This rising motion and the section's persistent melodic oscillation inflect the lyrics of this section on multiple levels, impacting the song's unique story of a toxic relationship.

#### **Analysis: Keaton Henson, "Sweetheart, What Have You Done To Us" (2013)**

The lyrics of the first verse of Keaton Henson's song "Sweetheart, What Have You Done To Us" also seem to reference a struggling relationship; the narrator speaks in first person to their "sweetheart," much as the lyrics in Eilish's song also speaks to "you" in the first person. Both songs are unique, though, in their musical and lyrical content. In the case of Henson's song, the melodic contour of the verse is a distinctly different shape compared to the above example; whereas Eilish's song's melody uses an overall rising melodic contour, Henson prefers an overall downward melodic contour, relying on motivic repetition and asymmetrical phrase structure to craft a compelling, imploring serenade to the narrator's "sweetheart."

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<sup>82</sup> Lewin, "Schubert, 'Auf Dem Flusse,'" 54.

### *Analysis of Melody*

In the first verse of the song, the melody's unique character favors an overall downward melodic contour with only a slight ascent at its end, a melodic shape Moore would likely call *falling*.<sup>83</sup> This melodic character, as well as motivic repetition and variation, crafts a melody that seems to unfurl itself in a slow oscillation as it progresses. The first line of the melody, shown in the melodic transcription in Figure 23, begins with a leap from G down to E, beginning on beat 3 of m. 22. The phrase is completed a measure later with a further descent from E to A at the end of the line with a leap down to G in between. This melodic motion follows a contour of descent except for the last pitch, which creates a subtle rise to the melody as the phrase ends. The effect is not the yearning rising melody of the previous example, rather its downward contour and meandering quality imparts a sense of resignation and finality.

Similar to the previous example, however, this final pitch of the phrase is not a chord tone or stable note in E minor, creating melodic-harmonic divorce. Instead, the note anticipates the next chord change to F major a measure later. As in the previous example, this moment of melodic-harmonic divorce briefly defies melodic magnetism, as the melodic tone A is pulled not towards E minor, its underlying harmony, but F major, the underlying harmony that follows.<sup>84</sup> Additionally, the entire melodic line,

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<sup>83</sup> Moore, "Delivery," 96.

<sup>84</sup> Larson, *Musical Forces*, 88–89.

22 G Am Dm C Em F Em

29 G Am Dm C Em

35 F Em F

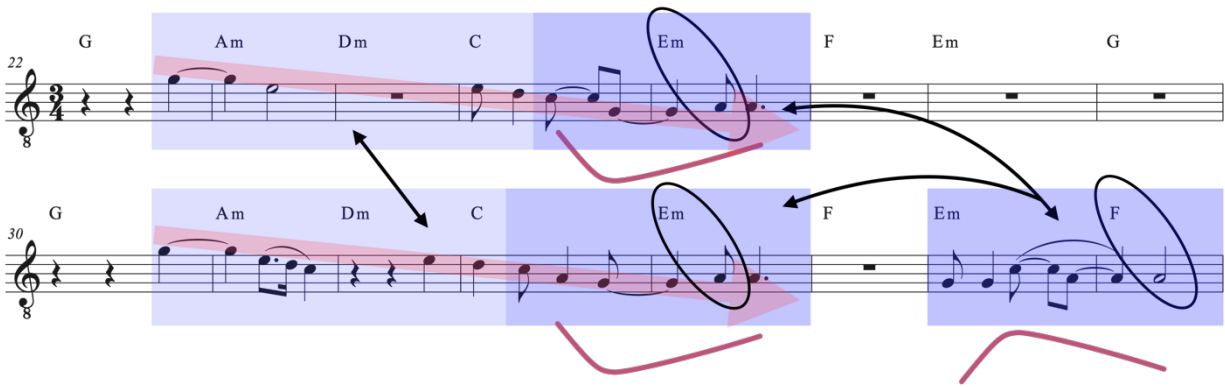
**Figure 23:** Keaton Henson’s “Sweetheart, What Have You Done To Us?” melody of the first verse with chord symbols in lead sheet notation

with its overall downward contour, favors offbeats; the only note on a downbeat is the downbeat of m. 25 and its short value instead emphasizes the melody’s offbeat pattern. This quality adds to a sense of oscillation or meander: of anticipation and syncopation that obscures the bar line and metric regularity.

An examination of the rest of the melody reveals that the next phrase, mm.30–34, is a slightly modified repetition of the first, setting up a syntactical structure between the two phrases that clarifies their relationship. The second line features a melodic ornamentation in m. 31 as it travels down to C. The second part of the phrase (mm. 32–34) contains all the same pitches as its equivalent in the first phrase, however it is

aligned metrically so that D, not E, aligns with the downbeat. This melodic modulation of the second phrase appears to be a comment on and elaboration of its origin, mm. 25–26 in the first phrase; they are clearly related, but the second statement has been metrically re-aligned and contains a different pitch order (jumping down from C to A first, not directly to G in m. 34).

The final part of the phrase at the end of the verse, mm. 37–37, is short (only two measures long) but is likewise motivically tied to the rest of the verse's melodic content. It seems to be more of a tag than a separate phrase, beginning on G<sub>3</sub>, the lowest pitch of the verse (an octave below the verse's first pitch). This final melodic fragment is cemented in relationship to the previous two phrases through their shared last three pitches and harmonic movement from E minor to F, although the last fragment features a leap up to C instead of a leap down from C, as in the previous phrases. Thus, it acts as a sort of melodic tag to the previous lines, repeating and elaborating on previous material to bring the section to its completion. The melody's meandering quality gives it a sense of continuously circling back through motivic material and the end of each line seems to fluctuate hesitantly around an axial pitch of A<sub>3</sub>. The overall melodic effect of the verse is one of cycling downward, the pitch of A acting as a sort of buoy about which the melody's line is tethered, being continually drawn around it, and back towards it (Figure 24).



**Figure 24:** Keaton Henson’s “Sweetheart, What Have You Done To Us?” melodic contour of the first verse, with colors and arrows indicating similar downward motion between the first two phrases and similar pitch content between the end of these phrases and the tag (with circles indicating the melodic-harmonic divorce of the first two phrases resolved in the melodic tag)

*Analysis of Lyrics*

The lyrics of the first verse of this song, temporarily considered as a separate text, reveal a narrator questioning their “sweetheart” about their seeming fickleness or absence in the relationship (Figure 25). As in the previous example, a close reading of the lyrics reveals its different potential inflections through the use of different placements of pitch accents, and its internal syntactical structure. A reading of the first line of the verse emphasizing “what”, “you,” “done,” or “us” generates four unique contextual meanings of the sentence (shown in Figure 26). In each of these different lines, a different word has been *focused* through pitch accent, giving it a newly implied context.

The same process can be utilized for the final sentence of the line, emphasizing “what,” “have,” “you,” or “done” to create three different contexts (Figure 27). Each of these different emphases change the pitch intonation and therefore inflection of the sentences, altering their perceived meaning and communication.

Sweetheart, what have you done to us?  
I turned my back and you turned to dust  
What have you done?

**Figure 25:** Keaton Henson’s “Sweetheart, What Have You Done To Us?” lyrics of the first verse

Sweetheart, *what* have you done to us?  
Sweetheart, what have *you* done to us?  
Sweetheart, what have you *done* to us?  
Sweetheart, what have you done to *us*?

**Figure 26:** Keaton Henson’s “Sweetheart, What Have You Done To Us?” different possible stress patterns of Line 1

*What* have you done?

What *have* you done?

What have *you* done?

What have you *done*?

**Figure 27:** Keaton Henson’s “Sweetheart, What Have You Done To Us?” different possible stress patterns of Line 3

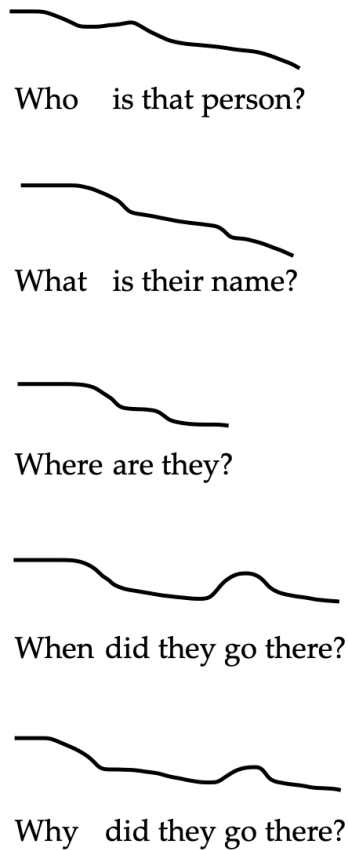
As in the previous song, the lyrics prominently feature a question in the first line (“What have you done to us?”), however, this particular question is *not* a yes-or-no question. Instead, it begins with “what,” and therefore would generally not be spoken with a rising intonational contour. In fact, most such wh- questions beginning with who, where, what, when, etc., feature falling pitch accents, as shown in Figure 28.<sup>85</sup> Thus, it is entirely likely that this question would naturally feature a falling nuclear accent, although a rising or level nuclear accent could potentially also be used instead to give the question a different emotional affect.

The lyrics in this verse also feature internal repetition, tying them further together through their shared syntax (see Figure 29). The first and last lines involve direct repetition; the last line of lyrics, “what have you done?” is a shortened version of

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<sup>85</sup> “Questions: Wh- Questions,” Cambridge Dictionary, 2024, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/grammar/british-grammar/questions-wh-questions>.





**Figure 28:** Common pitch-intonational shapes in wh- questions

“what have you done to us?” Removing “to us” from the first sentence generalizes the question. Instead of the narrator asking what their sweetheart has done to the two of them specifically, they ask instead what they have done on a broader scale. The middle line also features repetition between “I turned” and “you turned.” Interestingly, the only semblance of rhyme occurs between the first and second lines, *not* between the questions in the first and third lines (a result of removing “to us” from the latter). The result is a collection of lines that are closely bound together through internal repetition,

perhaps indicating the proliferation of the narrator's disbelief at their sweetheart's indifference.

Sweetheart, *what have you done* to **us**?

I **turned** my back and you **turned** to **dust**

*What have you done?*

**Figure 29:** Keaton Henson's "Sweetheart, What Have You Done To Us?" lyrics of the first verse; color highlights indicate repetition within the verse

### *Relationship Between Melody and Lyrics*

A comparison of the melodic and lyrical analyses of the verse reveals a melodic inflection of lyrics characterized by downward melodic contours and motivic repetition and modulation (see Figure 30). First, an examination of melodic high/low points reveals which single-syllable accents help shape lyrical inflection. Due to leaps downward to melodic low points in mm. 25 and 33 and upward to a melodic high point in m. 36, as well as a sense of strong metrical accent on the downbeats of mm. 25, 26, 33, 34, and 37, a distinct pattern of emphases is inflected on the lyrics (see Figure 31). In the first line, emphasis falls on "*what*" (metrical accent) and "*done*" (melodic accent and metrical accent), inflecting the question with a sense of accusation as the narrator

questions their sweetheart's actions. This sense of accusation can be perceived through the implied context of the line, inferred by its specific pitch accents.

22 G Am Dm C Em F Em  
Sweet - heart, what have you \_\_\_ done \_\_\_ to us?

29 G G Am Dm C Em  
I \_\_\_ turned \_\_\_ my back and you turned \_\_\_ to dust

35 F Em F  
What have you \_\_\_\_\_ done?

**Figure 30:** Keaton Henson's "Sweetheart, What Have You Done To Us?" melody of the first verse with lyrics

Sweetheart, *what* have you *done* to us?

I *turned* my back and *you* turned to dust

What have *you* done?

**Figure 31:** Keaton Henson's "Sweetheart, What Have You Done To Us?" lyrics of the first verse with musical emphases

Interestingly, the melodic high point of the *final* lyrical line, with its leap up to C instead of down from C (in m. 36), instead emphasizes the word “*you*,” drawing attention to the narrator’s sweetheart as the actor of perceived wrongdoing. These melodic low/high points can be seen as *focusing* attention on the words “*done*” in the first line, and “*you*” in the second line, specifying the context and the narrator’s communicative implications of each line. These different accent placements on the *same* lyrics (“What have you done?”) give them two different intonations. This evolution of melody-lyric interaction through the verse, as well as the melody’s meandering line and obscuring of the bar line, contributes to the verse’s dynamic discourse. As we will see below, syntactic relationships between these two lines will further impact their relationship and impact the song’s narrative.

Significantly, the first and second line of lyrics are connected not through *lyrical* repetition, but through *melodic* repetition, as they are set with almost identical melodic content. This melodic content connects the two lyrical lines in meaning, just as lines with lyrical repetitions are connected in meaning. Thus, the phrase “what have you done to us?” in mm. 25–26 is melodically bound in association with the phrase “[I turned] my back and you turned to dust” in mm. 30–34, suggesting a syntactic association as well. Because of this melodic relationship, the lyrics seem to suggest that what the narrator’s “sweetheart” has “done to us” is to “turn to dust,” implying their absence or inadequacy in the relationship.

The relationship between the end of the first phrase and the last phrase is particularly noteworthy because it shares not only lyrical repetition, as discussed above, but also *melodic* repetition, creating an additional layer of syntax. More specifically, the last line shares the same pitches as the last three notes of each previous line phrase (compare mm. 25–26 and mm. 36–37). Rather than a note-for-note melodic repetition, however, the melody moves with *inverse* motion, creating a melodic low point (on G) in the first line and a melodic high point (on C) in the last line. This melodic inversion causes emphasis to fall on different words in each line, inflecting the statement “What have you done” in the first line as “What have you *done*?” and in last line as “What have *you* done?” These different emphases, shown in Figure 32 and Figure 33, create very different senses of affect on the same lyrical content and help shape the narrative of the verse, *focusing* on a different word each time. In the first line, emphasis on “done” (“What have you *done*?”) emphasizes the *actions* of narrator’s sweetheart as the narrator questions these actions (presumably their “turning to dust,” from the next line). In this final line, emphasis on “you” (“What have *you* done?”) shifts focus from the wrong-doing itself to the *wrong-doer*: the “sweetheart.” The focus on “you” implies a context in which the narrator is asking what the addressee particularly has done (in comparison to what they themselves have done, for instance: “*I* have done everything, what have *you* done?”).

22 G Am Dm C Em F Em  
Sweet - heart, what have you done to us?

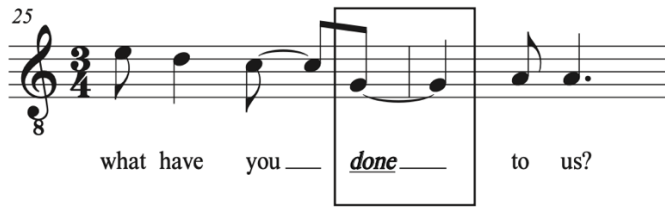
29 G Am Dm C Em  
I turned my back and you turned to dust

35 F Em F  
What have you done?

**Figure 32:** Keaton Henson’s “Sweetheart, What Have You Done To Us?” melodic low and high points emphasize specific words in the lyrics to suggest unique inflections of the same question

A recomposed version of the last line, which removes the emphasis on “*you*” (restoring emphasis on “*done*”), implies a very different relationship as the verse progresses (shown in Figure 34). Thus, while the repetition in the lyrics by themselves may seem like a simple tag or refrain, the altered melodic inflection in the last line reveals this final question is instead a transformation or modulation of the first question. This unique melodic modulation of the original melodic shape helps define a specific narrative focus and affect through the inflection of lyrics in this verse.

