

MUSIC AND GENRE IN FILM: AESTHETICS AND IDEOLOGY

by

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Abstract

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This thesis examines the multivalent relationship between film music and film genre: the ways that generic syntax and ideological structure shape the use and meaning of music within a genre, and the ways that music, in turn, shapes and complicates film genres and individual films within each genre. Detailed accounts of Melodrama, Horror, and the Western are provided, with examples drawn from (among others) *Random Harvest* (Mervyn LeRoy, 1941), *Penny Serenade* (George Stevens, 1941), *Picnic* (Joshua Logan, 1955), *White Zombie* (Edward and Victor Halperin, 1932), *I Walked With a Zombie* (Val Lewton and Jacques Tourneur, 1943), *Cannibal Holocaust* (Ruggero Deodato, 1980) *High Noon* (Fred Zinnemann, 1952), *The 3:10 to Yuma* (Delmer Daves, 1957), and *The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly* (Sergio Leone, 1966).

The first chapter, “Genre and Music,” outlines three possible interactions of film genre and film music, drawing on three basic approaches to genre in the film studies literature: interpretive, economic, and reflexive genre criticism. The interpretive approach argues that each genre has a hidden ideological value system that shapes the narratives and aesthetics of the films within that genre, with musical ramifications that will vary from genre to genre. (A Western, for instance, might use self-consciously old-fashioned music not merely to establish the setting but to establish distance between the world of the audience and the relatively

unconstrained world of the diegesis.) The economic approach shows how market forces shape the development of a genre, as when studios use the music from a successful film in the trailer for another film in the same genre. Finally, the reflexive approach accounts for the ways in which artists (and critics) self-consciously shape and react to genres, as when a composer tries to avoid the use of generic clichés when scoring a particular kind of film. The later chapters of this dissertation take a primarily interpretive approach to genre, but the economic and reflexive approaches having been laid out here as a program for future research.

The second chapter, “Music in the Melodrama: Where Words Leave Off,” argues that one of the currently dominant approaches to film music, according to which music is used to represent the fundamentally unrepresentable emotions of the characters, is in fact best suited to the scores of melodramas. This is, however, not the only thing music will do in melodramas: although it often depicts a character’s repressed desires, it also depicts the collective will of the repressive society. This chapter also attempts to clarify the nature of the genre of melodrama (which is notoriously slippery, among film genre scholars), arguing that it is precisely the systematic use of aesthetic gestures such as music to represent underlying ideological conflicts that makes a film melodramatic.

The third chapter, “Music in the Horror Film: Terror Chords and Jungle Drums,” argues that the genre of horror is undergirded by a structural opposition between some marginalized group and the dominant social order, which in the films takes the form of the conflict between the monstrous Other and the monster’s threatened victim. Each of which receives a musical illustration, leading to a contrast between the musical Other (representing, often quite explicitly, the marginalized group) and the music of normality. After developing a general model of horror scoring, this chapter attempts to demonstrate the value of genre for the understanding of specific film scores by making a special study of the Voodoo zombie films of the 1930s and 40s. Although it would be simple enough to suggest that these films are crudely racist, careful

attention to their plots and scores reveals a surprising variety of musical meanings, and gives us reason to question common-sense notions of the “appropriate” use of ethnically marked music in film.

The final chapter, “Music in the Western: The Cowboy’s Epic Situation,” advances a new definition of the Western, arguing that the genre is defined as much by an epic narrative voice (which privileges telling over showing, and makes the narrator imminent within the text) as by any subject matter or theme. This sense of epic distance is created in part through *mise-en-abyme* effects, including musical ones. In *High Noon*, for instance, a reoccurring song within the film recounts the plot of the film as it unfolds. However, there are also purely musical gestures that have the same effect: non-leitmotivic repetition of cues, the citation of specific musical styles outside of the “normal” language of film music, the use of elaborate performative musical gestures, and the use of simple and lucid musical forms. All of these call attention to the hand of the maker, and thus to the score (and the film) as a made thing.

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A General Introduction: Genre, Film Genre, and the Genre Film.

Genre

The term “genre” is used widely, and often without explanation, but like many aesthetic concepts it is surprisingly difficult to pin down. At its most basic, a genre is a subdivision of an art form according to certain shared properties. We tend to imagine that each genre consists of both a constellation of essential generic traits and a list of canonical generic texts. In theory, these aspects of genre are mutually reinforcing, the generic canon confirming the ubiquity of the traits, and the generic traits in turn confirming the centrality of the canon. In practice, matters are much hazier, and the more attention we pay to history, the more we find that our definitions of genre are contingent and intuitive. Both the boundaries of the canon and the properties deemed to be essential change over time, with traits that once seemed central to the definition of a genre become peripheral, and vice-versa. The genre of comedy takes on different shapes in the Old and New Athenian comedies, the comedy of Shakespeare, the comedy of Charlie Chaplin, and the comedy of Judd Apatow. Nevertheless, to describe these as stages in the historical development of the comedy is to assert that *something* persists throughout all of these developments that is not historically determined but arises from the nature of artistic creation, or from the human perceptual apparatus. Genre theory tends to assert that these enduring qualities are the true or essential nature of each genre.¹ If we made no claims about the essential nature of the comic, we would no longer be doing genre criticism, but something else – perhaps etymology, for we would no longer have any reason to exclude Dante's *Divina Commedia* or Balzac's *Comédie humaine*.

Any account of genre must contend with this tension between the historical and the transhistorical, and the current study tends to err on the side of the latter. Although I have attempted, at various points, to historicize my speculations (describing, for instance, the ways

¹ See Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (London: BFI, 1999), 1-21.

that the horror film changed after the collapse of the studio system, and the meaning of “cowboy music” for the record-buying public in the 1950s and 60s), for each genre my primary interest is in the ways that music interacts with a durable value system that lies at the genre's heart, and persists, if not timelessly, at least throughout the history of cinema. Rick Altman has argued that when we attempt to identify these “transhistorical” properties of genre, in fact we only identify genres as determined by our own contingent historical position.² I tend to agree. But I diverge from Altman by holding that there is still genuine value in describing these contingent generic models in detail, and working out each model's consequences for our understanding of individual texts. What this dissertation provides is thus an *experiential* account of genre, based on the following assertions:

1) As experiencing subjects, we have complicated models of genres in our heads, derived from our experience of texts and our interactions with other subjects. We bring these models to the table whenever we engage with texts, or indeed when we engage with the world.

2) These models shape our experience of individual texts to a profound degree. (One wants to say “individual texts within the genre,” but this would beg the question: the judgment that a text belongs to such-and-such a genre is in itself a consequence of the internalized model.) This is as true of texts that seem to struggle against the model as it is for those that confirm it.

3) As scholars, we gain nothing, and may lose much, by ignoring this aspect of our experience. There are some texts, at least, for which we can arrive at more interesting, nuanced, and powerfully descriptive readings by asking the questions that our internalized models of genre prompt us to ask.

In that I have eschewed audience-reception surveys in favor of a fine-grained description of my own experience of these films and their scores, this project runs the risk of slipping into solipsism, which is perhaps a risk of experiential accounts more generally. I have attempted to guard against this by buttressing my observations with the primary and secondary literature on

2 Ibid., 9.

genre and music, and with close analytical readings of the films and their scores, but the degree to which I have succeeded is ultimately for the reader to decide. The risk is somewhat amplified by the fact that, in the main body of this dissertation I largely abandon descriptions of experience in favor of assertions of fact, preferring statements like “As Robin Wood demonstrates, Brian De Palma's *Carrie* (1976) is concerned with the existential threat posed by female sexuality” to circumlocutions like “my internalized model of the genre of horror, shaped in part by the model of horror I infer from the writings of Robin Wood, prompts me to experience *Carrie* as if that film were concerned with the existential threat posed by female sexuality; furthermore, I experience this *aspect* of my own experience as though it were an immutable and obvious fact, detectable not only in my response to the film but in De Palma's initial patterning of the text.” The latter, though exhausting, is closer to what I really mean. But the primary goal of this study, which is to demonstrate the ways in which careful attention to genre can energize close readings of individual texts, is better served by the former.

Film Genres and Genre Films

Systematic theorists such as Aristotle and Northrop Frye have, at various times, attempted to construct generic frameworks that divide the entirety of existing culture into a fixed set of genres.³ Thus understood, every film would have a genre, and all films would be genre films. Writers on film genre, however, have tended to focus on genres as they arise out of practice and popular discourse, focusing on categories that have been widely used by filmmakers and filmgoers. The Western, the gangster film, the comedy, the melodrama, horror, science-fiction. . . the list is a long one, but neither endless nor exhaustive. Certain sorts of films, most notably art films and glossy prestige dramas, are almost never described in terms of genre, and

3 Aristotle, *Poetics*. Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990). For a history and bibliography of such attempts, see Altman, *Film/Genre*, 1-21.

so are conspicuously absent in the film genre literature. This study likewise focuses on the “standard” genres of melodrama, horror, and the Western. This does not mean, however, that it would be impossible to discuss music's interactions with genres that are not widely attested. The methodology of this study, in a nutshell, is to come to a provisional understanding of the structure and syntax of the genre in question; then to determine how music can, in theory and in practice, shape this structure and be shaped by it in turn; and finally to show how individual films and their music interact with this musical model of the genre. There is nothing that would prevent us from applying this approach to categories drawn from Frye's fourfold division of literary genres, or from his twelvefold division of literary modes. The results, of course, would vary, and to a certain extent might provide grounds for preferring one set of generic categories over another.

The Value of this Text for Future Research

Readers who are primarily film scholars may wish to think of this dissertation as an intervention in the current discussions of film genre. Genre criticism often fails to discuss the aesthetic properties of individual films in any kind of detail. This study attempts to correct this by focusing on a single aesthetic property of the films, demonstrating that a well-thought-out understanding of any specific genre must be reflected in, and shape our experience of, even the smallest details of individual films within that genre. This may require us to revise our understanding of certain genres, and also implies that genre itself is more dynamic and experiential than most current theories would suggest. In the current study, chapter 2, on the melodrama, does the most to show how music can help us come to terms with outstanding questions of film genre theory. I do not mean to argue that music is uniquely revealing of the ways that individual films interact with their genres. Attention to *any* aesthetic variable across multiple genres would advance the current state of genre studies. It may be, however, that music is uniquely suited to the task, due to the relatively well-established tradition of film music

studies and the uniquely robust set of tools that scholars of music have developed for carrying out close readings of this kind.

For musicologists who focus on film music, on the other hand, this project may be seen as a corrective to the current tendency towards “great works” and “great man” criticism in the film music literature. A sizable amount of current research in film music is dedicated to exposing the brilliant sonic imagination of individual composers and directors, or the innovative properties of individual scores. I am sympathetic to this project, but I feel that it cannot afford to ignore the role of genre: not only do we risk praising as innovative a scoring choice that is in fact perfectly ordinary, we also risk allowing brilliant twists on generic formulae to pass unnoticed. In the current study, Chapter 4, on the Western, does the most to demonstrate that genres offer distinct systems of musical meaning, subject to innovation, elaboration, and frustration by individual artists just like any other system. Again, this project is only one possible solution to the larger problem. Similar ends could be achieved by studies that place individual scores into precisely observed historical periods, national styles, or production contexts. (All else being equal, is there a difference between a Fox score and an MGM score?) Genre may be a particularly useful approach, however, in that the discipline of film genre studies developed in response to auteur theory, and so offers us a relatively tested and reliable set of tools for problematizing auteurist understandings of the work of art.

There has already been some research on the relationship of film music and genre, of course, which is described in greater detail in the following chapter. For students of this field, the current study has value in that it attempts to move beyond a model in which musical gestures have fixed meanings that can illustrate the generic meaning of a film, but can never challenge or alter that generic meaning (which is likewise fixed), and are never transformed in turn by their generic context. I argue instead for a fundamentally hermeneutic model, in which the film's genre shapes our experience of each musical gesture, but these musical gestures shape the overall interaction of the film text with its generic model. Eventually, the music- and genre-

inflected meaning of each individual film contributes to our internalized model of the genre, which, as suggested above, is always something of a moving target. In the current study, chapter 3, on the horror film, does the most to show that a detailed understanding of a film's genre is only a jumping-off point for our understanding of its music. A genre does not tell us music will mean in any particular film, rather, it is a way to grapple with the music's meaning. It offers no readymade answers. What it offers, at its best, is a useful set of questions.

Chapter 1. Genre and Music

As in many other aspects of contemporary motion pictures, it is not standardization as such that is objectionable here. Pictures that frankly follow an established pattern, such as 'Westerns' or gangster and horror pictures, often are in a certain way superior to pretentious grade-A films. What is objectionable is the standardized character of pictures that claim to be unique.

– Theodor Adorno and Hanns Eisler, *Composing for the Films*

Introduction

Let it be said first that there is no single fundamental or overarching relationship between film music and film genre. Each of these fields is multifaceted to an almost dizzying degree, and at times, with regard to genre in particular, the various elements seem less like facets of a single object and more like disparate concepts corralled together under a single name.⁴ Different aspects of genre interact with different aspects of music, and in different ways. And of course, these interactions themselves interact with one another. If a totalizing theory of film music and film genre were ever to be found, it would have to be at the level of the interactions among the interactions.

My own goals are more modest. As indicated in the introduction, I hold that genre always exists as both a pattern impressed on the text and as a fantasy in the mind of the viewer (or perhaps a shared fantasy across the minds of many viewers).⁵ In any individual genre film, the generic pattern will affect details of the filmic text, but our experience will be shaped just as profoundly by how we expect films in this genre to behave. This applies to the films' scores as well. On the one hand, there are specific patterns for how music behaves in various film genres, and on the other, viewers experience a genre-specific fantasy of what music can *mean* within the

4 Two comprehensive surveys of film genre are Rick Altman *Film/Genre* (London: BFI, 1999), and Steve Neale *Genre and Hollywood* (New York: Routledge, 2000). In both cases, the main impression one comes away with is one of incommensurability. Different kinds of genre theorists (and genre historians, if one wishes to make the distinction) are simply not talking about the same things.

5 On this point, see Altman, *ibid.*, 170 and following.

genre. That is to say, our experience of genre is not merely a matter of knowing what the films will probably sound like, but also in our reactions to those sounds, for each genre includes a value system, and an underlying set of aesthetic and ideological tensions, which shape our response to any sort of music whatsoever. Therefore, it cannot be innocently assumed that a musical gesture will mean the same thing in one specific genre film as it would in a film of another genre, let alone in a concert hall.

This dissertation is primarily concerned with the ways in which film music and film genre combine to produce meaning in individual films: the ways that a generic context can shape the form or meaning of film music, and the ways that music can highlight, contribute to, or complicate the underlying generic syntax of a film.⁶ However, because even an intentionally limited understanding of music and genre cannot afford to be entirely naïve, this chapter's discussion of genre is somewhat more wide-ranging and philosophically involved.

Approaches to Film Genre

Barry Keith Grant's *Film Genre Reader*, a standard volume of essays on film genre, makes room for two different kinds of writing about genre, here labeled theory and criticism.⁷ The theoretical essays are abstract philosophical attempts to grapple with the nature of genre as a whole, while the critical essays generally attempt to understand the history or significance of a single genre or subgenre in some kind of detail. A third sort of essay (not represented in Grant's collection) focuses on an individual genre film without really addressing the broader question of

6 What this leaves out, for the most part, is the way that genre shapes the activity of the producers and consumers of film music: that is, industrial history and fan studies. These are both worthy topics, and of course are tightly bound up in the creation and reception of meaning. But they will be elided in the main body of this work except in the most obvious cases of overlap.

7 Originally published in 1986, the book has gone through four editions; somewhat confusingly, these are titled *Film Genre Reader*, *Film Genre Reader II*, etc. giving the impression that they are volumes in a series. The most current is *Film Genre Reader IV*, 4th edition (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012).

genre, and although Grant apparently deems this approach unworthy, these essays are well represented elsewhere, especially in edited volumes dedicated to individual genres.

The gaps between these categories are difficult to bridge: philosophical accounts of genre in general often wind up with little to say about any one genre, and many of the accounts of individual genres would benefit from more detailed accounts of individual films. By focusing on the specific aesthetic variable of music, the later chapters of this book will attempt to connect detailed models of the melodrama, horror, and Western genres to concrete accounts of specific films. But it is only in this chapter that we will grapple with the knotty question of what genre actually is.

Figure 1.1: Approaches to genre.

	<u>Interpretive</u>	<u>Economic</u>	<u>Reflexive</u>
<u>Focus on</u>	Genre as	Genre as industry	Genre as auteurist
<u>creators</u>	ideological control	practice	project
<u>Focus on</u>	Genre as popular	Genre as fan	Genre as object of
<u>audiences</u>	ritual	preference	critical fantasy

As laid out in the figure above, there seem to be three major theories of film genre in the existing literature, each of which has a creator-based aspect, concerned primarily with what filmmakers do, and a receiver-based aspect, concerned primarily with the activity of audiences (with the terms audience and filmmaker here construed as broadly as possible). This division is highly schematic. One only occasionally encounters a pure version of any of these approaches, and the audience-based and filmmaker-based aspects of each axis are particularly likely to mix. Nevertheless, one of these basic tendencies is generally dominant, and considering them in isolation will help us come to grips with what might be at stake in genre's interactions with music.

The most popular and consequential of these approaches is *interpretive* genre criticism,

which studies the hidden value system projected by each genre.⁸ Most prior interpretive film genre criticism takes either an ideological approach (which holds that this value system is imposed from above as a mechanism of social control) or a ritual approach (which holds that genres' value systems derive from the unconscious desires of the mass audience).⁹ The second approach, *economic* genre criticism, focuses on interactions between the film industry and the genre's audience, especially with regard to advertising and marketing. This can theoretically be divided into the industry practices approach (creator based), and the fan preference approach (receiver based), but in practice only the first of these is well developed, the discipline of fan studies having developed on rather different lines.¹⁰ The final approach, *reflexive* genre criticism, treats genre as a collective invention, shaped and eternally reshaped by filmmakers' creation of self-consciously generic works, and by critics' responses to these works. The filmmaker-based approach (which is common, but rarely receives a name) treats genre as an element of the broader *auteurist* project. The audience-based approach (again quite rare) accounts for genre as a *critical fantasy*.

As noted above, this division is self-consciously schematic, and many individual accounts blend these elements. Thomas Elsaesser's seminal account of the melodrama, "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama" combines a ritualistic account of the ways in which the films' surfaces project a hidden value system with a fundamentally auteurist understanding of the films' genesis.¹¹ Henry Jenkins uses an economic and historical lens, as

8 Neale calls theories of this kind "socio-cultural" in *Genre and Hollywood*, 220. Although my understanding of what is at stake in this kind of criticism is heavily indebted to his, I find the label misleading. Perhaps as a result, I would classify several of the theories he calls socio-cultural as reflexive rather than interpretive – for instance, Thomas Schatz's *Hollywood Genres* (Columbus: McGraw Hill, 1981), and the semantic/syntactic theory suggested by Altman in *Film/Genre*.

