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The “Ghost Melody” as Acousmatic Voice. Music and Effect from Melodrama to Cinema

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<p>Resumen</p> <p>Anche se nel famoso libro di Peter Brooks (<i>The Melodramatic Imagination</i>, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976; ristampato nel 1995) si parla solo di passaggio e in modo alquanto impreciso di musica, sono numerosi gli studi musicologici che negli ultimi vent’anni si sono ad esso richiamati per attirare l’attenzione sull’importanza del <i>mélodrame</i> nel teatro (musicale e non) ottocentesco. Il mio articolo, all’interno di questo quadro, cercherà di esaminare la presenza della musica di scena nel <i>mélodrame</i> come una voce spesso invisibile, ma drammaturgicamente e narrativamente attiva. Il caso di studio prescelto riguarda un <i>mélodrame</i> francese (<i>Les frères corses</i>, 1850) che ebbe un enorme successo sulle scene anglosassoni e la cui “ghost melody” può essere considerata una tipica voce “melodrammatica”.</p>	<p>Abstract</p> <p>Peter Brooks in his famous book <i>The Melodramatic Imagination</i> (1976, reprinted in 1995) refers to music in a vague way. However, in the last twenty years have appeared numerous musicological studies about this topic, which indicate the importance of melodrama in the nineteenth century theater (not only musical). Within this framework, this article surveys the presence of melodrama’s incidental music as a voice often invisible, but dramaturgically and narratively active. The case study regards a French melodrama (<i>Les frères corses</i>, 1850) which was a huge success in the Anglo-Saxon stages and whose “ghost melody” can be considered a typical melodramatic voice.</p>
<p>Palabras clave</p> <p>voce dissociata, <i>mélodrame</i>, musica del pre-cinema</p>	<p>Keywords</p> <p>Dissociated voice, melodrama, proto-film music</p>
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The “Ghost Melody” as Acousmatic Voice. Music and Effect from Melodrama to Cinema¹

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Studies on “voice” (the quotation marks are necessary because of the multi-faceted nature of the term) have advanced in such a way in the last thirty years that it would be impossible to succinctly describe the ‘state of the art’. In the following pages I will focus on three main critical trends that I will apply to a specific case study: (1) the voice as “narrative instance” following the theoretical and analytical framework proposed by Gérard Genette (1980 [1972]); (2) the voice as “pulsional object” in the Lacanian perspective outlined by Michel Poizat (1992 [1986]); and (3) the voice as “dissociated voice” according to Steve Connor (2000). These references are to be ascribed within a cross-sectional and general methodology, but in this paper I will be focusing on French musical dramaturgy from the nineteenth century, a period that witnessed the emergence of a genuine aesthetic of voice detached from body. Like Connor, Serge Zenkine addresses this issue by using the concept of “ventriloquia”, in a broader sense, to designate “un certain art de produire des voix déplacées” (Zenkine, 2001: 358).

The case study that I will examine is *Les frères corses*, a “drame fantastique” based on the novel of the same name by Alexandre Dumas *père*, represented at the Théâtre-Historique in Paris on July 10th, 1850. It is in many ways ascribable to the tradition of *mélodrame*. The strong use of music as dramatic device has led many scholars to consider the “melodrama as proto-film music”. As pointed out by Jacqueline Waeber,

When dealing with the history of film music, scholars rarely miss an opportunity to remind us that the musical practices of nineteenth-century opera and melodrama were already ‘cinematic’, and thus impacted on the development of film music (Waeber 2011: 217).

In this context — that of melodrama as archeology of cinema — I would like to mention another foundational text that has delved into the acousmatic voice and the mismatch between voice and body: *La voix au cinéma* (Michel Chion 1999 [1982]).

¹ My thanks to Christine Evans-Millars and Úrsula San Cristóbal for reading and improving this paper.

The music of Alphonse Varney for *Les frères corses*

To address the *mélodrame* from the point of view of music might seem a hazardous, if not somewhat forced, aim. In the first edition of *Les frères corses* (Grangé and Montepin 1850), the composer's name is not even mentioned. Alphonse Varney (1811-1879) — this is his name — composed incidental music for various plays represented at the Théâtre-Historique, where he was the conductor. Among other pieces, he composed the music for *Le chevalier de Maison-Rouge* that Verdi saw in Paris in 1847 and which I analyzed in a recent study (Sala 2013). Unfortunately, as often happens in these cases (the nineteenth century incidental music, closely linked to performance, has survived only in small part), I am aware that just one piece of the original score composed by Varney remains today: the “mélodie de l'esprit”, which was published in a piano reduction and that I will examine later in this text (to put it in cinematographic terms, it shall be the main theme of the show). Despite its ephemeral nature linked to live performance, Varney's music is key in achieving dramatic effect in *Les frères corses*. Moreover, I think it would be almost impossible to really understand this piece without referring to Varney. In the words of Michael Pisani:

At a time when the study of nineteenth-century theatre largely meant drama as literature, the role of music could be marginalized, even ignored. This is no longer the case now that drama is more often analyzed as a theatrical process, and the “mechanics” of production, including music, loom as important as dialogue, acting style, and scenic design (Pisani 2004: 70).