Question from Line 1



Question from Line 3



The last three pitches of each question are the same, reordered to create inverse melodic contours.

**Figure 33:** Keaton Henson’s “Sweetheart, What Have You Done To Us?” comparison of melodic contour between the same lyrical question in Line 1 and Line 3



**Figure 34:** Keaton Henson’s “Sweetheart, What Have You Done To Us?” re-composition of the final line of lyrics to remove emphasis on “you,” shifting emphasis back to “done”

Finally, the overall shape of the melody of this section serves as an additional method of lyrical inflection. Through its continually falling contour, the melody seems

to draw the lyrics downwards in contemplation or resignation. Whereas the melodic contour in Eilish's "when the party' over" drew the lyrics up towards an increasingly high register and level of tension, the lyrics in Henson's song are repetitively drawn down towards the final pitch of each line, behaving in a manner well described by Larson's melodic gravity (the tendency of a note to descend).<sup>86</sup> This motion of descent, paired with the axial motion or meander around the final pitch of A, can be interpreted as inflecting the lyrics with a sense of finality or eventuality. The melody's favoring of metric displacement seems almost to echo the narrator's emotional distress. As the melody descends, the narrator pleads with their sweetheart, always coming to rest on A at the end of each line. This pitch does not reach its harmonic resolution until the final line however, due to the melodic-harmonic divorce of the first two lines; it is only in the final iteration of the descent that the A becomes stable harmonically in F major, obeying the law of melodic magnetism.<sup>87</sup> This final question is thus colored with a sweeter quality; it is almost as if the narrator suddenly accepts their sweetheart's wrong doings in a moment of radical understanding.

This last lyrical line also features a different contour at its very end in contrast with the previous two lines. Focusing just on the end of the first, second and third line reveals a melodic contour that follows rising, rising, and falling shapes, respectively.

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<sup>86</sup> Larson, *Musical Forces*, 83.

<sup>87</sup> Larson, 88–89.



Thus, while the first two lines of lyrics imply that the addressee (the “sweetheart”) should respond, the final line, with its falling melodic shape, reads more as an accusation, “assertion [or] exclamation.”<sup>88</sup> These melodic qualities combine with the song’s lyrical content to help illustrate the narrator’s unique address to their sweetheart.

### **Analysis: Loney Dear, “Hulls” (2017)**

In the previous two songs, the lyrical narrator chronicles a challenging relationship using a direct, second person address throughout (“Don’t you know I’m no good for you?” “What have you done to us?”). One can easily imagine the lyrics of either of the above verses being spoken directly from narrator to addressee in close succession, perhaps as the narrator’s monologue to their loved ones. The first verse of Loney Dear’s song “Hulls” is less straightforward, switching between first, second, and third person points of view. This shifting of address obscures the relationship between narrator and addressee (or listener), although with no less melancholy a mood. Furthermore, the verse’s distinct melodic contour inflects its lyrics with continual leaps down, as discussed earlier. This section explores how the verse’s melodic shape at all three levels of inflection, coupled rhythmically with its harmonic progression, builds the song’s narrative and reinforces the lyrics’ fragmented narration. In the next chapter, I explore further the melodic characteristics of the entire song and how they shape the overall

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<sup>88</sup> Snarrenberg, “Prosody,” 143.

narrative, building an expressive narrative arc through first establishing a pattern of melodic contour and then disrupting that pattern at the song's key dramatic climax.

### *Analysis of Melody*

As mentioned above, the distinct melodic shape of this melody can be seen at first glance (see Figure 35). Each melodic fragment (excluding the last line) ends with a leap down of an interval of at least a fifth (sometimes up to a minor seventh), always corresponding with the move from beat 1 to beat 2 of the measure. Not only does this melody feature these uncharacteristically wide leaps (for a vocal line), but it is also remarkably static leading up to the leaps. Over half of the melodic fragments of this section are comprised of only two notes: a repeated note on one pitch, and the other note, which is reached after the leap (for instance, in mm. 3–4 or mm. 5–6). The melodic character of this line suggests a *terraced* melody, to borrow a term used by Allan Moore, which jumps back and forth between two distinct melodic levels, unlike the previous songs, which prefer stepwise motion and more modest leaps.<sup>89</sup>

It is also crucial to note the strong relationship between the melodic line of this section and its harmony. Significantly, all the notes that make up the melody are chord tones; except for the E $\flat$  in m. 18 (a suspension), there are no non-chord tones in the

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<sup>89</sup> Moore, "Delivery," 97.

3 Gm Bb/F

8 EbM7 Bbadd9/D Bb/D

12 Cm Cm7/Bb

16 F7/A Bb (Gm)

**Figure 35:** Loney Dear’s “Hulls,” melody of the first verse with chord symbols in lead sheet notation

melody of this entire section. This indicates that melodic motion and pitch are particularly contingent on the song's harmonic changes, as melody and harmony move in tandem through the verse. This motion of moving in tandem can be described by Larson’s concept of melodic magnetism, mentioned previously, which seeks to draw unstable notes to their closest stable neighbors.<sup>90</sup> For the most part, the melody utilizes common tones to sustain a note through a change from one chord to another (for instance, the melody remains on the shared note of D from G minor to Bb in mm 5–6). In

<sup>90</sup> Larson, *Musical Forces*, 88–89.

other instances, the chord tone of one chord will change to the nearest chord tone of the next chord (as seen in mm. 11–12 as the melody moves from D to E $\flat$  as harmony moves from B $\flat$  to C minor). This melodic movement fully conforms to the force of melodic magnetism, avoiding any sense of melodic-harmonic divorce seen in the previous examples. In fact, due to the relatively static nature of the melody, and its conformity to harmonic changes, I claim that it is harmony that drives this melody forward.

Because of this, I will now explore a more in-depth understanding of the harmonic motion of this section of melody, corresponding with the song's first verse. The piece begins in G minor, which will I refer to for now as tonic, as it returns to this key as a tonal home at the beginning of the following song section (to be discussed more in the following chapter).<sup>91</sup> As the melody progresses, the bass descends with stepwise motion, driving the section's harmonic progression, which shifts every two measures on the downbeat. This shift of the bass seems to induce harmonic changes, while still allowing the other chord tones to remain the same across these changes, when possible. This harmonic movement is reinforced by an arpeggiated synthesizer line that constantly outlines the chord progression, following the descending movement of the bass (shown in Figure 36). This bass line generates a harmonic progression (shown in Figure 37) that forgoes clear sense of motion towards harmonic closure.

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<sup>91</sup> As we will see in the next chapter, this song's shift towards a tonal center of B $\flat$  in later song sections suggests a double-tonic complex. In this chapter, however, with focus solely on the first verse, I proceed with tonic as G minor.

Instead, the descending bass line drives the section forward to end harmonically open, only reaching resolution at the start of the next song section. Particularly significant is the shift in m.12 to C minor, marking the beginning of the second part of the verse with a shift to the iv chord. This moment also corresponds with the melody breaking the upper barrier of D4 to reach up to Eb for the first time. Thus, the melody's terraced nature, with its continual leaps down, is driven by the bass's gradual descent and the harmony's cyclical character.

### *Analysis of Lyrics*

As mentioned above, the lyrics of the first verse of this song feature a complex relationship between narrator and addressee, as the narrator cycles through several different narrative points-of-view, creating a disjunct address (see Figure 38). Matthew BaileyShea describes how "voice and address are intimately tied to expressions of intimacy and distance," and how shifts in address in song can be used as expressive devices.<sup>92</sup> The first part of the verse uses second person point of view, a perspective in which the narrator portrays the story from the perspective of "you," drawing their addressee in to their narrative (see Figure 39). In this verse, the narrator describes the addressee's general absence or distrust of friends. Due to the fragmentation of the lyrics, the narration is ambiguous. For instance, in the first line, the fragment "these

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<sup>92</sup> BaileyShea, *Lines and Lyrics*, 129.

The image displays a musical score for the first verse of 'Hulls' by Loney Dear, consisting of four systems of music. Each system includes a synthesizer part (treble clef) and a bass part (bass clef). The key signature is one flat (Bb) and the time signature is 4/4. The chord progressions are indicated above the synthesizer part.

- System 1 (Measures 3-7):** Chords are Gm and Bb/F. The synthesizer part features a steady eighth-note melody, while the bass part provides a simple accompaniment.
- System 2 (Measures 8-11):** Chords are EbM7, Bbadd9/D, and Bb/D. The synthesizer part continues with the eighth-note melody, and the bass part uses a more complex rhythmic pattern.
- System 3 (Measures 12-15):** Chords are Cm and Cm7/Bb. The synthesizer part maintains the eighth-note melody, and the bass part continues its accompaniment.
- System 4 (Measures 16-18):** Chords are F7/A, Bb, and Gm. The synthesizer part continues with the eighth-note melody, and the bass part concludes the first verse.

**Figure 36:** Loney Dear’s “Hulls,” synthesizer and bass transcription of the first verse with chords shown in lead sheet notation (bass line octave-adjusted for ease of reading)

<b>Part A (mm3–10):</b>	<b>Gm</b>	<b>Bb/F</b>	<b>EbM7</b>	<b>Bb/D</b>
<b>Part B (mm 11–18):</b>	<b>Cm</b>	<b>Cm7/Bb</b>	<b>F7/A</b>	<b>Bb</b>

**Figure 37:** Loney Dear’s “Hulls,” chord progression the first verse, parts A & B

people” begins the narrative, setting up its ambiguity from the start by prioritizing these words at the beginning of the verse. Taken together with the rest of the line, “what are your friends for?” one can possibly assume that “these people” are the “friends” referred to later in the line. The fore-fronting of “these people” seems to emphasize their participation in the narration, giving the line a quasi-accusatory tone.

These people, what are your friends for?

You wish they could help you

You better get used to

We don't sleep much

We're looking for trouble

We saw town sides

I was your lover

**Figure 38:** Loney Dear's "Hulls," lyrics of the first verse

In the next two lines, fragmentation continues to create narrative ambiguity, compounding with the second person POV to create a sense of uncertainty and uneasiness. Reference continues to “these people” from the first line with the “they” of the second and third lines, implying that the narrator wishes “these people” (“your

These people, what are your friends for?

You wish they could help you

You better get used to

We don't sleep much

We're looking for trouble

We saw town sides

*I was your lover*

Key:

First Person Singular

First Person Plural

Second Person

**Figure 39:** Loney Dear's "Hulls," narrative points of view in the first verse

friends") could help "you." The purpose of the actions described in these lyrics is missing; the narrator does not explain what "you wish they could help you" *with*, or *what* it is "you better get used to." Additionally, it is not entirely clear if the narrator is addressing a different character (a singular "you"), a general "you," or speaking as themselves in a covert second person point-of-view, as described by BaileyShea.<sup>93</sup> This narrative ambiguity, created by word choice, narrative POVs, and fragmentation, builds a story that suggests an uncertain, perhaps distressed narrator.

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<sup>93</sup> Matthew BaileyShea, "From Me To You: Dynamic Discourse in Popular Music," *Music Theory Online* 20, no. 4 (2014), <https://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.14.20.4/mto.14.20.4.baileyshea.html>.



In the second part of the verse, beginning with “We don’t sleep much,” a sudden shift to first person plural point of view simultaneously clarifies and complicates the narrative, continuing the verse’s ambiguity. Now, the narrator uses the pronoun “we,” implying them and some other character(s) are now the subject of the story, perhaps the other character (“you”) referenced in second person POV in the previous part of the verse. The narrator describes the actions of these characters in a much less abstract manner than in the first part of the verse; they are much easier to visually conceptualize: “not being able to sleep,” “looking for trouble,” “travel[ing].” However, the continued fragmentation of the lines still leaves much unclear, not only within the lines themselves, but in how they relate to each other. For instance, one might wonder why the characters “don’t sleep much” — perhaps due to them “looking for trouble.” The third line, “we saw town sides,” further complicates the narrative: are the characters not sleeping because they are traveling? Are they looking for trouble during their travels? Did the traveling happen in a different time frame than the previous actions, due to its use of the past tense “saw”? These narrative ambiguities continue to support an impression of the narrator as confused, distressed, and unhappy, giving a glimpse of the songs’ narrative, but keeping its true nature veiled from the listener.

Finally, the last line of the verse shifts to first person singular point of view, providing arguably the least ambiguous line of the verse and giving a more concrete glimpse into the mind of the narrator. The seemingly simple line “I was your lover,”

conveys a myriad of information about this verse's story, given the context of the previous lines. The use of the personal pronoun "I" gives concrete shape to the narrator for the first time, drawing focus on them as a singular person, not the distant "you" or the communal "we." Furthermore, the use of "I" in addition to "you" in the sentence serves to create distinction between these characters as separate actors in the story, also potentially clarifying the identity of the "we" of the previous lines (the narrator and their lover). This final line also further clarifies that the characters' relationship to each other was romantic in nature, and the use of past tense suggests that relationship is now over. BaileyShea points out that many songs "that begin from a position of distant reflection will ultimately turn toward a more intimate mode of address."<sup>94</sup> In this last line of the verse, the shift to a more direct address brings the verse's narrative into sudden focus, finally providing a possible explanation for the narrator's distress and their narrative fragmentation.

The ambiguity of the verse can be further analyzed by exploring different intonational readings of the lyrics. Emphasis, or *focus*, can be added to certain words to draw attention to them, subtly altering the meaning of their line. For instance, using just the first clause, "these people," two distinct readings can be created by emphasizing the first or second word in the clause. "***These*** people" implies emphasis on the fact that it is *these* people, not a different group of people, that the narrator is referencing. In contrast,

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<sup>94</sup> BaileyShea, *Lines and Lyrics*, 130.

“these *people*” focuses the *people* as the subject of the narrator’s attention: who they are, what they’ve done (or not done), etc. This process of different intonational readings can be applied to any line of the verse to imagine different contexts and potentially altering the story of the verse. Especially given the verse’s ambiguity, discussed previously, these subtle clarifications of meaning can be crucial in helping shape the narrative as it unfolds.

### *Relationship Between Melody and Lyrics*

How, then, is this ambiguous first verse clarified and shaded with meaning by its melody (and subsequent harmony) in the medium of song? To answer this question, I now discuss how melody inflects the lyrics of the verse affectually and semantically, at the levels outlined above.