9 The terms "ideological" and "ritual" are derived from Altman, *Film/Genre*, 21.

10 See page 20, below.

11 Thomas Elsaesser, "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama," in *Imitations of Life: a Reader on Film and Television Melodrama*, ed. Marcia Landy (Detroit:

well as new interpretive insights, to revise the traditional ritualistic account of the early sound comedy in *What Made Pistachio Nuts?: Early Sound Comedy and the Vaudeville Aesthetic*, but his work's strong basis in industry practices is always in service of interpretation.¹² And of course surveys of genre theory such as Rick Altman's *Film/Genre* and Stephen Neale's *Genre and Hollywood* attempt to cover all of these aspects simultaneously. Nevertheless, the tendencies listed in the figure above can be observed across the writings of many different genre theorists, and considering them in isolation will help us explain the potential interactions of genre and music.

The Interpretive Axis: Ideology/Ritual

Ideological genre criticism views genre as a discourse originated by the powers-that-be (i.e., the studio system, and often simply society at large) and addressed to the audience as a method of social control.¹³ The content of a film is not the surface elements of plot structure, visual motif, melodic contour, etc., or at least not mainly this. Rather, films are carriers for a more important message that is essentially ideological. Each genre is created (or arises) to instill a certain set of beliefs in the audience.¹⁴ The genre of the Western, for instance, might be seen to

Wayne State University Press, 1991), 68-92. It will be noted that auteurist genre criticism, in particular, cannot stand alone: the genre must exist in some sense prior to the artist's alteration of its codes.

12 Henry Jenkins, *What Made Pistachio Nuts?: Early Sound Comedy and the Vaudeville Aesthetic* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).

13 Altman, whose review of the existing film genre literature heavily informs this chapter, argues that all existing approaches to genre can be understood as a specific configuration of the classic speaker-message-audience triad of semiotics. *Film/Genre*, 121.

14 This version of genre theory very rarely appears in its pure form, perhaps because theorists content to unequivocally damn genre cinema are also content, by and large, to ignore it. It is more common to see this position hypostatized as a grounds for qualification (or sometimes as a straw man to be abjured). For instance, Linda Badwell writes that "Horror is reactionary. Its job has long been to punish transgressions of conventional gender roles and reinforce stereotypes," but this is in the introduction to a chapter describing the ways in which *certain*

“[preach] integration and assimilation and absolute obedience to the laws of the land.”¹⁵

Romantic comedies could be seen to valorize a certain form of heteronormative pair-bonding, slasher films may punish and demonize sexuality, and so on. Each genre has a particular ideological project that shapes the surface of the genre. The general assumption is that this process is largely automatic: institutional and bureaucratic pressures on the one hand, and internalized psychological pressures on the other, combine to force the creation of ideologically “correct” texts, and ideologically correct reactions to texts, without conscious intervention on the part of the producers or the consumers. It should be noted however that various institutions *have* made attempts to influence American audiences through cinema – witness the Production Code Administration from the mid-1930s to the late 1960s, or the current MPAA Ratings Board – and some writers on genre have tried to take these entities into account. James Naremore, for instance, has used the Breen Office's censorship memos to decode the deeper significance of Film Noir.¹⁶

Another major approach to genre, which might be seen as the ideological school's inverted twin, is the ritual approach. Here again, genre films are seen to reinforce a certain set of beliefs and ways of behaving. However, this content is not imposed from on high by the powers that be. Rather, it derives from the audience. Ritualistic genre critics believe that the masses want to see certain stories told and certain values reinforced (often unconsciously or semi-consciously), and seek out texts that provide this content. One of the classic texts of ritualistic genre criticism is Carol Clover's *Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*, which claims that the male audience for violent horror films seeks out these products to

horror films (made by certain auteurist filmmakers) complicate and undermine this very ideological project. *Film, Horror, and the Body Fantastic* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1995), 102.

15 Judith Hess Wright, “Genre Films and the Status Quo,” in *Film Genre: Theory and Criticism*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (London: The Scarecrow Press, 1977), 57.

16 James Naremore, *More Than Night: Film Noir in its Contexts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

engage in both a sadistic identification with the masked killer and a masochistic identification with the brutalized and generally female victims.¹⁷ Most dominant social scripts would forbid this kind of cross-gender identification. The films, therefore, meet a need in the audience that otherwise would go unmet.

Ritualistic critics hold that genres arise more or less through a process of natural selection. The films that fit the audience's sense of what the world should be are successful at the box office, and so the studios make more of them; films that do not fulfill the audience's needs – which may include films that reinforce the dominant ideology! – sell poorly and are not repeated. Films may even be consciously tailored to the audience's shifting ideological demands.¹⁸ The great benefit of ritual-based genre criticism is that it gives politically motivated film critics a way to talk about genre films in positive terms. Rather than instilling the dominant ideology in the passive audience, genres arise precisely as a resistance *to* the dominant ideology, and can be used to diagnose the ways in which the dominant ideology fails to meet the psychological needs of the populace.

The ritual and ideological approaches might seem incompatible, positing as they do two radically different origins for the genres familiar to us today. But a number of efforts have been made to combine them. Robin Wood reminds us that, on the one hand, the dominant ideology is always incoherent, and contains the seeds of its own critique, while on the other hand, the ideological palliatives demanded by the mass of the people are by no means ones which politically motivated film critics would design for themselves.¹⁹ Thomas Schatz claims that

17 Carol Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (Princeton University Press, 1992).

18 On this point, see Gregory Lukow and Steven Ricci, "The 'Audience' Goes 'Public': Inter-Textuality, Genre, and the Responsibilities of Film Literacy," *On Film* 12 (1984): 29-36. Lukow and Ricci discuss what they see as instances of direct address to the audience in the Warner Brothers gangster cycle of the 1930s, which shifted over time in response to public attitudes towards criminality. Notably, this includes cases in which the same film was released multiple times, with different opening titles.

19 Wood has made this argument more than once. See for instance "Art and Ideology: Notes

“genre’s fundamental impulse is to continually *renegotiate* the tenets of American ideology. . . what is fascinating and confounding about Hollywood genre films is their capacity to ‘play it both ways,’ to both criticize and reinforce the values, beliefs, and ideals of our culture within the same narrative context.”²⁰ And Altman has suggested an appealing model according to which ideology suggests one certain set of stories, ritual a different set, and successful genres arise from the intersection of the two.²¹

In any case, although they differ on some details, both ideological and ritual accounts suggest that genres are fundamentally “about” a moral and aesthetic value system, a sense of right and wrong, of beautiful and ugly, of normal and abnormal, and a set of social scripts for various kinds of people in society (i.e. proper behavior for men, for women, for members of various social classes, and so on). None of these issues will be overtly expressed in the genre's surface content. It is not quite accurate to say that they speak to the audience’s subconscious, for they are perceptible, but they operate on a very abstract level and need not be consciously perceived in every case. If this covert content seems to reinforce the dominant ideology (almost inevitably understood by critics as undesirable), it will typically be described as a system of ideological control.²² If, however, it exposes the incoherence of this ideology (or, more rarely, depicts a viable alternative to it), and thereby challenges its dominance, then the film’s genre elements will be read as ritual, considered for these purposes as a kind of psychological defense activated by the mass of the people in response to a social code that has marginalized and

on Silk Stockings,” *Film Comment* 11, no. 1 (May-June 1975): 28-31.

20 Thomas Schatz, *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking, and the Studio System* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981), 35.

21 Altman, *Film/Genre*, 87.

22 Typically, but not universally. Some critics – especially those who are concerned with cinema's depiction of marginalized groups within society – argue that genre's reactionary aspects are a matter of popular ritual. (In fact, Clover touches on this in *Men, Women and Chainsaws*.) Interestingly enough, however, the tendency to see genre's progressive aspects as ritual rather than ideological really does seem to be universal. If an exception exists, I haven't encountered it.

abused them.

Musical Rituals and Ideologies

Film music has often been described as operating in a very similar way. Royal Brown's account of Erich Wolfgang Korngold's score for *The Sea Hawk* (Michael Curtiz, 1940) posits a ritualistic, mythmaking role for the musical depictions of masculinity and femininity: the music gives us to understand that Captain Thorpe is not merely a man, but Masculine, and Doña Maria not merely a woman but Feminine.²³ Agency is here ascribed to the composer, but no particular political agenda is implied. In that the sexual politics conveyed by the score are very ancient and entrenched – Brown calls them “chivalric” – we might assume that they are valued by, and in a sense demanded by the audience, but they are not exactly progressive. Claudia Gorbman is less generous in her treatment of Max Steiner's music for *Mildred Pierce* (Curtiz, 1945), which she claims functions as one element of the film's totalizing system of ideological control.

Interestingly enough, she suggests that Steiner could not have struggled against that totalizing system even had he wished to: our reading of the film's music is essentially forced by the more emphatic ideological content of the storytelling.²⁴

Neither of these scholars are doing genre criticism, of course. Rather, they are talking about the meanings of individual films. This is one of the great conceptual problems with combining genre scholarship with film music scholarship. If the film's genre determines its hidden ideological meaning, and its music expresses its hidden ideological meaning, won't every reading of a film within a particular genre turn out exactly the same? (What would even be the point of considering a film's music if we can arrive at the same hidden meaning via its genre, or vice-versa?) A number of solutions to this dilemma are possible. First of all, even if the hidden

23 Royal S. Brown, *Overtones and Undertones: Reading Film Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 103.

24 Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 109.

mythic meaning expressed by Korngold's *Sea Hawk* score is more or less the same as the underlying myth expressed by his score to *Captain Blood* (Curtiz, 1935), or for that matter by John Williams' score to *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (Spielberg, 1981), there is still much to be learned from studying the precise mechanisms through which that meaning is expressed. Second, we should remember – as genre theorists almost always do, if and when they start to discuss individual films – that the ideological meaning of a genre is not monolithic. Every individual film will differ from the generic model to a certain extent, and grapples with the genre's fundamental ideology in a different way. The differing scores will contribute to this process (as we shall see in the later chapters of this book).

Just as interpretive criticism is the dominant form of genre criticism in film studies, so too the current literature on film music's interaction with genre is dominated by interpretive approaches, and this study largely continues that trend.²⁵ Certainly, this is the approach most compatible with the standard account of film music. Gorbman, who again is no genre theorist, suggests that the classic Hollywood style, as a whole, is a system of social control (as have many film scholars, the classic formulation being perhaps that of Jean-Louis Baudry).²⁶ Interpretive genre theory protests to the contrary that the Hollywood style is not monolithic, that in fact it is a system of systems, each addressing a different set of ideological/ritual concerns, and manifesting in a different filmic genre. Each genre film, then, has a hidden value system which more or less matches that of the genre. The composer can either consciously attempt to reinforce this ideological content in musical terms, or consciously challenge it (as David Raksin claimed to have done with his score to *Laura*),²⁷ or – and this I think is the most likely possibility, given the way that most composers discuss their experience of scoring films – the composer may simply score each individual sequence in the film according to his or her general practice (which of

25 This literature will be discussed at greater length near the end of this chapter.

26 Jean-Louis Baudry, "The Basic Cinematic Apparatus," *Film Quarterly* 27 (Winter 1974-5): 39-47.

27 Interview in Royal Brown, *Overtones and Undertones*, 283.

course changes somewhat with historical period, national schools, and personal style), resulting in a score that unconsciously traces the ideological structures already present in the film. Or perhaps both film and score are separately shaped by the same ideological and mythological undercurrents. Timothy Scheurer argues for instance that “the entire mythology of the west will inform musical mythopoesis in the Western film.”²⁸

Let us take as an example the tendency of scores for family melodramas to provide attention-grabbing music in scenes where material wealth is ostentatiously displayed. One of the standard uses of film music is to highlight the most important scenes in a film, and it is part of the unspoken value system of the family melodrama that wealth is very important (if not always exactly good). The composer may recognize the importance of wealth to the narrative, and use music to reinforce this, or to comment on it. But these scenes tend to be marked as important in other ways: they are narrative turning points, they are shot interestingly, they coincide with performative excess on the part of the cast, and so on. This is how we know that wealth is important in melodramas to begin with! Therefore, without intending to make any particular statement about wealth, the composer may simply recognize these scenes as important and provide them with music based on that realization. Yet a third possibility lies in the fact that music, in our society, is conceived of as a kind of creature comfort in its own right, and therefore may appear in these scenes simply because it is to be expected that a fancy restaurant or lavish party will have music in the background. But even if these scenes were scored only out of a concern for verisimilitude, the audience, trained to associate the presence of music with a certain formal weight, will read them as more important due to the music. Important kinds of scenes in various genres – killings in horror, showdowns and standoffs in Westerns – are musically marked through some version of these processes. Of course, once it has been decided that music will appear in a certain scene, the next question is what kind of music should appear.

28 Timothy Scheurer, *Music and Mythmaking in Film: Genre and the Role of the Composer* (Jefferson: McFarland Books, 2008), 25.

And here, it is harder to escape the notion that composers are either consciously or unconsciously reacting to the film's covert ideological content.

The Economic Axis: Industry Practices/Fan Preferences

This approach to genre is essentially market-based. The creator-focused side of the economic axis holds that genres arise as marketing tools for studios. A studio seeking to capitalize on its own success will create a sequel, but studios seeking to cash in on the success of their rivals will instead take pains to market their product as similar in kind – generically linked – to the competing product. Altman provides a superlative overview of this process.²⁹ Often it means using a similar marketing campaign, hiring the same (or similar) personnel, and telling the same kind of story. The kinds of stories that have proved particularly successful over time are the ones we know today as genres. We could claim that there is something like an unwritten contract between the studios and the audience: the studio will make a horror film or a romantic comedy, and the audience will see the film.³⁰ It need not be a good film. This is what having a built-in audience means: the truly devoted fans have already spent their money, more or less, as soon as the film is shipped to the theater. Scholarly attention has generally focused on more specific and narrower versions of this contract, such as the drawing power of a popular franchise or a bankable star, but some attention has been given to the dedicated genre audience.³¹ Certainly, the continued survival of the horror genre despite repeated broadsides of scorn from

29 Altman, *Film/Genre*, 78-83 and 100-123.

30 This is not quite the same as the “generic contract” described by Altman (*Film/Genre*, 158), which has more to do with the way that various discursive actors agree to believe that each genre has certain properties, and does not really involve guarantees on the part of either party.

31 A good example of genre-based economic criticism is Kevin Heffernan, “Inner-City Exhibition and the Genre Film: Distributing *Night of the Living Dead* (1968),” *Cinema Journal* 41, no. 3 (2002): 59-77. For an example of the more typical star- and franchise-based material, see Paul McDonald, *The Star System: Hollywood's Production of Popular Identities* (London: Wallflower, 2000).

the critics (and – let us be honest – a large number of deeply regrettable movies), points to the power of this simple economic feedback loop.

As with the ideological/ritual approach, we may assume here that genres arise from the overlap between the stories the studios want to sell and the stories the audience wants to buy. The difference is that the stories that constitute a genre need not share any ideological content. Indeed, in this case the stories need not in fact be similar! They only must be marketed as such. Altman records an attempt by Universal to re-market *Dracula* as a science-fiction movie in order to take advantage of the 1950s boom in that genre.³² But too much bait-and-switch will cause the audience to reject the studio's marketing attempts, and therefore films are also tailored to specific generic expectations as they are being produced, leading films to become, in a sense, a part of their own marketing campaigns, and a part of the marketing campaigns for future offerings from the same creators.³³

Positivist film historians usually describe genre using this basic framework. Mercenary and artistically nugatory though the studios' attempts to capitalize on genre may be, it is usually these statements about genre that leave the richest historical record. Even the most straightforward ideological interpretations are necessarily speculative: it may seem obvious that *Dracula* was an attempt to reinforce early 20th-century ideas of class and gender, but Todd Browning left behind no correspondence that we can point to as proof. That it was briefly marketed as a science-fiction film, on the other hand, is a matter of historical record. Andrew Tudor has made a forceful argument that only this sort of genre criticism should be taken

32 Altman, *Film/Genre*, 78-79.

33 Again, scholarship on this point tends to focus on specific properties rather than on genre as such. Derek Johnson, "Cinematic Destiny: Marvel Studios and the Trade Stories of Industrial Convergence," *Cinema Journal* 52, no. 1 (2012): 1-24, recounts the ways in which Marvel's comic-book adaptations are used to drive interest in future films from the franchise. As Altman notes, however, while each studio will try to position their films as part of a franchise or a cycle (thus drawing the audience to future offerings from that studio), competing studios will attempt to co-opt their opponents successes by playing up the films' generic identity. (*Film/Genre*, 59 and following).

seriously – that however obvious our interpretive accounts of a genre film might seem, they require us to make unsustainable claims about either the knowledge and intentions of the filmmaker, or “some universal human response” to the films.³⁴ Few other critics subscribe to Tudor's rigorously ascetic approach, possibly because it obviates all of the really interesting things about genre. But one cannot avoid the sneaking suspicion that he might have a point.

As mentioned above, the bulk of the economic genre criticism that exists focuses on industry practices, as these have left the clearest historical trail. One could imagine an audience-focused economic genre criticism, focusing on the spending habits of the dedicated genre fanbase, and on the kind of genre commentary that appears in specialized magazines such as *Fangoria* and *Soap Opera Digest*, but in fact this area is largely unexplored.³⁵ The literature on fan studies is vast and growing, but tends to focus (as does fandom itself) on individual franchises and auteurs rather than on genres, and to focus on the creative activity of fans themselves (in the form of magazines, fan-fiction, newsletters, costumes, and the like) rather than on the texts the fans value. A handful of exceptions do exist, but these tend to combine their exploration of the fan culture with an account of the industry's attempts to capitalize on that culture.³⁶

34 Andrew Tudor, “Genre,” in *Film Genre Reader III*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 10.

35 *Fangoria* is a magazine pitched to fans of horror films, and *Soap Opera Digest* focuses on soap operas, a small-screen genre tightly linked to film melodrama. Both include a wide range of content, but the economic features of the genre are obviously well understood. *Fangoria* includes a regular feature called the “Chopping List” which keeps the readership informed when recent horror films become available for purchase on DVD. And on the online forums attached to *Soap Opera Digest* we find statements like “I've watched [*The Young and the Restless*] since it came on over 30 years ago, but if they cut [the popular character Melody Scott] out, I'm outta here,” and “**LETS ALL STOP WATCHING AND SEE HOW LONG THESE WRITERS WORK!**” [sic]. Comments on “Melody Thomas Scott Out at Y&R,” *Soap Opera Digest*, June 11, 2011, <http://www.soapoperadigest.com/content/melody-thomas-scott-out-yr>

36 A typical example of this is the discussion of fandom and marketing in Keith M. Johnston, *Science Fiction Film: A Critical Introduction* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), 152-6.