As mentioned above, *Les frères corses* is a theatrical adaptation of the novel by Dumas *père*, published in 1844. Although the plot is well known, it is worthwhile to summarize it briefly. Louis and Lucien (renamed Fabien in the play) de Franchi are twin brothers linked by a deep and somewhat morbid relationship. Despite their opposite characters (Louis, a melancholic scholar and “partisan des réformes françaises”, went to Paris to become a lawyer, while Lucien / Fabien, proud and traditionalist, remained in Corsica with his widowed mother, Savilia de Franchi), the two brothers communicate with each other by distance in a telepathic way. As told by the Lucien himself, he and Louis were siamese twins and

il a fallu un coup de scalpel pour nous séparer; ce qui fait que, tout éloignés que nous sommes maintenant, nous avons toujours un même corps, de sorte que l'impression, soit physique, soit morale, que l'un de nous éprouve a son contrecoup sur l'autre (Dumas père 2007 [1844]: 59).²

The stage adaptation examined here is divided into three acts. The first takes place in Corsica and begins musically: Maria (a maid) “chante au filet” a Corsican song noted as an “air nouveau de M. Varney” that creates the *couleur locale* in which the act is taken place.³ The climactic scene is the final one in which, after several warnings, Louis’ ghost appears to Fabien:

FABIEN (*Il reste en chemise et s’assied à la table à droite, écrivant*)

“Mon frère, mon cher Louis, si cette lettre te trouve vivant encore, écris-moi à l’instant même deux mots pour me rassurer... J’ai eu un avertissement terrible, écris-moi! écris-moi!...”

(*Il plie sa lettre et la cache, en même temps paraît Louis de Franchi, en chemise comme son frère, mais avec une tache de sang à la poitrine*)

LOUIS (*poussant un soupir*) Ah!

FABIEN (*se retournant*) Mon frère... mort!

SAVILIA (*apparaissant sur le seuil de la porte, à gauche*) Qui a dit mort?...

LOUIS (*le doigt sur sa bouche et à Fabien*) Silence! Regarde!

(*Il marche à reculons, passe à travers la muraille et disparaît; au même moment la toile du fond se lève, on voit une clairière de la forêt de Fontainebleau; d’un côté est un jeune homme qui essuie son épée et de l’autre Louis de Franchi, couché entre deux témoins qui lui portent secours*) (Grangé and Montépin 1850: 11).⁴

Although the text does not make any mention of music, it is clear that this scene is inconceivable without orchestral accompaniment: precisely here is where the “mélodie de l’esprit” appears for the first time. It is Louis’ “voice” that tells Fabien (though telepathically) that he has been killed in a duel.

The second act opens with an unexpected flashback coinciding with a radical change of space and atmosphere. The curtain opens to show “la galerie entre le foyer et les loges” of the Opera during “une nuit du bal masqué” (once again the act begins with music: “Pendant tout le tableau on entend jouer au fond les quadrilles du bal”). We move then from Corsica to Paris (we are in the midst of the typical Parisian carnival) and back to the same time span of the first act, but following Louis’ life. This flashback is a type of narrative device that Genette calls “internal homodiegetic analepsis” because its temporal field coincides perfectly with that of the first story

² These words by Lucien are found almost identical in the *pièce* (act I, scene 8).

³ Act I, scene 1.

⁴ Act I, scene 17.

(Genette 1980 [1972]: 51). The act will finish in the same point of the first (as if to mirror it), with the death in duel of Louis: Fabien's vision was thus not a mere hallucination. Now we are sure: Louis was really killed in a duel. If at the end of the first act we saw Fabien in his room in the foreground, and Louis shot to death, like a kind of "vision" in the background of the scene, now the positions are reversed: Fabien and Servilia are the ghosts that appear on the background, while Louis is dying before our eyes. When the two witnesses approach a dying Louis lying on the ground and ask him if he wants to leave a message to his family, he replies:

LOUIS C'est inutile; elle saura tout.

MONTGIRON Quand?

