"Eleanor Rigby": Structure in the Arts

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An approach will be presented here for developing methodologies for the analysis of the structures through which art forms communicate. A specific methodology for the analysis of music is developed and applied to John Lennon and Paul McCartney's "Eleanor Rigby."

It appears that one must distinguish at least two types of art forms at the outset. The first of these are art forms, such as music and oral literature, in which composition and interpretation are two temporally distinct operations usually performed by different individuals; the second are art forms, such as the graphic arts, in which composition and interpretation are simultaneous.

GENERAL METHODOLOGY

The Prague School was first to distinguish two types of language usage associated with the aesthetic function of language, which they called foregrounding and automatization. Foregrounding occurs when the attention of the audience is drawn from the message communicated to the verbal form used to convey that message. Attention is drawn to the form by the unexpectedness of its use. Unexpectedness of usage is commonly achieved by deviating from a pattern of expectations—either those common in the verbal behavior of the culture involved, or those systematically created by the author. Automatization is, on the contrary, achieved by adhering to the expected pattern.

McLendon (ms.) has identified four dimensions within which patterns are systematically created and broken in poetry: spatial, phonological, grammatical, and lexical patterns. Through the analysis of the patterns established and violated in these four dimensions, one is able to specify the units of structure in the poem, within and among which one looks for meaning.

The spatial dimension concerns itself with the physical appearance of the printed poem on the page: its division into stanzas, capitalization, indentation, punctuation, the arrangement of the words on the page (as in the works of E. E. Cummings), and, theoretically, the typeface chosen.

The phonological dimension involves various types of sound patterns: stress, rhyme (of both consonants and vowels), metrical schemes, alliteration, and so on. In addition, types of sounds that elicit value judgments in a culture (sound symbolism) are included in this dimension. Richard Wagner in *Das Rheingold* tries to depict the ugliness of the dwarf Alberecht in lines crowded with /g/ and /gl/ sequences:

Garstig glatter glitsch'riger glimmer!
Wie gleit' ich aus!

The grammatical dimension concerns itself with sentence structure and length, as well as word structure. In "My Heart Leaps Up When I Behold," Wordsworth deviates from normal syntax in the lines:

So was it when my life began,
So is it now I am a man,
So be it when I shall grow old.

The deviation involves foregrounding of the first two lines within the context of normal syntax, which, however, becomes automatized in the context of the poem through the syntactic parallelism emphasizing the parallelism of the thoughts.

The lexical dimension involves choice of lexical item. This dimension is exploited in all textual material, even that of a nonpoetic nature. Lévi-Strauss' attempts to understand the meaning of protagonists' names in myths reflect the importance of the lexical domain in texts. In analyzing Baudelaire's "Les Chats," Riffaterre comments on the use of *amoureaux* rather than *amants* in the opening line of the poem: "*Amoureaux* is not, like *amants,* confined to serious or tragic connotations. . ." (1966: 221).

According to McLendon, one analyzes the structure within each of these four dimensions one at a time, looking for the building of pattern and its violation. After analyzing each of the dimensions, using instances of foregrounding to identify key points, one then compares the structuring of the dimensions with one another to identify the degree of convergence of patterning among the structuring in these four dimensions, and to isolate the patterns of contrast. The lack of complete congruency among patterns of structure gives the poem dynamic tension. It is possible to evaluate the poem, at least in part, by how effectively the dynamic tension is used to heighten important areas of meaning.

An example of how patterning within one dimension, the syntactic, may contrast with that in other dimensions can be shown in Shakespeare's sonnet, "When in Disgrace with Fortune and Men's Eyes." A classic sonnet is defined as consisting of fourteen lines with a specific rhyme scheme, and contains a single thought with a reversal of ideas in the last six lines. Shakespeare's sonnet conforms to this pattern. Although spatially divided into verses (a division supported by the rhyme scheme), syntactically the sonnet is a single sentence.

Although McLendon explains how the approach is to be used with poetry, it is not clear how the four dimensions were identified. Before a similarly rigorous structural analysis can be applied to another field (such as music), it is necessary to specify a method by which one determines potential dimensions of structuring to be examined.

The specification of the dimensions seems to involve the impressionistic identification of areas of potential variation within the art form under consideration. The validity of the impressionistic classification can be verified by requiring that each dimension be characterized by the following: each dimension must be able to co-occur with the others; and each dimension must contain at least two variables that are unable to co-occur. Thus the dimensions become analogous to position classes in the traditional linguistics, and the variables that occur in these dimensions are similarly analogous to the members of a position class. Because position classes occur sequentially, and the dimensions in the art forms generally occur simultaneously, a term from symbolic logic, *domain,* is used to describe the areas of an art form under scrutiny. A domain may be defined as a set of two or more mutually exclusive variables that can co-occur with other domains.

By means of this methodology, one should be able to specify the domains of structuring, which should be manipulable in any art form. Painting, for example, seems to contain domains for color, shape, texture, line, and the like.

DOMAINS OF STRUCTURE IN MUSIC

In attempting to identify the domains of structuring available to a composer in music, it is useful to compare two pieces of music, examining their differences. This allows the establishment of six domains: melodic line, modality and key, time, dynamics, timbre, and spatial arrangement.

Four of these domains—time, dynamics, timbre, and spatial arrangement (particularly of performers, rather than textual material)—are domains of structure available to verbal art forms as well as to music. They seem to have been considered only rarely in the analysis of verbal art forms, since they are domains of structure manipulated in actual performances.

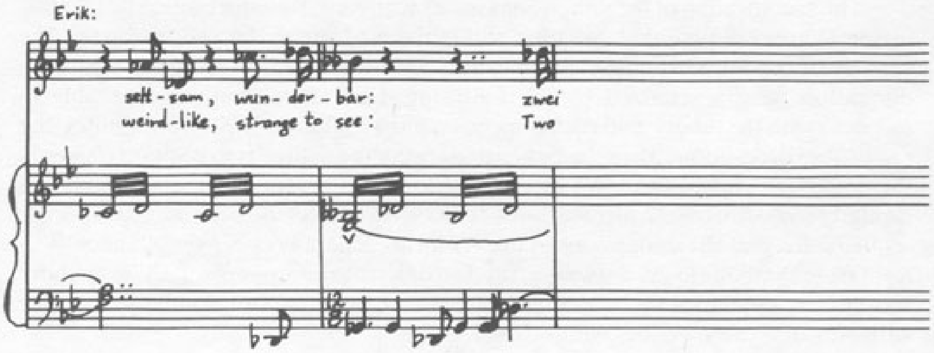
Melodic Line

One of the most outstanding differences between two pieces of music is a difference in melodies. Since the melodies in any two pieces of music are potential variables, a domain of melodic line may be identified. Melodies, or melodic lines, are in some ways similar to supersegmental phenomena in language, and like supersegmentals, frequently carry some sort of meaning. Music of the Romantic period, as typified by the works of Richard Wagner, frequently contains leitmotifs that are assigned meaning. In *Der Fliegende Holländer,* Erik discusses with his fiancée Senta a dream he has had. He describes the approach of a strange ship. The orchestra at that point intones the melodic line associated with the Flying Dutchman. This informs the audience that the ship in the dream is the Dutchman's (see Figure 1).

This use of melody with meaning is not restricted to the Romantic period, or to melodies created by the composer himself. Puccini used the American national anthem in *Madame Butterfly*. Recently, a rock group (the Brooklyn Bridge) inserted the opening measures of Mendelssohn's "Wedding March" into a song called "The Worst that Could Happen."

Melodic line has been traditionally analyzed in terms of two components: melodic contour and intervals between successive notes.

Figure 1



Melodic Contour

Roberts (1936) has suggested that the contour of the melodic line can be used as one of the criteria for defining a specific style of music in order to identify music areas for North America. Nettl (1954) also discusses melodic contour as a distinctive feature in classification procedures.