Music on the Market

Unfortunately, the market-based approach is perhaps the least useful for understanding the way that music and genre create meaning in any particular film. Jeff Smith, the best authority on film music's commercial aspect, views genre as fundamentally anti-commercial, recording instances in which the most commercially viable songs conflict with the genre's aesthetic needs.³⁷ In any case, this purely economic version of the model is concerned primarily with what kinds of projects get greenlit, and how they are marketed once produced, and the film's music rarely plays a part in either process. In the post-studio era, composers are often not even hired until well into the production process, and although marketing campaigns invariably use music, it is frequently music that does not appear in the film itself.

However, although composers are usually attached to projects more or less as an afterthought, this is not always the case. There's not a composer alive who can carry a film the way a big-name actor or director can, but there are some celebrities within the field, and their celebrity is often generically marked. Hans Zimmer, since his Oscar-winning score for Ridley Scott's *Gladiator* in 2000, has become the de-facto sound of both the action film and the historical epic. His style is instantly recognizable. There is a certain kind of anachronistic metal-and-leather drumming, often in a slightly off-kilter time signature; there are percussive, circular brass vamps marked by the occasional lyrical string melody (descending, in almost every case) and splashes of electric guitar; and of course there must be a wordless contralto *vocalise* over a drone for the scenes of love and/or mourning. By and large what we hear is *Carmina Burana* and *Mars: Bringer of War* by way of Basil Poledouris's score for *Conan the Barbarian* (John Milius, 1982), but Zimmer gives it his own unique twist. The beats are yet heavier, the melodic aspect yet more attenuated, the surfaces richer and glossier to the point of hollowness. In the

37 Jeff Smith, *The Sounds of Commerce: Marketing Popular Film Music* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 216-218.

words of Peter Broadwell, Zimmer's style fills out the music's rather unimpressive melodic-harmonic skeleton "like an aural muscle suit."³⁸

Zimmer is fantastically prolific in many genres, and so his association with a project should not signal anything to us about the film's generic status. But if the project is marked as a historical action film in other ways (through title, plot summary, etc.), Zimmer's attachment to the project becomes a signal to the audience that this particular instance of the genre will be more like *Gladiator* than others – and for the economic understanding of genre, which typically focuses on "surface" content and box office figures rather than the "deeper" structures favored by the ritualistic/ideological approach, making a film that is as much like *Gladiator* as possible becomes very important. Studios make genre films more or less the way Adorno accused the culture industry of making popular music: they want to make a film that's as similar as possible to the most successful recent example of the genre while still being different enough to be recognizable as a discrete product.³⁹ Approaching the same phenomenon from the audience's perspective, we could claim that audiences seek out new historical epics not because they fill some hidden psychological need, but rather because *Gladiator* was pleasurable, and seeking out films that are like *Gladiator* is a more or less reliable way of experiencing the same pleasure. Zimmer's name on the project is a clause in the implicit contract signed by the audience and the studios: the filmmakers warrant that they are making a certain kind of movie, which (among other things) sounds a certain way; in return, the audience agrees to pay for it. The sound of Zimmer's music in the film is evidence that that the contract has been fulfilled.

But is there really a sound of Zimmer's music? (My decision to focus on this particular music/genere nexus is far from innocent.) It is an open secret within the industry that Zimmer's

38 Peter M. Broadwell, *Swashbucklers on Stage: Musical Depiction of Pirates and Bandits in English Theater, 1650-1820*, (PhD Diss, UCLA, 2011). Despite the title, Broadwell's dissertation contains some very interesting material on the music for pirate films, including a fair amount of information on Zimmer's scoring process.

39 Theodor Adorno with George Simpson, "On Popular Music," *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science* 9 (1941): 17-48.

scores are produced by a factory system, the structure of which has been elucidated by Broadwell's research.⁴⁰ Zimmer writes much music himself, but also serves as a kind of executive producer, farming out cues and even entire scores to other composers within the “factory,” RCP (Remote Control Productions, originally known as Media Ventures), each of whom will be assisted by a team of assistant composers, orchestrators, and “cue specialists” – skilled laborers, as it were – who specialize in one or two specific kinds of musical gesture. (One prominent cue specialist is the Australian vocalist and composer Lisa Gerrard, who is responsible for the aforementioned mournful/romantic *vocalise*.)⁴¹ After the cues have been completed, Zimmer reviews them and alters or replaces them as needed, allowing him to impose a unified creative stamp. Furthermore, all of these products use an exclusive sample library that Zimmer created, at great expense, from top London studio musicians; this is the source of the music's sonic gloss.⁴² (As a result, we often hear the same actual sound waves across multiple RCP scores.)

Zimmer himself is fairly open about all of this, and many of his collaborators receive credit for their work.⁴³ Junior composers such as Klaus Bladelt and Harry Gregson-Williams are

40 Broadwell, “Strategies and Tactics of Battle Sequence Composition from Berlioz to Bladelt” (paper presented at the annual Music and the Moving Image conference, New York, New York, May 21-23, 2010). A published version of this material is forthcoming. Dr. Broadwell was also kind enough to confirm additional details of the Zimmer system by personal communication.

41 Gerrard has nearly forty soundtrack credits of various kinds on [imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com). Of these, the vast majority are for Media Ventures/Remote Control Production work, and feature the characteristic *vocalise* featured so prominently in *Gladiator*.

42 The music industry press generally focuses on this aspect in their coverage of the Zimmer/RCP sound. See for instance Mark Wherry, “Media Adventures,” *Sound On Sound*, October 2002, <http://www.soundonsound.com/sos/oct02/articles/hanszimmer.asp>. The original Zimmer library described in Wherry's article was eventually replaced with an even glossier one.

43 Note, however, that I am more or less taking Zimmer at his word on this. He is more open than one might *expect*, and claims to be proudly so, but no one has yet published his employees' side of the story. Broadwell's forthcoming research may shed additional light.

given lead credit on scores when Zimmer judges their contributions to be significant enough, and every film scored by this process will credit numerous additional arrangers and orchestrators. Many composers have used ghostwriters out of laziness or necessity, but Zimmer argues for his distributed system as an alternative and indeed more viable model for musical creativity. Depending on the rubric one uses for success, he may be right.⁴⁴

The Zimmer sound is therefore a factory sound, like Tin-Pan Alley and Motown, and indeed like many of the golden-age Hollywood studio music departments. Like these other factories, it tends to produce music that is exceptionally competent but also exceptionally predictable. This music does not typically vary from film to film, let alone from genre to genre: many of the musical features listed above are elements not of Zimmer's historical epic style, or even his action style, but simply of his style writ large. Nevertheless, Zimmer's name has become part of the marketing package by which films are identified as action. Because his sound is factory-like, action films in the past decade have had an extremely dependable and generically marked sound. Over time, it has become a marker of genre, and even composers unaffiliated with the Zimmer factory must adopt this style or consciously deviate from it. James Horner, who is not affiliated with the Zimmer factory, included Gerrard-esque vocalizes in his score for *Troy* (Petersen, 2004).

Furthermore, Zimmer's music is frequently used in trailers for action films. As Soundtrack.net notes, cues from the *Gladiator* score were used in the trailers for *Gladiator* itself, *Beyond Borders* (Martin Campbell, 2003) *Black Hawk Down* (Scott, 2001), *Chicken Run* (Peter Lord, 2000), *K-19: The Widowmaker* (Kathryn Bigelow, 2002), and *Tears of the Sun* (Antoine Fuqua, 2003), all of which were scored by Zimmer or by one of his house composers,

44 Specifically, Zimmer speaks about the value of working closely with instrumentalists so that the musical result is a collaboration born in the recording studio, rather than a mere realization of the composer's numinous vision. Zimmer generally does not discuss his collaborations with other composers, but the same principle would seem to apply. Testimonial interview by Hans Zimmer," DVD extra for *Der Sound für Hollywood* (Ariane Riecker, 2011), DVD Release 2011, Polyband.

but also in the trailers for *House of Flying Daggers* (Zhang Yimou, 2004), scored by Shigeru Umebayashi, *Minority Report* (Steven Spielberg, 2002), scored by John Williams, *The Alamo* (John Lee Hancock, 2004), scored by Carter Burwell, *The Four Feathers* (Shekhar Kapur, 2002), scored by James Horner, *The Golden Compass* (Chris Weitz, 2007), scored by Alexandre Desplat, and *Windtalkers* (John Woo, 2002), scored by Horner. This is not so blatant, or so obviously determined by genre, as Universal's decision to market *Dracula* as science-fiction. But it is a broadly similar kind of bait-and-switch. And surely it is of interest that most of the films from the second list clearly have other generic affiliations: *The Alamo* is a Western, *Minority Report* is science-fiction, *The Four Feathers* and *Windtalkers* are war films, and so on. (The same is true, though less universally, for a number of the films that RCP did go on to score. *Beyond Borders* is more sober and contemplative than its trailer would suggest, and *Chicken Run* is a parody of a prison-break movie, the music here presumably being part of the joke.)

Might the choice to use the quintessential action sounds of RCP in these trailers be an attempt to convince the potential audience that they would be seeing something suitably thrilling? The *wuxia* film *House of Flying Daggers* is probably the most telling example here. *Wuxia* is a Chinese genre marked by acrobatic swordplay and historical intrigue – an action-packed genre to be sure, but closer to the classical Hollywood swashbuckler than to the modern Hollywood action film, and many of its thematic concerns and aesthetic features are thoroughly *sui-generis*. Furthermore, it is one of the most Chinese of Chinese genres, with deep roots in the early Shanghai cinema and pre-cinematic Chinese popular literature.⁴⁵ In that American audiences are always reluctant to embrace foreign film, the film's American distributor (Sony Pictures Classics) had much to gain by associating it with more familiar Hollywood fare. They would get little help from Umebayashi's score, an intriguing and thoroughly unfamiliar blend of

45 For a good overview, and a sense of *wuxia*'s importance as a national (and nationalist) genre, see Stephen Teo, "The Martial Arts Film in Chinese Cinema: Historicism and the National," in *Art, Politics, and Commerce in Chinese Cinema*, Ying Zhu and Stanley Rosen, eds. (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010), 99-110.

traditional Asian instruments and synth-drenched pop. By constructing the trailer almost entirely out of fight scenes (and without a single line of dialogue), the distributors attempted to convince us that this particular *wuxia* film would have a maximum of acrobatic swordplay while keeping the historical intrigue to a minimum and doing without the specifically Chinese cultural referents altogether. The percussion-heavy cue that they borrow from *Gladiator* helps them make this case, perhaps even more so if the audience can't remember where they originally heard it. If the main weakness of a film you're marketing is that it is vaguely alien, perhaps the best possible approach is to try to create a vague sense of familiarity. The Zimmer/RCP phenomenon is an unusual case, of course. But it should demonstrate, like the curious repackaging of *Dracula*, that generic identifications along economic lines do not always have a rational basis in the filmic text.

Other composers who are generic specialists tend to become associated with a genre due to collaborations with directors who are also genre specialists. Ennio Morricone's association with the Western comes primarily (although not entirely) through his association with Sergio Leone. John Carpenter is an important horror composer mostly because John Carpenter is also an important horror director.⁴⁶ John Williams became the go-to composer for fantastic action-adventure through his association with George Lucas and Steven Spielberg. But these names remain marketing terms in their own right. If Ennio Morricone's name is attached to a Western (or Carpenter's to a horror film, even as a composer), this becomes an aspect of the contract offered to the genre audience, a promise that this film will provide the kind of experience the viewers are seeking. And the music within the film can help to fulfill this contract. Interestingly, what matters once the audience is in the theater is the sound of the music, not the name of the composer. The fan-creator contract is not actually that specific: what we want is not "a Hans

46 Horror buffs will likely think of Morricone as a horror composer as well, due to his early-career collaboration with Dario Argento. His association with Westerns is more widely known, but note again that economic genre criticism will require close attention to the specific audience for each genre.

Zimmer Score,” but rather music that sounds like our idealized concept of a Hans Zimmer score, and we are only interested in the score in that it is a part of the generic experience as a whole. Sci-fi fans who spend their money on a space adventure film expecting something like *Star Wars* (George Lucas, 1977) – a concept that includes a score in the John Williams *Star Wars* model – will not be satisfied by a score in the John Williams *Catch Me If You Can* (Spielberg, 2002) model, to say nothing of the John Williams *Images* (Robert Altman, 1972) model.⁴⁷ Delightful as either of those prospects might be, it’s not what is entailed by the contract. Composers, like actors, occasionally get type-cast, but what is typecast is a sound as much as a name. This in turn shapes the future sound of the genre.

If the interpretive axis of genre tends to give insight as to why a certain scene might be scored, or how music fulfills a certain structural function of the genre, the economic axis helps explain why certain sonorities and textures become generically marked. As one would expect, the structural aspects of music’s interaction with film genre tend to be (or at least to seem) exceptionally durable, but sonorities and textures change quite radically with time and place. Of course, there are other economic factors that can shape the sound of a genre. Successful cycles of films often share the same personnel, which means that composers who never enjoyed Morricone’s or Zimmer’s name recognition still found themselves writing large cycles of films within a single genre. Roy Webb’s scores for the Val Lewton Universal horror cycle in the 1940s, and Frank Skinner’s work on the Douglas Sirk melodramas of the ’50s and ’60s, may have shaped the sonic imagination of later composers.

The Reflexive Axis: Genre as Auteurist Project/Genre as Object of Critical Fantasy

The model of fan *expectation* offered in the previous section ushers in the third and final

47 For *Catch me if You Can*, Williams provided a quirky, jazzy score that drew on his early experience as a bandleader. His striking avant-garde score for *Images* is described by Royal Brown in *Overtones and Undertones*, 177-180. For our purposes here, it suffices to say that neither score sounds a bit like *Star Wars*.

major approach to genre, which I call *reflexive* genre theory. When focused on creators, reflexive genre criticism accounts for genre as an element of a director's auteurist project. Frank D. McConnell uses an aphoristic fragment from Kafka to explore this process: "Leopards break into the temple and drink to the dregs what is in the sacrificial pitchers; this is repeated over and over again; finally it can be calculated in advance, and is a part of the ceremony."⁴⁸ Auteurist genre criticism often begins with a more or less ideological approach, holding that genres are durable patterns that reinforce dominant social codes. However, rather than claiming, as Gorbman does for Steiner, that the artist is helpless to resist these messages, auteurist genre critics see the artist's role as essentially analogous to Kafka's leopards. Artists can turn over the apple cart, drink the sacrificial chalices dry, and tell stories that the dominant code (and thus, the genre itself) would seem not to allow. To make art within a genre, artists must find, in McConnell's words, "new varieties of creative outrage."⁴⁹ The fruits of these efforts, however, are always short-lived. The genre will absorb the radical gesture and reinscribe the social code around it. The next generation of filmmakers, then, will face the same struggle, and will be forced to come up with new and more radical gestures to disrupt it. McConnell's account of genre is essentially negative: although genre provides a creative springboard for artists, film can still be divided into expressive, auteurist texts (which deviate from the genre) and debased, generic texts, which remain entirely within it. The "creative outrage" remains art so long as it remains outrageous, but once it has been recuperated to genre it becomes meaningless.

However, this particular understanding of the artist's relationship to genre is a bit two-dimensional, and may rely on a faulty understanding of how meaning is created in art. Douglas Hofstadter's philosophy of language suggests that information is encoded in language, and must

48 Frank D. McConnell, "Leopards and History: The Problem of Film Genre," in *Film Genre: Theory and Criticism*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (London: The Scarecrow Press, 1977), 8. No reference to a specific work of Kafka's is provided.

49 Ibid.

be *decoded* by the audience in order for anything to be communicated.⁵⁰ No message can be meaningful without a language (i.e. a conceptual apparatus) that allows the message to be decoded. In Hofstadter's account, this is true not only for spoken and written languages (what are sometimes called “natural languages”), but also for other “languages” such as programming languages, mathematics, and even music.⁵¹ *Pace* Christian Metz, it also applies to the language of film, a language that is often called visual, but is perhaps more properly audio-visuo-ideological.⁵² No message can be understood without a system for understanding it – no figure can exist without a ground.

These terms can also be reversed. Thus: there is no system that does not engender some language operating within it. Any field becomes a ground for a vast number of potential figures. Each genre is obviously a system (perhaps a totalizing system, as Gorbman claims for film as a

50 Douglas Hofstadter, *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid* (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 158-176.

51 Hofstadter vacillates on this last point somewhat, however, and eventually suggests that some music – Bach, at least – is so deeply self-structured that any human would be able to decode its meaning, eventually, given enough time and a large enough chunk of music. *Ibid.*, 161.

52 Metz has famously claimed that cinema differs from natural language in that it is, in a sense, self-decoding, and always denotative: “The image is *always actualized*. Moreover, even the image – fairly rare, incidentally – that might, because of its content, correspond to a 'word' is still a sentence... A close-up of a revolver does not mean “revolver” (a purely virtual lexical unit) – but at the very least, and without speaking of the connotations, it signifies 'Here is a revolver!' It carries with it a kind of *here* (a word which André Martinet considers to be a pure index of actualization).” *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*, trans. Michael Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974). That film does not partake in every single property of natural language is certainly true, but that it is self-decoding is certainly false, as we might have known from Magritte's *La Trahison de Images*. Although the vast majority of films present us with a realist causality in which screen objects are assumed to 1) exist and 2) persist, such that any photographed object or person has been asserted to exist, it is hardly impossible to imagine filmic contexts in which the picture of a gun is wholly non-diegetic, used to express some aspect of a character's subjective experience, or as an example of the category “weapons,” or of the category “things with pistol-grips,” or even as a word that rhymes with “fun.”

whole), and therefore there is a language that genre allows us to understand – languages, in fact. Individual films can be read as figures against the background of the genre. Some critics go so far as to claim that they must be so read. This is the position held by Jim Kitses, for instance, whose influential theory of the film Western is intended as a ground against which the careers of auteurs like Anthony Mann, Budd Boetticher, and Sam Peckinpah can be meaningfully understood.⁵³

If genre is a *langue* that gives rise to the *parole* of an individual genre film – that is, if genre is an underlying semiotic system that is shaped into a concrete expressive utterance by the filmmaker’s controlling intelligence – this means that, even as genre and style curtail the possibilities of discourse, they also *constitute* the possibilities of discourse. Whether fulfilling or violating the norms of the genre, the gestures of a film will be understood with respect to the generic model. We might even claim that the difference between “artistic” languages such as film and music, and more pragmatic kinds of communication such as spoken language and math, is that the languages made intelligible by artistic systems such as film, music, and genre depend heavily on the violation or perversion of that system’s apparent “rules” for the production of meaning. (Leonard Meyer’s expectation-based model of musical meaning, according to which our ability to guess how pieces *should* go enables our emotional response to the ways they *do* go, is surely relevant here.)⁵⁴ To speak through genre, one must break genre. This kind of thinking often leads to an organicist model of genre history in which, as Schatz puts it,

“ . . . a form passes through an *experimental* stage, during which its conventions are isolated and established, a *classic* stage, in which the conventions reach their ‘equilibrium’ and are mutually understood by artist and audience, an age of *refinement*, during which certain formal and stylistic details embellish the form, and finally a *baroque* (or ‘mannerist’ or ‘self-reflexive’) stage, when the form and its embellishments are accented to the point where they themselves become the

53 Jim Kitses, *Horizons West: Anthony Mann, Budd Boetticher, Sam Peckinpah: Studies of Authorship Within the Western* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969).