LOUIS Ce soir!

MONTGIRON Et qui le lui apprendra?

LOUIS Moi!

(Il retombe évanoui. Étonnement général. Pendant ces derniers mots, le fond du théâtre s'est ouvert lentement. On voit la chambre du premier acte, l'horloge marquant neuf heures dix minutes; madame de Franchi sur le seuil, et Fabien regardant dans la position exacte qu'ils occupaient tous deux)

FABIEN *(à sa mère qu'il fait mettre à genoux)* Priez pour Louis, ma mère, moi je vais le venger!

(Le rideau baisse) (Grangé and Montépin 1850: 21)

In the third act Fabien's revenge takes place. It is interesting to note that, like in the previous acts, this one also opens with music: a song that a woodcutter sings while working in the Fontainebleau forest (the model is the gravedigger's song in the last act of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*).⁵ We are in fact at the same place where Louis was killed and where Fabien will kill Château-Renaud (this is the name of his brother's murderer). The last act ends with a visionary *tableau*. After Fabien has fulfilled his revenge and the body of Château-Renaud lies in the same place where Louis' body laid, we witness of the last telepathic contact between the two brothers:

FABIEN *(s'éloignant)* Ma mère, je vous ai tenu parole! Louis! Louis!... Je puis le pleurer maintenant!

(Il fond en larmes dans les bras d'Alfred)

SCÈNE VIII

LES MÊMES, LOUIS

LOUIS *(apparaissant et posant sa main sur l'épaule de Fabien)* Eh! pourquoi me pleurer, frère? Est-ce que nous ne nous reverrons pas là haut?

⁵ It is not a coincidence that Shakespeare's *Hamlet* was adapted for the Théâtre-Historique (premiere: 15 December 1847).

(*Le rideau baisse*) (Grangé and Montépin 1850: 26)

I think this quick summary draws attention to the importance of the dramaturgy of “the double” or *split personality* in this “drame fantastique”. The presence of the alienated voice is a paranormal but also psychological phenomenon: just think of “disembodied voices” that characterize opera mad scenes. Our main direction goes from *mélodrame* to the cinema, but it cannot avoid passing through the Italian opera (especially through Bellini and Donizetti’s mad scenes). For example, the entrance of Imogene, Lucia and Elvira in these operas: Bellini’s *Il pirata* (1827), Donizetti’s *Lucia di Lammermoor* (1835) and Bellini’s *I Puritani* (1835):

The melody in F minor played by the *cor anglais* cues Imogene’s entrance and serves as an “aria without words”, according to Friedrich Lippmann’s description⁶ but corresponds to a mysterious voice that Imogene translates in a pantomime, during which “she comes forward with slow steps, looking around in bewilderment; it seems she is searching for something in the sky above”, and so on.⁷ A voiceless body hearing a disembodied voice. Lucia, too, appears in pursuit of a voice [a mysterious sound played by the flute solo]: “Il dolce suono / mi colpì di sua voce!”... And Elvira in *I puritani*, too, sings: “Qui la voce sua soave”... [Her scene and aria begins with a acousmatic melody] sung off stage: “Ah, rendetemi la speme / o lasciatemi morir!” From the wings these words anticipate their refrain-like recurrence throughout the cantabile: Elvira’s voice pursues another voice (Sala 1994: 29).

Returning to *Les frères corses*, the two brothers, viscerally bound yet so different (almost antagonists), were played by the same actor (in Paris by Charles Fechter). So they had — literally — the *same voice*. The published text of the *pièce* shows, in this respect, an interesting “Notes des auteurs”:

L’acteur chargé, en province, des deux rôles de Fabien et de Louis devra s’efforcer de donner au rôle de Fabien un caractère d’âpreté sauvage et à celui de Louis une teinte mélancolique; double physionomie que M. Fechter a su imprimer à ces rôles avec tant de bonheur (Grangé and Montépin 1850: 26).

In short, the effect which the actor must produce in the audience is the “double physionomie”, that is, diversity within the identity. Although opposed to each other in character and cultural choices (as much “civilized” is Louis as “wild” is Fabien), the brothers (who were born siamese twins) are irresistibly attracted. In the course of the plot, the magnetic fluid that unites them is musically

⁶ Adamo and Lippmann (1981: 400).

⁷ This stage direction does not appear in the libretto by Felice Romani but in Bellini’s autograph score.

expressed through the “*mélodie de l’esprit*”. The latter is a sort of soundtrack of the famous and typically “melodramatic” *voix du sang*.