First, single word emphasis, created by the melody’s high and low points, inflects specific meaning on the lyrics in a regular pattern, corresponding with down beats, melodic leaps, and harmonic changes. As mentioned above, the melody of the verse is terraced, functioning on two distinct levels, separated by its idiomatic leaps down at the end of each line (shown in Figure 40). This melodic quality emphasizes particular words in the lyrics and gives it a particular character and affect (to be discussed more below). At the level of single-word emphasis, a pattern of stress occurs on the last two syllables of each line, often corresponding with the last word of each

lyrical line (corresponding with the downbeats of mm. 4, 6, 8, 10, etc.). The second-to-last syllable receives a metrical accent, falling on the downbeat, and a harmonic accent, as harmony changes from chord to chord. The last syllable, corresponding to the downwards leap, also receives extra attention due to its disruption of the otherwise static melody. For instance, the first line, “these people,” discussed above for possible intonational emphases, receives metrical and melodic emphasis on “these *people*,” supporting a reading that emphasizes the *people*, or friends, the narrator is wanting help from. This emphasis is also supported by the introduction of the synth line and bass on the downbeat of m. 4 (corresponding with the lyric “*people*”). The pattern of melodic contour in the rest of the verse continues to create a regular pattern of implied lyrical stresses, shown in Figure 41. These emphases help shape the lyrical fragments, giving some form to their otherwise quite ambiguous nature and creating a more nuanced narrative.

Another way melody helps clarify lyrical meaning in this verse is through its harmonic implications, especially during changes from one harmony to the next. These harmonic changes correspond with the emphases mentioned above which fall on the downbeat of every other measure (mm. 4, 6, 8, 10 etc.). With each harmonic shift, the word or syllable aligned with this shift is layered with additional meaning and expression, helping clarify the emotional mood and affect of the lyrics as the narrative unfolds. The interpretation of different harmonies implicating different emotions is, of

3 Gm Bb/F  
8 These peo - ple What are your friends for? You wish they could

8 EbM7 Bbadd9/D Bb/D  
8 help you, you bet - ter get used to We don't

12 Cm Cm/Bb  
8 sleep much, we're look - ing for trou - ble We saw

16 F7/A Bb  
8 town sides, I was your lo - ver

**Figure 40:** Loney Dear’s “Hulls,” melodic transcription of the first verse with chord symbols in lead sheet notation

course, highly subjective; however, I believe their potential to affect lyrical understanding and perceived affect cannot be understated. Furthermore, research points to speech intonation having its own hierarchical structures and syntax with regards to pitch, just as a melody can imply or support harmonic structures. Patel notes that “although there is nothing resembling chord structure or harmony in speech intonation, there is intriguing evidence from speech synthesis that local pitch events may combine into larger structures that have their own principles of patterning.”<sup>95</sup>

<sup>95</sup> Patel, *Music, Language, and the Brain*, 202.

These **people**, what are your **friends for?**

You wish they could **help you**

You better get **used to**

We don't **sleep much**

We're looking for **trouble**

We saw **town sides**

I was your **lover**

**Figure 41:** Loney Dear's "Hulls," lyrics of the first verse with implied musical emphases

Harmony can also "articulate points of tension and resolution (i.e., instability vs. stability), and points of openness and closeness," which can also interact with linguistic syntax and speech-intonational structures.<sup>96</sup> Thus, harmony in song can interact not only with lyrics on a purely abstract, affectual level, but also potentially interact with hierarchical patterns of speech intonation and syntax. In my analysis of harmony in this verse, which represents one possible interpretation of many, I map how harmonic syntax gives this verse a distinct affectual narrative and helps shape lyrical meaning.

For instance, the delivery of the first line, "these people" in G minor, generally gives the line a sense of melancholy or accusation (minor modes in Western Art Music

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<sup>96</sup> Patel, *Music, Language, and the Brain*, 342.

have been generally considered to correspond more with ‘sad’ moods than ‘happy’). Altering the mode of this line to major could impart it with a much more hopeful quality; rather than regarding “these people” as a burden or disappointment, the narrator would seem to be regarding them fondly or optimistically. The second line of the verse, as written, *does* have a major mode that occurs on the word “friends” (emphasized due to metrical placement, as discussed above). Taken together, the two lines can be interpreted to imply the narrator’s shifting emotional affect through this monologue, as they first present the subject of the line “these people,” considered with disappointment, and then reveal they are considered “friends,” perhaps in a moment of bittersweet fondness. The effect of the harmonic inflection of these lines is also supported by their harmonic shifts occurring specifically on the emphasized words, “people,” and “friends,” further cementing their affectual relationship. Furthermore, the shift from G minor to B $\flat$  major (in first inversion), corresponds with the descent in the bass from G to F, representing an intervallic opening in the chord that further impacts the shift from minor to major mode. All of these chordal qualities of the change in harmony, and their alignment with the lyrics in the particular way outlined above, give these lines a unique emotional affect, regardless of how one chooses to interpret them.

As mentioned above, another particularly notable harmonic shift occurs in m. 12 as the harmony shifts from B $\flat$  to C minor (iv in the key of G minor) and the melody

breaks its terraced barrier of D, above which it does not venture before this moment.

The alignment of harmonic and melodic shifts, as well as metrical emphasis, gives the downbeat of this measure a particular stress, not only in strength but also in quality.

The line, “we don’t sleep much,” receives stress on “sleep,” emphasizing it as the subject of the line. The unique melodic and harmonic shift on this word further inflect the word “sleep” with a quality of melancholy and modulation, as the second section of the verse begins its foray into C minor.

The section then continues to follow the pattern of melodic leaps and harmonic descent until the final line, “I was your lover,” which disrupts this pattern. The significance of this line, with its first person POV finally providing some clarity to the lyrical fragmentation of the verse, is reinforced by stepwise motion in the melody (versus a descending leap) and a stepwise ascent in the bassline (versus a stepwise descent). The melody lingers on E $\flat$  over the bar line, only coming to D, a chord-tone of B $\flat$  major, on the second half of beat one, creating the first melodic suspension in the verse. Similarly, the bass moves up to B $\flat$  to support the harmony, rather than continuing its previously consistent descent, which would have led it directly to G (perhaps as a return to tonic). Instead, this rise to B $\flat$ , and the aforementioned suspension, give the lyrics emphasized by this melody (the word “lover”) a specific character: a bittersweet recollection of the narrator’s past relationship.



A re-composition of this verse with an altered overall melodic contour, using more stepwise motion and smaller descending leaps, has a distinctly different affect (see Figure 42). These alterations serve not only to de-emphasize the stepwise motion of the last line, "I was your lover," but also impacts the overall affect of the verse, communicating a narrative state that can be interpreted as simultaneously less pessimistic and less grounded, each fragment pushing forward in a desire for resolution. As we will see in the next chapter, the disruption of this song's melodic contour in a manner very similar to this re-composition corresponds with a narrative shift and an increase in tension in later sections. Thus, the interaction between melodic contour, harmonic inflections, and lyrical narrative help shape the song's story throughout this verse, maintaining narrative ambiguity as melodic and lyrical fragments slowly reveal more and more of the narrator and their story. As we will see in the next chapter, these interactions can also occur on larger scales, working to influence a song's expression between song sections and throughout entire songs.

3 Gm Bb/F

These peo - ple                      What are your friends for?                      You wish they could

8 EbM7 Bbadd9/D Bb/D

help you,                      you bet - ter get used to                      We don't

12 Cm Cm/Bb

sleep much,                      we're look - ing for trou - ble                      We saw

16 F7/A Bb (Gm)

town sides,                      I was your lo - ver

**Figure 42:** Loney Dear's "Hulls," re-composition of the first verse with reduced leaps and increased stepwise motion

## CHAPTER 3: LARGE-SCALE MELODIC CONTOURS

In the previous chapter, I discussed melodic contour and its interaction with lyrics at the level of single words, phrases, and song sections. I explored single-word intonational emphases created by melodic high or low points, syntactic relationships created by motivic repetition, and overall affect created by the overall melodic character of phrases and song sections. This chapter expands those observations to include larger formal sections of songs and entire song forms. Within these larger-scale parameters, I examine melodic contour using the methods discussed previously, paying special attention to melodic movement on a larger scale. In the analyses that follow, I explore how changes in melodic contour interact with and articulate form. Rather than segmenting my analysis into separate explorations of melody and lyrics, as I have done previously, these analyses unfold more organically, although they are still informed by considering the expressive content of melody and lyrics on their own and then comparing their interaction. I examine melodic contour shifts between song sections and their effects on lyrical meaning and affect and analyze melodic contour across an entire song form, mapping how shifts in melodic contour (and its implied harmony) articulate narrative arcs, especially in songs whose forms are otherwise ambiguous.

## **Section-to-Section Relationships**

Between sections of a song, melodic contour can help articulate structural relationships (for instance, between a verse and a chorus) and help articulate a song's lyrical narrative and form. Specifically, changes to the manner or character of melodic movement (*how* a melody is moving) between sections can contribute essential expressive and formal information about the relationship between these sections. Additionally, shifts in melodic register between sections can also articulate form. I focus in even more detail on this phenomenon, tracking the melodic shifts across several sections of a song to determine their expressive effects.

### *Changes in Melodic Contour*

Let us begin by focusing on how changes in melodic contour affect formal relationships between song sections. This will involve an examination of changes in all the aspects of melodic contour discussed in the previous chapter (melodic high and low points, syntactic and motivic relationships between phrases, and overall character and contour of melody). The goal of the following analysis will be to ascertain these characteristics of a song's melody and examine the expressive effects of their changes between song sections.

Previously, I explored how melodic contour has a significant effect not only on the general expressive affect of a passage, but also on the meaning and narrative of the

lyrics of that melody. How a melody moves interacts with lyrics to give them a specific inflection. In the previous examples, we saw melodies that utilized several different melodic contours: oscillation, overall rising or falling shapes, axial or terraced motion, motivic repetition, and strategic use of melodic high or low points. All of these characteristics as a whole give a song section its particular meaning and affect. The following analyses explore the changing *manner* of melodic motion between song sections.

In the previous chapter, I pointed out how the distinct ascending and oscillatory character of the melody in the first four phrases of Billie Eilish's 2019 song, "when the party's over," gives it a sense of struggle or distress; as the narrator implores her loved one to examine their struggling relationship, the melody continuously rises, spanning a range of an entire two octaves, and oscillates by step in each line. All these qualities impart a sense of increasing desperation to the section as the narrator questions their loved one's actions and intentions. At the end of the four phrases, then, the melody is poised on E5 at the top of a peak, just having delivered the lyrics "But nothin' ever stops you leavin'" (see Figure 43). One can imagine several possible directions the next song section could take, both lyrically and melodically. The melody could remain in the proverbial registral stratosphere as the narrator airs their heightened anxiety and stress. It could slowly crawl its way back down, perhaps as the narrator begrudgingly accepts the imperfections of the relationship, focusing instead on its positive qualities. Or,

perhaps the melody could begin the rising cycle anew, dropping back down to the start of the first verse and rising once again as the narrator’s tensions perpetually increase.

Timestamp: 0:17

The figure displays a musical score for the first four phrases of Billie Eilish's song "when the party's over,". The score is written in treble clef with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a 3/4 time signature. The chords are labeled above the notes: A, B, C#m, B, E, B, A. The lyrics are written below the notes. The first phrase starts at measure 13 with the lyrics "Don't you know I'm no good for you?". The second phrase starts at measure 18 with "I've learned to lose you, can't afford to". The third phrase starts at measure 24 with "Tore my shirt to stop you bleed - in'". The fourth phrase starts at measure 30 with "But noth - in' ev - er stops you leav - in'".

13 A B C#m B E B A  
Don't you know I'm no good for — you?

18 A B C#m B E B A  
I've learned to lose — you, can't — af - ford to

24 A B C#m B E B A  
Tore my shirt — to stop — you bleed - in'

30 A B C#m B E B A  
But noth - in' ev - er stops — you leav - in'

**Figure 43:** Billie Eilish’s “when the party’s over,” melody and lyrics of the first four phrases

In actuality, the song behaves in a different way, as Eilish’s lyrics focus on a quiet self-confession, the narrator acknowledging that, despite the dysfunction in her relationship, she doesn’t really want to be alone. The new melodic material (shown in

Figure 44) maintains the oscillation of previous section but features an overall contour that falls instead of rises, creating a very different affect than what came before. The first line of this new material (mm. 37–40) falls back down an octave from E5 to E4, losing the registral height gained by the last two lines of the previous section. The next line (mm. 42–45) continues the descent, at first jumping back up to A4, breaking from the previously pentatonic melodic material, before descending to C#4, with the last line following this same contour (mm. 47–50). This descending melodic motion starkly contrasts with the ascending motion of the song's first four phrases, giving this material a different expressive and emotive character; while the opening of the song rises with pleading uncertainty, the melody that follows seems much more grounded and assured.

Furthermore, the use of scale degree  $\hat{4}$  (A, starting in m. 42) marks the first time in the song up to this point that this note is used. Naphtali Wagner discusses how songs that use pentatonic melodies can suppress certain notes (scale degrees), and how the introduction of these "suppressed notes" can coincide with formally dramatic moments in a song, often supported by other musical features.<sup>97</sup> This song's utilization of a previously suppressed note ( $\hat{4}$ ) in addition to its changing melodic contour in this particular line paint it as an especially important dramatic moment in the song.

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<sup>97</sup> Naphtali Wagner, "Fixing a Hole in the Scale: Suppressed Notes in the Beatles' Songs," *Popular Music* 23, no. 3 (October 2004): 257–69, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261143004000212>.

Timestamp: 0:49

The image displays three staves of musical notation for Billie Eilish's song "when the party's over". Each staff is in the key of F# major (indicated by three sharps: F#, C#, G#) and 4/4 time. The first staff, starting at measure 36, has the lyrics "Quiet when I'm com - in' home and I'm on \_\_\_ my own" and chord symbols A, B, C#m, B, E, B, A above it. The second staff, starting at measure 42, has the lyrics "I could lie, \_\_\_ say I like it like that, like it like that \_\_\_" and chord symbols F#m, C#m, E, A above it. The third staff, starting at measure 47, has the same lyrics and chord symbols as the second staff. The melody in all staves consists of eighth and quarter notes, with some notes tied across measures.

**Figure 44:** Billie Eilish’s “when the party’s over,” melody and lyrics of new song material

Furthermore, the melody of this new material differs from that of the preceding section in additional ways. While the opening section features a distinct rising melodic contour at the end of lines (indicating the “speaker” expects a response), the melody of the new section instead descends, resulting in level and falling contours at the ends of lines. At the end of the first line of this section (mm. 39–40), the melody descends with stepwise motion and then remains on E4 to repeat the last note. This contour corresponds with Snarrenberg’s *level* speech-intonational pattern that, as discussed in the previous chapter, generally communicates “a lack of finality, as if the speaker has



more to say.”<sup>98</sup> The final two lines of the new material, which share the same melodic line, descend through their last note, corresponding with a *falling* speech-intonational pattern, indicating the speaker is not necessarily expecting a response. Taken altogether, the end contours of the lines in the new material reveal a significantly different implied mode of communication than in the preceding material, further reinforcing the impression that, while the opening focused on the narrator pleading with her loved one to respond, this new song material shifts to self-sufficient statements, addressing either her loved one or herself.

The opening material and the material that follows are further differentiated by the content of the lyrics themselves (shown in Figure 45). In the previous chapter, I discussed how the lyrics of the first four lines feature the narrator addressing her loved one about the difficulties of their relationship. This section involves the narrator addressing “you,” presumably the person she is in the relationship with, and describing actions that have occurred in the past (“[I] learned to lose you,” “[I] tore my shirt,”). In contrast, the addressee “you” is noticeably absent in the lines that follow. In fact, she only utilizes the pronoun “I,” describing only her own thoughts and actions.