54 Leonard Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning in Music* (University of Chicago Press: 1956).

‘substance’ or ‘content’ of the work.”⁵⁵

In each step along this progression, the development of the genre is driven by the auteur’s play with generic convention.

This model is appealing, like many organicist models; like many organicist models, it is also deeply compromised. The generic status of a film is by no means fixed when the prints are shipped to the theaters – and here I mean both the category with which the film is labeled, and its specific way of relating to that category. Neale, for instance, notes that *Stagecoach* began as a self-conscious revisionist Western (leopards drinking the ritual wine) and became an image of classicism (leopards drinking the wine as part of the ritual) for later critics.⁵⁶ McConnell suggests that what drives the genre forward is the artist’s decision to take risks with the form, but it may be that the new and exciting gesture that drives genre forwards is not the violation of the rule, but rather the re-formation of the rule around the violation. Auteurs may shape genre by choosing – again, perhaps not very consciously – to recognize specific aspects of past films as generic conventions, which thus become worthy of elaboration, frustration, and play.

But are auteurs always playing the games we think they are? Or is this, like so much else of what we write about film, simply a dream in the head of the critic?

Just as interpretive and economic genre theories have filmmaker-based and audience-based aspects, so too reflexive genre theory must make room for the audience’s reflections on genre. If auteurs may choose to make a film that partakes of such-and-such a genre, then so too may an audience member decide – if not very consciously – to *experience* a film as a member of such-and-such a genre. This appears most clearly in the way that genres sometimes seem to retrogress backwards through time, absorbing films that were made before the genre was codified. Organicist historians describe these as precursor texts, or as primitive examples of the

55 Schatz, *Hollywood Genres*, 37-8.

56 Neale, *Genre and Hollywood*, 212-3.

genre that do not yet exhibit all of the traits associated with its “mature” form. But our actual experience, watching these films, is less chronologically fastidious. We still hold them up to the standard of later examples of the genre, even if we know this to be absurd. *Night of the Living Dead* (Romero, 1968), is supremely self-aware with regard to its status as a horror film, and plays with the clichés of that genre, not least with regard to its music, which changes from clichéd organ-heavy “horror” music in the first half of the film to shrieking electronic sonorities as the plot careens further and further off the rails. The film is, however, entirely unaware of its status as a *zombie* movie. With those clichés it does not play – and cannot, for they have not yet achieved the status of cliché. But we must remember here that, as Carl Dahlhaus notes in a rather different context, artworks are different from other historical objects in that they have both diachronic *and* synchronic presence: “music of the past belongs to the present as music, not as documentary evidence.”⁵⁷ And so too *Night of the Living Dead* belongs to the present as a zombie movie, regardless of its original context. Whether we want to or not, we see the film as part of the zombie canon. We hold it to *those* standards, see its bold transgressions of *that* generic model, decode its figure against *that* ground. By the same token, although Neale is right to recognize that *Stagecoach* was a revisionist Western in its day, he is wrong to suppose that, therefore, we should discount our current experience of it as a classical text. The organic model of genre put forward by theorists such as Schatz is in a sense bad history, in that it does not acknowledge the fact that *Stagecoach* was intended as a revisionist text. But if we evaluate the model not as history, but as a snapshot of our current understanding and experience of these historical texts, the inconvenient historical fact becomes entirely irrelevant.

To be sure, some facts about genre are less disputable than others. It is an absolute fact that *Dracula* was once marketed as a science-fiction film. But does this change our *experience* of the film? I argue that it does not, not unless we *judge* the film to be a science-fiction film.

57 Carl Dahlhaus, *Foundations of Music History*, trans. J. B. Robinson (Cambridge University Press: 1983), 4.

Furthermore, I argue that such a judgment is a Kantian aesthetic universal: a thing we believe to be factually true, but which we must acknowledge, if pressed, to not be provably true.⁵⁸ We can talk about the properties of *Dracula* that make *Dracula* horrific (or science-fictional), just as we can talk about the properties of Mozart's 41st Symphony that make Mozart's 41st Symphony beautiful (or banal), but these discussions never rise to the status of proof. Genre only affects our experience of a film in so far as our aesthetic judgments about genre affect our experience of the film (although the more considered historical/factual judgments may do so indirectly, in so far as they influence our aesthetic judgments). Something like the No True Scotsman fallacy is at work here, but I would submit that precisely what is happening, in the No True Scotsman fallacy, is that the speaker is conflating his/her aesthetic judgment of what a Scotsman *should* be – what it would be pleasing for a Scotsman to be – with a factual judgment of what a Scotsman actually is. We should not conflate our aesthetic judgment of what a Western is (an intensely mythicized story about heroism and violence which ends with a falling-away of the West and the establishment of the modern order) with our factual judgment of which films are Westerns (those that feature cowboys).

Rick Altman approaches this problem through the prism of musicals, noting that he has a colleague who believes Elvis movies are not *real* musicals like *Singin' in the Rain* (Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen, 1952).⁵⁹ To Altman, this is unacceptable: Elvis and others sing songs in the films, therefore they are musicals, and any other judgment is mere snobbery. Granted, *Fun in Acapulco* (Richard Thorpe, 1963) is a film musical in this narrowly factual sense, and we must not pretend that texts of this kind do not exist. But this does not mean that they must be just as central to our model of the genre as the texts that we *judge* to be central. A theory of genre arrived at in such a dispassionate fashion would not be interesting to talk about, and good

58 For Kant, this is mainly reserved for judgments of beauty. Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgment*, translated by James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon University Press, 1911). <http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/k/kant/immanuel/k16j/book1.html#SS6>.

59 Altman, *Film/Genre*, 217.

scholarship needs to be interesting as much as it needs to be fair.⁶⁰ Pretending to give *Fun in Acapulco* equal weight with *Singin' in the Rain* may even be a kind of dishonesty, a *repression* of our actual reaction to the films in question! If, while watching Elvis singing on a surfboard, we find ourselves thinking “Well fine, but it’s not a *real* musical,” that’s a genuine aesthetic experience which deserves to be reported and explored.

Genre is always a mixture of filmic trait on the one hand, and audience expectation on the other. The decision at every turn to fulfill or to frustrate this audience expectation is a major tool – perhaps *the* major tool – that an auteur of genre has at his or her disposal.⁶¹ But with precursor texts (or texts that are otherwise incorporated into a generic canon illegitimately), the text’s status as a member of the genre is mostly audience expectation, hanging on whatever few relevant filmic traits happen to appear. This is, to my mind, the best explanation for the fact that, as genre theorists have often remarked, accounts of individual genres typically focus on a few relatively well-behaved films while sweeping many lesser-known texts under the rug because they don’t fit the model.⁶² If we want a theory of genre that explains all texts, this is a serious problem. If we want a theory of genre that explains the audience’s experience of genre, however, the fact that some texts will fit the model better than others is inescapable. Our sense of the genre, which is an intuited rather than a ratiocinated thing, shapes our reaction to the films that we read as generic.

This important *productive* role played by theories of genre is the flipside of auteurist

60 The interesting approaches to a genre's liminal texts would be ones that attempt to grapple with or account for their liminality, such as Kay Dickinson's *Off Key: When Film and Music Won't Work Together* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) or Amy Herzog's *Dreams of Difference, Songs of the Same: The Musical Moment in Film* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2010).

61 This has been widely observed. For a summary of the relevant literature, see Neale, *Genre and Hollywood* 207-220.

62 See for instance Neale, *Genre and Hollywood*, 239, Altman, *Film/Genre*, 223, Johnston 22-3.

genre film creation. When we speculate about film genre, either half-consciously alone, or casually in a chatroom or coffeeshop, or dogmatically in an academic journal, we are to a certain degree playing with and altering, or even devising, the meaning of the filmic text. In the academic literature, the most widely discussed example of a genre that has been shaped by commentary is the melodrama (with film noir running a close second). The terms melodrama and melodramatic, as both Neale and Altman point out, were originally used by Hollywood marketing departments, critics, and screenwriters to describe hard-boiled crime films of the kind that would eventually come to be labeled thrillers.⁶³ In the 80s and 90s, however, academic film critics began to use the same word to describe an altogether different set of films focused on family issues, social conformity, class anxiety, and above all on the role of women in negotiating these territories.⁶⁴ Neale in particular is dogmatic in his assertion that melodrama as we know it today is the invention of a handful of scholars.⁶⁵ Russell Merritt has found fault with this view, arguing that even if the label changed, the category we now recognize as melodrama had always existed,⁶⁶ but even if we assume that Neale's account is totally accurate, would this make our experience of melodrama less “real” than our experience of more reliably historical genres?

All of the concepts of genre dealt with so far preserve a strict subject-object division between the critic and the generic discourse. Genre theorists working on the interpretive or economic axes would generally assume that if the genre did not exist before a critic came up with

63 Out of the genre theorists I have surveyed, only Altman seems to see these contributions as important for their own sake (*Film/Genre*, 71-6). Neale accords them a backhanded sort of respect by acknowledging that they sometimes inspire later filmmakers who, having credulously accepted the conventional wisdom of critics, go on to make pastiches of genres that never truly existed. *Film Genre and Hollywood*, 182-3.

64 A classic text here is Mary-Anne Doane's *The Desire to Desire: the Woman's Film of the 1940s* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

65 Neale, *ibid.* He likewise consigns film noir to the ashcan of history: these very texts were historically described as melodramas!

66 Russell Merritt, “Melodrama: Post-Mortem for a Phantom Genre,” *Wide Angle* 5, no. 3 (1983), 24-31.

it, it could not be a real genre. For some this is almost a moral issue: a critic inventing generic categories is like a scientist inventing experimental results. Tzvetan Todorov, writing on literary genre, erects a firm boundary between modern structuralist critics and all other discursive actors with regard to genre: "I believe we will have a useful and operative notion of the word if we agree to call genres only the classes of texts that have been historically perceived as such," he writes, with the implied continuation, "by someone other than me."⁶⁷ But the example of melodrama exposes this as wishful thinking, at least in part. The study of genre is to a degree the shaping of genre. Another example, more narrow but just as interesting, is the subgenre of "Comedies of Remarriage" identified – or rather, posited? – or rather, summoned into existence? – by Stanley Cavell.⁶⁸ Cavell, unlike the melodrama scholars, was never trying to identify a broad transhistorical category of film. He sought rather to describe a specific body of texts with specific features. And yet the generic linkages he describes are no more or less "legitimate" than those of the family melodrama, and his category can certainly be pushed forward to include later romantic comedies such as *When Harry Met Sally* (Ron Reiner, 1989) and *Crazy Stupid Love* (Glenn Ficarra and John Requa, 2011), and backwards to include something like *So Long Letty* (Lloyd Bacon, 1929). The category is a useful and robust descriptor that escapes the limited bailiwick Cavell intended for it: it has, in short, entered the modern lexicon of filmmaking and filmgoing.

When critics notice linkages on our own, when we posit genres and subgenres, we *may* be talking nonsense. But also we may not. Only time will tell whether the generic categories we invent turn out to be widely adopted (and thus, "real") or adopted by none but ourselves (and

67 Tzvetan Todorov, *Genres in Discourse*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 17. Elsewhere, Todorov allows for the invention of genres by critics, but he still makes a clear distinction between these "theoretical" genres and the "historical" genres invented by other sorts of actors. For a summary of this aspect of Todorov's thought, see Altman, 9-10.

68 Stanley Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981).

thus "nonsense"). And even positing a nonsensical category is likely to tell us something interesting about the texts in question. Much rides, for me, on the notion that there is value in genre as an act of pure critical imagination. Most other actors in generic discourse – studios, filmmakers, audiences – do *not* discuss the kinds of generic distinctions with regard to music that I am suggesting here. I believe the patterns I have described to be real, if largely unacknowledged. But time will tell.

Composers Reflecting on Genre

Unlike the other intersections of music and genre, the reflexive axis of genre requires either the creators or the receivers of the discourse to be conscious of music's status within a genre. We would need to find film musicians self-consciously playing with the generic conventions of film music, and film critics (or musicologists) claiming that genre has strong effects on the use and meaning of music in a film, which amounts to asserting the existence of score genres (or inventing them), just as Cavell asserted (or invented) the comedy of remarriage. Very little scholarship on either front exists. Film music scholars who address genre do not generally claim that composers are aware of generic conventions, and as of this writing there have been no attempts to synthesize or describe the body of scholarship on genre film music. Therefore, we must approach these as open questions. Do composers reflect on generic conventions when creating their scores? And do scholars draw on their personal ideas of genre when making interpretive claims?

To a limited extent, at least, the answer to both questions is yes. Few composers openly discuss any aspect of their practice, but Frank Skinner's composition manual *Underscore* gives some specific instructions on writing for various genres, indicating for instance that Westerns require "tremolo chords in the upper strings and woodwinds" in order to convey "an outdoor picture and the sound of the open spaces."⁶⁹ Bear McCreary, in his score for the television horror

69 Frank Skinner, *Underscore* (New York: Criterion Music Corp, 1960), 201.

series *The Walking Dead*, specifically chose to avoid standard horror scoring techniques such as “spooky atmosphere” and “loud noises when scary things happen,” at the behest of director Frank Darabont.⁷⁰ In each case, the composers are making claims about the purpose or nature of the genre (the creation of fear, the depiction of space), and correlating these with specific musical techniques. Furthermore, McCreary's interaction with Darabont shows us that the generic implications of the soundtrack are recognized by creative personnel outside of the music department. It is my assertion – and it will have to remain an unproven one, for now – that the awareness these isolated writings demonstrate is shared far more broadly by film composers and other creative professionals in the film industry.

Musicological Reflections 1: Listmakers

As for the audience-based aspect, any writer on film music who addresses the question of genre is in a sense “inventing” the genre they describe. This is true even for a book like Kristopher Spencer's *Film and Television Scores, 1950-1979: A Critical Survey by Genre*, which consists of nothing more than a list of films in each genre with a brief description of each score's musical style.⁷¹ Although Spencer makes no claims about the nature or meaning of genres, or about the role played by music in genre, even this is a model of genre-music interaction, as we can see by comparing Spencer's lists with those provided in Wolfgang Thiel's *Filmmusik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*.⁷² For the most part, Thiel too ends up essentially listing scores in

70 Clayton Neuman, “Interview with Bear McCreary,” <http://blogs.amctv.com/the-walking-dead/2010/11/bear-mccreary-interview.php>

71 Kristopher Spencer, *Film and Television Scores, 1950-1979: A Critical Survey by Genre*, (Jefferson: McFarland, 2008). Spencer's is not the only example of this approach: Randall Larson has written two book-length accounts of individual genres which, while far more comprehensive, do not really move beyond the list-of-representative-scores model adopted by Spencer. These are *Musique Fantastique* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 1984), and *Music from the House of Hammer: Music in the Hammer Horror Films* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 1996).

72 Wolfgang Thiel, *Filmmusik in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1981). Thiel's extremely valuable treatments of the comedy and the documentary film depart from

each genre (although he provides much more descriptive and interpretive detail). However, his aim in doing so is quite different: Thiel is an active composer himself, and seems to value genres primarily for the opportunities they afford to the composer. As a result, rather than focusing on the most popular or typical scores, he tends to focus on the most ambitious or unusual ones.⁷³ Furthermore the genres described by Thiel are highly idiosyncratic, in that he conflates the Horror film with the Crime film, and considers the Western to be a subgenre of the Adventure film. Both Thiel and Spencer have obviously asserted the existence of the genres they describe – and it does no good to simply claim that Spencer is right while Thiel is wrong! Indeed, the generic map drawn by Thiel is perfectly coherent, if unfamiliar, and there are musical similarities between the genres that (from Spencer's perspective, and my own) he seems to have spliced together. Canon-formation is never a merely descriptive act. To a certain degree, it must always be an imaginative one. But Spencer and Thiel's books are ultimately unsatisfactory because they never explain *why* the films they describe belong on such-and-such a list.

Another listmaker, although quite a different one, is Mark Brownrigg, whose dissertation *Film Music and Film Genre* approaches the problem from the opposite direction. Rather than listing scores and composers, he catalogues characteristic musical features. We are told for instance that melodramas feature “big, symphonic melodies, lyrical and longline in construction,” often orchestrated with “the romantic resonance of string instruments and piano: if [they] had been playing tuba and drums the effect of their scenes together would have been quite different.”⁷⁴ Brownrigg's work is admirable for its thoroughness: each effect he identifies is provided with copious examples, and his lists of topoi are quite extensive. He also makes one extremely important and incisive theoretical point, which is that film music can be a site of

mere listmaking, adopting a more theoretical and musicological approach.

73 Neither Thiel nor Spencer specifically acknowledges their criteria for selecting scores, but when comparing the two books side by side the difference is clear.

74 Mark Brownrigg, “Film Music and Film Genre” (PhD Diss., University of Stirling, 2003), 152 and 156.

generic hybridity.

It is, however, one thing to isolate a series of orchestrations, gestures and other musical tropes associated with the Western, for example, but quite another to find a film that uses *only* these. Close listening soon reveals that Westerns sound like Westerns for *most* of their running time, but not *all* of their running time. Once we factor in the sobbing strings for the love scenes, the bugle calls and snare drums for the cavalry scenes, the discord and sudden *sforzandos* for the scary scenes, and so on, one might be left with the conclusion that films from different genres all sound pretty much the same after all. But this can't be so. Parodic films. . . spoof not only the narrative, setting and character clichés of a given genre, but also camp up the music associated with the orthodox canon. This would seem to indicate that genre-specific conventions do indeed exist; they would have to be to be manipulated so.⁷⁵

The argument is that by borrowing sobbing strings, snare drums, and discord, the films have momentarily become melodramas, war films, and horror films respectively. This is a brilliant observation. But it also lays bare an underlying weakness to Brownrigg's approach. The various musical traits Brownrigg identifies as generically marked are the sonic equivalent of what genre theorists call a film's "iconography," which means that Coplandesque fanfares are a part of the Western in the same way that horses and ten-gallon hats are a part of the Western. However, although we might fairly suggest that any film with a ten-gallon hat in it is at least *gesturing* towards the Western, the same cannot be said for horses, which appear in all sorts of films. The horse in the Western is invested with a certain energy, and has a certain resonance within the narrative structure. The same can be said of many elements of the genre's *mise-en-scène*, but not all: the horse in the Western is not merely a horse, and hats are not just hats, and guns are not just guns, but chairs – which are not part of the genre's iconography, but nevertheless do appear in the majority of Western films – are merely chairs, and knives merely knives.