From the “*mélodie de l’esprit*” to “ghost melody”

Les frères corses was honored with a favorable review by Gérard de Nerval, which was published in the newspaper *La Presse* on August 12th 1850. It begins by opposing the traditional *merveilleux* and the modern *fantastique* (*Les frères corses* belongs to the later) in a radical way: “Jamais le drame fantastique n’avait encore été traité en France de la façon selon laquelle l’entendent les allemands. – Nous confondons presque toujours le fantastique avec le merveilleux”. Nerval recalls, in a very effective way, the effect of the final *tableau* in the first act. Fabien has just finished writing the letter when his brother's ghost appears to him:

Alors on voit monter jusqu’au plafond une brume épaisse, qui bientôt s’éclaircit et laisse voir des formes indecises; – elle se fond bientôt comme les brouillards sous les rayons du jour, et l’on aperçoit au fond du théâtre un carrefour de la forêt de Fontainebleau. La neige couvre les rochers et poudre les arbres. Une longue avenue, où les troncs des tilleuls jettent d’informes silhouettes sur le tapis blanc de la neige de la terre, se perd au fond de l’horizon. Deux hommes immobiles sont debout d’un côté; de l’autre, un homme soutient dans ses bras un autre jeune homme, frappé à mort. – C’est un duel et la victime est Louis de Franchi. La toile baisse sur ce tableau (Nerval 1850).

The specular retake of this same scene at the end of the second act is well commented by Nerval, highlighting its originality:

La décoration qui termine le premier acte reparaît ici mais tournée dans le sens inverse et l’on entrevoit au fond la chambre même de la maison, où Fabien voit à travers une hallucination providentielle les causes et la catastrophe du duel de son frère. Rien n’est plus satisfaisant et plus neuf au théâtre que cet intermède mystique où, comme Hamlet, Fabien regarde *par les yeux de l’âme* (Nerval 1850).

Not only the eyes are important, but also the *ears of the soul*, because in these two parallel scenes we hear the “*mélodie de l’esprit*”, which will then be echoed at the end of the drama. The fact that Nerval does not mention the music in his review, remember music’s ephemeral nature in *mélodrame*. As we can read in an article published in 1834, anticipating a widespread idea in the

critical writings on film music: “Depuis plus de trente ans que la musique de mélodrame est connue en France, elle a été entendue tous les jours, mais elle a été très peu écoutée” (Anon. 1834). It is apparent then that, for today’s scholars, music of *mélodrames* is a “lost object” that should be reconstructed.

Despite Nerval’s own appreciation of the piece, *Les frères corses* only obtained a *succès d’estime* rather than a *succès fou*. However, it is very significant that the “mélodie de l’esprit” composed by Alphonse Varney was published in Paris in a piano reduction (Varney 1850)⁸, the full transcription thereof is available in Appendix 1. Before analyzing the piece, it is worth highlighting its wide reception. In fact, *Les frères corses*, as it often happened to French *mélodrames*, soon crossed the English Channel and the Atlantic Ocean, enjoying a huge success in the English-speaking world. In London, Dion Boucicault’s adaptation of *The Corsican Brothers* premiered on February 24th, 1852 at the Princess’ Theatre with Charles Kean in the role of the twins. In New York, the same drama was staged on April 21th, 1852 at the Bowery Theatre with Edward Eddy in the main role. It is interesting to note that a review published a few days after the London *premiere*, referred to the music that accompanies Louis’ appearance at the end of the first act, as following:

Nothing can exceed the art with which this is managed; with ghostly terror, heightened by low tremolos of the violins, and the dim light upon the stage, the audience, breath-suspended, watches the slow apparition, and the vision of the duel which succeeds: a scenic effect more real and terrible than anything I remember (Lewes 1852 cited in Smith 1976, 143).

The sound effect of *pianissimo* tremolo in the violins is inseparable from the visual effect of the dimming of the lights upon the stage, and both music and lights are essential to create the scenic effect of this *tableau*. In fact, I think it is necessary to point out something never taken into due consideration up to now: the music used in London for this scene is the same “mélodie de l’esprit” that Alphonse Varney had composed for the Paris’ *mise en scène*.

David Mayer was the first to draw attention on *The Corsican Brothers*’ “ghost melody”, but he erroneously attributed it to the Princess’ Theatre musical director, Richard Hughes (Mayer 1976: 120). His article is still very important for two reasons; on the one hand, he transcribed the “ghost melody’s” melodic line that allows us to state with certainty that it is precisely Varney’s “mélodie de l’esprit” despite the change of meter from 2/4 to 4/4. On the other hand, he documented the

⁸A copy of this rare pamphlet is preserved in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département de la musique, A. 48935 (Fonds du Conservatoire).

persistence of this song throughout the subsequent stages of the drama: the “ghost melody” will be part of *The Corsican Brothers’* incidental music until the 1920s.⁹ Therefore, Norman O’Neill’s reference to the melody in his interesting *Music to Stage Plays* of 1911 comes with no surprise.