Additionally, this section of lyrics occurs in the present, as the narrator is “comin’ home ... on [her] own” and questioning whether to “lie [and] say I like it like that.” This shift of focus from “you” to “I” and the shift of temporality give the

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<sup>98</sup> Snarrenberg, “Prosody,” 143.

Don't you know I'm no good for you?  
I've learned to lose you, can't afford to  
Tore my shirt to stop you bleedin'  
But nothin' ever stops you leavin'.  
Quiet when I'm comin' home and I'm on my own  
  
I could lie, say I like it like that, like it like that  
I could lie, say I like it like that, like it like that.

**Figure 45:** Billie Eilish's "when the party's over," lyrics of the first two song sections

chorus a much more introspective impression, as though the narrator is describing her thought processes about the relationship in real time. Although the final lines of lyrics state that the narrator is considering lying to *someone*, perhaps implying an addressee, the lack of a separate addressee in this section (a "you," as in the previous section), suggests that the narrator could instead be considering lying to *herself*, acknowledging the complex reality of a dysfunctional relationship.

The melodic syntax of the new song material is uniquely crafted in such a way that it contextualizes the lyrics, further affecting their meaning and mood. In mm. 42–50, the narrator states that "I could lie, [and] say I like it like that," seemingly communicating that "that" (what she doesn't like) is being "on [her] own," from the

previous line. This action, however, is only something that the narrator states *could* happen, not necessarily what *will* happen. It is unspecified whether the narrator will lie (and say “[she] like[s] it like that) or rather say nothing at all, instead implying that she likes being “on [her] own.” Regardless, the overall effect of these phrases is more self-confident than the opening, expressed by the assured nature of their descending melodic line and their repeated melodic and lyrical content. As in the Keaton Henson example in the previous chapter, the lyrical repetition of “like it like that” is echoed in the melody through motivic repetition between mm. 43 & 44 (and again between mm. 48 & 49). In the second iteration of the “motive” from m. 43, the word “that” slides down from E to C#, further emphasizing the word as the low point of the phrase and subsequently emphasizing the meaning behind the word “that”: *that* the narrator is alone. This emphasis is reinforced by its relatively long length compared to other words in the line. Thus, the combination of lyrical repetition and motivic repetition draws special attention to this section of the song as vital not only to the structure of the song, but also to the song's narrative.

At this point, readers may be wondering what formal song structures could be used to classify these two sections. The first four lines of the song clearly introduce song material and seem to build up to material to come; I classify these lines as part of the first verse. The final two phrases of what I have referred to as “the new material” — which range from mm. 42–50, starting with the lyrics “I could lie...” — accompany a

thickening of vocal accompaniment, addition of bass, and a different harmonic progression. Additionally, as mentioned above, the descent of the melodic contours of these lines, as well as the addition of scale degree  $\hat{4}$ , breaking the previously pentatonic melody, differentiate it from the verse material. These factors point towards its classification as the song's chorus. How, then, can we classify the middle phrase in mm. 37–40, starting with the lyrics "Quiet when I'm coming home..."? Its similar harmonic progression, texture, and vocal timbre to the verse suggest it to be a part of verse material. However, I would argue that it exists in an in-between space; the distinct shift in melodic contour after the significant ascent of the verse's opening as well as the shift in lyrical content signal that this line is heading in a different direction, both melodically and dramatically. As the vocal line begins its delicate descent, this intermediate line helps connect the ascending melody of the verse to the grounded melody of the chorus.

Taking both lyrics and melodic contour into account, the chorus communicates not only an introspection that comes across as deeply personal, but one that is self-assured, expecting no response. This directly contrasts with the uncertain, open-ended address of the verse as the narrator questions her loved one and reminisces about her relationship. I interpret the intermediate phrase, "Quiet when I'm coming home..." as facilitating the transformation of this uncertain emotional state into the more assertive statements of the chorus. Thus, independent formal structures present in lyrical and

melodic content can interact in the form of song to help articulate its overall narrative shape.

### *Changes in Register*

Shifts in melodic register also play an important role in articulating form and relating the lyrical content of song sections with each other. Changes in register from section to section can create different relationships between the melodic and lyrical content of those sections.

Several relationships are possible. Some songs continue in the same melodic register between song sections or traverse roughly the same registral space. In Eilish's "when the party's over," for example, the verse begins on E3 and ascends to E5. The next phrase begins on the same note (E5), continuing the line with its gradual descent to C#4 which then leads directly into the chorus. This shared melodic register between song sections can be understood to imply a shared sense of *narrative* register; the sections seem to be part of the same continuing narration. Although the chorus features a different point of view and sense of temporality, the melodic tie across sections supports a perception of these sections of narrative being told as part of the same story. In other words, the narrator may be shifting address in the verse, but they intend the lyrical material of the two song sections to be directly related, the chorus being a direct narrative continuation of the verse.

Other songs, however, utilize distinct shifts in melodic register between sections. What lyrical and formal implications are signified, then, when the melody of a new section lives in a register either higher or lower than that of the previous section? How does melodic register help articulate form, both in songs that adhere to common formal archetypes like verse-chorus form, as well as in those that resist such categorizations? How do shifts in register shape the dramatic narratives of a song? To answer these questions, I analyze a song that features such registral shifts and, borrowing from the linguistic concepts of *key* and *paratone* shifts, examine how they may shape discourse across song sections.

Let us consider registral shifts in the first four sections of the 2016 song “God Don’t Leave Me,” by the group Highasakite.<sup>99</sup> The melody begins with a four-measure line (mm. 5–8) that starts on C4 and ends on F3 in mm. 5–8 (shown in Figure 46). This melodic line is then repeated in mm. 9–12, giving the section an *x y x y* form. This form is also evident in the lyrics; both phrases begin with the lyrics “God don’t [\_\_\_\_] me,” corresponding with motive *x*, and “I’ll/I’m [\_\_\_\_],” corresponding with motive *y* (for instance, in the first line: “God, don’t leave, I’ll freeze” and “God, don’t tempt me, I’m weak”). This melodic and lyrical repetition and form identifies these eight measures as a formal unit.

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<sup>99</sup> This song is credited as having been written by Ingrid Helene Håvik, a member of Highasakite and the main vocalist on this track.

Timestamp: 0:16

**Section 1**

5      Cm/Eb      Bb/D      Eb/G      Fm/Ab      Eb/G      Bb

God, don't leave me, I'll freeze \_\_\_      I pan-ic in \_\_\_ my bed-room half a-sleep

9      Cm/Eb      Bb/D      Eb/G      Fm/Ab      Eb/G      Bb/F

God, don't tempt me, \_ I'm weak \_\_\_      a nee-dle is \_\_\_ a shit-ty way to leave

**Figure 46:** Highasakite’s “God Don’t Leave Me,” melody and lyrics of the first section

The song’s next eight measures (mm. 13–21, shown in Figure 47) also form a formal unit through melodic repetition but stay in the melodic register of the first section, forming a continuous discourse much like that shown in the Eilish example above. The section begins in m. 13 on G3, seemingly a lower register than the beginning of the previous section. However, other melodic material in the section, in mm. 7 & 11, sits firmly in same register as the first section; thus, I do not believe it implies a true registral shift. In fact, the entire melodic content of the second section (barring the last two notes and the low Eb3 in m. 14) contains notes already sounded in the first section. Thus, this second section directly continues the narrative of the first. The narrative continuation is also reinforced by the lyrics, which address “God” in the first section and “you” in the second section, presumably the same addressee.

Timestamp: 0:48

**Section 2**

13 Cm/E $\flat$  B $\flat$ /D Eb/G Fm/A $\flat$  Eb/G B $\flat$ /F  
Cre-a-tor of my aw - ful mind You crossed \_\_\_ the line \_\_\_ this \_\_\_ time \_\_\_ You crossed

17 Fm/A $\flat$  Eb/G B $\flat$ /F Cm/E $\flat$  B $\flat$ /D Eb/G Fm/A $\flat$  Cm B $\flat$ /D  
\_\_\_ the line \_\_\_ this \_\_\_ time It's been a long time since the phone rang and it was you

**Figure 47:** Highasakite’s “God Don’t Leave Me,” melody & lyrics of the second section

The first registral shift of this song begins with the lead up to third section in m. 21 as the melody ascends to G4, breaking into a new, higher register and creating a formal section that, while it repeats melodic *and* lyrical content from the first section, resists categorization as a repetition of the opening section due to its new register (see Figure 48). Considering the lyrics by themselves reveals direct repetition between the start of the first and third song sections with “God, don’t leave me, I’ll freeze” (shown in Figure 49). An examination of the melody itself also reveals repetition; the melodic character is almost identical between the sections. In fact, there is literal repetition at the transposition of an octave between m. 7 in the first section and mm. 25 and 27 in the third section. The first part of each section, while not a literal repetition, shares the same rhythm and contour. The most distinct difference in the third section is the leap up from G to B $\flat$  in m. 23 instead of a leap down in the corresponding melodic phrase in the first



section in m. 5. Thus, lyrical content and melodic character in this last section by themselves suggest a return to the formal structure of the first section, perhaps following an overall ABA form.

Timestamp: 1:23

**Section 3**

22 Cm/Eb Bb/D Eb/G Fm/Ab Eb/G

8 God, don't leave me, I'll freeze \_\_\_\_ If on-ly 'bout a se-cond of your time

26 Bb/F Fm/Ab Eb/G Bb/F

8 if on - ly 'bout \_\_\_\_ a se-cond of your time

**Figure 48:** Highasakite’s “God Don’t Leave Me,” melody & lyrics of the third section

However, given the distinct registral shift at the beginning of this third section, which begins with a short ascent at the end of the last section, this section resists categorization as a mere repetition, suggesting the presentation of new material and new discourse to the story’s narrative. What effect might this shift have on perception of how formal sections relate to each other, or on perception and meaning of lyrical content? To explore this question, I draw on similar register-shifts in speech intonation and the linguistic concepts that help define these phenomena.

God, don't leave me, I'll freeze

I panic in my bedroom half asleep

God, don't tempt me, I'm weak

A needle is a shitty way to leave

Creator of my awful mind

You crossed the line this time

You crossed the line this time

It's been a long time since the phone rang and it was you

God, don't leave me, I'll freeze

If only 'bout a second of your time

If only 'bout a second of your time

God, don't leave me, I'll freeze

Like the last summer

God, don't leave me, I'll freeze

Like the last summer (God, don't leave me now)

**Figure 49:** Highasakite's "God Don't Leave Me," lyrics of the first four song sections

In spoken language, pitch communicates vital information about a speaker's intentions and can help draw attention to specific words or phrases in spoken dialogue, as I have discussed throughout this project. In previous analyses, I focused on speech-intonational patterns *within* sections (such as *focusing*, end-of-phrase contour shapes, and overall contour). However, intonation can also be used in speech to communicate the relationship *between* sections: how they are related in discourse. Crucially, how a phrase, sentence, or section of speech relates to what came before it is created by shifts in intonational *register*. These pitch shifts in speech can help communicate if the information to follow is new, a continuation of what followed, or an aside to the current conversation.

Specifically, linguist Ann Wennerstrom identifies two categories of intonational patterns that involve registral shifts between one phrase and the next: *key* shifts and *paratone* shifts. The first category, *key*,

is the choice of pitch a speaker makes at the onset of an utterance to indicate the attitude or stance towards the prior one. ... High key, a high onset in the pitch range, indicates a contrast in attitude with respect to the prior utterance. Mid key, having no change in pitch range, indicates a consistent attitudinal stance with respect to the prior utterance. Low key, a low onset in the pitch range, indicates that the utterance does not add anything special with respect to the prior one, ... it is a foregone conclusion.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Wennerstrom, *The Music of Everyday Speech*, 23–24.

Unlike other speech intonational patterns, key “refers not to the shape of the contour itself but to its relative location in the speaker’s range.”<sup>101</sup> In spoken language, Wennerstrom states, the starting pitches of the phrase in relation to the previous phrase carry the most speech-intonational meaning, based on their registral shifts.<sup>102</sup> These shifts in register can therefore communicate a vital aspect of the narrator’s implied meaning and can influence the addressee’s interpretation of that meaning.

The other category of intonational pattern that involves registral shift is *paratone* shifts. This intonational pattern involves altering one’s intonational register to communicate the organizational structure of larger segments of speech, such as sentences or paragraphs. More specifically, these shifts involve an “expansion of pitch range at the beginning of a new topic unit and a corresponding compression of pitch range at that unit’s end.”<sup>103</sup> Some linguists have even posited that register can be used to affect multiple layers of organization in discourse, for instance to organize different topics in a logical hierarchy.<sup>104</sup> In short, expanding one’s register of speech, for instance by shifting to a *higher* register, evokes the introduction of a new “topic” in the discourse. Wennerstrom even mentions that using a shift to a higher register helps draw listener attention to new information and mark it as important.<sup>105</sup> On the other hand, shifting to

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<sup>101</sup> Wennerstrom, *The Music of Everyday Speech*, 43.

<sup>102</sup> Wennerstrom, 42.

<sup>103</sup> Wennerstrom, 44.

<sup>104</sup> Wennerstrom, 44.

<sup>105</sup> Wennerstrom, 104.

a *lower* register can mark a shift in discourse to information that is “subordinate to, or tangential to, the main topic.”<sup>106</sup> Used in spoken discourse, these high and low shifts of register help speakers communicate their intended flow of information and dialogue as they partake in discourse or tell a story.

In this chapter, I suggest that the manipulation of melodic register in the song example above, and in song more broadly, functions in a manner that, while not being exactly equivalent to registral shifts in speech intonation, is conceptually similar. The shifts in melodic register, at the very least, draw one’s attention to them. Especially in the instance of melodic shifts to higher registers, the introduction of a new melodic register suggests a sense of novelty: listeners are hearing something they have not heard before, literally experiencing parts of the melodic voice they have not yet experienced. Listeners are also hearing the melody in a different relationship to the underlying harmonic progression of the section; in the first section, the melody begins on scale degree  $\hat{1}$  (in solfege: *do*) in C minor, whereas in the third section, it begins on  $\hat{5}$  (*sol*). This alteration of melody-harmony relationship adds to the novelty of the registral shift.

This novelty is also imparted onto lyrics, for instance, in the third section of the song (see Figure 50, which now presents the first four song sections for comparison). This song section, despite its lyrical and melodic similarities to the first section, imparts a distinct sense of novelty due to the significant shift of register that begins at the end of

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<sup>106</sup> Wennerstrom, *The Music of Everyday Speech*, 104.

m. 20 and is realized in m. 23 at the onset of the third section. Thus, rather than suggesting a new verse, this third section instead signals a formal unit that, while it shares content with another section, is a transformation of that section into something new as the story's narrative evolves. In this way, shifts in register can help articulate formal structure, especially helping to clarify formal function in songs with more ambiguous formal sections.