Melodic lines have been traditionally described as undulating, arc shaped, descending, terraced, and the like. For example, in *Tristan und Isolde* Wagner uses undulating melodic lines near the end of the "Liebestod" to represent the waves Isolde claims are engulfing her.

Intervals

Within the domain of melodic line, intervals between the notes in the melody must also be considered. Both Roberts and Nettl have used intervals as an additional feature in specifying music styles among American Indians. Nettl identifies the "importance of minor seconds, major thirds, and perfect fourths as melodic intervals" among people in the Eskimo-Northwest Coast area, for example (1954: 36).

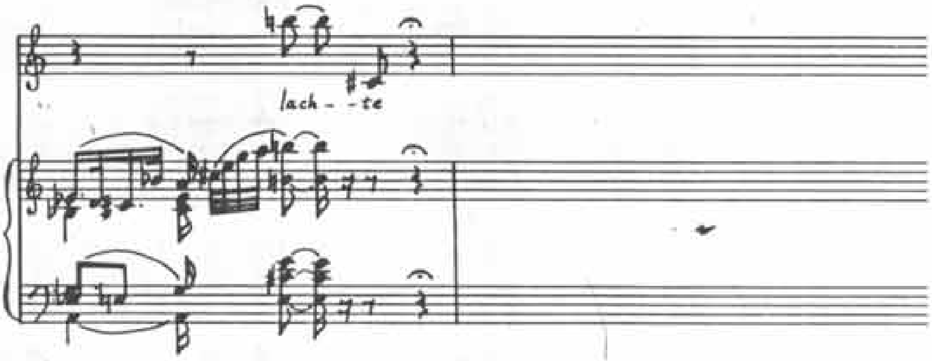
In Western music, melody lines rarely contain intervals of more than a space of five notes (that is, a fifth), although leaps of an octave do occur. Extremely large intervals, therefore, call attention to themselves (are foregrounded) in Western music and should always, at least in Western music, be examined closely.

Turning once again to Wagner, this time to Act II of *Parsifal,* we find an interval of almost two octaves. Kundry, explaining how her current degraded state came to be, says that she saw Christ on the cross and laughed (see Figure 2).

Modality and Key

Within this domain, the variants are those associated with mode, key, and harmony. The field traditionally studied under the rubric of musical theory and harmony is encompassed in this domain.

Figure 2



Mode

In Western music, the two major variants in mode are major and minor. This distinction refers to traditional conventions for the construction of the scale (or set of eight notes, described by letters of the alphabet; for example, the scale of C major contains the tones C, D, E, F, G, A, B, and C). Major scales differ from minor scales in the distance between the second and third tone, and the distance between the fifth and sixth ones. (There are various types of minor scales with additional distinctions that need not be discussed here.) Melodies written in minor modes are regarded as sad and melancholy by Westerners.

Key

The key in which a piece of music is written specifies what tone of the scale (A, B, C, and so on) is to be the base (tonic). The base note (tonic) of the scale affects the construction of the scale, since the tones represented by the letters are not equally distributed. The distance from C to D is twice the distance from E to F. The result is that the scale of C major, for example, has no sharps (raised tones marked by a # after the letter) or flats (lowered tones marked by a *b* after the letter). The scale of C major contains the notes C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C (in that order), while the scale of A major contains three sharps: A, B, C#, D, E, F#, G#, A.

It is not clear if a given key has a culturally established meaning in any musical tradition. Merriam (1964: 92) reports that both Rimsky-Korsakov and Scriabin claimed to have a form of synesthesia that enabled them to associate specific keys with specific colors.

Composers tend to use changes in key, rather than specific keys, for effect.

Harmonies

Harmonies are created when two or more notes are played simultaneously. Each instance of two or more notes being played together is referred to as a chord. The distance between the notes played is used to identify the specific type of chord. Thus a C and an E played simultaneously constitutes a chord known as a third (that is, there are two steps between C and E).

Chords commonly consist of triads, or three notes played simultaneously. The traditional field of harmony studies the internal structure of the chord (the relationship between the notes that are used in its construction) and the patterns in which chords occur sequentially (how given chords relate to other chords).

Both individual harmonies and the movement from one chord to another have culturally controlled responses. Chords constructed on minor patterns sound sad and melancholy to Western ears. It is important not to apply the interpretations given certain music structures cross-culturally. Harmonies in parallel seconds (say C and D played simultaneously, followed by D and E played simultaneously) are generally considered discordant in Western music, while in the Caroline Islands the same harmonic pattern is considered quite beautiful and the sound is said "to ring like a bell."[1]

Time

Still a third domain of structuring is provided by rhythm, tempo, or any aspect of timing. Time signatures are used by composers to indicate the number of beats in a given segment of music called a bar. A time signature of 3/4 would indicate that three (the top number) quarter (the bottom number) notes must occur in each bar. In addition, the time signatures tell where the musical stress is to fall. In 4/4 time (four quarter notes to a bar) there is primary stress on the first beat and secondary stress on the third beat.

Time signatures can be varied in sequential bars for various effects. Stravinsky's use of time signatures of 5/16, 3/16, 2/16, and 4/16 in sequential bars produces the ragged rhythms that strike Western ears as primitive near the conclusion of *Le Sacre du Printemps.*

Time changes can also have effects akin to those produced verbally by onomatopoeic devices. Mussorgsky's use of alternate bars of 5/4 and 6/4 time in the "Promenade" of *Pictures at an Exhibition* successfully reproduces the strolling gait of a visitor at an art gallery.

Dynamics

By varying the volume, different effects can be created. Musical notation distinguishes two categories of variables in the domain of dynamics: relative volume, indicated by the terms piano (p), fortissimo (ff), sforzando (sfz), and the like; and change in volume, indicated by terms such as crescendo and diminuendo.

This domain, like the following ones, deals with instructions to the performer of the work. Although rarely discussed with verbal arts, a full analysis of a play or narrative would have to take into consideration any stage directions that would indicate at what volume the line is to be delivered (if it is not being left to the discretion of the actors or directors and others involved with the performance).[2]

Timbre

The sound of a given melody is determined in part by the instrument playing the melody. Since the quality of sound may be varied by changing instruments, a domain of timbre may be identified. Musically the variables manipulated are: the sound of an instrument in its different ranges (such as the abnormally high basoon notes that open *Le Sacre du Printemps*); unusual instruments (the phonograph recording of the nightingale in Respighi's *Pines of Rome*); odd uses of instruments in combination (the cello playing higher than the violins in *Pines of Rome*); and repetitions of the same melody played on different instruments (Ravel's *Bolero*).

Spatial

The final domain can be identified only from the score and at an actual performance. This domain involves the spatial arrangement of the music on the page (rarely used in music), or the arrangement of the orchestra and performers. Although the spatial arrangement is less important in music than in poetry, certain features, such as repeat signs, may be a clue to the understanding of the music.

Composers have made more extensive use of the spatial arrangement of the performers than of the notes on the printed page. Instruments of the orchestra are generally assumed to be in the orchestra pit, but composers such as Wagner, Respighi, Mozart, Holst, and others have specified that some instruments or performers are to perform offstage at various moments.

ANALYSIS OF "ELEANOR RIGBY"

A complete analysis of a song requires that all the domains of the text and all the domains of the music be analyzed. In addition, it is necessary to analyze the way the patterns in the music and those in the text complement and contrast with one another. It is quite possible for a poetic structure to be foregrounded by a musical structure. Lennon and McCartney's "Eleanor Rigby" will be analyzed to illustrate the method described.

Spatial Domain

Since "Eleanor Rigby" is available for analysis through a recording of an individual performance, no inferences as to the structuring of a spatial domain either in the text or in the music can be made.[3] A transcription of the performance is given in the Appendix.[4] The text (cf. Figure 3) has been arranged spatially as a poem on the basis of the phonological pattern evident in the song.