The music to the latter [*The Corsican Brothers*] has become almost traditional with the pit and gallery, and I have heard them sing the famous ghost theme with the orchestra. This is not a great melody, and has no particular musical value, but it certainly fits the situation. You will no doubt remember the ghost of one brother appears to another. The lights go down, the music starts in true melodramatic fashion, but still it holds the audience (O’Neill 1945 [1911]: 128).

If we consider the *mélodrame* (music included) as one of the factors behind modern popular culture, I believe it is essential to consider it as a largely international phenomenon, and therefore to analyze it with an intercultural approach. The popularization of the “ghost melody” is revealing in this regard, but it is not the only case. For example, in the English version of *La Pie voleuse* — one of the most popular French *mélodrames* (Paris, Théâtre de la Porte Saint-Martin, 29 April 1815), from which Rossini’s *La gazza ladra* (1817) would have been based on — a piece of music composed by Alexandre Piccini is preserved for the climactic scene of the *pièce* (the one where Annette, persecuted innocent, is conducted to the scaffold).¹⁰ This funeral march was performed in the same scene in London, where the “melo-drama” was staged with the title *The Magpie or the Maid?* at Covent Garden on 15 September, 1815. The music for the English version is composed by Henry Bishop (“director of the music to the Theatre Royal Covent Garden”) and is also published in a piano reduction, but it is no coincidence that on the title page of this edition we read: “The whole of the music, with the exception of one air, composed and arranged for the pianoforte by Sir Henry R. Bishop” (1815). Inside the score, the funeral march (the only “air” not composed by Bishop) is correctly indicated as by A. Piccini (Bishop 1816: 23).

Returning to *The Corsican Brothers*, it must be said that the “ghost melody” was published in London; on the title page of the illustrated edition is printed the famous *tableau* that closes the play’s first act (Stoepel 1852). It is a *tableau* so inextricably linked to Alphonse Varney piece that the title page image is worth reproducing in the Appendix 2. If the information indicated on the title page of this edition (O’Neil 1945 [1911]: 128) is accurate, the music for *The Corsican Brothers* was not arranged by Robert Hughes (as suggested by David Mayer), but by Robert Stoepel (1821-

⁹ As documented by David Mayer, both Charles Fechter’s production (the same actor who played the roles of Fabien and Louis in Paris) in 1866, and Henry Irving’s production in 1880 preserve the original “ghost melody” in the incidental music.

¹⁰ I analyzed Alexandre Piccini’s score of *La pie voleuse* in Sala (1995).

1887), a composer who had worked at Théâtre-Historique of Paris, where he collaborated with Varney and Sylvain Mangeant in the realization of the incidental music of Alexandre Dumas' *Monte-Cristo* (1848).¹¹ It is not unlikely that Stoepel played an important role in the introduction of the "ghost melody" in London.

We must now try to piece together what we have considered separately (recompose the synesthesia): the music of Appendix 1 and the image of Appendix 2. Looking carefully at the latter, it is clear that the first appearance of Louis' ghost occurs at the end of the first act. Louis rises from under the stage through the "Corsican trap" (as it was called), sighs and touches his brother's shoulder who has just finished writing his letter. Fabien turns and exclaims: "Mon frère ... mort." At this point Savilia (the widow mother of the two brothers) also enters and Louis' ghost whispers some words to his brother (with an accompanying gesture): "Silence! Regarde!" David Mayer comments on the scene:

Fabien is startled by the ghost who then gestures toward the upstage wall and abruptly vanishes down another trap. The wall, a gauze, becomes transparent to reveal a tableau of Louis' death in Forest of Fontainebleau. The curtain slowly falls (Mayer 1976: 120).

The music accompanying the *tableau*-vision that takes place behind "a gauze" made transparent by the illumination changes. The "ghost melody" is the voice of silence invoked by Louis and is what makes the tableau patent. As shown in Appendix 1, the melody is accompanied by a "tremolo dolce" that creates a halo in correspondence with the gauze behind which the scene takes place. I'm referring to the first appearances of the song (in C major) because I think the varied reprise of the melody in G major may be (perhaps) what accompanied the last *tableau* at the end of the third act. So the melody in C major would be the version of the "ghost melody" as presented at the end of the first two acts. We may also speculate, as Norman O'Neill did, how a melody so devoid of musical value has provoked such a strong dramatic effect but since it certainly fits the situation we do not have to wonder why.