75 Ibid., 56. Brownrigg also provides a useful survey of film genre scholarship that makes some mention of music or sound, although his account of film music scholarship that mentions genre is notably incomplete.

This last example is a telling one. For there exists another genre, the horror film, in which the knife has *immense* iconographic significance. Many films contain knives, but horror films contain horror-knives, with the particular associations of impending doom, phallic power, and bodily fallibility that such objects suggest. In addition to these implications (which are all loosely speaking ideological), horror-knives have an aesthetic element. They need to be big, glistening, and interestingly angled, for instance, in a way that the purely functional knives of a documentary about woodcarving certainly would not.

This lesson can be applied to music as well. Dissonance appears in quite literally every film score I have ever encountered, but it is in horror films that we find horror-dissonance. Other genres can borrow this effect (briefly mixing their genre, and becoming horrific), but only – and this is the crucial point – if the transplanted dissonance *feels* like something out of a horror film. Examples of this sort of mixing exist, but it is an error to claim, as Brownrigg does, that any film containing dissonance and *sforzandos* is borrowing the musical rhetoric of the horror film.⁷⁶ In every score, certain cues will respond to the local needs of the sequence (that is, to the small-scale narrative or musical logic) without bringing any generic myth into play. Furthermore, some musical gestures are typical of multiple genres. Brownrigg holds that the brass fanfare is a war-film topos, but this is surely mistaken. This particular feature is as much a part of the Western's iconography as it is a part of the war film's, and as much a part of the swashbuckler's as either of the others. A slightly different energy will attach in each case, and it is the *flavor* of this energy, for lack of a better word, that tells us how (and whether) the cue is generically marked.⁷⁷ Therefore, although it provides an excellent lexicon of scoring techniques,

76 For intrusions of horror-rhetoric, see the opening sequence of the melodrama *Written on the Wind* (Sirk, 1956), or the rape sequence in the Western *For a Few Dollars More* (Leone, 1965), which is described in the fourth chapter of this study.

77 Whether this “flavor” is purely a matter of reception, or whether there are in fact distinct musical traits that tend to separate Western-fanfares from War-fanfares, is not a question I wish to address here, although such a study would be fascinating. Based on my own unscientific impressions of the phenomenon, however, I would guess that if such patterns exist, they are

Brownrigg's approach does a rather poor job of explaining the subjective experience of genre film music. The lists of topoi he lays out are useful and comprehensive, but he grants them altogether too much power, and fails to recognize that topoi are as much constituted by their frame (including the genre we find them in) as they are by a specific musical motif.

Out of all the current writers on film music and film genre, Brownrigg makes the boldest claims for the existence of musical genres associated with each film genre (which is again to say that he has invented musical identities for the genres). In that a cue that fits one of his musical categories will retain that generic affiliation in any sort of film in which it appears, Brownrigg's musical genres are actually more clearly defined than his filmic genres! But he gives no very clear account of the argument that defines his generic categories. He attempts to arrive at his lexicon of topoi for each genre inductively by watching a series of movies and recording the cues that appear frequently, but this approach is incompatible with the genre-mixing phenomenon as he describes it. A Western without "sobbing strings for the love scenes" is no more or less rare than a melodrama without sobbing strings. Assigning this gesture to the melodrama, then, requires Brownrigg to have at least a nebulous mental model of what Melodramas, Westerns, and sobbing strings all mean, which allows him to recognize that the Western in this case is the odd man out. There is nothing inappropriate about Brownrigg having these mental models, which are quite possibly what both genres and topoi actually *are*, but again I would argue that truly interesting and productive genre criticism requires us to describe these models, and even grapple with them, rather than leaving them unstated and unchallenged.

Musical Reflections 2: The Interpretive Critics

As noted at the outset of this chapter, there is a growing body of literature that approaches film music through interpretive genre criticism. Leaving aside the essays that focus

quite subtle differences, and would be observable as statistical trends rather than as definite rules.

on individual genre films, we find a number of accounts that focus on individual genres or cycles of films. Heather Laing's *The Gendered Score: Music in 1940s Melodrama and the Woman's Film* posits a special relationship between the 1940s melodrama and orchestral film music, claiming that these scores require us to examine "the generic and musical precedents of theatrical melodrama and the ideas of the melodramatic mode. . . as well as the representation of female characters in opera."⁷⁸ Laing thus claims that music in melodrama must be heard *differently*: as audience members, we are primed by "the ideas of the melodramatic mode" to hear the music in a certain way, and therefore, as scholars, we must account for the music in a certain way, which in this case involves delving into the genre's cultural antecedents. (Laing stops short, however, of claiming that the listening strategies we apply to the melodrama might be inappropriate for other kinds of films.) Stephen Meyer follows a similar tack in his forthcoming study of the music of biblical epics.⁷⁹ Focusing mainly on the scores of Miklós Rózsa, Meyer claims that these films establish a binary dualism between the public sphere (that which is Caesar's) and everything outside of it (that which is God's – but also, depending on the film, romance, parenthood, and family life in general). Here again Meyer suggests a generically motivated inflection of our normal way of looking at film music. But again it is not clear what, if anything, this tells us about music beyond the boundaries of the genre in question. Many films that are not biblical epics nevertheless alternate between two sonorities, one associated with family and spiritual life, and one with violence and the public sphere. The original version of *The 3:10 to Yuma* (Delmer Daves, 1957), for instance, is structured in precisely this way. Are we to hear this Western exactly the same way that we would hear a biblical epic? Meyer's work also stands uneasily as a work of interpretive genre criticism in that it focuses on the output of a

⁷⁸ Heather Laing, *The Gendered Score: Music in 1940s Melodrama and the Woman's Film*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 3.

⁷⁹ Meyer included elements of this material in a conference presentation, "Spectacle and Authenticity in Miklós Rózsa's *Quo Vadis* Score" (paper presented at the annual Music and the Moving Image Conference, New York, New York, May 21-23, 2010).

single composer (although there are benefits to this as well), and similar questions surround Kathryn Kalinak's monograph on the use of music in the Westerns of John Ford.⁸⁰ Is this a typical musical gesture for the biblical epic? Or simply typical of Rózsa's style? Does this score respond to a feature of the genre, or merely to an element of Ford's auteurist stamp?

Interpretive accounts of individual genres, then, seem to call out for some kind of comparative approach. As of this writing, there is only one of these: Timothy Scheurer's *Music and Mythmaking in Film*.⁸¹

Scheurer's book in many ways lays out the framework for what I am trying to accomplish here. His stated goal is to explain the ways in which music can reflect the fundamental underlying myth of each genre (placing him in the ritualistic wing of interpretive criticism), and the ways in which filmmakers use this mythic content as the raw material for a "theme and variations" process that accounts for genres' changes over time (which he attempts to chart by cataloging characteristic scoring topoi over the history of each genre).⁸² These are admirable goals, and although Scheurer's account of music's engagement with the genres' ideological structures is not entirely successful, the book is excellent when considered as genre history. Brownrigg's catalogs of topoi are more comprehensive, and, next to Spencer's lists, Scheurer's canon of important genre films seems artificially constrained – but Scheurer's is the best account of the development of genre scoring practices over time.

80 Kathryn Kalinak, *How the West was Sung: Music in the Westerns of John Ford* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

81 Timothy Scheurer, *Music and Mythmaking in Film: Genre and the Role of the Composer* (Jefferson: McFarland Books, 2008), 25.

82 Ibid., 8-14. The metaphor of theme-and-variations (also used by Neale, *Genre and Hollywood*, 207-14), is thought-provoking but inexact. There is a spirit of combinatorial play in theme-and-variation movements that is largely absent in genre cinema. It might be more apt to think of the genre as a classical warhorse (Beethoven's 5th, for instance), and the individual genre film as a new recording of that work, which the performer attempts to make vital, original, and necessary. The theme-and-variations metaphor does have more resonance with certain particular cases, however, such as Joss Whedon et. al.'s arch treatment of the horror genre in the TV series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003).

Another major strength of Scheurer's book is his recognition that aesthetic differences between the musics of different genres have a fundamentally ideological basis. We are told that detective films do not provide heroic trumpet fanfares for their heroes because the heroes of these films are too tarnished and ambiguous to merit such musical treatment.⁸³ However, like Brownrigg, Scheurer argues that the meaning of a given musical gesture is more or less fixed, apparently claiming that the meaning of a musical gesture in *any* film is the same as its meaning in the concert hall.

The idea that any musical gesture can be assigned a single meaning, independent of context, is already a pretty severe distortion of how we experience music. Some have even argued that music is uniquely dependent upon context. Edward Cone, for instance, writes that

Musical gestures lack signification, but they can be significant. Like a sigh, a musical gesture has no specific referent, it conveys no specific message. But like a sigh, it can prove appropriate to many occasions; it can fit into many contexts, which in return can explain its significance. The expressive content of the musical gesture, then, depends on its context. Deprived of context, the gesture expresses nothing; it is only potentially expressive. No context, no content.⁸⁴

Cone seems to argue here that a musical gesture will have one context at a time: we can try various keys in music's lock until we find the one that fits (or perhaps it is better to think of music as a key which we can use to open a variety of contextual doors, one at a time). He suggests, for instance, that successive verses of a strophic song will bring out different shades of meaning from the music to which they are attached: "words, then, do not limit the potential of music; rather, by specification and exemplification, they may render it more easily comprehensible."⁸⁵ Cone goes on to discuss the contexts provided by program notes, programmatic titles, and entirely subjective "nonverbal but highly personal" contexts which

83 Scheurer, *Music and Mythmaking in Film*, 82.

84 Edward Cone, *The Composer's Voice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 165.

85 *Ibid.*, 167.

grant the music “a content based on the correspondence between musical gestures and their patterns on the one hand, and isomorphically analogous experiences, inner or outer, on the other.”⁸⁶ Film genre, too, is a context. Understanding the ways in which genre, in particular, provides meaning to musical gestures (and the ways in which filmmakers exploit these possibilities) could be seen as one of the main goals of this study.

For Scheurer, however, the meaning of the gesture is defined outside of the context of the film. This has the curious effect of effacing genre's ability to shape the meaning of a musical cue, even as it shapes every other aspect of the cinematic experience, which flies in the face of my own experience in studying genre scores, and the reactions I have seen in my students. Furthermore, although Scheurer's book does a good job of showing how music can reinforce genre – painting the hero as heroic in the Western, painting the woman as a seductress in the crime film – at no point does it suggest that a film's score could shift or complicate our understanding of the film's interaction with its generic model. This too seems counterintuitive. Film music is not some external gloss on a preexisting text, it is an integral element of the film itself. The interaction of music and genre is a hermeneutic circle: any cue in a genre film is shaped by its generic context, but the film's genre, and its relationship to that genre, is shaped by the music in turn. Scheurer breaks the circle, treating music and genre as separate systems that mirror each other without ever truly interacting.

Conclusion: On the Necessary Conditions for a Theory of Genre Film Music

This chapter has attempted to provide a synoptic and totalizing account of the potential interactions of film genre and music. Like the totalizing genre theories provided by Altman and Neale, it is probably more satisfying (if it is satisfying) as philosophy than as film criticism or musicology. By attempting to summarize all approaches to genre and submitting each to a rational academic critique, one ends up pulling very far away indeed from the actual films (and

86 Ibid., 169.

in my case, the scores) that make up any given genre. You cannot really use these theories to say something about a film – rather, you can say that one *could* say such-and-such a thing if one were committed to a particular theoretical approach. Such is the condition of meta-criticism.

It might even be that the reason that meta-criticism gives us so little purchase on actual films is that it makes a category error in assuming that the various approaches to genre described above are in fact describing parts of a single whole. And so the framework established above seems to call for three complementary studies of genre's interactions with music: an interpretive study, focusing on music's interactions with genres' underlying value systems; an economic study built on a comprehensive exploration of the music used in trailers, soundtrack albums, marketing tie-ins, and fan culture; and a reflexive study grounded in an exhaustive search for self-conscious awareness of genre in the extant literature on film music, not only in the academic literature but also (and perhaps even more importantly) in the writings of composers, popular critics, and fans. The first of these studies, or at least its groundwork, is laid out in the remaining chapters of this dissertation. The other two may be regarded as forthcoming.

However, if the versions of genre described by interpretive, economic, and reflexive genre criticism are disparate, they are nevertheless connected: the economic axis goes a long way toward explaining how genres come to exist, the interpretive axis explains (or perhaps, elaborates and extends) our experience of these genres, and the attraction they have for so many of us, and the reflexive axis depends for its operation on the system of genres created by the other two. It may be hoped, therefore, that the disparate theories of music and genre arrived at through these studies will eventually yield some version of a general theory of genre. The broader purpose of this task established, we now may dispense with these heady speculations, and turn with greater confidence to the task immediately at hand.

Chapter 2. Music in the Melodrama: Where Words Leave Off

He did not seem to comprehend his position, except that it was horrible. It is probable that he, also, was disentangling from amid the vague ideas of a poor man, ignorant of everything, something excessive. While the bolt of his iron collar was being riveted behind his head with heavy blows from the hammer, he wept, his tears stifled him, they impeded his speech...

– Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*

Introduction

As noted in the previous chapter, Steve Neale has argued that melodrama does not properly speaking exist.⁸⁷ By doing so he is making a striking metaphysical claim about the nature of genre, which would, if scrupulously worked out, leave very few genres unscathed, but nevertheless, it should be recognized that melodrama's claim to existence as a continuous historical category is particularly tenuous. Therefore, what we address in this chapter is not primarily a canon of texts, but a canon-forming argument, a way of looking at the world that will allow us to assemble a canon. Melodrama, I will argue, is best defined by a particular relationship between the film's aesthetic surface and a set of underlying social tensions, in which extreme aesthetic gestures are used to highlight the moments in the film when the underlying tensions are hinted at or exposed. Which tensions in particular provoke this aesthetic excess will vary from film to film and era to era, as the case studies later in his chapter will demonstrate. The fundamental structural relationship between the ideological tensions and the aesthetic surface, however, is fixed.

I will begin by exploring and justifying this “melodramatic imagination” in some detail,

⁸⁷ Neale, *Film Genre and Hollywood*, 182-3. Although I know of no other scholar of genre who denies melodrama outright, several others have pointed out that its historical tradition is less robust than that of most other genres. See for instance Merritt, “Melodrama: Post-Mortem for a Phantom Genre,” Altman, *Film/Genre*, Williams, “Melodrama Revised” and Barry Langford, *Film Genre: Hollywood and Beyond* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 31.

not attempting to resolve the genre's status for once and all, but rather to locate the specific understanding of it that seems most relevant for our purposes here.⁸⁸ With this accomplished, I will examine the interaction of this particular ideological construct with current accounts of film music. As we shall see, defining the use of music in the film melodrama presents us with special difficulties, not because it is too difficult, but because it is too easy. For the other genres treated in this study, I will offer novel ways of conceiving of music's relationship with film, but here I will argue that one of the most prevalent approaches to film music in modern scholarship is in fact a thoroughly melodramatic one. Finally, through close readings of cues from three very different melodramatic films, I will observe the model in action, attempting to resolve a couple of outstanding theoretical questions along the way.

I. Theories of Melodrama

Etymologies

Many accounts of film melodrama and literary melodrama begin with an etymological history of the term, which in English has had two related meanings. The oldest of these is, quite simply, a dramatic entertainment with a musical component. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, "melodrama" first appeared as an Italian loan-word meaning "opera" in Dr. Burney's 1789 *General History of Music*, and later came to mean any sort of non-comic theater with song, dance, or pantomime, including the sort of stage-drama-with-underscoring that musicologists refer to as melodrama today.⁸⁹ Melodrama in this sense is a purely formal category, and very

88 The term is taken from Thomas Elsaesser, "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama," *Ibid.*, and "Peter Brooks, "The Melodramatic Imagination," in *Imitations of Life*, ed. Marcia Landy (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), 50-67.

89 "melodrama, *n.*" *OED Online*. December 2012. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/116226?redirected/From=melodrama> (accessed December 15, 2013). For the special musicological definition of "melodrama," see Peter Branscombe, "Melodrama." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press, accessed

nearly all narrative film would count as melodramatic.

The other well-attested historical definition of melodrama, which developed from the first, refers to the sorts of plots that these entertainments typically have. This in turn has two facets. First of all, a melodramatic plot is one in which emotions, actions, and characters are grotesquely inflated, to the point of threatening our suspension of disbelief. Second, a melodrama is a kind of malformed or adulterated tragedy.⁹⁰ It may refer to tragedy supplied with a cop-out happy ending; alternately it may refer to a work that is tragic in tone but lacks moral or intellectual seriousness; finally, it could refer to a work that is too stylized or artificial in its presentation of tragic concepts. Many have noted that melodrama is generally a term of abuse, and that there is frequently an element of snobbery involved.⁹¹ Melodrama is bad drama, we are told, and while the lack of a genuinely tragic ending, a lack of seriousness, or a flamboyance of tone might be to blame, there is very often also a suggestion that this sort of debased entertainment has a natural appeal for people whose aesthetic sensibilities are similarly debased (meaning variously women, the poor, etc.).

Several elements of these traditional definitions are still relevant to the film genre of melodrama, despite the lack of direct historical continuity. There is frequently some kind of disconnect or mismatch between film melodrama's aesthetic surface and its ideas (as will be discussed in greater detail below). Melodrama has remained a term of abuse, and even the genre's partisans tend to recognize it as an abused category in need of defense and justification.

March 13, 2013, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/18355>. Note that for Jean-Jacques Rousseau (whose *Pygmalion* of 1762 is generally held up as the oldest melodrama in this sense), “mélodrame” meant opera, as it did for Burney.

90 For a history of this aspect of melodrama's reception, see Ann Norris Michelini, *Euripides and the Tragic Tradition* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006) 321-323.

91 See for instance Christine Gledhill, “The Melodramatic Field: An Introduction,” in *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*, ed. Gledhill (London: British Film Institute, 1987), 5, and Williams, “Melodrama Revised,” 43-44.

And as we might expect, melodrama retains a special relationship with music. But with regard to film melodrama, at least, the causal link between the two definitions has been reversed: where once the malformed melodramatic narratives were simply the sorts of plots that we found attached to the formal category of melodrama, now an extravagant musicality is *one of the characteristic ways in which melodramatic narratives are malformed*.⁹² Just as the characters, emotions, and dramatic reversals are larger than life, so too is the music, and indeed, so are the color, the *mise-en-scène*, the performances, the costuming... and these excesses, which the etymological account explains as unfortunate byproducts of the combination of music and narrative, are now valued in their own right. Rather than a sign of flawed tragedy, the volatile surface of melodrama becomes a way to speak of deeper tragedies that cannot be otherwise expressed.