Phonological Domain

Phonologically, the poem is delimited by the line (sung twice): "Ah, look at all the lonely people!" (henceforth referred to as the introductory lines). The poem begins ([1] and [2]) and ends ([21i] and [22i]) with a repetition of this line.[5] The repetition of this line at the same time divides the poem into two major parts, each introducted by this line [1], [2] and [15], [16]. These two major sections consist of lines [1] to [14] and lines [15] to [22i].

However, the poem is also divided into three stanzas, consisting of a verse and a chorus, by the lines:

All the lonely people, where do they all come from?
All the lonely people, where do they all belong?

which close each stanza [7]-[8], [13]-[14],[21]-[22].

The boundaries of the division into three stanzas correspond with the boundaries of the division into two parts (that is, the end of the second stanza coincides exactly with the end of the first part, and the end of the third stanza coincides exactly with the end of the second part). In fact, the terminal boundary marker line, "Ah, look at all the lonely people!," and the chorus line, "All the lonely people, where do they all come from? All the lonely people, where do they all belong?," which close the last stanza, are sung simultaneously at the close of the song.

The three verses—[3] to [6], [9] to [12], and [17] to [20]—share the same meter, dactylic hexameter, for the first and third lines, and dactylic monometer for the second and fourth lines. The first and third lines are also characterized by the absence, in the second foot, of the expected second unstressed syllable. The missing syllable corresponds to phrase final position where a supersegmental juncture could be expected (noted by a comma in the text). In lines [3], [9], [17], and [19], the juncture falls between the subject and the main verb, implying an isolation of the subject. The missing syllable is compensated for in the music by an appropriately placed beat in the orchestra, which marks the syllable, and a concurrent long note for the vocalist.

The three verses are also rhymed in the same pattern. The first and second lines are always rhymed, as are the third and fourth.

Grammatical Domain

Grammatically, each verse is constructred quite differently. The first verse consists of a three-line declarative sentence [3] to [5], followed by a one-line interrogative [6]. Lines [3] to [5] appear to be a single sentence containing three concatenated clauses, all having "Eleanor Rigby" as subject.

"Eleanor Rigby, picks up the rice in a church where a wedding has been, lives in a dream, waits at the window, wearing the face that she keeps in a jar by the door."

Figure 3

Eleanor Rigby

1 A a Ah, look at all the lonely people!
2 A a Ah, look at all the lonely people!
————————————————————————
3 B b Eleanor Rigby, picks up the rice in a church where a wedding has been,
4 C b Lives in a dream,
5 B c Waits at the window, wearing the face that she keeps in a jar by the door
6 C c Who is it for?
**** **** **** **** **** **** **** **** **** ****
7 D d All the lonely people, where do they all come from?
8 D e All the lonely people, where do they all belong?
- -
9 B f Father McKenzie, writing the words of a sermon that no one will hear—
10 C f No one comes near.
11 B g Look at him working, darning his socks in the night when there's nobody there!
12 C g What does he care?
**** **** **** **** **** **** **** **** **** ****
13 D d All the lonely people, where do they all come from?
14 D e All the lonely people, where do they all belong?
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15 A a Ah, look at all the lonely people!
16 A a Ah, look at all the lonely people!
————————————————————————
17 B h Eleanor Rigby died in the church and was buried along with her name.
18 C h Nobody came.
19 B i Father McKenzie, wiping the dirt from his hands as he walks from the grave—
20 C i No one was saved.
**** **** **** **** **** **** **** **** **** ****
21 D d All the lonely people, where do they all come from?
21i A a Ah, look at all the lonely people!

22 D e All the lonely people, where do they all belong?
22i A a Ah, look at all the lonely people!

———— First division
════ Second division
- - - - - - Third division
***** ***** ** Fourth division

NOTE: Lines 21i and 22i are sung simultaneously with lines 21 and 22. Numbers in column I refer to line; capital letters refer to metric construction; small letters in the third column refer to rhyme scheme.

The sentence could easily be outlined as:

I. Eleanor Rigby
  A. Picks up the rice
  B. Lives in a dream
  C. Waits at the window

This three-line sentence contrasts sharply with the four-word interrogative "Who is it for?" [6], which is then foregrounded.

The second verse, [9] to [12], consists of a one-line sentence fragment, a one-line declarative sentence, a one-line imperative, and is closed by an interrogative, as was the first verse. That the initial line, "Father McKenzie, writing the words of a sermon that no one will hear," is intentionally a sentence fragment is confirmed by the line that follows, "no one comes near" [10]. Line [10] is obviously an independent sentence and does nothing to make line [9] more complete.

Line [11] forcibly draws the audience into an involvement as spectators with the imperative construction "Look at him working, darning his socks in the night when there's nobody there." Like the first verse, the second ends with a question, "What does he care?"

The third verse, like the second, consists of three sentences and a fragment. The first two lines are declarative sentences [17] [18]: "Eleanor Rigby died in the church and was buried along with her name. Nobody came."

The third line of the verse, line [19], reminiscent of Father McKenzie's appearance in line [9], is another fragment, lacking a main verb: "Father McKenzie wiping the dirt from his hands as he walks from the grave."

Thus Eleanor Rigby is always the subject of declarative sentences, while Father McKenzie is always associated with sentence fragments that appositionally modify his name.

The last line [20] deviates from the parallelism of the first two verses that end with questions. It is instead, unexpectedly, a declarative sentence, the damning line "No one was saved."

Contrasting with the three stanzas that describe the actors, the two introductory lines, [1] and [2] and [15] and [16], are both imperative. The chorus lines, while declarative, comment on the action rather than describe it.

Grammatically, the chorus lines [7] and [8], [13] and [14], and [21] and [22] are ambiguous, since English does not transcribe stress. Either of the following is possible:

All the lonely people, where do they all cóme from?
All the lonely people, where do they all bélong?

or

All the lonely people, where dó they all come from?
All the lonely people, where dó they all belong?

The first asks for a physical position of origin, while the second asks for a causal explanation (Why are there so many lonely people?). The music at this point resolves the ambiguity. Stress in English is associated with high pitch; emphatic stress with still higher pitch. The vocal line for the chorus, melodically, is identical for the two lines up to the word "do." The melodic line at that point in both cases moves upward with a huge interval of an octave the first time. Then, as if echoing the emphatic stress on "do," when the line is repeated, the melodic line moves up a tenth, two full tones higher than it did the first time.

Melodic Line

Melodic lines exist both for the orchestra and the singer. These are given in Figure 4 (vocal lines are labeled VL; orchestral lines are labeled OL). Because of the relationship between the melodies and the intervals that make them up, it is necessary to discuss a certain amount of harmony at the same time as we consider melody.

There are four melodic lines for the singer. These are isomorphically associated with the metrical divisions of the lines as schematized by the capital letters in Figure 3. The decision to segment the introductory lines and chorus from the verse because of their phonological patterning is thus reinforced by the difference in the structure of the melodic lines associated with those verbal lines.

One of the vocal melodic lines (VLa /1-3, 5-8/) corresponds to the introductory lines:

> Ah, look at all the lonely people!

Another vocal melodic line (VLb /19-26/) corresponds to the chorus lines:

> All the lonely people, where do they all come from?
> All the lonely people, where do they all belong?

The remaining two vocal lines (VLc /9-12/ and VLd /13/) correspond respectively to the first and third lines of each verse (B in the text) and the second and fourth lines of each verse (C in the text).