Additionally, the registral shift in the third section not only draws attention to the line but also affects lyrical meaning and the song's overall narrative. The introduction of the new register impacts both the affect of the lyrics and perception of their overall organizational structure and narrative. Whereas the lower register of the first song sections sounds resigned and discouraged, the higher register of the third song section gives it a much more pleading, direct mood, over the same lyrics. Taken together now with the content of the first and second sections, the third section, with its higher register, seems like less of a narrative return than a narrative transformation; rather than the narrator once again resignedly lamenting her situation, she has evolved to now pleading more urgently with "God" for "a second of [their] time." This transformation is further supported by the direct repetition of this phrase in m. 25,

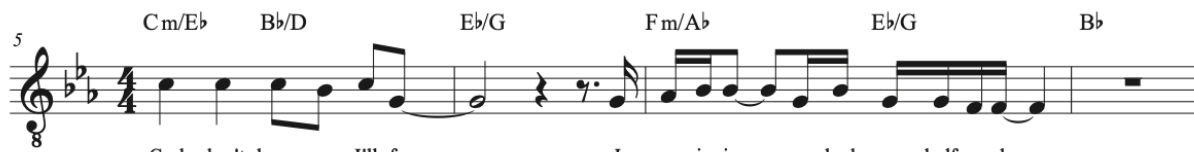
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**Figure 50:** (next page) Highasakite's "God Don't Leave Me," melody and lyrics of the first four song sections with chord symbols in lead sheet notation

Timestamp: 0:16

**Section 1**

5 C m/E $\flat$  B $\flat$ /D E $\flat$ /G F m/A $\flat$  E $\flat$ /G B $\flat$



8  
God, don't leave me, I'll freeze \_\_\_ I pan-ic in \_\_\_ my bed-room half a-sleep

9 C m/E $\flat$  B $\flat$ /D E $\flat$ /G F m/A $\flat$  E $\flat$ /G B $\flat$ /F



8  
God, don't tempt me, I'm weak \_\_\_ a nee-dle is \_\_\_ a shit-ty way to leave

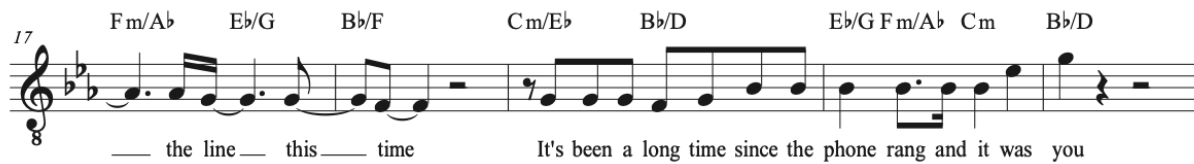
0:48 **Section 2**

13 C m/E $\flat$  B $\flat$ /D E $\flat$ /G F m/A $\flat$  E $\flat$ /G B $\flat$ /F



8  
Cre-a-tor of my aw - ful mind You crossed \_\_\_ the line \_\_\_ this \_\_\_ time \_\_\_ You crossed

17 F m/A $\flat$  E $\flat$ /G B $\flat$ /F C m/E $\flat$  B $\flat$ /D E $\flat$ /G F m/A $\flat$  C m B $\flat$ /D



8  
\_\_\_ the line \_\_\_ this \_\_\_ time It's been a long time since the phone rang and it was you

1:23 **Section 3**

22 C m/E $\flat$  B $\flat$ /D E $\flat$ /G F m/A $\flat$  E $\flat$ /G



8  
God, don't leave me, I'll freeze \_\_\_ If on-ly 'bout a se-cond of your time


26 B $\flat$ /F F m/A $\flat$  E $\flat$ /G B $\flat$ /F



8  
if on - ly 'bout \_\_\_ a se-cond of your time

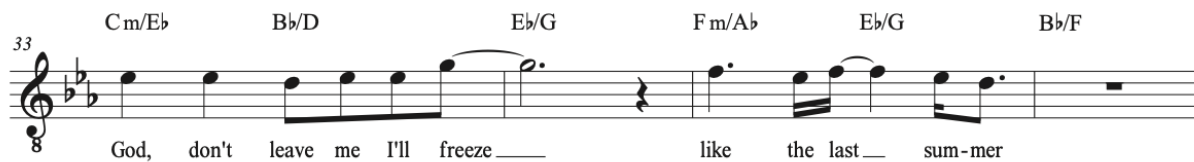
1:52 **Section 4**

29 C m/E $\flat$  B $\flat$ /D E $\flat$ /G F m/A $\flat$  E $\flat$ /G B $\flat$ /F



8  
God, don't leave me I'll freeze \_\_\_ like the last \_\_\_ su-mmer

33 C m/E $\flat$  B $\flat$ /D E $\flat$ /G F m/A $\flat$  E $\flat$ /G B $\flat$ /F



8  
God, don't leave me I'll freeze \_\_\_ like the last \_\_\_ sum-mer

giving the section only three melodic phrases instead of four. The phrase that is left out is the corresponding phrase in section one in m. 9. Thus, the repetition further emphasizes the line “if only ‘bout a second of your time” as the narrative evolves through the song.

Instead of returning to material from the second section (to create an ABAB form), the fourth section of this song (mm. 29-36) is another transformation of first section material. This transformation is also created by a register shift, which sets the same lyrics, “God, don’t leave me, I’ll freeze,” this time starting on Eb4 (in solfege, *me*). Despite using the same lyrics and chord progression, I claim that this fourth song section is set apart from not only section one but also from section three by its subtle shift in register, starting higher than section one (C4) and lower than section three (G4). This creates a melodic line that begins on scale degree  $\hat{3}$  (*me*) of C minor, instead of  $\hat{1}$  (*do*) or  $\hat{5}$  (*sol*), giving it an audibly different relationship to the underlying harmonic progression than previous sections. While the line “God, don’t leave me, I’ll freeze” sounds distressed and pleading in section three, the shift down to Eb in section four transforms it into a demand or an uninhibited announcement as the narrator seems to now be directly addressing “God” to stay with her through difficult times. This section further reveals that the narrator’s worries are not unfounded; she’s gone through this before, just “last summer.” Thus, the registral shift in this section, supported by a more forceful vocal timbre and added vocal harmonies, helps articulate the delivery of this



vital narrative background of the story and crystallizes the narrator's worries about being abandoned by revealing that she has been abandoned before.

Melodic register in genres with sung vocals have further implications relating to registers of the voice. Victoria Malawey explains that register has a broad range of definitions; "some experts define [it] in terms of differences in physiological production, others in terms of resultant sound quality, and others in terms of pitch range."<sup>107</sup> Regardless of which definition one considers, the physical act of changing vocal pitch range can often result in a change of vocal timbre, for instance when a singer shifts from a lower-pitched chest voice to a higher-pitched head voice. When such a shift in vocal timbre corresponds with a shift in melodic register, it can reinforce formal relationships between sections and further the expressive potential of the passage.

The dramatic shifts of register throughout the first four sections of Highasakite's song (moving from low → high → medium registers), along with other aspects such as texture, instrumentation, and vocal timbre, help build its narrative arc. The organization of the lyrics by themselves suggests a formal design that features only two distinct sections: section one (reiterated in sections three and four) and section two. However, the registral shifts in sections three and four support a formal design that instead *transforms* the melodic material from section one, creating a gradual alteration of

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<sup>107</sup> Malawey, *A Blaze of Light in Every Word*, 41.

material and building narrative energy towards the end of the fourth section (shown in Table 2).

**Table 2:** Narrative arc in the first four song sections of Highasakite’s  
“God, Don’t Leave Me”

Song Section	Melodic Register	Starting Pitch	Pitch Range	Narrative Affect
Section One	Low	C4 ( <i>do</i> )	F3 – C4	Resigned, hopeless
Section Two	Low	G3 ( <i>sol</i> )	E $\flat$ 3 – G4	Resigned, bitter
Section Three	High	G4 ( <i>sol</i> )	F4 – B $\flat$ 4	Pleading, hopeful
Section Four	Medium	E $\flat$ 4 ( <i>me</i> )	D4 – G4	Demanding, forceful

The song then continues to an extended development of this fourth section, creating a formal trajectory that ultimately continues to blossom in energy and intensity as the song progresses. This development is supported by a gradual increase in instrumental texture (for instance, added rhythmic density in drums and additional synth layers). As melodic material is developed throughout the song, listeners may re-evaluate their perception of previous song sections as the song’s form unfolds. Rather than transitioning to a contrasting formal section with differing lyrical and musical material, as one might expect, the song’s incessant reiteration of the opening line (“God,

don't leave me") retroactively reveals this to be the key lyrical, melodic, and conceptual idea of the entire song. This formal structure shapes the lyrics' dramatic arc as the narrator cycles through different iterations of their plead for help. Throughout the song, registral shifts help build the narrator's multifaceted approach to asking for help, helping articulate formal shape in a song that otherwise resists clear formal categorization.

### **Analysis of an Entire Song: Loney Dear's "Hulls" (2017)**

In the final part of this chapter, I examine a song in its entirety to determine how all the aspects described above (melodic contour, character, registral shifts, etc.) help shape the song's narrative, interact with its lyrics, and articulate large-scale formal structures. In my analysis, I explore how the artist Loney Dear's song "Hulls" (2017) establishes a pattern of melodic contour in its first half and then develops and disrupts this pattern in its second half, delaying the song's dramatic arrival until its end. Throughout this analysis, I consider how these subtleties of melodic contour help articulate a formal design that resists straightforward formal categorizations. Drawing on scholarship on popular song form by Drew Nobile, Trevor de Clercq, and others, I examine how the song continually delays its teleological arrival as it cycles through formal sections that resist a sense of true resolution. I also discuss how this formal ambiguity interacts with lyrical syntax. Overall, I show how these aspects support the fragmented psyche of the

song's narrator and build towards a moment of revelation. To do so, I proceed section by section to discuss the formal function of each part of the song and explore how it builds teleological anticipation.

The first two formal sections of "Hulls" establish a pattern of melodic contour and introduce the lyrics' ambiguous narrative. As we saw in the previous chapter, the first verse of the song features a terraced melody with characteristic descending leaps. These qualities of melodic contour, along with regular harmonic changes, help articulate the song's narrative. In this verse, the narrator recollects their past and reflects on their loneliness, their emotions coming into sharper focus at the end of the first verse with the line "I was your lover." As seen in Figure 51, the lyrics of the next verse (parts A & B) continue this direct address using the pronoun "I," this time in the present tense. The musical content of these two verses (shown in Figure 52) follows the same harmonic progression and, for the most part, the same melodic contour (with some rhythmic variation and the addition of a stepwise lead-in to m. 25). This shared melodic and harmonic material between the two verses, especially given the lack of a chorus or other song section between them, sets their lyrical content in dialogue. Through these ties, the narrator's uncertainty and distress in the first verse seem to be directly referenced in their current actions "*now*" in the second verse (for instance, "*now* I hold back when I talk to you").

These people, Verse 1, Part A  
what are your friends for?  
You wish they could help you,  
you better get used to

We don't sleep much, Verse 1, Part B  
we're looking for trouble  
We saw town sides,  
I was your lover

Now I hold back, Verse 2, Part A  
when I talk to you.  
when I'm blacked out  
And you're biased,  
cause I'm keeping you close to me

I grab your arm hard, Verse 2, Part B  
to make you hit me  
To make it hurt less,  
to even wait here

**Figure 51:** Loney Dear's "Hulls," lyrics of verses 1 & 2

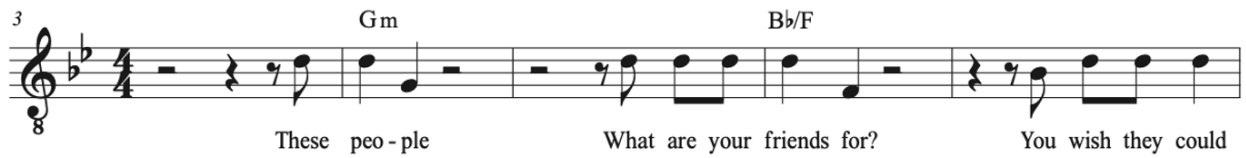
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**Figure 52:** (next page) Loney Dear's "Hulls," melody and lyrics of the first two verses  
with chord symbols in lead sheet notation

Timestamp: 0:06

**Verse 1 A**

3 Gm Bb/F



These peo-ple What are your friends for? You wish they could

**Verse 1 B**

8 EbM7 Bbadd9/D Bb/D Cm



help you, you bet-ter get used to We don't sleep much,

13 Cm/Bb F7/A



we're look - ing for trou - ble We saw town sides,

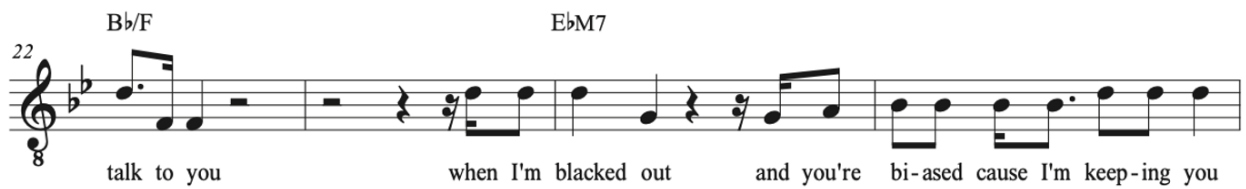
**Verse 2 A**

17 Bb Gm



I was your lo - ver Now I hold back when I

22 Bb/F EbM7



talk to you when I'm blacked out and you're bi-ased cause I'm keep-ing you

**Verse 2 B**

26 Bbadd9/D Bb/D Cm Cm7/Bb



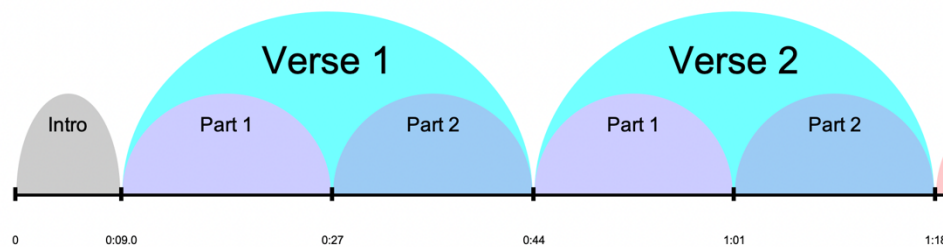
close to me I grab your arm hard, to make you hit me

31 F7/A Bb



to make it hurt less to e - ven wait here

In the second verse, the narrator continues their present-tense address as their actions become increasingly agitated: “I hold back,” “I’m blacked out,” “I grab your arm hard / to make you hit me.” As tension increases, other instrumental and harmonic textures are introduced, including a syncopated bass line and drums. Therefore, as this verse unfolds, it facilitates both repetition and progression; its clear repetition of melodic and harmonic material from the first verse articulates its formal function as another verse, but its new lyrical content and its progressive ramp-up of instrumental energy also structure it as a new narrative installment in the song’s unfolding story. Figure 53 shows a formal diagram of both verses along a timeline, also displaying their similarity in length; both are sixteen measures long.