One of the key elements is the combination of sweet and "religious" tone music (in major mode) with a terrible scene. The tremolo that is usually combined in melodramatic rhetoric with situations such as "agitato" is used here in an unwind agogic context and as an *anticlimax*. Even the diminished seventh chord (bars 17-18), another "melodramatic" topic, which is inserted as a

¹¹ The *Monte Cristo* premiere that Alexandre Dumas *père* adapted for the stage by dividing it in two evenings in collaboration with Auguste Maquet, took place at the Paris Théâtre-Historique on the 3rd and 4th of February 1848. I analyzed the incidental music for this *pièce* in Sala (2013).

diversion by way of the interrupted cadence, has nothing “rough” to it but rather serves to create an effect of “mysterious” parentheses before the final clause. In a recent article, Michael Pisani speaks of this “mysterious” effect as a kind of “sweetness of memory” (Pisani 2012: 37). In this important article — which I only became aware of only once I had already finished my research — we learn that the original version of “ghost melody” was in B major, the same unusual key of the reminiscence motif of Dumas *filis’ Dame aux camélias* (1852), composed by Édouard Montaubry to accompany Marguerite Gautier’s death.¹²

The other aspect that should be emphasized is the *cantability*: we listen to a melody designed to be in tune with an unspoken or unspeakable text. It seems like an acousmatic song *without words*: not by chance it starts when Louis (“le doigt sur sa bouche”) tells Fabien to be quiet. In short, it becomes a voice-object in the sense pointed by Poizat:

The voice as object is thus constructed both as lost object and as first object of jouissance. It is thus not surprising that a quest for the object is set in motion, a search for lost phonic materiality, now dissolved behind signification (Poizat 1992 [1986]: 103).

At the time of final separation, the brothers also seem to find each other. In the final scene, when Fabien can finally give free rein to his grief, the Louis’ ghost appears to him for the last time and says, “Eh! pourquoi me pleurer, frère? Est-ce que nous ne nous reverrons pas là haut?”. And at this point, the “ghost melody” resonates for the last time.

The best way not to lose an object is to identify with it, to make oneself that object. To identify with the lost vocal object is to become loss oneself, [...] to *be* silence; in other words, to die (Poizat 1992 [1986]: 104).

Stage to Screen

The classic study by Nicholas A. Vardac (*Stage to Screen: Theatrical Origins of Early Film: David Garrick to D.W. Griffith*) published in 1949, has recently been the subject of criticism. Vardac’s thesis that cinema should be considered “as the ultimate aesthetic expression of a cycle of realistic-pictorial theatrical production which had been a part of the rebirth of the objective spirit in the middle of the eighteenth century” (Vardac 1987 [1949]: XVIII) appears today too teleological

¹² I analyzed Montaubry’s incidental music for Dumas *filis’ La dame aux camélias* in Sala (2013). It should be mentioned that Armand Duval’s role was created in Paris by the same actor (Charles Fechter) that had played the twins in *Les Frères corses*.

and especially confusing in the way it uses the term “realism”. An interesting discussion of this topic can be found in Ben Singer’s book *Melodrama and Modernity*, which moves the focus from the “pictorial realism” to what he calls the “absorptive realism”,

a mode of “illusionism” in which the spectator experiences a powerful sense of absorption in the diegesis. [...] Absorptive realism, which one might also call diegetic illusionism, is what typically has been regarded as the goal of effective commercial filmmaking. [...] Vardac argued that “pictorial realism” was the ultimate goal of stage melodrama. It is not clear, however, what he meant by this. [...] Given Vardac’s argument that movies beat melodrama at its own game, and given the pervasive critical emphasis on cinema’s absorptive powers, I am inclined to think Vardac’s pictorial realism was essentially equivalent to absorptive realism (Singer 2001: 177).¹³

However, It is true that — with all the clarifications and corrections — the intertextual and intermedial approach to the study of the origins of cinema still offers many possibilities of application and development, and that the music should be considered a key (and an underestimated) element in this historical and theoretical framework.

If we take the image in Appendix 2 it is difficult not to associate the scene with a cinematic situation *ante litteram*. The characters stunned and immersed into the darkness on the front are like moviegoers and the *tableau* that takes place on the background (behind the enlightened theatrical gauze) is like a “movie screen”. The music of Appendix 1 could then be interpreted as the agent of an illusion-immersion that is both theatrical and cinematographical. Going back to Michael Pisani’s article, I agree with him when he points out that the incidental music for the theater can often be considered as a “prehistory of film music” (Pisani 2012: 31). As for *The Corsican Brothers*, Pisani offers a suggestive parallel that it is worth mentioning.