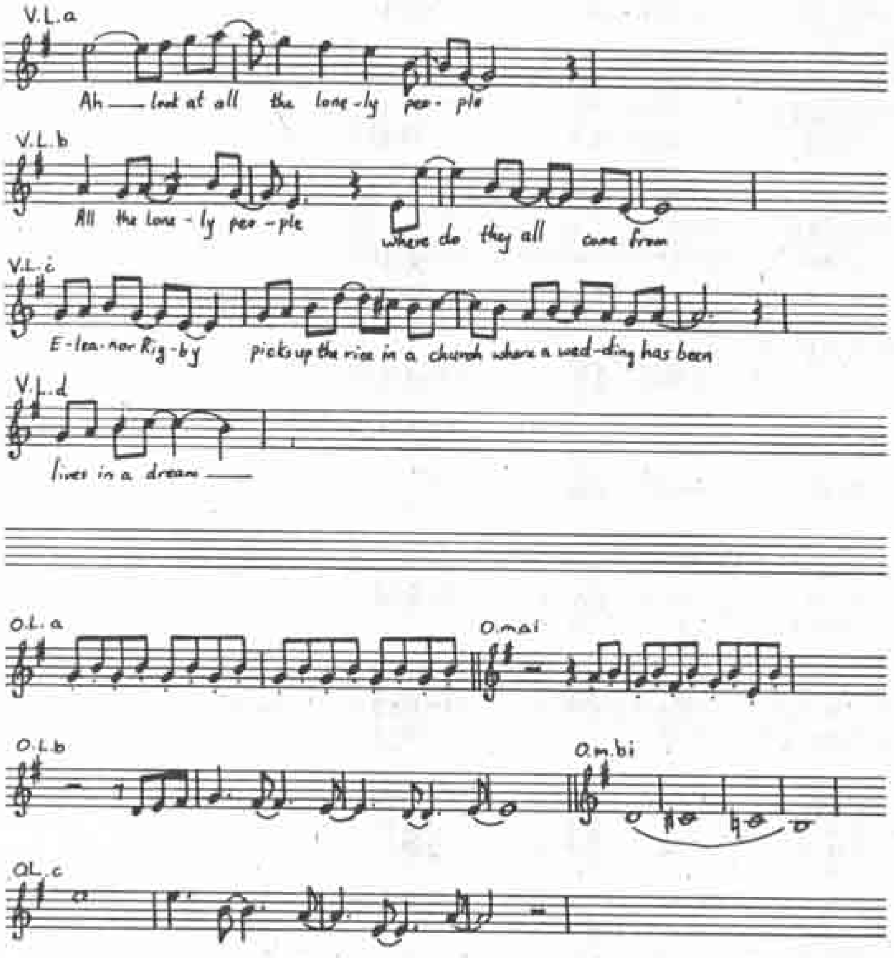
The vocal line for the introduction /1-3, 5-8/ is an arc-shaped line, dropping to a sixth below the opening note. The primarily downward motion gives a feeling of dejection (especially when coupled with the appearance of a sixth; cf. modality). The melody line ranges over an interval of a ninth.

The melodic line used for the chorus sections /19-26/ spans a still wider range, that of a tenth. The interval of a tenth occurs between two consecutive notes and is the widest interval of the entire piece. It serves to foreground the text at that point, and as previously explained, resolves any possible doubt that "Where do they all come from?" requires the emphasis to be placed on the word "do," thereby signifying a question as to the cause of the loneliness.

The melodic lines for the verses have pitifully small ranges compared to the introductory and chorus melodies. The shorter verse melody has a range of a fourth, with no interval larger than a whole tone. The longer melody spans an interval of a seventh, thanks to the appearance of a single E. Without the E the range would have been a fifth. E, however, is the tonic (base) note of the key, and it is peculiar that it only occurs once (and not as an initial or terminal note at that). Its appearance, however, exactly matches that place in the text where the expected unstressed syllable is absent (cf. phonological domain).

Several melodic lines appear in the orchestra as well. Two of them figure

Figure 4


V.L.a
Ah — look at all the lone-ly peo-ple
V.L.b
All the lone - ly peo - ple
where do they all come from
V.L.c
E-lea-nor Rig-by picks up the rice in a church where a wed-ding has been
V.L.d
lives in a dream —
O.L.a
O.ma1
O.L.b
O.m.b1
O.L.c

importantly by recurring with variations (OLa and OLb). The first is a rapid melody that appears in the orchestra during the verse dealing with Eleanor Rigby (OLa /14-18/). The second is a slow moving line appearing in the orchestra during the verse concerning Father McKenzie (OLb /32-35/).

A melody, very similar to that associated with Eleanor Rigby (OLa), appears briefly in the introduction /4, 8/ (see OMai in Figure 4). A melody, similar to that associated with Father McKenzie (OLb), appears underlying the chorus /19-26/ (see OMbi in Figure 4). These melodies seem to reinforce the identification of Eleanor Rigby and Father McKenzie as "the lonely people."

In the third verse a new melody (OLc) appears behind the first text line "Eleanor Rigby, died in the church and was buried along with her name," which contains a high E held five and a half beats, the longest held note in any of the melodic lines. This sustained note gives a wailing quality to the music at that point, as though lamenting Eleanor Rigby's passing.

The third verse line in this third verse (19B), "Father McKenzie, wiping the dirt from his hands as he walks from the grave," is foregrounded by two features: a sudden change in dynamics and timbre, and the production of the same melody by both the orchestra and the vocalist (/59,60,61/). In addition to foregrounding, these two features produce a high dramatic intensity at this point.

Modality

An examination of the modality and key shows it to be E minor. A minor key is felt to be sadder and more melancholic than a major key by Westerners.

The basic harmonies are chords of E minor and C major. C major is the sixth tone in the key of E minor. The sixth tone is the tonic of the related minor. In a minor scale, the sixth tone may be raised a half tone. In the key of E minor, the sixth tone is C. C and C# may therefore both occur. A C major chord in the key of E minor thus seems somewhat unstable, since the chord is based on C, which need not always occur, but may vary with C#.

The sixth tone carries with it a feeling of emptiness, hollowness, or loneliness. Wagner, for example, uses the sixth in opening *Tristan und Isolde* to indicate unresolved and unfulfilled love.

Changes in the harmony are not synchronized with changes from one melodic line to another, thus creating dynamic tension. Even this tension has its own pattern; the harmonies change consistently from E minor to C major before the conclusion of each of the vocal melodic lines of the verses.

Time

The domain of time is manipulated very little; it remains 4/4 throughout the entire piece. Incessant quarter notes dominate the accompaniment to the verse. Subservient melodies associated with Eleanor Rigby (OLa and OLai) are double timed; those associated with Father McKenzie (OLb and OLbi) are half timed.

Dynamics

The domain of dynamics also exhibits very little variation. Only near the end of the last verse do the persistent staccato notes increase in volume (precisely with the words "Father McKenzie" in the text).

Timbre

The domain of timbre is manipulated in several ways. The stanzas and chorus lines are sung solo. Only the command "Ah, look at all the lonely people!" is sung in harmony and contrapuntally near the end /63-69/.

Variation in timbre is particularly marked in the strings, and underscores divisions of the song previously identified in considering patterns of structuring within other domains. Thus staccato strokes occur with the verses, while legato bowing occurs with the chorus lines.

Lexical Domain

In analyzing the lexical domain (the choice of words), we consider the implications and connotations of forms encountered and examine the imagery.

"Eleanor Rigby" opens with the imperative sentence "Ah, look at all the lonely people!" It is sung twice [1], [2]. The doubling of the line seems subliminally to presage the introduction of two people who must be equated with the lonely people.

Verse I introduces the first of the two, Eleanor Rigby. It is interesting to consider meanings and/or cultural implications of names chosen in texts. In this case the name Eleanor Rigby suggests an Irish ethnicity, a point that needs to be kept in mind for later clarification.

Eleanor Rigby is described in the first verse as living in a dream. She longs for involvement with other people and seems deliberately to seek out people to watch who are involved. She has gone to the church to see a wedding, a union of two people. Her desire to marry is evident from her handling of the rice, which symbolizes the wedding ceremony.

At home, she waits at the window, looking out at life like so many lonely people, masking herself from and for everyone [5]. For whom is she watching and waiting? The chorus calls attention to the "lonely people" once again, this time asking where they come from and where they belong [7], [8].