**Figure 53:** Loney Dear’s “Hulls,” formal diagram showing similarities between verses 1 & 2

The next section of the song, beginning in m. 35, features new melodic and harmonic material and a shift in melodic register and address, signaling it as a different

formal section and emphasizing it narratively (shown in Figure 54). The section begins with the melody reaching new registral heights with a leap up to G5 and a change in address; with the addition of the pronoun “he,” the narrator now describes a different character directly (“*he’s* a madman”) and ties them together using the possessive pronoun “my” (“*he’s my* trouble”). Although this material shares qualities of melodic contour with the previous sections in its descending melodic leaps, it also features *ascending* leaps on beats 3 & 4 of mm. 35, 37, and 39. These leaps draw attention to the lyrics “a madman,” “my trouble,” and “not right,” emphasizing the narrator’s unsettled or conflicted perception of their addressee, “he.”

Timestamp: 1:15

35  
8

and he's a mad-man

37

he's my trou-ble

39

it's not right now

41  
8

he's my bur - den

**Figure 54:** Loney Dear’s “Hulls,” melody and lyrics of mm. 35–42 with chord symbols in lead sheet notation

Furthermore, the registral shift in this new song section can be understood to indicate a different level of communication; as the narrator now addresses the unknown



other character (“he”), the complexity and ambiguity of the narrative is heightened.

Who is the “he” in this story, and how does he relate to the previous narrative? Is “he” part of the “we” referred to in the first verse (“we don’t sleep much”)? Is “he” the “you” referred to in the verses (“I was your lover”)? Or is this other character perhaps a destructive facet of the narrator’s own psyche that they are trying to distance themselves from by referring to themselves in the third person (instead of “he’s a madman, “I’m a madman”)? I claim that, due to the distinct registral shift in this section, as well as other characteristics discussed above that differentiate it from the verses, this section’s address is distinct; regardless of who “he” is, it is evident from both melodic and lyrical material that this section plays a pivotal role in progressing the song’s narrative and formal trajectory.

Additionally, this new section is differentiated not only by its change of register, altered melodic contour, and shift in lyrical address, but also by its harmonic motion, which serves to destabilize tonic. In the previous chapter, I treated G minor as the song’s tonic for several reasons. First, the song’s intro and the first few measures harmonically center G minor as tonic; the synthesizer in the opening outlines a  $i-V^{4-3}$  progression in G minor and lands squarely on a G minor chord in the first measure of the first verse. Additionally, the second verse also begins on G minor, answering the harmonic openness at the end of the first verse. In the song section that follows, however, the previously emphasized G minor is nowhere to be found, contributing to a

sense of harmonic instability. Instead of returning to G minor, the B $\flat$  chord at the end of the second verse now leads to E $\flat$ , which begins the new section. The harmonic progression then cycles from E $\flat$ –C/E–F–D, accompanied by a continually ascending chromatic bass line and increased rhythmic activity in the drums (shown in Figure 55).<sup>108</sup> This sequence ends on D major, the first occurrence in the song of the dominant chord of G minor, building anticipation of a resolution to come.

(B $\flat$ )      E $\flat$ add9  
And he's a madman  
            C/E  
He's my trouble  
            Fadd9  
It's not right now  
            D  
He's my burden

**Figure 55:** Loney Dear's "Hulls," lyrics of the third song section with chord symbols shown in lead sheet notation

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<sup>108</sup> This harmonic motion can also be understood as a sequence of 5-6 shifts (from E $\flat$ –C/E and from F–D) with an ascending chromatic bassline and the root D cast out in the bass in the final chord.

How, then, might one classify this section using established formal categories? I suggest that the section's harmonic instability, as well as the differences of melodic contour, register, and address discussed above, firmly establish this new song section's formal function as one that builds up energy, both musically and narratively. I suggest that this section, at this stage in the song's formal progression, is best described as a prechorus. Nobile asserts that "the two main tasks of a prechorus are to destabilize the verse and provide a transition to the chorus."<sup>109</sup> Additionally, Nobile describes how "prechoruses generally outline the functional progression from pre-dominant to dominant."<sup>110</sup> This harmonic function fits within an overall harmonic trajectory which moves away from and back to tonic, corresponding with verse-prechorus-chorus forms. Nobile also categorizes this progression as "a teleological process [that] underlies each formal cycle, with the three functions of initiation, buildup, and arrival spanning one section each."<sup>111</sup> In other words, the verse initiates the teleological cycle, the prechorus builds up teleological anticipation, and the chorus represents a teleological arrival. This section's harmonic motion, which functions to destabilize the verses, thus builds up a teleological progression initiated in the verses, anticipating an arrival to come.

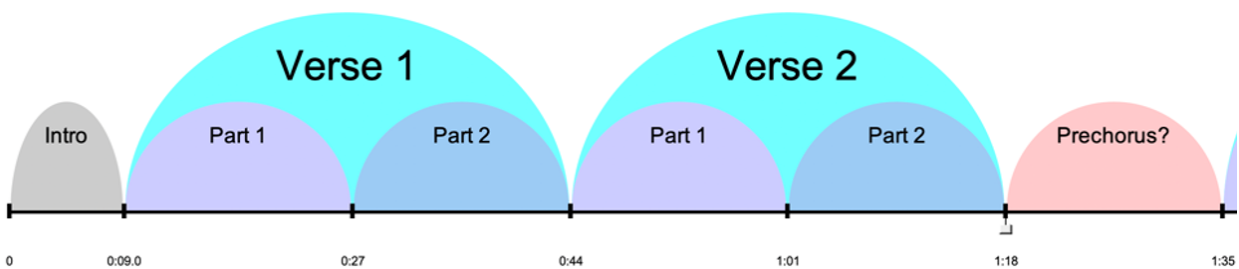
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<sup>109</sup> Nobile, *Form as Harmony in Rock Music*, 103.

<sup>110</sup> Nobile, 95.

<sup>111</sup> Nobile, "Teleology."

Nobile also notes that in post-1991 popular music, “sonic elements [take] on an even greater structural role” in shaping a song’s teleological progression, with aspects such as instrumental texture and vocal timbre helping shape formal trajectory.<sup>112</sup> The increasingly thick instrumental and rhythmic texture of this song section, especially in its final phrase, help drive a sense of energetic buildup. Additionally, this section is notably shorter than each of the verses, as is shown in the temporal timeline in Figure 56; in fact, its length is equivalent to half the verse, or to one of the two parts of the verse. Its shortened length thus robs this prechorus section of time to expose the same amount of lyrical and narrative content as the verses, detracting from its sense of resolution or conclusion. Altogether, this song section functions not as a teleological arrival itself, but as a continuation of the narrative and energetic buildup begun by the verses.



**Figure 56:** Loney Dear’s “Hulls,” formal diagram of the first two verses and new song section

<sup>112</sup> Nobile, “Teleology.”

Following this section, which I will now refer to as the prechorus, one might expect a tonic arrival at the beginning of the next section (presumably a chorus section), which would fulfill the preceding dramatic build and harmonic instability. Instead, "Hulls" cycles next to a section that shares overwhelming similarities, surprisingly, with the *verse*. This next section shares harmonic, melodic, and lyrical similarities to the previous two verses, tying it undeniably to previous material. However, it is at once old and new; though it repeats verse material, its shifts in melodic contour, lyrical content, and its temporal placement following the prechorus paint it both as an arrival of sorts and as just the next installment in the song's ever-building energetic and teleological cycle.

Despite shared melodic and harmonic material with the verse, this new song section from mm. 43–55 (in Figure 57, beginning with the lyrics "I talk loud...") is distinct from the previous verses in several ways. First, its first chord is *not* G minor, which begins the first two verses. Though the arpeggiated synth still stresses G minor, the bass plays E $\flat$ , implying E $\flat$ M7. Thus, the harmonic move from the dominant (of G minor) at the end of the previous section to this new section is not the straightforward resolution to tonic one might expect if this was, in fact, a new verse. It is possible that one could instead interpret the start of this new section as a return to the third bar of the verse (m. 8 in Verse 1), which *is* E $\flat$ M7, and would then match the phrase length and harmonic progression of the rest of the verse. However, other factors, such as melodic

contour, phrase structure and length, and lyrical content point towards a continuation of the formal cycle, rather than a strict return to verse material or a complete teleological arrival.

Timestamp: 1:33

43  $E_bM7$   $Bbadd9/D$   $Bb/D$   $Cm$

8 I talk loud I push right back when he's my trou-ble

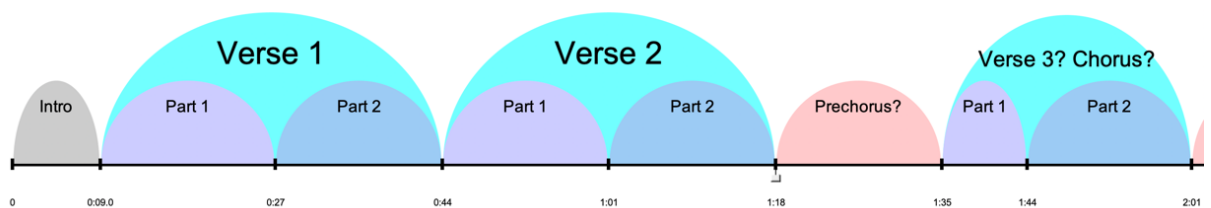
49  $Cm/Bb$   $F7/A$   $Bb$

8 my trou-ble to ask me to hit him 'til words got out

**Figure 57:** Loney Dear’s “Hulls,” melody and lyrics of mm. 43–54 with chord symbols in lead sheet notation

For example, in mm. 43–46, at the beginning of the section, the melody leaps from D to B $\flat$  rather than to G, as it does at the beginning of verses 1 and 2. In m. 44, the melody thus stresses what would be scale degree  $\hat{3}$  in G minor (in solfege, *me*), sounding much less grounded than the use of  $\hat{1}$  (*do*) of G minor at the beginning of the verses. The melodic character of the line is also altered: in m. 46, the melody leaps down to B $\flat$  (instead of F) and then includes stepwise motion to and from a neighbor tone, a character of motion not yet used in the melody of this song up to this point.

Furthermore, the phrase structure of the section is disrupted by the removal of half of the material from Verse Part A, proceeding directly to Part B in m. 47 with the arrival of the C minor chord an entire four bars early (or the repeated verse material begins four bars late). As seen in Figure 58, this disrupts the hypermetrical and sectional symmetry established in the verses; this new section is only twelve bars long, not sixteen. Additionally, at this shift, the lyrics repeat content from the prechorus, directly quoting it with the lines “he is my trouble, my trouble” in mm. 47–50. These characteristics of melody, lyrics, and inter-section phrase structures thus differentiate this section from the previous verses, suggesting it is not just the next verse; rather, it continues the building energy of the previous section, further delaying teleological arrival.



**Figure 58:** Loney Dear’s “Hulls,” formal diagram of the first four song sections

Additionally, this new section resists categorization as another verse simply from its temporal position in the song’s form. In the context of the prechorus’s higher register, this new section is experienced as having a registral shift back to the register of

the verse. This descending registral shift can therefore be understood to communicate a shift of narrative address as the melody functions in a similar manner to a shift in the intonational register of speech. It could also be understood as an indication of a shift in the narrator's psychological state, or a shift in the overall affect of the lyrics. This interpretation is supported as well by the shift in narrative between sections; in the prechorus, the narrator describes characteristics of "he," the ascending registral shift signaling this as new narrative information in the story. In the new section, as the melody returns to its previous level in the verses, the narrator is pulled back to the present and their description of their own actions. Wennerstrom describes how, in speech intonation, a shift to a lower register can sometimes be used to communicate a known fact.<sup>113</sup> It may be construed that the shift to a higher register coincides with the narrator sharing new, added information with their addressee, whereas the shift back to a lower register in the latter section corresponds with the narrator telling the addressee something they already know. Regardless of the exact effect of the registral shifts, I argue that perception of this new section's register, although it is the same as the verses, is transformed in communication and affect by the proceeding section's registral shift to a higher register, further differentiating its narrative function in the song from that of the verses. In other words, the journey of experiencing the higher register in the

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<sup>113</sup> Wennerstrom, *The Music of Everyday Speech*, 23–24.



prechorus affects perception of the melody's return to the same registral location in the section that follows.

Furthermore, this section (mm. 43–55, beginning with “I talk loud”) is additionally inflected by the harmonic structure of the section before it (the prechorus). As mentioned above, the harmonic progression finally arrives on D, the dominant chord in the key of G minor, at the end of the prechorus. Significantly, this is the first use of the leading tone of G minor (F#) in the song up to this point. Previously, the lead-in to the second verse transitioned back to G minor from Bb major, chords in a third relationship. Thus, the half-cadential gesture of the prechorus, as previously mentioned, suggests the beginning of the following section will have the most significant harmonic arrival of the piece. However, as we have seen, our sense of arrival in m. 44 on the anticipated G minor is complicated by the Eb of the bass. It is as if one is both arriving “home” to the familiar content and key of the verse while also arriving somewhere else entirely. One might expect that this quasi-verse-chorus section will act as a traditional chorus by rewarding all the build-up by eventually cadencing in the home key; choruses typically spend at least some time in tonic, either at their beginning or end or both.<sup>114</sup> Furthermore, the significant increase in texture and energy in this section gives it the most energetic tension in the song up to this point, also suggesting some sort of

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<sup>114</sup> Nobile, *Form as Harmony in Rock Music*, 71. In his chapter on choruses, Nobile describes three common chorus types (sectional, continuation, and telos) and their general harmonic structures. All three choruses' harmonic models contain some articulation of tonic.

arrival is imminent. Instead, this section follows the same harmonic path as the verses, ending “open” on B $\flat$ , leaving a full sense of arrival still unattained.

Throughout this last section, listeners may perceive a shift in their perception of tonic center, favoring B $\flat$  over the previously established G minor, and thus hearing the end of this section with more harmonic stability. Trevor de Clercq discusses instances where a major key and its relative minor key form a double-tonic complex in which both keys coexist in a song or song section.<sup>115</sup> De Clercq explains how movement between the tonal centers in the double-tonic complex may correspond with formal sections in song, for instance between a verse and a chorus. With this in mind, one may recognize a shift towards B $\flat$  as a tonal center throughout the last song section described, and possibly even in the prechorus as well (beginning with E $\flat$  as IV, then tonicized II, V, and III), while the verses center more firmly around G minor. One may also hear the end of the last section as concluding on tonic B $\flat$  in m. 54, however, I suggest that the melody’s emphasis on D (scale degree  $\hat{3}$ ) and the arpeggiated synth’s emphasis of C (scale degree  $\hat{2}$ ) complicate a sense of arrival. Regardless of if B $\flat$  or G minor sounds more tonally centered, I claim that this section functions more as a continuation of the song’s energetic build, rather than a conclusion of its cycle of growth.

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<sup>115</sup> Trevor de Clercq, “The Logic of Six-Based Minor for Harmonic Analyses of Popular Music,” *Music Theory Online* 27, no. 4 (December 2021), <https://doi.org/10.30535/mto.27.4.4>.