The tremolo of the ghost melody increased dramatic tension and even raised the level of suspense. (For a recent analogy, think of the moment near the climax of Hitchcock’s *Vertigo*, while Scotty waits for the transformed Judy to appear as the dead Madeleine, and the strings played a hushed – *sul ponticello* – tremolo version of his longing motive. The sense of combined fear and anticipation is eerily similar) (Pisani 2012: 37).

We could also say that “ghost melody” tremolo prefigures the typical atmosphere that will be the “voice” of electronic instruments such as the Theremin and the Ondes Martenot, which in cinema is evocative of the realm of the unconscious and the supernatural: “the Theremin’s and the Ondes

¹³ For another interesting critique to Vardac’s book, see Brewster and Jacobs (1997).

Martenot's qualities of portamento and vibrato and their timbral resemblance to the human voice were crucial for associating them with spectral, extraterrestrial and disturbing anthropomorphic presences in films" (Corbella and Windisch 2013: 65). In addition to these "structural" similarities, one must also be aware of the genealogical itineraries of a historical kind, in which it is possible to document the relationship of continuity between both theatrical and cinematic domains, starting from the musical point of view. Take for example the film *The Corsican Brothers* (1898), one of the "trick films" directed by George Albert Smith evoking Méliès' style.

One of the twin brothers returns home from shooting in the Corsican Mountains, and is visited by the ghost of the other twin. By special photographic contrivances the ghost appears quite transparent. After indicating that he has been killed by a sword thrust, and appealing for vengeance, he disappears. A "vision" then appears showing the fatal duel in the snow. To the Corsican's amazement, the duel and the death of his brother are vividly depicted in the vision, and finally, overcome by his feelings, he falls to the floor just as their mother enters the room (Low and Manvell 1997 [1948]: 78).

The scene of the vision was realized with the special photographic contrivances of cinematic medium however it is highly probable, even if not (yet) supported by evidence, that the music used to accompany it was the "ghost melody" of the theatrical tradition.

The continuity between melodrama's incidental music and musical accompaniment for narrative silent film is in fact an element on which we should reflect more deeply, with a view both historical and theoretical. Anne Dhu Shapiro (McLucas) recalled how the actor James O'Neill — after raising the great theatrical vogue of *Monte Cristo* in 1883 — had played the role of Edmund Dantes in a silent film by Adolphe Zukor in 1912. And finishing her study, she emphasized that a certain degree of continuity should be considered for what concerns the musical accompaniment. Of course, the music of silent film consists of an uninterrupted flow that is missing in the melodrama's highly discontinuous and localized incidental music. But if we think that "the same musicians who accompanied melodrama became the suppliers of music for the silent film, it is not surprising to find some of the same conventions with some of the same names — "hurry" and "agitato", for example — in the cue sheets and piano books for films" (Dhu Sapiro 1991: 73). To the "hurry" or "agitated" musical pieces we should add the ghost melody's "mysterious tremolo". Martin Marks also highlights a similar case; that of Walter Cleveland Simon, who after being an expert author of incidental music for the theater became an important composer of film music. According to Marks, Simon's film music "reflected the practices of many anonymous theater

musicians of his day and of earlier days, whose works do not happen to survive” (Marks 1991: 97). Gillian Anderson reported several testimonies taken from various American periodicals of the years 1913-1915 which show “that many orchestras were still using the music they had used years before, for the spoken drama” (Anderson 2004: 179).

Without falling into naivety of derivative genealogies, I find it essential to note that in moving from melodrama to pantomime (two areas known to be very close to each other), and therefore from the intermittent music of the first one to the continuous music of the second one, we find that whole scores, composed in the first instance for a theatrical pantomime, were adapted for the cinema. Two examples are fundamental in this discovery: *L'enfant prodigue* and *L'histoire d'un Pierrot*. The first case is related to a pantomime with music by André Wormser (1890) that was transformed or re-mediated in a film version by Michel Carré in 1907 (with the same title and the same music). The second case pertains to a pantomime with music by Mario Costa (1893), whose film version was made in the same way in 1914 by Baldassarre Negroni. This transition from pantomime to movies has been recently studied by Carlo Piccardi in an article that remains groundbreaking (Piccardi 2008-2009). However research addressing musical dramaturgy in theatre and cinema, from an intermedia approach, is still incipient. This article aims to offer a contribution to further research in this direction.