Let us say for the sake of the argument that all narrative involves two layers, an external layer composed of events, locations, objects, and physical bodies, and the purely mechanical or contingent succession of these things; and an inner layer that consists of the *motivations* for events, the *spirit* of a place (the national character, the *genius loci*), the *fetishistic significance* of objects (their meaning-for-us), the *subjectivities* of the characters, and the *fated* or *organic* succession of these things. Think of the first layer as the surface of the ocean, and the second as the rise and fall of the ocean floor, which, although itself invisible, shapes the motion of the outer layer in subtle and at times incalculable ways. Melodrama involves situations where the

92 That is to say, at some point along the line it became possible to say, with a straight face, that *Tosca* is a melodramatic opera. By the same token, we cannot describe a stage play with music as “a restrained and cerebral melodrama,” but presumably we once could. Judging by the quotations in the *OED*, the association of melodrama with narrative and aesthetic excess began (in English, at least), some twenty years after the term was first introduced. It is harder to judge when this became the primary meaning. Incidentally, the term “operatic” is now used more or less as “melodramatic” once was: to describe a novel or a symphony as operatic is to make a point about its exaggerated and overheated emotions, but no one could describe *Tosca* as an operatic opera.

inner layer is so powerfully inflected as to disturb the tranquil surface of the outer layer. The projection or protrusion of the story's inner life agonizes the surface of the outer life, so that the relationship between the ocean floor and the surface is no longer subtle nor even mistakable: we may not actually see the coral reef, as it were (for most of the inner world consists of things that cannot be directly sensed), but we see the waves breaking over it, and there would be something unnatural or unbelievable about the motion of the water if the hidden obstacle did not exist. Melodrama, then, is the art in which the aesthetic surface is subjected to motions and deformations that would, in the absence of some profound underlying cause, utterly beggar belief. In fact – and here is where the metaphor begins to break down – melodrama's narrative and aesthetic surface is often so turbulent that it seems unjustified and excessive even after we have intuited the hidden cause. Peter Brooks's account of literary melodrama focuses on this notion of near-unbelievability: drawing on examples from Samuel Richardson, Honoré de Balzac, and Henry James (whose notes on Balzac also inform Brooks's analysis heavily), he demonstrates that in each case their plots are marked by situations, behavior, and plot developments that strain the limits of belief, although the nature of these transgressions varies greatly through time.⁹³

Another problem with the hydrographic metaphor offered above is that the ocean's rocks and reefs are really there. We experience melodrama *as if* there were masses lurking deep within the text, upon which the aesthetic surface founders and ruptures, but in fact it is only that surface to which viewers and artists have access. We might even say that the underlying structure of a film is produced by the audience as they watch it. (The word "underlying" becomes

93 Peter Brooks, "The Melodramatic Imagination," *ibid.* Briefly, Richardson's characters break codified laws, through rape; Balzac's break unspoken laws, through rudeness; James's break psychological laws, through subjective perceptual shifts. (That is, a character to whose thoughts we have access will begin to perceive things differently, and the suddenness and lack of motivation for this change will challenge the reader's sense of normal mental processes.)

a bit misleading in this circumstance, but regardless of whether these processes have existential priority, they seem to have structural priority, just as the background of any given shot in a film *seems* to lie “behind” the plane of the movie screen despite the fact that it only exists by virtue of that surface being bombarded with a certain set of photons.) This understanding of melodrama is particularly relevant to the emotional experience of watching the films. Linda Williams classes melodrama, along with horror and pornography, as a “body genre,” in which the business of the film is to depict a state of emotional extremity, and, through “an almost involuntary mimicry of the emotion or sensation of the body on the screen,” to create that emotion in the audience as well.⁹⁴ But in fact there is no body on the screen. Where, then, do the audience's emotional states originate? Who is mimicking whom? (Brown, in *Overtones and Undertones*, suggests that music can allow us to project our own emotions onto the characters.)⁹⁵ Melodrama's troubled surface, thus understood, does not respond to an existing emotional process; rather, it calls that process into being by masquerading as its indexical sign. This is only to say that melodrama depends on a certain very specific suspension of disbelief: to feel an empathic connection to the characters of melodrama, we must believe that their deeper emotional lives exist, and are conditioned by a social reality more or less equivalent to our own, *despite* the narrative and aesthetic surfaces, which strain the limits of our credulity.

The Melodramatic Break

To illustrate the phenomenon, consider a single brilliant shot from Elia Kazan's *Splendor in the Grass* (1961). Here, just before “bad girl” Ginny Stamper (Barbara Loden) has an emotional meltdown at her parents' New Year's Eve party, the ribbon of a balloon somehow wanders around her neck. . . and suddenly we recognize it as a hangman's noose, prefiguring her

94 Linda Williams, “Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess,” *Film Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (1991): 2-13.

95 Brown, *Overtones and Undertones*, 109.

inevitable death. This is an extreme gesture: the symbolism is *so* direct, and furthermore, a ribbon is a pretty innocuous thing in itself, incapable of bearing even the direct symbolism "hangman's noose," let alone the second-order symbolism "fate-of-death" or the underlying social traumas (emotional neglect within the nuclear family, gendered double-standards for sexual expression) that doom this particular woman.



Image 2.1: *Splendor in the Grass*. This shot is sustained for several seconds. Although the ribbon seems to fortuitously catch on Ginny's shoulder as she turns, if we look carefully we can see the actress draping it around her own neck while her back is to the camera.

However, once invested with the intensity of all of these uncontrollable substrates, the ribbon is by *far* more affectively intense than a philosophical excursus on gender roles, and what is more (though this is surprising!), more intense than many scenes of actual violence. The effect is similar to that of pushing a large volume of water through a narrow pipe: the force is multiplied by the difference in consequence between the underlying trauma and the material

thing that's asked to bear it. The weightier the former, the more trivial the latter, the greater the overall effect. And even that explanation seems inadequate: with pipes, the force multiplier is predictable and the volume of water is constant. When melodrama works, the multiplier is unpredictable, and you get out more affect than you put in. (That after all is the whole point. Would we go to the movies to feel *as* bothered by social tensions as we already do?)⁹⁶

Any moment such as this, where the inner layer of the text powerfully affects the outer layer – that is, where a surfeit of desire is expressed through a troubling of the aesthetic or narrative surface – we shall call a melodramatic moment or melodramatic break. Basically all narratives will include at least a few of these. We have already seen, thanks to Brownrigg, that a genre's characteristic traits can be observed outside of proper instances of that genre, and furthermore, we can say that every film is at least a bit melodramatic in a way that we cannot say that all films are horrific, comedic, and so on.⁹⁷ We reserve the generic label “melodrama,” then, for stories in which this tendency is exaggerated, with melodramatic breaks becoming the rule rather than the exception. A melodrama is not a story with one absurd twist, but one where the entire narrative structure is made up of the surface chaos caused by obscure chthonic forces. It is not a single submerged coral reef, but a riverbed strewn with glacial erratics, characterized less by a discrete traumatic event than by a generally turbulent surface which we process as a stretch of white water. A torrent is a river being melodramatic.

96 The implication, of course, is that we go to feel *more* bothered. Many critics have noted that melodrama fans go to the theater to weep. See for instance Williams, “Film Bodies,” and Neale, “Melodrama and Tears,” *Screen* 27, no. 6 (1986): 6-83.

97 Brownrigg, “Film Music and Film Genre,” 56. On the idea that all films are a bit melodramatic, see Gledhill, “The Melodramatic Field: an Introduction,” 13. Williams, “Melodrama Revised,” goes so far as to say that not only film but modern American culture as a whole is melodramatic through and through.

Elsaesser and Excess

This is the key insight of Thomas Elsaesser's seminal essay "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama" which has gone on to influence every later account of melodrama.⁹⁸ For Elsaesser, melodrama is less a genre than a narrative mode in which we find, rather than well-formed plots where problems are presented and solved through the characters' vigorous action, "a sublimation of dramatic values into décor, colour, gesture, and composition of frame, which in the best melodramas is perfectly thematised in terms of the characters' emotional and psychological predicaments."⁹⁹ It scarcely needs to be said that these issues are sublimated into various kinds of sonic and musical excess as well.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, Elsaesser begins with the example of music (although he quickly glosses over this), and musical terms are used throughout his essay as a metaphorical prop: we hear of the "'melodic' dimension" of speech, the "build-ups and climaxes" of the editing, and so on.¹⁰¹

Like Burney's version of melodrama, then, Elsaesser's is essentially defined by a technique. As Cynthia Baron rightly emphasizes, it is only the *best* melodramas which Elsaesser thinks are particularly revealing of character psychology and underlying social traumas, and his business in writing the essay is to demonstrate that the denigrated melodramatic technique could be used to address serious issues.¹⁰² Elsaesser does suggest, however, that certain

98 Elsaesser, "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama," 68-92.

99 Ibid, 76. The features listed by Elsaesser are essentially elements of *mise-en-scène* and cinematography. The elements of cinema that he leaves out, in this core definition, are sound, narrative, and editing.

100 Brownrigg notes that melodrama is characterized by visual excess, and suggests that this is often matched with sonic excess. He makes no mention of the ideological basis this excess is usually deemed to have, however, or of the synchronization of musical excess with any event in the narrative. Brownrigg, "Film Music and Film Genre." 174-176.

101 Elsaesser, "Tales of Sound and Fury," 75.

102 Cynthia Baron, "Tales of Sound and Fury Reconsidered: Melodrama as a System of Punctuation," *Spectator* 13, no. 2 (1992): 46-59.

Freudian and Marxist themes are particularly well-suited to melodramatic expression – and for many later theorists, such as Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, this aspect of the genre is definitional.¹⁰³ The genre comes to be seen as a ritual response (in the sense introduced in the opening chapter) to a set of radically irreconcilable desires arising from the modern bourgeois condition. The outsized emotions of melodrama, the futile actions of the characters, and the outsized sonic and visual flourishes added by the filmmakers, derive from the overflow or splashback of these inexpressible tensions, excess of desire begetting excess of aesthetics. This is the core definition of the genre for our purposes. But although the idea that there is some link between melodrama's aesthetic and ideological excesses is well recognized, there is no firm consensus on the precise nature of this link, or on what sorts of ideological excess are likely to be aesthetically marked.

The Woman's Film

The definition of melodrama that has become most central to many modern accounts, however, arose in the 80s and 90s when a group of feminist critics including Pam Cook, Mary Ann Doane, Molly Haskell, and Tania Modleski began to establish a melodramatic canon defined less by a turbulent and significance-laden aesthetic surface than by a particular subject matter: the idealized nuclear family, flawed societal standards, and the way that women run afoul of the latter in pursuit of the former.¹⁰⁴ In these theories, we frequently find a historical

103 Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, "Minnelli and Melodrama," in *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*, ed. Christine Gledhill (London: British Film Institute, 1987), 70-4. For Nowell-Smith, the link is specifically Freudian and/or Marxist: melodramatic aesthetics are linked to the Oedipal lust that is hidden by psychological repression, or to the class aggression that is hidden by false consciousness.

104 Pam Cook, "Melodrama and the Woman's Picture," in *Imitations of Life: A Reader on Film and Television Melodrama*, ed. Marcia Landy (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), 248-262. Mary Ann Doane, *The Desire to Desire* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987). Molly Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973,

division between “the family melodrama,” primarily created in the 1950s and 60s, and “the woman's film,” primarily created in the 30s and 40s (possibly, as a number of critics have noted, because of the larger percentages of woman filmgoers during World War II).¹⁰⁵ The stylistically excessive family melodramas that Elsaesser and Nowell-Smith value can be thought of as “masculine” in that they are likely to have male protagonists and standard, Oedipal thematic concerns.¹⁰⁶ The woman's film is stylistically more sedate, but sublimates desire into various kinds of *narrative* excesses: non-Oedipal plots, unreliable narrators, convoluted and subjective narrative strategies, etc. We should note that while melodrama's aesthetic excess is generally seen as a site of resistance to the dominant ideology, the woman's film is more controversial. Some see its narrative instability as just such a resistant site, but others hold that this instability is a symptom of classical cinema's inability to depict (or even adequately conceive of) a female subject position.¹⁰⁷

The relationship between these canons is a matter of fairly intense critical scrutiny. The

revised 1987), 153-189. Tania Modleski, “Time and Desire in the Woman's Film,” *Cinema Journal* 23, no. 3 (1984): 19-30.

105 A variety of labels are used. Somewhat confusingly, both sides are occasionally held up as “true” melodrama. Pam Cook discusses the division between the melodrama and the woman's picture, but Laura Mulvey refers to these categories as tragedy and melodrama respectively. Pam Cook, *ibid.*, Laura Mulvey, “Notes on Sirk and the Melodrama,” in *Home is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*, ed. Christine Gledhill (London: British Film Institute, 1987), 75-83.

106 Caryl Flinn, *Strains of Utopia: Gender, Nostalgia, and Hollywood Film Music* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 133-137.

107 Arguing in favor of the woman's film we find Flinn, *ibid.*, and Cook, “Melodrama and the Woman's Picture.” Arguing against we find Doane, *The Desire to Desire*, 16 and 36-38. For Doane, the gaps and contradictions in the narratives of the woman's film map directly onto gaps and contradictions in Freudian psychology's conception of the female subject, and therefore serve less as a challenge to the dominant ideology than as an example of its failings – and if anything, the films are designed to keep women in their place. (She does recognize certain individual films as exceptions to this, however.)

woman's film is often seen as a subgenre of the “normal” family melodrama. Others, presumably objecting to the implicit value judgment, refer to the woman's film and the family melodrama as two discrete subgenres within a broader melodramatic genre (or simply two stages in the genre's historical development). Still others – most notably Doane – remind us that the woman's film as an industry category referred to many films that were not melodramas by any later standard, perhaps suggesting that the woman's film and the melodrama are two distinct genres which happen to overlap substantially.¹⁰⁸

A good review of the existing scholarship on the woman's film, as well as much valuable material on the role of music, appears in Heather Laing's book *The Gendered Score: Music in 1940s Melodrama and the Woman's Film*.¹⁰⁹ Drawing primarily on Doane's account of melodrama's “medical discourse,” Laing shows how female melodrama protagonists are often unable, unwilling, or not allowed to speak. Then, in an account that resonates with Nowell-Smith's, she suggests that this prohibition of discourse builds up an excess of psychic energy which must overflow into the narrative as music: “the musical-emotional 'voice' of the victimized woman in film melodrama may... remain resonant and disturbingly memorable, despite her verbal silence and/or ultimate subjugation to patriarchal social structures.”¹¹⁰ Laing therefore suggests that melodramatic excess is experienced by, and even to an extent *produced* by, the characters. The affective excesses of the film's music – and presumably also the staging, costumes, and cinematography – are those things that the heroine would say, were she able. Note, however, that for Laing “it is in the dynamic between diegetic behavior and diegetic or

108 Doane, *ibid.*, especially in the introduction (1-37) and the chapter on woman's film thrillers (123-154).

109 Laing, *The Gendered Score*.

110 *Ibid.*, 19; see also 29-31, where Laing suggests that these films may “suggest a very particular idea of subjectivity that, rather than just showing how women feel, actively demonstrates a certain frustration with the inadequacy or impossibility of verbal self-expression.”

non-diegetic music, rather than solely in the music itself, that the character's relationship to their own emotions can be traced.”¹¹¹ The music is the woman's emotional experience (or perhaps more generally, that which she must not express), but this is by no means the whole of her subjectivity.

Laing's study explicitly focuses on 1940's melodramatic woman's films about musicians, in which repressed female characters literally *make* music on a regular basis (or more generally, interact diegetically with music: rapturously listen to it, hold back from making it, etc.), and even within this limited set of films she is careful to indicate that this is not what music must always do, but one special thing that it *can* do. For the specific films that she discusses, Laing's theory works well indeed. However, even within the woman's film, it will not fully account for films with primarily non-diegetic music. Above, I suggested that the melodrama's excess desire was burned off either by melodramatic gestures performed by the characters, or by melodramatic aesthetics applied by the filmmakers. Laing reduces these to a single category: everything that makes the film melodramatic emanates directly from the character. And yet Laing offers no comprehensible mechanism for the character's production of this music (let alone more intangible qualities like the film's color-balance). Her argument is that in the woman's film, the film itself is a record of the female protagonist's subjective experience, with the music serving as an “explicit representation of [her] emotional state.”¹¹² Although this certainly does happen in individual sequences, the very fact that we can identify and recognize these sequences should demonstrate that this phenomenon will not account for melodramatic cinema as a whole. Furthermore, as we shall see in the examples in the second half of this chapter, melodramatic excess does not always attach to the protagonist (or indeed, to any single specific character). And Laing's own research seems to argue against the traditionally described

111 Ibid., 64.

112 Ibid., 30.

difference between the melodrama and the woman's film: she catalogs aesthetic excesses, not the narrative kind.

Further weakening the distinction between the family melodrama and the woman's film is the fact that Laing's model finds at least tentative purchase in so stylized a melodrama as Douglas Sirk's *Written on the Wind* (1956). The film chronicles the fall of a dysfunctional family of oil-rich Texans – the aging, frustrated patriarch Jasper (Robert Keith), and his two alcoholic and irresponsible children, Marylee (Dorothy Malone) and Kyle (Robert Stack). The children's characters are slightly different: Kyle wastes his time on debauchery in order to cope with his metaphorical and literal impotence, while Marylee, marginally more self-aware, drinks and sleeps around as a way of lashing out at the rest of her family. Both children are personally and sexually obsessed with Mitch Wayne (Rock Hudson), a childhood friend of Kyle's whom Jasper has begun to groom as his successor.

At first blush, Marylee would seem like an odd case study for Laing's account of melodramatic female repression. Rather than a reticent female subject like the duly cloistered and cowed protagonists of many woman's films, Marylee is brassy and talkative, hedonistic and unafraid of public censure. However, this persona turns out to be a mask. In one of the character's most important scenes, we see her alone by a riverbank, reminiscing about her childhood declaration of love to Mitch, and eventually collapsing in tears beside a tree trunk in which their initials are engraved in a heart. The Marylee that appears in this scene is much more conventionally feminine, but in that this is her secret self, and her internal self, we are inclined to think of it also as her true self. Therefore, although she produces discourse almost compulsively, her true self is never expressed. It is quite significant that, in the riverbank sequence, the critical information is provided by a kind of auditory flashback in which young Marylee is voiced by the child actress Susan Odin. Marylee never gets to say anything important in her *own* voice (i.e. Malone's).