Furthermore, from there, interestingly, the song ramps up to its most intense section *yet* (shown in Figure 59); it moves from the ending of the previous section on B $\flat$  (in mm. 54–55) directly back to another prechorus section, further delaying a definite teleological arrival by continuing the cyclical buildup. This final section (mm. 55–62, beginning with “He’s a madman”) concludes the first part of the song, as the entire track then dies away entirely before it continues to any more song material. I delineate this division as the end of the song’s first formal energy cycle; tension has been built throughout each section of the song up until this point and is then rather abruptly dissolved into nothing before it can reach a proper arrival (see Figure 60 for an updated formal diagram). The melodic and harmonic content of this last section act as the previous prechorus did, beginning with another melodic registral shift up to G5 and ending open on another half cadence in G minor. Thus, throughout the first cycle of this song, the listener is left hanging without a harmonic or narrative arrival. In the last measure, over the unresolved D major chord, the lyrics “he’s my burden” suggest the narrator has not yet achieved a resolution to their story; they are still weighted down by the burden and trouble of their loneliness.

Now considering the song’s first formal cycle in its entirety, how might one formally describe these last three ambiguous song sections? Can the section in mm. 43–55 (“I talk loud”) really be considered a chorus because no other formal section carries that designation, even though it lacks a sense of arrival? Is the prechorus really a

Timestamp: 1:58

55 E♭add9 C/E Fadd9

and he's a mad-man he's my trou-ble it's not right now

61 D

he's my bur - den

**Figure 59:** Loney Dear’s “Hulls,” melody and lyrics of mm. 55–62 with chord symbols in lead sheet notation



**Figure 60:** Loney Dear’s “Hulls,” formal diagram of the first cycle

prechorus, given that its final repetition fades into nothing? I suggest that the formal ambiguity of this section serves to propel the song forward, delaying arrival by creating a sense of continuously building energy and tension. Regardless of what classifications we choose to describe these song sections, I claim that the song has not yet reached a true teleological arrival. As the song’s building intensity dies away after “he’s my burden,” listeners are left hanging; it is as if the narrator’s “burden” is continually

dragging them backwards despite their best efforts to arrive at some resolution or peace of mind.

Furthermore, I propose that conceiving of these song sections (mm. 35–62, shown in Figure 61) using categorization into strict formal boxes misses the effect of the teleological journey between and through the sections, as articulated by shifts in melodic contour, harmonic progression, and lyrical content.<sup>116</sup> As the song unfolds from section to section, melodic and lyrical content is interpreted in the context of what came before; thus, melodic aspects such as registral shifts and changes of melodic contour, and their interaction with lyrical content, are vital in fully understanding the song's narrative story and formal design. Therefore, using a different method of description that considers the teleology of the song can allow for a more nuanced formal analysis, especially for those sections that resist formal categorizations, due to the interaction of characteristics such as melodic contour, timbre, texture, etc. Nobile uses the concept of a "journey metaphor" to describe a way of "thinking about form primarily as motion along paths leading to various goal points."<sup>117</sup> Using this concept of formal shape, I suggest that the first cycle of this song communicates a continual building of energy and motion throughout, only ending when it is abruptly cut off before it can truly fulfill its teleological resolution.

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<sup>116</sup> Nobile, "Teleology."

<sup>117</sup> Nobile, "Teleology."

**Prechorus?**

35 1:15 Ebadd9 C/E Fadd9

and he's a mad-man he's my trou-ble it's not right now

**Chorus?**

41 1:33 D EbM7 Bbadd9/D

he's my bur - den I talk loud I push right back

47 Bb/D Cm Cm/Bb

when he's my trou - ble my trou - ble to ask me to

**Prechorus?**

52 1:58 F7/A Bb Ebadd9

hit him 'til words got out and he's a mad-man he's my

58 C/E Fadd9 D

trou - ble it's not right now he's my bur - den

**Figure 61:** Loney Dear’s “Hulls,” melody and lyrics of mm. 35–62 with chord symbols in lead sheet notation

With the completion of its first energetic and narrative cycle and a moment of textural rest, the song resumes with its second and final cycle, which begins building up

energy much like the first cycle and continues to transform previous melodic material, eventually reaching the arrival that was hinted at but not realized in the previous cycle. As seen in Figure 62 and Figure 63, the third verse shares the same formal design, harmonic progression, and melodic material to the first two verses, especially in its latter half. However, it begins with a distinct use of melodic-harmonic divorce, a thus-far unused melodic characteristic in this song. Additionally, the melodic contour of the first part of this third verse significantly lacks the characteristic descending leaps of the first verses. Instead, it uses stepwise motion and smaller leaps. This alteration of melodic material from the song's first cycle distinguishes this new song section (and thus, the song's entire second cycle) as narratively different from the previous verses; instead of a pure repetition of the verse as the song continues, the narrative energy is heightened, and its development altered by this melodic adjustment. The altered melodic contour is almost jarring, especially in Part A of the verse, where the melodic-harmonic divorce, syncopation, and step-wise motion is most distinct. With this verse, another energetic cycle has begun, but in the *middle* of the overall narrative; it is only through experiencing the established melodic character of the song's first cycle that one perceives the melodic development present at the beginning of the new cycle. Furthermore, the narrator now describes a new set of characters ("the women"), "wish[ing] they would carry me over the waters," both harkening back to the first verse in which "you wish they could help you" and introducing new narrative content.

Timestamp: 2:18 **Verse 3 A**

64 Gm Bb/F

And the wo - men they sing in \_\_\_ their low keys

68 EbM7 Bbadd9/D

they sing how did they get here I wish they would car-ry me o-ver the

**Verse 3 B**

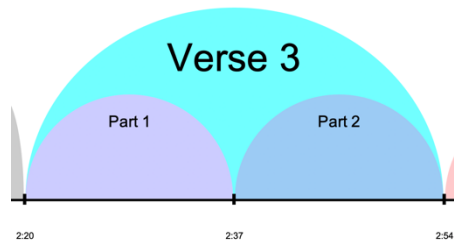
72 Bb/D Cm Cm/Bb

wa - ters but I can - not say an - y - thing this is a sec - ret

76 F 7/A Bb

you took me out here, you walked on a limb for me

**Figure 62:** Loney Dear’s “Hulls,” melody and lyrics of mm. 64–79 with chord symbols in lead sheet notation



**Figure 63:** Loney Dear’s “Hulls,” formal diagram of the third verse



Although the energetic build-up of song material in the second cycle is much like the first cycle, it eventually reaches new narrative heights and finally achieves a more concrete teleological arrival due to the continued development and transformation of melodic contour and its interaction with lyrics. Instead of a two-verse beginning to the cycle, the song progresses forward directly after one verse (the third verse, mm. 63–79) to a prechorus section (mm. 80–88, shown in Figure 64), beginning the teleological buildup faster than in the previous cycle. This prechorus is largely the same as in the previous cycle, increasingly harmonic instability and ending harmonically open. When this next section begins, however, in measure 89 (shown in Figure 65), the lead vocals are noticeably absent; instead, layered synth melodies fill in the space as the instrumental texture reaches its most dense and full sound yet. The arpeggiated synth line that underlaid the previous section now rings out and ends up doubled in a higher register. This moment, in which the regular delivery of vocals is unexpectedly withheld, subverts listener expectations and manages to be arguably the most energetic section up to this point.

Subverting listener expectations is not an unknown phenomenon in popular music. In his exploration of form in rock music, Brad Osborn defines types of *terminally climactic forms* that end with an independent section of new material, such as the

Timestamp: 2:52

80  $E\flat\text{add}9$   $C/E$   $F\text{add}9$

and he's my sad-ness he's my trou-ble it's not right now

86  $D$

he's my bur - den

**Figure 64:** Loney Dear's "Hulls," melody and lyrics of mm. 80–88 with chord symbols in lead sheet notation

Timestamp: 3:11

89  $E\flat M7$   $B\flat\text{add}9/F$   $B\flat/F$

(instrumental)

he's my

93  $Cm$   $Cm/B\flat$

trou - ble I was your

97  $F7/A$   $B\flat$

lov - er I was your lov - er

**Figure 65:** Loney Dear's "Hulls," melody and lyrics of mm. 89–99 with chord symbols in lead sheet notation

lengthy final section of the Beatles' "Hey Jude."<sup>118</sup> Nobile describes a formal trajectory that he calls an *anti-telos* chorus, in which an expected teleological arrival is withheld by a dramatic drop in energy. Lavengood defines the *complement* chorus, in which a chorus's sung melody is melodically and rhythmically altered, sometimes initially giving the impression that it has been dropped out entirely.<sup>119</sup> In the last two instances, telos can still be achieved (or our expectations fulfilled) shortly after they are withheld, as the next song section usually features a rise in intensity or a return of previous material.<sup>120</sup> This is also the case in "Hulls," as the emptiness of the missing vocal line is filled four measures later, resulting in what I characterize as the dramatic climax of the entire song.

This moment of teleological arrival is finally achieved in mm. 92–93 as the vocal line returns to the now iconic line "he's my trouble," fulfilling the song's teleological journey while simultaneously altering the most fundamental melodic characteristic of the song: the descending motion on beat 2 of each chord change (occurring every two measures). In this moment of arrival, the melodic line finally breaks the melodic gravity that has continually pulled it downwards throughout the song. In fact, this is the only

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<sup>118</sup> Osborn, "Subverting the Verse–Chorus Paradigm," 23–24.

<sup>119</sup> Nobile, "Teleology"; Megan Lavengood, "Oops!... I Did It Again": The Complement Chorus in Britney Spears, The Backstreet Boys, and \*NSYNC," *Society for Music Theory: Videocast Journal* 7, no. 6 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.30535/smtv.7.6>.

<sup>120</sup> Or, in the case of Alyssa Barna's formal designation dance chorus, the chorus is amped up in intensity to facilitate dancing or increased energy; Alyssa Barna, "The Dance Chorus in Recent Top-40 Music," *Society for Music Theory: Videocast Journal* 6, no. 4 (June 2020), <https://doi.org/10.30535/smtv.6.4>.

instance in the entire song in which the melody moves up at this metrical placement in the measure (from beat 1 to beat 2). Significantly, the melody is also shifted to a higher register with G5 aligning on the downbeat in m. 93 instead of Eb5 (in m. 48, the equivalent moment in the first cycle). After the establishment of a clear pattern of melodic contour in the first song cycle, the strategic alteration of this pattern articulates an important moment formally and narratively in the song.

I claim that this shift of melodic contour and register, considering the continual delay of arrival up to this point (including the lack of vocals right before) as well the textual and instrumental buildup, articulates this moment as the key teleological arrival in the song: the energetic high point of the song's formal design, and the key dramatic climax of the song's narrative. Despite the pessimistic lyrics themselves ("he's my trouble"), the rising stepwise motion of this line imparts a different communicative affect than settings of the same lyrics with a melodic contour that descends, as in m. 48 (or in m. 83). Previous iterations of this lyric thus sound despondent; this final statement instead sounds revelatory, as though the narrator is finally cutting through the ambiguity of previous lyrics to reach the crux of the narrative.

Remaining in the higher register, the next line repeats another pivotal lyric from previously in the song: the line "I was your lover," found at the end of the first verse at the very beginning of the song's buildup. Recall that this line was the song's first use of the pronoun "I," and provided its first moment of real narrative clarity, a movement

towards “a more intimate mode of address.”<sup>121</sup> Used at the end of the song, in this moment of teleological arrival, it serves as a further revelation of perceived vulnerability, repeated in mm. 98–99. The placement of these lyrics “he’s my trouble” and “I was your lover” at the key formal arrival of the song gives them special narrative significance, coloring our understanding of previous lyrical content through the lens of these lines. In this way, melodic contour helps shape and structure lyrical narrative, establishing and then transforming expectations of melodic motion and its interaction with lyrics and lyrical meaning.

After this teleological arrival is finally achieved, the song completes its second and final cycle much as the first cycle: returning to the harmonic progression of the prechorus, which ends with a sense of questioned resolution (shown in Figure 66 and Figure 67). Like the verse in this second cycle, however, altered melodic contour helps express the transformed state of the narrator. In mm. 100–107 (“and now he’s over land and seas”), this final section utilizes a distinctly different melodic contour than that of previous song sections. Continuing the melodic character of the final “he’s my trouble” and “I was your lover,” this last prechorus section uses mainly stepwise motion with occasional small ascending leaps. The result is a less rigid, more uninhibited lyrical affect accompanying the lines “now he’s over land and seas.” Ultimately, though, the section ends as did the other prechoruses, with an unresolved half cadence on D,

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<sup>121</sup> BaileyShea, *Lines and Lyrics*, 130.

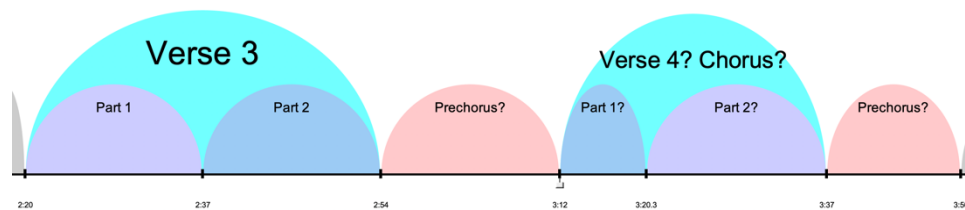
aligning with a final statement of “he’s my burden.” Despite the narrator’s moment of revelation, either to someone else or to themselves, they are still “burdened” by “trouble.” The unresolved nature of the song’s ending leaves up to interpretation whether the narrator will keep striving towards eventual resolution or cycle indefinitely as they continue to be tormented by their “troubles.”

Timestamp: 3:35

100 and now he's o-ver land and seas now he's o-ver land and seas

104 now he's o-ver land and seas he's my bur - den

**Figure 66:** Loney Dear’s “Hulls,” melody and lyrics of mm. 100–107 with chord symbols in lead sheet notation



**Figure 67:** Loney Dear’s “Hulls,” formal diagram of the second cycle

This analysis has shown how use of melodic contour can help articulate formal design and how this formal design interacts with and shapes perception of lyrical narrative. In "Hulls," the melody's insistent descending leaps, unresolved harmonic function, and shifts in melodic register create a formal design that cycles through repetitions of material that are simultaneously old and new, continually building energy and tension. This cyclical quality reinforces and is reinforced by the lyrics' ambiguity. Finally, towards the end of the song, a formal arrival is reached through the alteration of established melodic contour patterns, corresponding with the key dramatic climax of the lyrical narrative. A formal diagram of the entire song with its progression from initiation, buildup, and arrival can be seen in Figure 68. I have kept section labels intentionally ambiguous, representing the journey of this analysis and my own interpretation of the song as a continual build of energy until the narrative climax is reached. The goal of this analysis was not to fit the sections of this song into formal categories, rather, to show how melodic shape, in conjunction with other musical characteristics such as harmony, texture, and lyrics, helps articulate a broader formal trajectory that only reaches its teleological arrival until the end of the song's second and final cycle.