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APPENDIX 1

Mélodie de l'esprit
jouée dans
Les Frères corses

Prière pour piano Composée par A. Varney

Moderato religioso

(p) ben sostenuto il canto

tremolo dolce

ff *pp* *ff*

rall.

Même Prière (en Sol avec une variante mélodique)

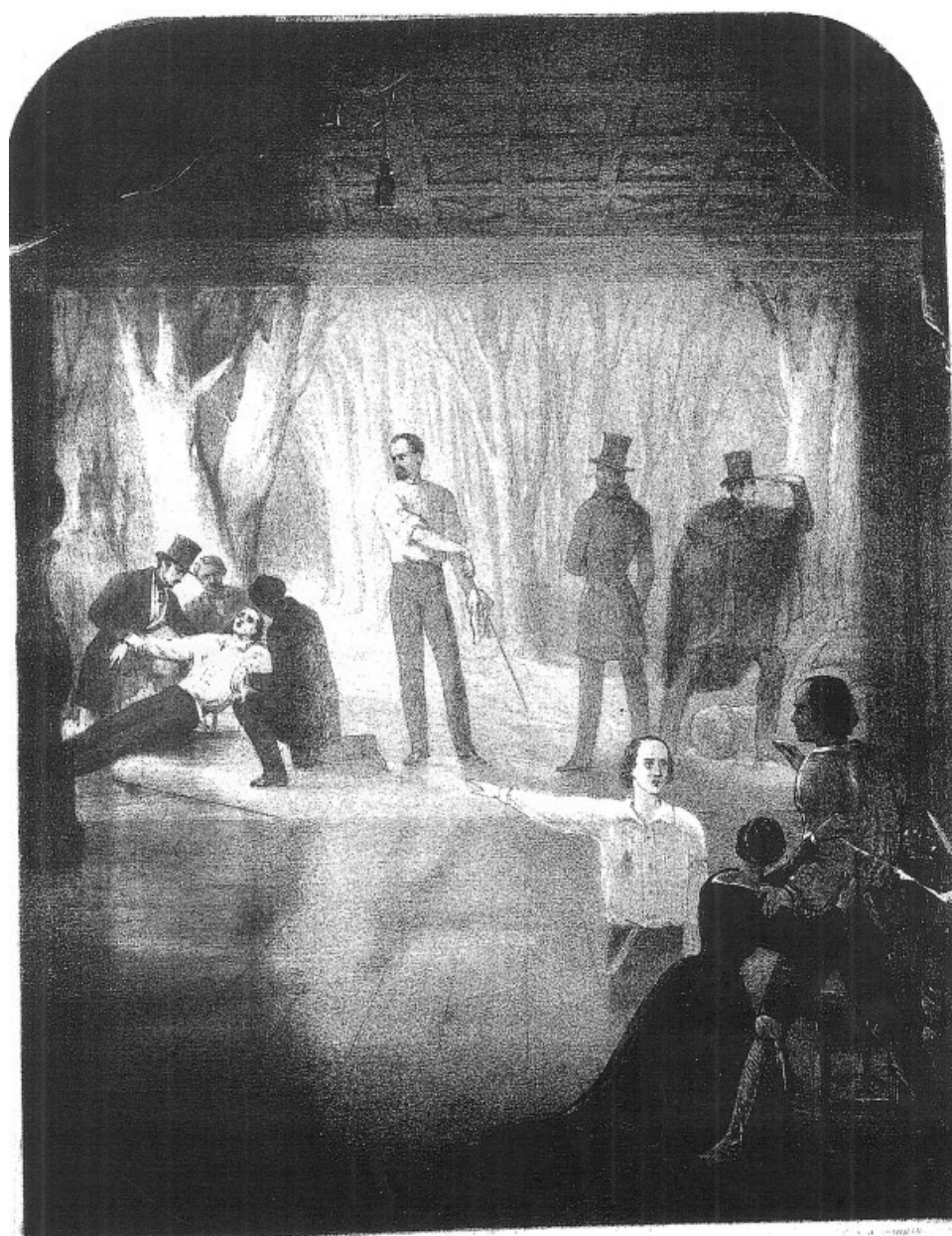
Dolce e ben legato il canto

ff

Ped.

APPENDIX 2

THE MELODY FROM
THE CORSICAN BROTHERS



COMPOSED BY
M. VARNY.

ARRANGED BY
R. STÖPEL.
DIRECTOR OF THE MUSIC AT THE PRINCESS'S THÉÂTRE

OF THE THÉÂTRE
HISTORIQUE PARIS.

PRICE. 2/3

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