Just as Laing's theory would suggest, this blockage boils over into gestures of melodramatic excess. Notably, the music in this scene *does* seem to be tightly linked to Marylee's subjective experience. The cue could even be seen as metadiegetic in Claudia Gorbman's sense: not just a record of the character's emotions, but a record of her internal soundtrack.¹¹³ Malone moves her lips in time to Odin's voice and sways in time with the music. Furthermore, although this music is not particularly excessive when compared to the rest of the film, Malone's intensely stylized gestural performance surely is. For this particular scene, Laing's theory cannot be improved upon. But *Written on the Wind* has never been counted as a woman's film: it's Sirk at his most bombastic, and Kyle's half of the plot is as Oedipal as they come.

Indeed, it is far from self-evident that the family melodrama and the woman's film are distinct enough, as genres, to require distinct musical strategies. Even “male” melodrama is often marked by a deep concern with women: in the 50s and beyond, melodrama is one of the very few genres where female protagonists regularly appear, and the core audience of the genre seems to have always been female.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, female characters are always more likely to be prevented from taking decisive or effective action (whether due to impediments within the story-world, or because, as Doane notes, female characters are narratively determined as passive).¹¹⁵ Therefore, if we assume (as Elsaesser does) that there is an either-or tradeoff between effective action and melodramatic excess, the characteristic aesthetic overflow and

113 Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies*, 22-3.

114 For Doane and other psychoanalytically-minded feminist critics, the difference is that the “male” melodrama, while focusing on female characters, does not allow them to escape the role they are accorded as objects of the voyeuristic gaze. This becomes a foundational criterion of genre and of value. Mulvey, for instance, argues that the distinction between melodrama (i.e., the woman's film) and tragedy (i.e., family melodrama) is not historical at all, but simply a question of whether a female character has narrative agency.

115 Doane, *The Desire to Desire*, 6.

burning-off will naturally attach itself to female characters. By the same token, as we see from Laing's book and Caryl Flinn's reading of *Penny Serenade* (which I will revisit in this chapter's case studies), the woman's film is less aesthetically sedate than has sometimes been proposed.

This is not to say that the woman's film must have no musical identity of its own. One of the most fruitful areas for future development in the musicology of melodrama would be to define the differences in scoring practice between these subgenres. But Laing may have put the cart before the horse somewhat by attempting to define the music of the woman's film without reference to melodrama as a broader genre (which is demonstrated by the ease with which her theory can be applied to a text like *Written on the Wind*). Therefore, this chapter will attempt to create a musical model of melodrama that is as broadly conceived as possible, including both woman's films and family melodramas in its scope. If the musical model we arrive at is robust enough, future research will determine whether the woman's film and the family melodrama use the same model (making them subsets of melodrama proper), or if the "male" and "female" melodramas use distinct variants. Doane and Neale both point out that, although the woman's film is always spoken of in relation to the melodrama, the industry term was also applied to certain non-melodramatic films.¹¹⁶ Special attention should be paid to these scores as well: are woman's films scored melodramatically even when they do not address the classic melodramatic subject matter? By the same token, we should examine what Modleski calls the "male weepie," that is, films that are melodramatic but overtly concerned with masculinity.¹¹⁷ Are these scored like "normal" melodramas, or like something else? But all of this is a program for future

116 Doane, *The Desire to Desire*, 35. Neale, *Genre and Hollywood*, 168-194.

117 Tania Modleski, "Clint Eastwood and Male Weepies," *American Literary History* 22, no. 1 (2010): 136-58. Modleski rejects overt tear-jerkers such as *Field of Dreams* (Phil Robinson, 1989), in favor of texts such as *Million Dollar Baby* (Clint Eastwood, 2004), which are somewhat cagey about their melodramatic status. She finds that the latter set of films reveal something about modern concepts of masculinity (and she is doubtless right), but for the investigation I am proposing here both categories should be explored.

research: none of these questions can be answered without first creating a detailed musical model of melodrama, and this gives us quite enough to do.

II. The Melo in the Drama

Much of the standard literature on film music defines it in essentially melodramatic terms, even in films that are not melodramas. According to James Buhler, “The very unreality of the musical score allows it to break open the narrative and radically transform what the audience sees and hears. The music grants insight into *what must otherwise remain unseen and unsaid*: psychology, mood, motivation” (emphasis mine).¹¹⁸ In non-melodramatic drama, then, music is the privileged site of the melodramatic break, a conventionally accepted location for expressionistic and excessive effects. This understanding is not specific to film. Cone writes that “when, as in song, a musical line is combined with a text,” or, I would add, with any other aspect of surface signification, “it is natural for us to accept the music as referring to a subconscious level underlying – and lying under – whatever thoughts and emotions are expressed by the words.”¹¹⁹ If narrative is grounded in signification, and images (as some theorists suggest) are a merely “transparent” duplication of factual reality, music is free to move beyond these realms.¹²⁰

It is important to note that emotion, the privileged site for melodramatic excess in many

118 James Buhler, “Analytical and Interpretive Approaches (II): Analysing Interactions of Music and Film,” in *Film Music: Theoretical Approaches*, ed. K.J. Donnelly (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), 47.

119 Cone, *The Composer's Voice*, 35.

120 The special “transparency” of film (and photography) is generally associated with André Bazin. See for instance “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” in *What is Cinema Vol. 1*, trans. and ed. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967 and 2005), 9-16. Even for Bazin, this transparency is not truly absolute, and others have argued strongly against the idea: c.f. Rudolf Arnheim, *Film as Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), 8-30.

of the standard film theory accounts, is thought of by Cone (and by many other musicologists) as a kind of surface. This idea is a legacy of Romanticism: we might point for example to Arthur Schopenhauer's assertion that music expresses the *essence* of emotion without ever portraying any concrete emotion whatsoever, or to E.T.A. Hoffmann's deprecation of the lesser composers who try to depict "definite emotions," or any number of remarks by other 19th-century aestheticians.¹²¹ More recently, Royal Brown has referred to music as "unconsummated affect,"¹²² and composer-critic Kyle Gann has written that the sort of music we generally describe as "emotional" is actually nothing of the sort: "what is expressed by this extremely fluid 'al niente' music is not really emotion, as in noble or sad or resigned, but a kind of sub-verbal tension and release, the vicissitudes of a violent, anguished reaction."¹²³

These writers seem to suggest that music has access to a sort of emotion beyond emotion – and likewise, the excessive emotion so characteristic of melodrama is different in kind, not

121 Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. Judith Norman, Alistair Welchman, and Christopher Janaway (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 289. E.T.A. Hoffmann, "Beethoven's Instrumental Music," in *Source Readings in Music History*, ed. and trans. Oliver Strunk (New York: Norton, 1950). A good general overview of this tendency can be found in Carl Dahlhaus *The Idea of Absolute Music*, trans. Roger Lustig (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), and Dahlhaus himself writes that "the sentimental characterization of music as the 'language of the heart'" is a bourgeois middle-brow notion that has nothing to do with the more refined aesthetic experience explained in his book (*ibid.*, 6).

122 Royal Brown, *Overtones and Undertones*, 27.

123 Kyle Gann, "Literal Fetishism," *PostClassic Blog*, September 28, 2005, <http://www.kylegann.com/PC050928-Literal-Fetishism.html>. Gann refers specifically to Toru Takemitsu's *Fantasma/Cantos*, but his intent is to make a broader stylistic point. Unlike the romantics, for whom the connection between music and these tensions is very real, Gann means to damn this music for claiming to be natural and thus concealing its own artifice: "It's as though Takemitsu went to elaborate lengths to make it sound as though the music simply *happened*, with no human agent... by employing a formidable level of technique to expunge the appearance of human agency, the fluid, orchestrally detailed, anguished, precious, 'al niente,' style purports to achieve a basic realistic naturalness that is self-evident and non-contingent."

merely in quantity, from emotion of the usual sort. In what follows, for convenience's sake, I will frequently need to make reference to “emotion,” and even to specific emotions like anger and love, but it should be borne in mind that these are terms of convenience. The emotions at stake in melodrama are beyond the normal categories and labels within which emotion can be contained. Any definite emotion is in a sense too concrete, too *productive*, to account for melodramatic excess: instead, we find a shadowy play of half-felt tensions and contradictions. Since the earliest stages of aesthetic Romanticism, music has been thought of as naturally suited to conveying this sort of para-emotional ebb and flow (or in the case of melodrama, this para-emotional flood and burst).

Music as a Language

Of course, there are those for whom music has no such special status, but is simply a sign system, capable of communicating roughly as much, and roughly in the same way, as any other sign system. Kofi Agawu writes, of the tendency to view music as a language, that

it is assumed that there is such a thing as a self-sufficient and self-regulating body of Classic works whose broad dimensions can be isolated and defined in terms of normative features, and that these features can and should form the basis for any interpretive exercise. It is also assumed that, however closely it approaches the nature of these norms, no Classical work embodies *only* these norms. Each work plays with or violates the expectations prescribed by norms,¹²⁴

and creates meaning by doing so. On this axiomatic foundation (which is simply the semiotic distinction of *langue* and *parole*) Agawu rests not only the classical style, but the very exercise of music interpretation. Without this, for him, there can be no meaning in music. Similar

124 Kofi Agawu, *Playing With Signs* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 6. Agawu also provides here a good summary of earlier accounts of music as a language.

statements have been made by Margaret Bent and Eero Tarasti.¹²⁵ All of these writers are thinking of rather different grammars, and of rather different styles, but the inherent principle is the same. We must understand the "grammatical" content of a language in order to understand the "expressive" content of a statement that distorts that grammar.

Emotion beyond Emotion, Music Beyond Music

This allows us to reframe the relationship between music and emotions. Music has routinely been seen as the excess to all signification. This is what Richard Wagner means by his claim that "the essence of higher instrumental music consists in its uttering in tones a thing unspeakable in words," and what Allen Weiss means by referring to communication without content as "musication."¹²⁶ But in fact, this structure and value system is recapitulated *within* music as well. There is a pervasive sense that normal musical language only goes so far, and that better things can be done, and truer things spoken of, by exceeding its bounds. (Wagner only speaks of the "higher" music, after all.) When Gann refers to "al niente music," he means music that uses complicated rhythmic and metric shifts to efface any sense of an artificial rhythmic grid, and dynamic markings such as 'al niente' to efface any sense of a corresponding artificial dynamic grid, and so on. Certain excessive musical gestures cannot be understood within the

125 Margaret Bent, "The Grammar of Medieval Music: Preconditions for Analysis," in *Tonal Structures in Early Music*, ed. Cristle Collins Judd (New York: Garland, 1998), 15-60. Eero Tarasti, *Myth and Music: A Semiotic Approach to the Aesthetics of Myth in Music, Especially that of Wagner, Sibelius, and Stravinsky* (Berlin: DeGruyter, 1979), 31.

126 Richard Wagner, "Program to Beethoven's 9th Symphony," quoted in Carl Dahlhaus, *The Idea of Absolute Music*, 19. Allen Weiss, *The Aesthetics of Excess* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), xi. "At the threshold that separates meaning from nonsense, we find rhythm, melody, harmony – the pure expression of the body in language. Speech is 'worked' at one extreme by metaphysics, and 'played' at the other extreme by music: logocentrism versus melocentrism. Such *musication* (the purest figure of elocution, which underlies all rhetorical figuration) is a function of absolute rhetorical differences, while conceptuality is a function of the dissimulation of such rhetorical differences."

conventional musical language at all, and therefore these deviations – of rhythm, of pitch, etc. – become the potential site of melodramatic breaks in the aesthetic surface of the music, where emotional excess (or rather, that characteristically melodramatic half-formed flood of emotion-stuff) surges through.

Therefore, it is not quite accurate to claim that film music is generally conceived of in melodramatic terms. The problem cuts deeper than that. For music's ability to serve as a higher language, a language of the emotions, or a translinguistic non-signifying sign of the Absolute, is contingent on *an essentially melodramatic interpretation of music itself*. If we define music as the excess to all signification, then music is only fully music when stress is applied to the musical system – and just as Balzac's melodrama, James's melodrama, and Richardson's melodrama require different levels of stress, so different musical systems require different amounts of musical stress. A diminished seventh in Monteverdi is every bit as shocking as a seven-note octatonic chord in Gershwin: in both, pressure has been applied to the joints of the musical language until it cries out in anguish.

Speaking about Music Speaking

Finding that agony, and identifying the hidden psychological or ideological tensions that account for the surface's aesthetic perturbations, have long been central tasks of music criticism. This sort of writing about music turns to hermeneutics, both in the sense of Schleiermacher, viewing music as a text that must be interpreted, shuttling back and forth between various interpretive frames in order to arrive at its extra-rational significance, and in the sense of Barthes, where the ineluctable desire to uncover the mysteries of the text becomes the major attraction *of the text*.¹²⁷ The music has a message, the message is hidden, and the message

127 Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics and Criticism*, ed. and trans. Andrew Bowie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1974).

demands that we interpret and understand it, although we can never entirely decode it. Any modern scholar who writes that Beethoven's 9th symphony is really about patriarchal rage (as Susan McClary has), or that Borodin's *Prince Igor* is really about the castrating oriental other (as Richard Taruskin has), is approaching music from this fundamental stance.¹²⁸ Interestingly, this kind of writing about music often lapses into the language of poetry – it would be all too easy, otherwise, to mistake that-which-music-evokes for something prosaic.¹²⁹ McClary does not merely claim that Beethoven represents patriarchal anger, but rather that “the carefully prepared cadence is frustrated, damming up energy which finally explodes in the throttling murderous rage of a rapist incapable of attaining release.”¹³⁰ Taruskin does not simply state that *Prince Igor* is really an expression of European anxieties about ethnic and feminine others, rather he cites it as an example of “not just the East, but the seductive East that emasculates, enslaves, renders passive. In a word, it signifies the promise of the experience of *nega*,” an apparently untranslatable Russian word which encapsulates everything that Taruskin just wrote in English.¹³¹ Having dragged meaning out of the musical cryptogram, he proceeds to re-encode it in a linguistic cryptogram, lest our eyes be blasted by its glory.

These are very nearly melodramatic accounts of music. Rather than trying to relate every

128 Susan McClary, "Getting Down Off the Beanstalk: The Presence of a Woman's Voice in Janika Vandervelde' *Genesis II*," *Minnesota Composers Forum Newsletter* (1987). Richard Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically: Historical and Hermeneutical Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

129 These prose-poems are another legacy of Romanticism. Dahlhaus, noting this trend, writes that “the unbounded imagination with which Tieck wounds prosaic logic... turns this exegesis into a poetic text that lets the reader imagine what is granted the hearer of absolute music: an experience that overcomes him for an instant, but which cannot be held fast. The musical impression is as fleeting as it is compelling, the poetic paraphrase lingering but insufficient.” *The Idea of Absolute Music*, 68-9.

130 McClary, “Getting Down off the Beanstalk,” 7.

131 Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically*, 165.

note of a musical work to an all-pervasive organic structure, as in much music analysis,¹³² they focus on individual points of rupture (the cadence for McClary, a certain kind of chromaticism for Taruskin), and account for these by relating them to something inexpressible hidden beneath, something which cannot be even described without lapsing into poetry. However, unlike the shot from *Splendor in the Grass* discussed above, there is no sort of mismatch in this case between the surface manifestation and the underlying trauma. Borodin's music is supposed to be a perfectly adequate representation of *nega* (or even an instance of the phenomenon). For McClary, the rage in Beethoven's music is not an inadequate sign of patriarchal anger: rather – and this is why she got raked over the coals in some quarters – she holds that the rage in the music is the *same* rage as that of the rapist. The whole point of music, or at least of the higher music, is that there is nothing to which it is inadequate. And perhaps as a result, the similarities between this kind of music criticism and the melodramatic imagination have gone unnoticed.

Logocentric and Melocentric Approaches to Film Music

In writings on film music, we find the same division between accounts of music as a totalizing sign-system and accounts of music as an excess to all signification. (We would probably find it anywhere: it may be that the whole of criticism is nothing more than efforts to normalize and efforts to particularize.) Broad accounts of film music as a whole tend to suggest that there is some kind of unified core or process upon which all film music draws (or all good film music, or, interestingly, all *bad* film music, with the notion that save for a few special exceptions, the bulk of film music is bad either aesthetically or ideologically). We have already discussed, in the previous chapter, the lack of freedom Claudia Gorbman accords to film composers working within the Hollywood system. Another prominent scholar, Anahid

132 For the importance of theories which try to relate the entire musical surface to “a 'secret' of musical form or musical coherence,” see Joseph Kerman, *Contemplating Music: Challenges to Musicology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 73.

Kassabian, argues that films should use pop music soundtracks – or at least that, as critics, we should value films that use pop soundtracks – because the symbolic vocabulary of late-romantic European classical music is inherently corrupted by patriarchal power structures.¹³³ She claims, for instance, that the kind of late-romantic orchestral music that reads as feminine automatically also reads as weak, while “musics outside classical Hollywood's semiotic code offer a wider range of possibilities for female characters.”¹³⁴ Kassabian's contention is that, in watching films while listening to traditional soundtracks, we run the risk of being forced by the music to identify with a patriarchal subject-position. Already we can see familiar patterns at work. Music's meaning for Kassabian is always-already-determined: although late-romantic music's power is nearly absolute, it only has the power to do one thing. No amount of skill or effort on the filmmakers' part could make it have any other effect. Even Kassabian's methodology is somewhat revealing. She bases her claims about the “normal” language of film music on an audience-response study conducted by Philip Tagg and Bob Clarida, in which volunteers were exposed to several excerpts of film music and then asked to write descriptions of their experience.¹³⁵

No listener heard any ideas of 'destiny' or 'against the will of' in themes in which they heard male characters, nor did they hear ideas of 'culturally emergent' in songs in which they heard female characters. They were clear, in other words, that male characters have control over their own 'lives,' including control over the possibility of resistance or rebellion, while the 'immobility' [Jurij] Lotman

133 Anahid Kassabian, *Hearing Film: Tracking Identifications in Contemporary Hollywood Film Music* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

134 *Ibid.*, 71, see also 30 and 61-89. Pop is not the only music that can have a range of different meanings in Kassabian's theory: the specific sentence quoted here refers to the “wider range” offered by the use of Baroque music in *Dangerous Liaisons* (Stephen Frears, 1988). This appears as a special case in her argument in favor of popular music, however.

135 This study's findings are included in Philip Tagg and Bob Clarida, *Ten Little Title Tunes: Towards a Musicology of Mass Media*. (Larchmont: Mass Media Music Scholars' Press, 2003).

ascribed to plot-space is quite clearly expressed as characteristic of female characters.¹³⁶

By focusing on statistical data, Kassabian reinforces the suggestion that no one *tries* to make music have these meanings. Rather, the patriarchal structures are simply "there" in a nebulous, all-enveloping way that one is forced to form an identity against.