The second verse introduces Father McKenzie. His name suggests an Irish ethnicity like Eleanor Rigby's. He is possibly the parish priest of the church where Eleanor Rigby has picked up the rice. He is equated with Eleanor Rigby structurally, since he occupies the initial position in the second verse, paralleling Eleanor Rigby's initial position in the first verse. In terms of the verses, Father McKenzie's name appears as the answer to the question "Who is it for?," which ends Verse I [9].

Father McKenzie, like Eleanor Rigby, does not relate to people. There is no communication between him and his congregation. His sermon goes unheard [9]. No one comes to him [10], even though this is one of the functions of his priestly office.

Alone at night, he darns his socks, truly a job for his wife—if he could have one. As Eleanor Rigby needs a husband, Father McKenzie needs a wife. As Eleanor Rigby is incomplete, Father McKenzie is more so. Not only does he not relate to people as a human being, but he does not relate as a priest, an occupation that demands involvement on one hand, but prohibits it on the other (that is, he cannot marry). He is as incomplete as the line that introduces him (a sentence fragment), which is syntactically incomplete.

After a reappearance of the chorus lines [13] [14], the introductory lines reappear [15] [16], giving the impression that the song is about to start again. Structurally it does repeat. As Verse I referred to Eleanor Rigby and Verse II referred to Father McKenzie, the first half of Verse III refers to Eleanor Rigby and the second half to Father McKenzie.

Eleanor Rigby has "died in the church and was buried along with her name" [17]. The phrase "died in the church" is ambiguous and can be taken to mean she died a Christian (as a member of a Christian church or in the Christian tradition) or that she had literally died in the church building. The latter interpretation would indicate that Eleanor Rigby spent many hours in the church, and thus would be in keeping with the postulated involvement between her and Father McKenzie. The evidence for such an involvement comes not only from the structural positioning of Eleanor Rigby and Father McKenzie in Verses I and II, but also from their being joined together in Verse III, where their appearances structurally are parallel to those in Verses I and II. In addition, the music supplies some interesting clues to the relationship. The rapid melody line associated with Eleanor Rigby (OLa) and a variant of the melody line associated with Father McKenzie (OLb) are played simultaneously at the start of Verse III /54-56/. The linking of both the names and melodies hints strongly at a closer relation between the two that never comes to fruition.

The two people are chosen presumably because they are Irish Catholics, and there is a tradition in the literature of men who leave their sweethearts to become priests, while their girlfriends remain pure and unmarried. The two usually are rewarded with divine salvation. The image of salvation is violently broken when Eleanor Rigby dies, and the audience is told through the foregrounded line [20] (by virtue of its not being a question parallel to the last line of the other verses) "No one was saved."

All of this would tend to indicate that the ambiguity of the line is not to be resolved. Eleanor Rigby died in the church building where she spent a great deal of time; and she died in a Christian tradition as well.

That she never married seems clear. "Eleanor Rigby died in the church and was buried along with her name": she was born Rigby, and died Rigby. There are no Rigby offspring. Great people's names live after them, but Eleanor Rigby's dies with her. She was not great. No one even cared enough about her to come to her funeral [18]. Only Father McKenzie, duty bound, came and wipes his hands of the whole affair as he leaves the grave. Those psychoanalytically inclined may choose to equate dirt with sex, and thereby see Father McKenzie as rejecting life twice: once by withdrawal from the class of marriageable males when he became a priest, and again symbolically at the funeral.

An examination of the three verses shows a growing panic with the isolation of people and the negation of relationships. Verse I contains two sentences, one of which is a huge declarative sentence spanning three lines and containing three main verbs with Eleanor Rigby as subject of each. There are no negatives, and the final line is a question that relates to Eleanor Rigby's rationale for her actions and her hoped-for involvement with others.

Verse II contains three complete sentences and one fragment. Father McKenzie functions as the subject of the fragment and is referred to in [11] and [12]. Line [10] has a negative subject, and line [11] contains a negative clause. The final question to this verse deals with his lack of concern about his lack of involvement.

By Verse III there is no continuity between the sentences and the fragment. Eleanor Rigby is the subject of [17], while line [18] has a negative subject in "nobody." Father McKenzie appears briefly as the subject of the fragmented line [19], while line [20] contains the second negative of this verse.[6]

The lack of variation in the dynamics, harmonies, and rhythm serves to emphasize the relentless monotony in the lives of the lonely people. The agitated figure (OLa /14-17/) appears behind the word "waits," almost as if to mock by its speed the lack of movement in the act of waiting for something that will not come.[7] The slow moving figure (OLb /33/) that appears behind the word "darning" in Verse II similarly seems to accent the all too trivial nature of the act that is typified by the rapid movement of the darning needles. The act becomes a kind of "sound and fury, signifying nothing."

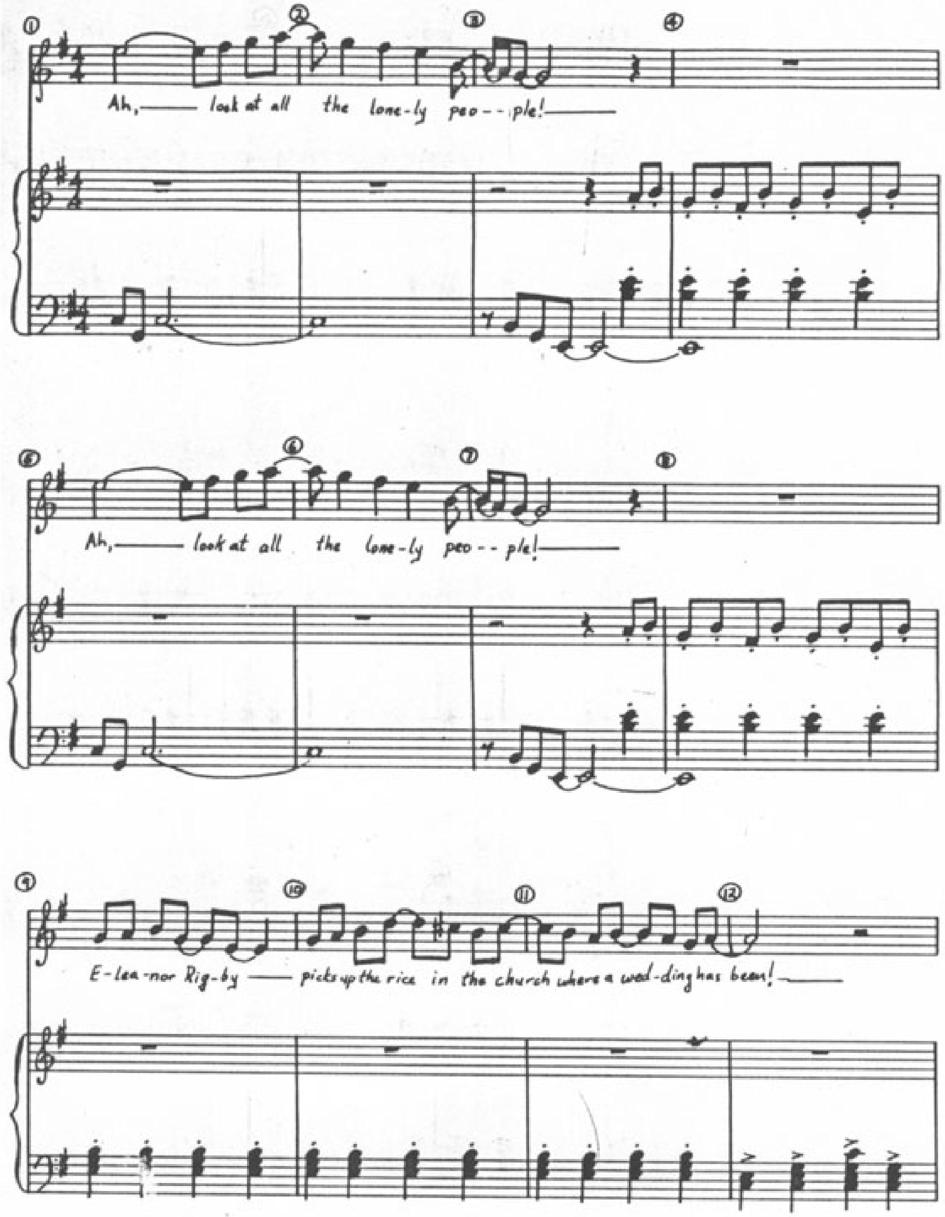
The wide range, large intervals, and legato bowing that underlie the introductory and chorus sections contrast sharply with the small range and staccato notes that underlie the verse. This parallels the distinction of the approach made to the material by the verse on one hand and the introduction and chorus on the other. The verses describe the protagonists, the introduction and chorus reflect the thoughts and attitudes of the observer. The observer's world is big, open, and more richly colored and sympathetic (as indicated by the large intervals, the ranges, and the legato bowing that accompany those sections). The lonely people live in a small, dull, unsympathetic world, where each person is isolated from others (as indicated by the small intervals and ranges of melodies and by the jagged staccato notes that accompany them).