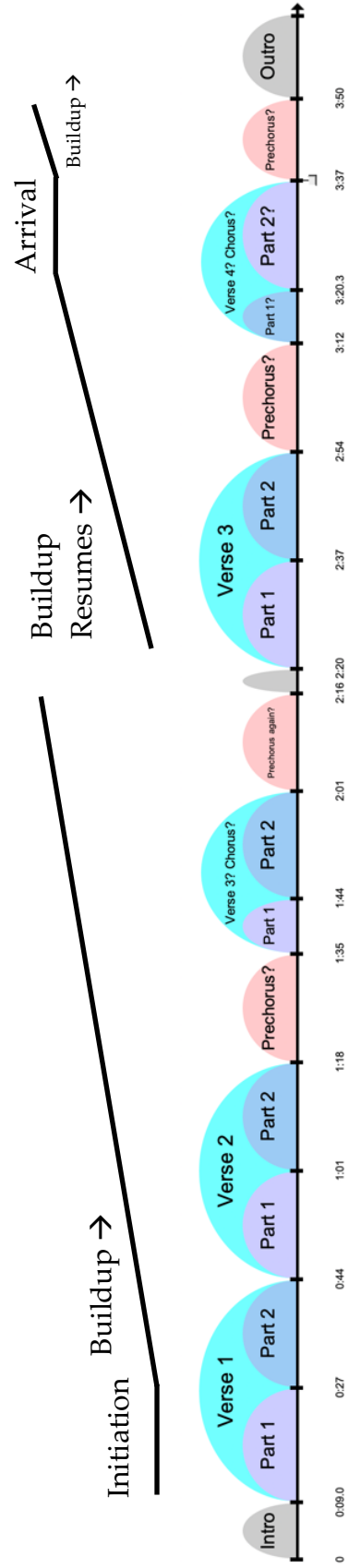
This analysis offers a way to consider the interaction between formal function and melodic contour that can be utilized when analyzing song forms, especially those that resist clear categorization using typical formal classifications. Instead of fitting song

sections into ill-fitting classifications, one can trace the ever-meandering line of melody through a song to understand its journey, both musically, and as a key expressive component of lyrical delivery.

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**Figure 68:** (next page) Loney Dear's "Hulls," formal diagram of the entire song





## CONCLUSION

One of the most crucial aspects of many songs is the perception of an intimate, personal expression. Throughout this thesis, I have shown how the interaction between lyrics and melodic contour can help build meaning and affect and contribute to this mode of personal address. From the smallest-scale level—the level of the individual word—to the largest-scale level—the scale of an entire song—melodic contour can influence our perception and understanding of lyrics, and its interaction with lyrical meaning contributes an essential component of a song’s expression. In this project, I outlined how these interactions can function at three primary levels within a song section: through single-word emphasis, through syntactic relationships, and through overall affect. In addition, I explored the impact of melodic contour on lyrical meaning *between* and *across* song sections, showing how these interactions can help articulate both musical and dramatic formal structures.

The methodologies outlined in this project can also be used to increase understanding of the way melodic contour and syntax interact with lyrical meaning in other songs, both in indie music and in other genres. While the songs analyzed in this project are all relatively recent (released within the last 10 to 15 years), indie songs and singer-songwriter songs from earlier periods also feature expressive interactions between lyrics and melodic contour. For instance, the methodologies outlined in this project could be applied to songs written by artists such as Joni Mitchell, Bob Dylan,

and others whose self-expressive songs emerged at the beginning of the singer-songwriter genre. They can also be applied to indie or singer-songwriter songs that draw influences from other genres such as pop, country, and electronic music.

Furthermore, I propose that analyzing lyrics and melodic contour is worthwhile in songs of other popular music genres, and other song genres more broadly. One characteristic of popular song, as expressed by Richard Middleton, is that their lyrics tend towards “everyday language”: the language of speech and spoken expression, making comparisons between speech intonation and melody especially productive.<sup>122</sup> Thus, lyrics in any song genre that carry speech-intonational and linguistic “baggage” can interact expressively with melodic contour to build meaning and affect. Those songs whose lyrics more closely resemble poetry rather than prose and use poetic meters rather than patterns of speech—for instance, in many songs classified as art song—would potentially carry less of this speech-intonational “baggage.” Melodic contour in these instances would likely interact more closely with poetic meter and poetic meaning, as explored by Carl Schacter, Stephen Rodgers, and others, than speech-intonation, although not exclusively.<sup>123</sup> In these instances, a close examination of the accents and rhythms of poetic meter such as using Harald Krebs’s method of “basic

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<sup>122</sup> Richard Middleton, *Studying Popular Music* (Buckingham; Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1990), 229.

<sup>123</sup> Schacter, “Motive and Text in Four Schubert Songs,” 110–121; Rodgers, “Sentences with Words,” 58–85; Rodgers, “Schubert’s Idyllic Periods,” 223–46.

rhythm of declamation," may be more helpful than speech intonation.<sup>124</sup> However, considering the interactions of melodic contour and lyrical meaning at the levels of syntax and overall character will prove insightful even for those songs with pre-existing texts, or those with poetic meter and rhyme. Matthew BaileyShea compares syntax of lyrics to syntax of musical phrases, noting those instances in which they correspond and contradict, and showing how the study of these parameters can be helpful in analyzing pop and art song alike.<sup>125</sup> Furthermore, at the level of overall contour, David Lewin and Heather Platt show how shifts in melodic character can help articulate formal structures and deeper textual meaning in art song.<sup>126</sup> Thus, I believe that the process of examining melodic contour-text interaction at the various levels discussed above can be used as a tool to analyze songs across popular music genres, as well as in the genre of art song.

Additionally, I would suggest that studying the relationship between the pitch contour of the sung voice and the meaning of the words sung is a worthwhile endeavor for any musical traditions that includes the singing of language. This includes the use of sung lyrics in larger- or longer-scale musical forms, such as the use of sung vocals in opera, oratorio, and symphony, as well as longer popular forms, such as concept albums, in which a collection of songs is united by a central subject or narrative. Tracing

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<sup>124</sup> Krebs, "Fancy Footwork," 69.

<sup>125</sup> BaileyShea, *Lines and Lyrics*, 96–125.

<sup>126</sup> Lewin, "Schubert, 'Auf Dem Flusse,'" 52; Platt, "Dramatic Turning Points in Brahms Lieder," 76–77.

the relationship between the narrative and language of these larger forms and the contour of its melody could unveil larger scale formal or dramatic structures.

Furthermore, the relationship between lyrical meaning and any pitch contour of the voice, on the spectrum of spoken to sung lyrics, can contribute to a better understanding of their expressive and meaningful combination. The interactions between pitch fluctuations of the voice and lyrics can influence expression and meaning in any musical traditions that include vocalized language. For instance, scholars have explored the fluctuations of pitch in the rapped voice and how they impact meaning, form, and flow in songs with rapped passages. Robert Komaniecki categorizes the pitch of rapped vocal lines into five techniques that range from “more speech-like” to “more song-like”; some of these techniques, Komaniecki states, “could very well be holdovers from the performers’ speech patterns.”<sup>127</sup> Mitchell Ohriner systematically analyzes the similarities and differences between the fluctuations of pitch frequency in rapped lyrics and those in speech, noting also how emcees use the parameter of vocal pitch fluctuation to express their individual identities.<sup>128</sup>

In essence, any musical tradition that utilizes language can utilize the established systems of expressing meaning that are inherent in language (such as using pitch contour to contextualize spoken utterances). Characteristics such as timbre,

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<sup>127</sup> Robert Komaniecki, “Vocal Pitch in Rap Flow,” *Intégral* 34 (2020): 29, 43.

<sup>128</sup> Mitchell Ohriner, “Analysing the Pitch Content of the Rapping Voice,” *Journal of New Music Research* 48, no. 5 (2019): 413–33, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09298215.2019.1609525>.

rhythm, and pitch influence meaning and affect both as linguistic markers and as musical markers. For instance, an expressive melody may feature a dramatic high point, just as a speaker may use pitch emphasis to focus attention on a particular word in a sentence or phrase. Or, as Stephen Rodgers has shown, the phonetics of a text can contribute not only vital semantic meaning but also to a song's expression musically as the text's vowels and consonants interact with its musical setting. Likewise, Victoria Malawey, Zachary Wallmark, and others have shown how vocal timbre, including vocal timbres used in spoken language, can contribute to the expression and meaning of vocal lines in song.<sup>129</sup> This project similarly aims to explore the connection between language and music through the shared parameter, in this case, pitch contour.

This thesis's assertion of a close tie between pitch of speaking and of singing also accompanies the impulse to better understand the cognitive and neurological processes of these phenomena. In recent years, more studies have been done to explore the cognitive processes of pitch, in both music-theoretical fields and music-psychological fields. One stream of research in this area has focused on what Diana Deutsch calls "the speech-to-song illusion." Deutsch's seminal 1995 study examines how some samples of speech, after repeated listenings, can be perceived as musical melody, pointing towards

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<sup>129</sup> Malawey, *A Blaze of Light in Every Word*, 99–100; Zachary Wallmark, "Analyzing Vocables in Rap: A Case Study of Megan Thee Stallion," *Music Theory Online* 28, no. 2 (June 2022), <https://doi.org/10.30535/mto.28.2.10>.

"strong linkages [that] must exist between speech and music."<sup>130</sup> A 2013 article by Tierney et. al. provides a neurological study of this phenomenon, making note of areas of the brain responsible for processing speech that can undergo the speech-to-song illusion, and their overlap with areas of the brain responsible for "pitch extraction and song production."<sup>131</sup> A following 2018 study suggests that perception of musicality in such speech-to-song phrases increases with repetition and that subtle adjustments to the pitch of such phrases can impact this perception.<sup>132</sup> Additionally, Robert J. Zatorre and Shari R. Baum, in a 2012 article, discuss evidence that perception of coarse pitch contour in speech and in music may share cognitive processes.<sup>133</sup> These comparisons of the neurological perceptions of speech and song support a cognitive link between them, and additional research in this area can help further clarify this relationship.

Another interesting avenue for the methods utilized in this project is the examination of how familiarity of a song has the potential to change one's perception of how its melodic contour may relate to speech-intonational phrases. As discussed in the aforementioned studies by Deutsch and others, the repetition of a song-like spoken

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<sup>130</sup> "Speech-to-Song Illusion," Diana Deutsch, 2021, <https://deutsch.ucsd.edu/psychology/pages.php?i=212>. Deutsch's sound clip which features this phenomenon can be listened to on her website at the above URL.

<sup>131</sup> Adam Tierney et al., "Speech versus Song: Multiple Pitch-Sensitive Areas Revealed by a Naturally Occurring Musical Illusion," *Cerebral Cortex* 23, no. 2 (2013): 249, 252–253, <https://doi.org/10.1093/cercor/bhs003>.

<sup>132</sup> Adam Tierney, Aniruddh D. Patel, and Mara Breen, "Acoustic Foundations of the Speech-to-Song Illusion," *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* 147, no. 6 (2018): 888–904, <https://doi.org/10.1037/xge0000455>.

<sup>133</sup> Shari R. Baum and Robert J. Zatorre, "Music Melody and Speech Intonation: Singing a Different Tune?" *PLOS Biology* 10, no. 7 (2012), e1001372, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pbio.1001372>.

statement increases its perception as song; repetition affects cognitive perception. While I believe that the interactions between melodic contour and speech intonation outlined in this project are perceivable upon first listen, I also postulate that subsequent listenings and internalization of how melody and language interact can affect one's perception of the song as listeners familiarize themselves with this interaction and process how parts of a melodic line, phrase, or song section build affect and meaning for them individually.<sup>134</sup>

Another potentially rich application for the methodology presented in this thesis is in analyzing songs in languages other than English. How do the unique grammatical, syntactical, and intonational features of a given language interact with the melodies that speakers of that language pair with them in song? How do listeners who can understand the language a song is sung in perceive melodic shape and syntax differently than those who don't know that language, and are unaware of its linguistic structure? If a person listens to a song sung in a language they don't understand, do they perceive any implied linguistic meaning from musical material alone? The Turkish language, for instance, is agglutinative; suffixes affixed to verbs and nouns in most cases replace the use of separate personal pronouns. Turkish grammar also most often uses subject-object-verb word order instead of subject-verb-object word order, as is

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<sup>134</sup> It would also be interesting to explore how much songwriters report thinking consciously about interactions between music and aspects of language, such as syntax and intonation, as they write songs.



utilized in English. These aspects of the Turkish language place key semantic and narrative information at the end of sentences and phrases, potentially aligning them with cadences and at the border of formal divisions in the form of lyrics. How might this syntactic structure and its intonational impacts on speech affect their interaction with melody in the context of song, and will Turkish speakers perceive this interaction differently than non-Turkish speakers? Patel speculates about the difference between melodies created by speakers of English versus speakers of French, which uses “short prosodic phrases [that] common[ly] end with a rising pitch movement if they are not the final phrase in the sentence.”<sup>135</sup> More study of songs in languages other than English, especially those that utilize multiple languages in the same song, can help further define these songs’ characteristics of language-music interaction.

Additionally, tonal languages such as Mandarin Chinese and Vietnamese utilize distinct intonational “tones” to create lexical meaning. In these languages, changes of intonation can affect not only the contextual meaning of a word or phrase, but the actual lexical meaning of the word itself (for instance, in Mandarin Chinese, mā 妈 spoken with a level tone means *mother*, whereas mǎ 马 spoken with a falling then rising tone means *horse*).<sup>136</sup> Studying the melodic contours that accompany these words in

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<sup>135</sup> Patel, *Music, Language, and the Brain*, 192.

<sup>136</sup> “What Are The Four Mandarin Chinese Tones?,” ThoughtCo, updated on November 4, 2019, <https://www.thoughtco.com/four-tones-of-mandarin-2279480>.

their sung form can shed new light on how these linguistic and musical expressions interact and how artists can use melodic contour to communicate both musically and semantically. Patel suggests that some genres, such as Cantonese opera, feature “a close correspondence between the contour of a spoken text and its associated musical melody,” whereas in other Chinese vocal genres, “such close matching between text and music is not observed.”<sup>137</sup> Further research into melodies used in tonal languages can help explore these different strategies of text setting and their impacts on expression.

Even between different varieties of the *same* language, distinctions in intonation can potentially impact the pitch of the voice in song. In his study of the pitch of the rapped voice, Ohriner asserts that “many of [the differences between emceeing and speech] amplify distinctions in the intonational phonetics of mainstream American English and African-American language.”<sup>138</sup> Studying the ways in which patterns of intonation specific to a language variety impact a lyrics’ sung melody can reveal the language’s linguistic “baggage” in the context of song. This leads to further questions such as: how does the natural changing of a language’s intonational patterns over time affect their melodic setting in song? For instance, the intonational phenomenon of “uptalk” describes a recent trend in English and other languages that ends a declarative

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<sup>137</sup> Patel, *Music, Language, and the Brain*, 217.

<sup>138</sup> Ohriner, “Analysing the Pitch Content of the Rapping Voice,” 430.

sentence with an upward rise in intonation, instead of a downward fall in intonation.

What impact may this intonational trend have on the melodies artists are choosing to use to set such lyrics?

Such questions point toward broader concerns about the cognitive processes of songwriting and song-listening, and any instances of language used in musicking. How does the brain work on both linguistic and musical levels to aid an artist's musical expression in songwriting, and how do listeners then interpret these songs using their own cognitive processing? This is a large question that will likely remain at least partially clouded in mystery, at least in the near future. However, studying the auditory products of these creative-cognitive processes, namely the combination of lyrics and melody in the genre of song, can move us one step closer to understanding them better. With the methods outlined in this project, I hope to provide both songwriters and song-listeners with a new set of tools to explore interactions between lyrics in melody in song and to encourage reflection on expressive uses of language in musicking more broadly.

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