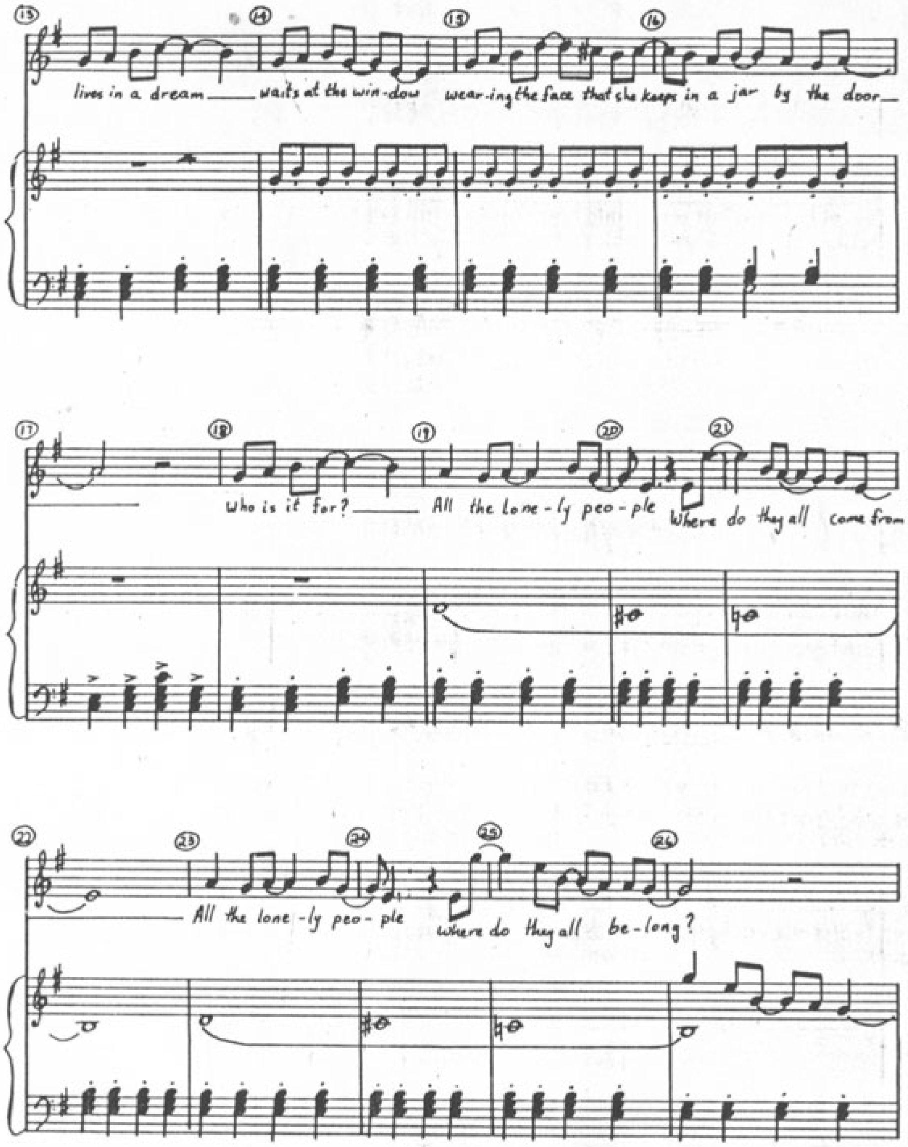
In summary, the song can be shown to be on two levels. One deals with the story of two people, Eleanor Rigby and Father McKenzie, who cannot relate to each other, but need each other, and with the eventual death of one of them. On a second level, the poem gives some explanations to the questions it poses: "All the lonely people, where do they all come from? All the lonely people, where do they all belong?"

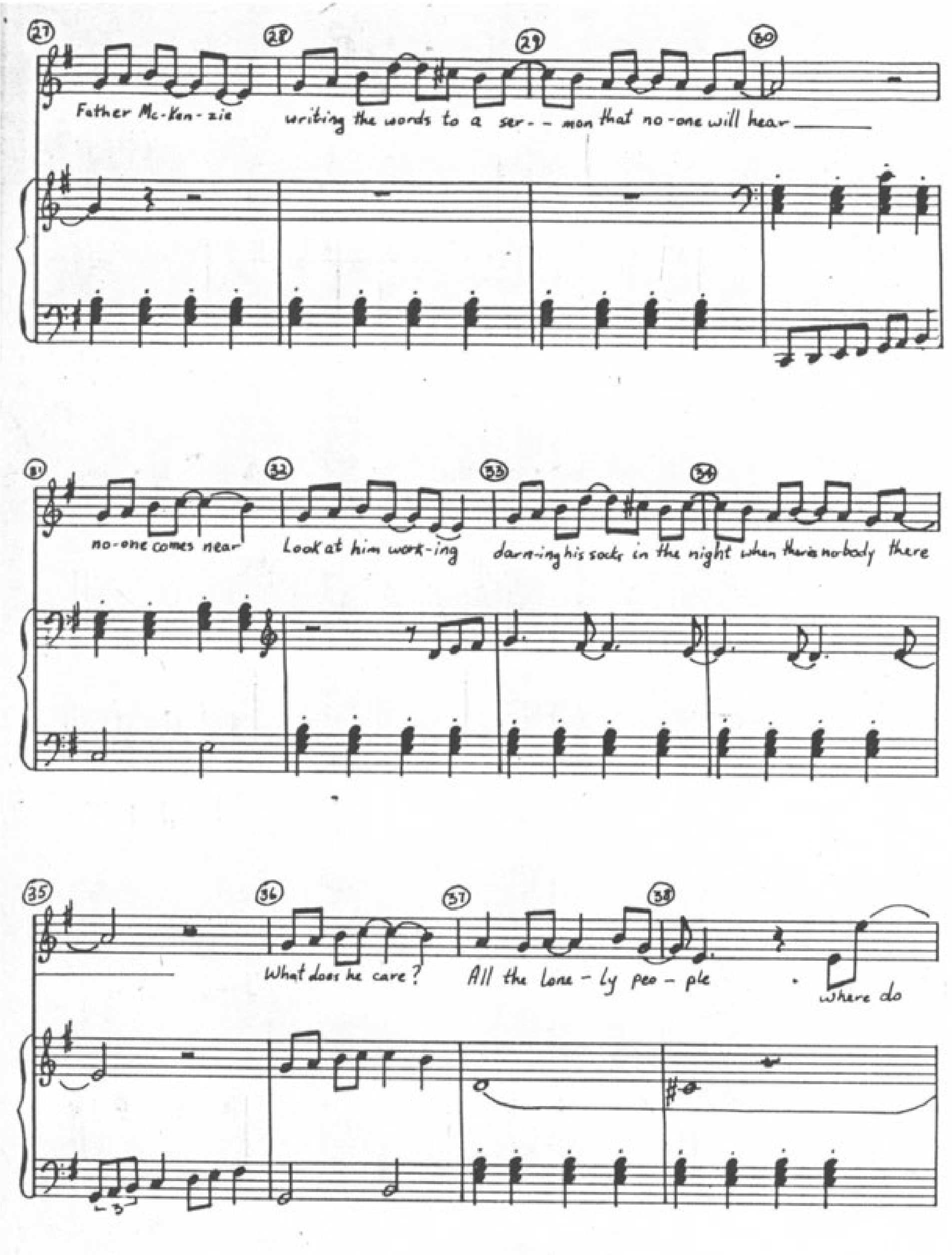
The poem suggests that loneliness stems, at least in part, from a rejection of life (as exemplified by Father McKenzie's withdrawal from normal relationships through marriage), as well as through inabilities to communicate. Other causes cited are the facades and images that are built up by people to avoid having to reveal their basic personalities. Eleanor Rigby hides not only behind the "face that she keeps in a jar by the door," but also behind the walls of her house, where she sits peering out at a world in which she does not participate.

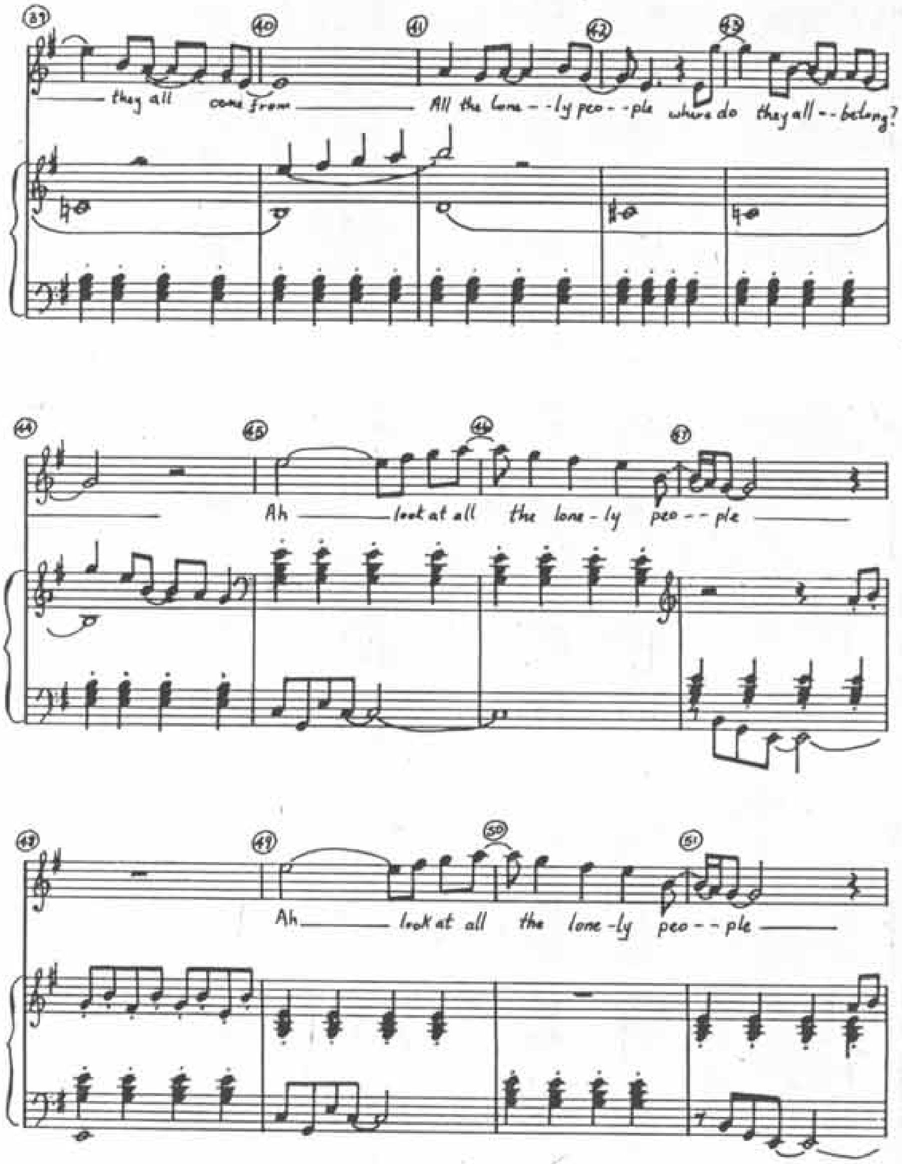
A structural analysis of this type does not tend to reveal any sudden, new, "hidden" meanings in a song or other art form. It is not meant to. Its purpose is to make overt the methods by which structuring was manipulated by the artist in order to give an audience their initial impressionistic interpretation. It supplies a method by which one may objectively evaluate different interpretations of art forms and, when combined with the idea of dynamic tension, it offers an objective method for evaluating art forms by identifying how successfully the artist has conveyed his message by establishing, manipulating, and deviating from patterns.

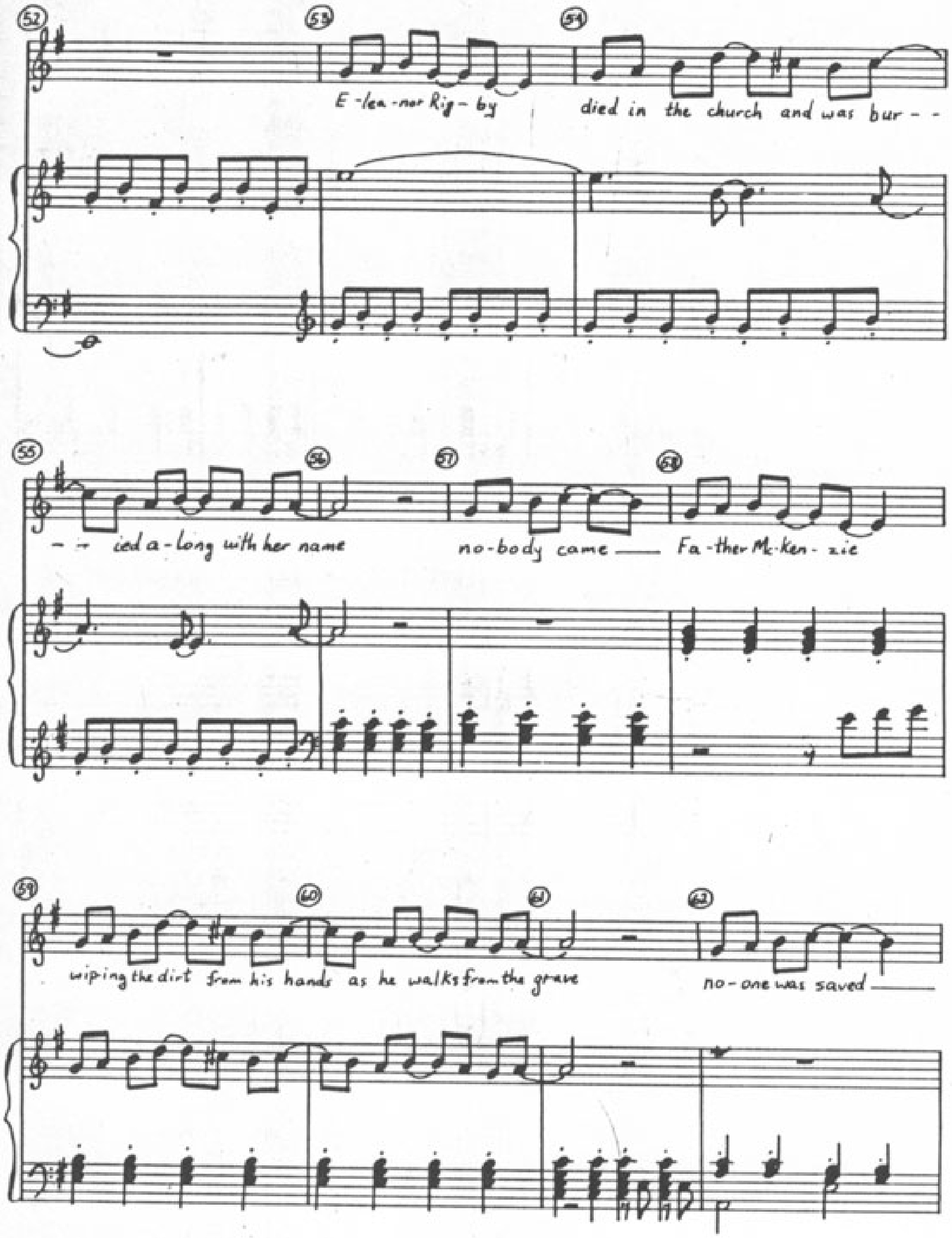
Appendix

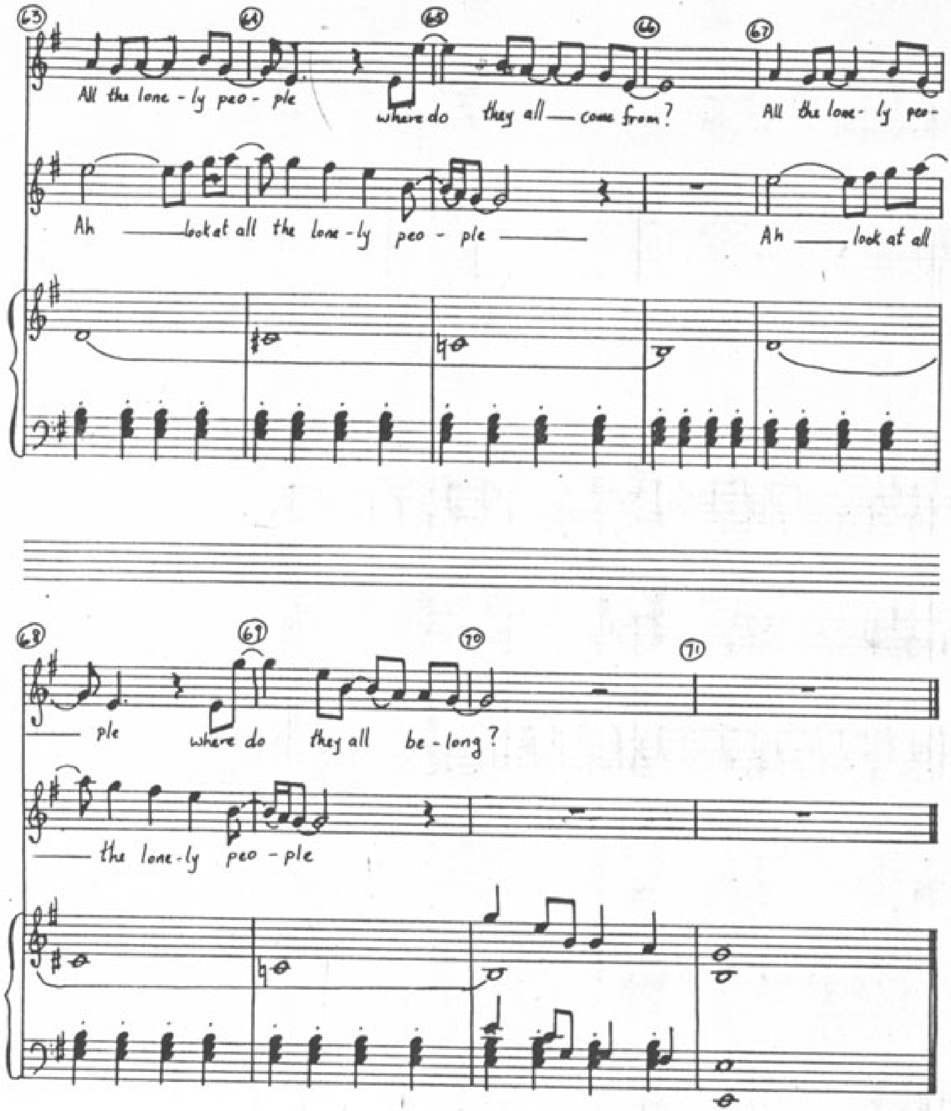

①
②
③
④
Ah, —— look at all the lone-ly peo- - ple! ——
⑤
⑥
⑦
⑧
Ah, —— look at all the lone-ly peo- - ple! ——
⑨
⑩
⑪
⑫
E-lea-nor Rig-by —— picks up the rice in the church where a wed-ding has been! ——


13 14 15 16
lives in a dream — waits at the win-dow wear-ing the face that she keeps in a jar by the door —
17 18 19 20 21
Who is it for? — All the lone-ly peo-ple Where do they all come from?
22 23 24 25 26
All the lone-ly peo-ple where do they all be-long?


Father Mc-Ken-zie writing the words to a ser- - mon that no-one will hear
no-one comes near Look at him work-ing darn-ing his socks in the night when there's nobody there
What does he care? All the Lone-ly peo-ple where do


they all come from
All the lone--ly peo--ple where do they all--belong?
Ah look at all the lone-ly peo--ple
Ah look at all the lone-ly peo--ple


E-lea-nor Rig-by
died in the church and was bur--
--ied a-long with her name
no-body came
Fa-ther Mc-Ken-zie
wip-ing the dirt from his hands as he walks from the grave
no-one was saved


63
64
65
66
67
All the lone - ly peo - ple
where do they all — come from?
All the lone - ly peo -
Ah — look at all the lone - ly peo - ple —
Ah — look at all
68
69
70
71
— ple where do they all be - long?
— the lone - ly peo - ple

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NOTES

This essay is a revised version of one begun in a seminar on the ethnographic, linguistic, and stylistic analyses of texts conducted by Professor Sally McLendon at the Graduate Center of CUNY. I am indebted to her for the generous assistance she has given me in preparing this manuscript.

1. During the history of any art form, the rules may vary drastically through time. Music, like language, changes through time; acceptable musical forms at one point in time may not be acceptable at another. What was harmonically unacceptable to Bach was commonplace to Stravinsky. Any analysis of a piece of music, therefore, must take into account the musical conventions of the period in which the music was composed.

In addition, access to historical data in a particular art may be helpful in identifying domains. For example, if composers today do not exploit the potential for harmonic variation that musical forms provide, it would nevertheless be possible to recognize the potential for such variation by examining the changes that have taken place in the last several decades.

2. Likewise, directions as to the staging of a performance, specified by the author, must be considered in both verbal and musical performances. In plays, textual material that indicates where performers are to stand or move may constitute foregrounding. Other staging devices such as lighting, type of sets, and so on, would also have to be considered in the structural analysis of a play.

3. It is important to note at this point that there is a distinction to be made (which has been hinted at) between the instructions given by the author and those deleted or added by the interpreters; between the structure of the work as created by its author and as performed by himself or others. All performing arts may also be structurally analyzed in terms of a specific performance. It is therefore important to separate the author's specifications from those of the interpreter.

4. The music was transcribed from the recording *Revolver* with the very great assistance of Mona Reich.

5. Henceforth, the numbers in brackets refer to the line of the text as it appears in Figure 3. Numbers in slashes / / refer to the number of the bar in the transcription that appears in the Appendix.

6. Sequences of structures that are constantly shortening seem to build tension in other art forms as well. Alfred Hitchcock, in his classic film *Psycho,* uses photographic shots of decreasing length (that is, the length of time between the points when the camera is moved to another angle is constantly growing shorter) to build tension.

7. The waiting done by Eleanor Rigby by the window is sedentary, and not the agitated type of waiting done by someone like Elektra in Richard Strauss' opera of the same name. In the opera, Elektra paces "like a caged animal" while waiting for the screams that will indicate Clytemnestra's death. This type of waiting is accompanied by rapid, undulating melodies in the orchestra.

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