But if these accounts seem to suggest that music can be reduced to some underlying system of meaning in which individual gestures matter little, there are also many studies that exhibit the countervailing tendency, framing particular cues (or scores, or composers, or whole film movements) as excesses to the dominant system. Michel Chion's remarks on *The Informer's* score are particularly noteworthy here, in that he is discussing another high-Hollywood score by Max Steiner, and agrees with Gorbman on the particulars of the composer's musical technique, but disagrees about the music's ideological significance. After noting the critical consensus (as of that writing) that music tends to duplicate the information on the image track through mickey-mousing, Chion describes Steiner's use of leitmotif technique as an excess to this system: the music we hear as Gypo takes a shot of whiskey, "far from being a so-called suggestive little descending arpeggio, [is] actually a resolute melody... [that] accompanies the hero and is wed to his fate throughout the film, in an expressive way more than an imitative one."¹³⁷ At its best (in

136 Kassabian, *Hearing Film*, 33. Kassabian's is only one possible interpretation of the data. An example that would count as "hearing a male character" is the following response: "Hombre violento que va hacer obras de bien, el ando a caballo y su coro reflejo el bien," which Tagg and Clarida translate into "man, violent, will (do s.g.), good deeds, travelling, on horseback, heart of gold." Tagg and Clarida, *Ten Little Title Tunes*, 589 and 709. The cue described is the title theme to the TV version of *The Virginian* (Frank Price et. al., 1962-71). Might the listener not simply be describing their sense of the Western genre as male-oriented, rather than associating the music with a man specifically? It is also possible that this kind of description in itself indicates the kind of subtle gender biases in the respondents that the correlation is meant to detect in the music (i.e., those who do not see femininity as inherently passive might, for ideological reasons, be unlikely to describe music in these terms in the first place).

137 Michel Chion, *Audio/Vision: Sound on Screen*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York:

Chion's account), Steiner's leitmotif technique powerfully expresses the main character's overwhelming guilt, which is a suitably melodramatic emotion, and Chion even goes so far as to describe music's role here as a system of punctuation – a metaphor also used, quite independently, to describe melodramatic aesthetics by Elsaesser.¹³⁸ Gorbman herself has described the half-formed musicality of characters who hum and whistle as a kind of expressive aesthetic rupture in the normal system of film music, which opens “the most intimate portal to the singer's subjectivity.”¹³⁹ Tellingly, she reads one instance from *American Beauty* (Sam Mendes, 1999) as “an almost hysterical warning to [the singing character's] husband not to get in the way of her sexual adventures.”¹⁴⁰

With these examples in mind, we might well echo Jeff Smith's contention that “the film score's most common function” is “the communication of affective elements to the spectator,” a process which “encourages spectators to make inferences about a film's events, characters, and setting to facilitate the ongoing comprehension of the narrative.”¹⁴¹ But what *sort of* comprehension, and what sorts of inferences? Suppose that we see a city street, and hear a jazzy version of “New York, New York” in the background.¹⁴² Well, we may infer that the street is in New York, and this will certainly help us understand the plot as it continues to develop. But this is not at all the kind of thing Smith is talking about. The examples that he offers to support his

Columbia University Press, 1994) 51.

138 Elsaesser, “Tales of Sound and Fury,” 74.

139 Claudia Gorbman, “Artless Singing,” *Music, Sound, and the Moving Image* 5, no. 2 (2011): 161 and 160.

140 Ibid.

141 Jeff Smith, “Movie Music as Moving Music: Emotion, Cognition, and the Film Score,” in *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition, and Emotion*, ed. Carl Plantinga and Greg M. Smith (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 159-60.

142 Note that while the melody tells us something about the surface level of the drama – the location – the jazziness of the arrangement already reveals something on the deeper level, the *genius loci*.

statement all have to do with our understanding of the deeper significance of events: a battle scene is “jaunty” rather than “tragic;” the “emotional meanings of the music” help us “interpret [a character's] demeanor during a rather mundane dinner scene.”¹⁴³ Mere narrative cueing is not the “most common” (or, elsewhere, the “most important”)¹⁴⁴ function of the film score: the true business of music is either to express emotions that are not otherwise expressed (i.e., repressed emotions – precisely the sort of thing that Laing's account of melodrama scoring focuses on), or to give the emotions a weight that they could not otherwise have, thus separating the emotion of melodramatic excess from the merely ordinary sort of emotion. This is not the point that Smith is trying to make,¹⁴⁵ but he does give examples of both tendencies elsewhere in his essay. At the end of *The Elephant Man* (David Lynch, 1980), as Joseph Merrick (John Hurt) prepares to kill himself, and the music swells with grief, “Merrick does not weep, sob, or display any of the other behaviors we associate with overt expressions of sadness,” and furthermore “the simple epithet 'sadness' is inadequate for the emotions depicted within Merrick.”¹⁴⁶

And so again we find a fundamentally melodramatic interpretive model. There is on the one hand a kind of aesthetic surface; on the other hand, we find individual excessive events that trouble that surface. To an extent this is true of every film element. We are not generally meant to notice cinematography, or editing, or dialogue, or performance, and yet in melodrama, or more specifically during the melodramatic break, we typically do. However, we are even more

143 Ibid., 161-2.

144 Ibid., 147.

145 The argument that Smith is trying to make has to do with the *mechanism* through which film music works on the emotions of the audience. In the description quoted below, he wishes to draw attention to the fact that the character's emotions (which the music depicts) and the audience's emotions (which the music helps shape) are not in fact *the same* emotions. If we extend his argument to the rest of melodramatic aesthetics, this poses something of a challenge to Linda Williams's account of audience engagement in “Film Bodies.”

146 Ibid., 155.

likely to notice (and interpret) the musical breaks, in part due to music's historically determined aesthetic *autonomy*. The pervasive absolute-music construct prompts us to mentally detach the music from the film and reify it as a distinct object, excessive to the film, in a way that we would rarely think to reify the film's editing, cinematography, and so on.¹⁴⁷ Typically, we account for this excessive object by reading it as an epiphenomenon of psychological or ideological phenomena elsewhere in the filmic text, which in turn are construed as “underlying.” Ironically, then, it is precisely because of the absolute-music construct, which holds that music represents nothing, that we are likely to see film music as a representation of an underlying process!¹⁴⁸ We also may tend to see film music as a surface element because of the material fact that it is almost invariably added during post-production. It's not quite right to say that the score is created after the film is created (for the film is not complete until the music is added), but we can fairly say that the composer reacts to elements that are already present, somewhere, and it is but a slight leap to assume that this “somewhere” must have something to do with the character's emotions, or with some shared social trauma (which are, as noted above, the two major focal points of film studies' theorization of the melodrama).

As these accounts demonstrate, it seems natural to assume that film music offers us knowledge about the hidden world-within-the-world that is characteristic of melodrama. And it might, therefore, seem quite unnatural to attempt to seize on this mode of interaction as somehow specific to the genre of melodrama. But we should not forget that this is not the *only*

147 For the history of the idea of “absolute music,” see Dahlhaus, *The Idea of Absolute Music*, and Daniel Chua, *Absolute Music and the Construction of Meaning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). For the continued relevance of this idea to modern concepts of film music, see Caryl Flinn, *Strains of Utopia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

148 Theodor Adorno and Hanns Eisler see this as the problem with the whole enterprise of film music: to write effective *film* music, the composer must serve the film's aesthetic vision, but to write effective film *music* the composer must serve nothing but his or her own transcendent idea. *Composing for the Films* (New York: Oxford, 1947; London: Continuum, 2007), 57.

way that an individual musical cue that exceeds the normal system of film music could function. Royal Brown's revitalization of Sergei Eisenstein's concept of vertical montage relates musical excesses to the *visual* language of cinema (rather than to its narrative or psychological mechanisms); Smith's own discussion of the economic role of film music explains musical excesses as the product of market pressures; and Fred Steiner's essay on Bernard Herrmann's *Psycho* score often lapses into the language of pure musical analysis (tracing compositional procedures and attempting to understand how the notes fit together) without more than a cursory attempt to understand the deeper emotional or communicative significance of the notes so connected.¹⁴⁹ With the phrase “deeper communicative significance” I betray my own prejudice: my training and reading in the study of film music has taught me to find all of these approaches somehow incomplete. And yet all of these, quite on their own, would be tenable approaches to any piece of non-film music, even a passionately emotional one, and so we ought to allow their application to film music as well. One could even apply them productively to the scores of melodramas – but to do so would be to miss, profoundly and completely, the interaction of the genre with its music. (By the same token, recognizing the emotion-centered interpretive approach described above as a fundamentally melodramatic one does not invalidate its use on scores from films of other genres. What it demonstrates, however, is that this “standard” approach to film music will have no purchase whatsoever on a film that is not somewhat melodramatic.)

Reading the Melodramatic Score

As demonstrated in the first section of this chapter, the melodramatic imagination is a heightened narrative register, marked by various kinds of excess. In film, this has become more

149 Brown, *Overtones and Undertones*, 135-145. Smith, *Changing Tunes*. Fred Steiner, “Bernard Herrmann's 'Black-and-White' Music for Hitchcock's *Psycho*,” *Film Music Notebook* 1, no. 1 (Fall, 1974): 28-36, and no. 2 (Winter, 1974-5): 26-46.

or less inextricably associated with a particular set of thematic concerns (and a particular series of texts) that revolve around issues related to the family and women's experiences. To consider a film melodramatic, we must find that there is some kind of mismatch between the characters' internal "want" and the "must" of their external circumstances, that this tension is not satisfactorily resolved, that it boils over in wanton eruptions of pure aesthesis, and that these mismatches and eruptions occur frequently and vigorously enough to characterize the entire surface of the film as melodramatic.

We have also noted that music, too, is frequently interpreted in melodramatic terms. And even more so than other musicologists, writers on film music tend towards melodramatic readings. Because the conditions of modern filmmaking and filmgoing tend to result in fragmentary and unstable musical texts (cut up and shuffled in post-production, drowned out by sound effects and dialogue), we nearly always focus on interpreting individual overwhelming gestures.¹⁵⁰ Indeed, any musical *event* in a film is already excessive simply in that it is an event: as Gorbman so aptly shows, the normal surface of film music is the musical non-event, either the unheard melody of her title or an equally unheard silence.¹⁵¹ If either silence or melody draws our attention, this is already a violation of the standard code, and a potential melodramatic break. In melodramas, both music and silence are routinely used: Peola's most melodramatic scene in John Stahl's *Imitation of Life* (1934) is marked by the abrupt cessation of the quasi-diegetic background music in the restaurant where she works, while the most melodramatic scene for that character in Sirk's 1959 remake is marked by the deafening eruption of a big-band jazz out of a scene of musicless dialogue. Therefore, we cannot assume

¹⁵⁰ Robert Nelson, for instance, writes that "musical color may be taken to represent the sensuous or exotic side of music, in distinction to musical structure and line, which may be looked on as representing the intellectual side... film music is overwhelmingly coloristic in its intention and effect." Robert Nelson, "Film Music: Color or Line?" *Hollywood Quarterly* 2, no. 1 (1946): 57-65. This attitude reflects the general rule.

¹⁵¹ Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies*, 73.

that every cue that serves a melodramatic purpose will be melodramatic as music as well. Context is all. Simply recognizing the cue as excessive, however, is not enough to guarantee a melodramatic reading. This occurs when we attempt to read the deeper significance behind the cue, and attach it either to a character's psychological process, or to an underlying social trauma. The reductive view of film music in which the score as a whole is equivalent to the characters' suppressed emotions, therefore, is wrong on two counts. When music gives voice to the repressed, it is through a melodramatic break, and there is no score in which every cue functions as a melodramatic break. Furthermore, even in its heightened, melodramatic register, music can speak of things other than emotion. Melodramas tend to focus on a sort of conflict or mismatch between an individual's desires and broader social norms. Through its emotion-depicting function, music can represent the individual side of this conflict, but – as will be demonstrated in the case studies below – it also frequently represents the other side as well, serving to voice the collective will society.

Two broader theoretical questions remain. First, precisely how is melodrama related to the woman's film? As indicated above, I do not plan to offer a firm answer in these pages. However, we have already summarized Laing's theory, which – with some reservations – seems to be a useful model for the woman's film, and in what follows, I will weigh her explanation against the alternative hypothesis that music operates similarly within both canons.

The second question is more fundamental. What sorts of ideological excess are generally matched with aesthetic excess in melodrama films? This may be one of the areas in which musicology has the most to offer film genre studies. Elsaesser suggests that only the language of music will really be able to account for melodrama's stylistic excesses – but aside from borrowing musical vocabulary, he does not provide an analysis of this kind. In the case studies below, I attempt to provide just such a “musical” reading. On the one hand, this involves greater attention to musical detail when describing individual melodramatic breaks. Precise details of

the timing and musical language suggest different underlying causes than some of the traditional theories of melodrama would allow. The second way in which our approach to melodrama can be more musical is by attending to the ways in which even points of melodramatic rupture can be organized into a developing pattern over the course of a film. Music is above all else a temporal art, characterized by changing patterns of growth and decay, tension and release, and repetition and variation. There are cases in which our understanding of an individual melodramatic break depends on that gesture's location within a broader system of excess. However, in this pursuit we must avoid falling into the trap of expecting these systems to be totalizing, coherent, or predictable. (And in this sense, close attention to particular melodramatic breaks may reveal that the search for any *single* connection between melodramatic aesthetics and melodramatic ideology is a fruitless one.)

III. Three Melodrama Films

RANDOM HARVEST, (Mervyn LeRoy, 1942)

Random Harvest, based on a popular novel by James Hilton, has a deliciously convoluted plot that I almost hate to spoil here. It opens in an asylum, where we are introduced to a World War I officer (played by Ronald Colman) who has lost his memory from shell shock. Because his name is unknown, he goes by John Smith, or Smitty. When the news breaks that the war has ended, Smitty is frightened by the noise of the celebrations, and runs away. He eventually encounters a music hall singer named Paula (Greer Garson) who takes him under her wing and falls in love with him (despite his fragility and lack of affect, and a strange dead-end plot twist in which they briefly believe that he has murdered one of her coworkers). They eventually marry, and to support his new family, Smitty begins writing. However, on his way to a meeting with a major publisher, he is struck by a car, and this causes him to lose all memory of his life as Smitty, and to remember his original identity as Charles Rainier, scion of a wealthy

industrial family.

Amazingly enough, even this *double* traumatic amnesia is not the most flagrantly melodramatic twist in the plot. After some initial misgivings, Rainier is welcomed back into his family, especially by his step-niece Kitty (Susan Peters), who rapidly takes a romantic interest in her mysterious new pseudo-relative.¹⁵² Although he had planned to pursue a scholarly career after returning from the war, Rainier finds that the family's industrial concern has fallen into disarray in his absence, and he reluctantly puts these plans on hold to try to fix it. An ellipsis of several years follows, during which Kitty attends and graduates college, and Rainier successfully salvages and revitalizes the family fortune. Rainier and Kitty eventually become engaged, much to the disappointment of Paula, who – and this, by the way, is the most melodramatic twist – is now working as Rainier's private secretary under an assumed name, in hopes that something she does or says will remind him of who she really is.

This is a melodrama with a happy ending, and so all is eventually restored. Rainier begins to half-consciously remember bits of his past – not as images or ideas, but as the half-formed liquescent yearning that is melodrama's stock-in-trade. Kitty breaks off their engagement when she realizes that he loves another, and Rainier then marries Paula *again*, but only as a sterile marriage of convenience to support his burgeoning political career. Paula suffers through all of this in silence, having been convinced by a convenient psychologist that simply *telling* Rainier would do no good.¹⁵³ But eventually he does remember all, and the closing

152 Kitty is not related to Rainier by blood, and he never knew her as a child, his sister having only recently married Kitty's father. Nevertheless, the incestuous overtones to their relationship, and the fact that she's a fifteen year old girl when she's first introduced, ensure that the audience finds her a thoroughly inadequate rival to Paula. The Smitty/Paula relationship is not without incestuous overtones of its own, of course. She spends a fair amount of time mothering him even after they are married.

153 This is an interesting variation on what Doane calls the genre's "medical discourse." (*The Desire to Desire*, 38-69.) Generally, the female characters are ill, and stay silent for reasons known only to themselves, and the heroic (or pseudo-heroic) doctor figure must compel them to

sequence has him reuniting with Paula at the cottage that they once shared, and responding to her adoring call of “Oh, Smitty!”

Throughout all of this, it is sound and music that call Smitty back: not *seeing* his wife, but hearing a squeaky cottage gate, and a celebrating mob, and above all the wedding hymn “O Perfect Love.” (It's his reaction to this last that convinces Kitty to cancel their marriage.) Well before Rainier has conscious access to his Smitty-life, then, he has access to that life's musical memories.



Music Example 2.1: “O Perfect Love,” a popular wedding hymn that appears several times in the score of *Random Harvest*.

Random Harvest is one of the most fetishistic of the classic melodramas. Objects are never merely themselves in this film. Throughout the second half of the film, Rainier carries the key to Smitty and Paula's cottage, symbolically seeking to unlock his past. There's also a brilliant treatment of Paula's two necklaces, the first a strand of worthless beads given to her by Smitty because they match her eyes, and the second an incalculably valuable gem (once owned by an Empress), which Rainier gives her to reward her duties as a society wife. One necklace is marked by wealth and social status, and the other by simplicity, a kind of luxurious emotional and bodily connection, and – significantly – by purely aesthetic value judgments, the beads being chosen not for their worth but for their beauty. This encapsulates the division between the Rainier and

Paula to speak to effect a cure. Here, Smitty is the sick one, and although it's still the woman who must remain silent, the doctor character specifically enjoins her against speaking. But for the audience the effect is much the same. We feel an overwhelming desire for her to speak, but at the same time we know she can't and won't. But what does it mean that, as much as we want Paula to *speak*, we want Smitty to *know*?

Smitty personae more generally. When Rainier takes over the family business, he is doing the proper and socially mandated thing. In his office, he's constantly dwarfed by an enormous painting of his father, which stares severely down at him, and he stays in the business because the firm "keeps other families going too – little families in little homes, all over England."

Smitty's life, by contrast, is an idyll, both bucolic and bohemian: he is a writer, she is a music hall performer, they do what they want rather than what they must, and they are ever so happy.

It is the business of the film to convince us that the Smitty-life is preferable to the Rainier-life – or, if we identify with Paula, to commiserate with her knowledge that she was better off with Smitty than with Rainier. Interestingly, although the Rainier identity is the factual one, it is presented to us in the film as a kind of false consciousness: he would happily abandon it all in a second, if he could only be awoken to the revolution. (And although the revolution in question is not a socialist uprising, but an internal, world-of-art/countryside/family-life/romantic-love sort of revolution, Rainier's final recollection of his identity is partially triggered by the sound of celebrating workers at the successful end of a strike.) Therefore, the film's fundamental melodramatic contradictions array themselves against certain conventional notions of respectability. Of course, the values the film holds up as alternatives – art and love – are pretty respectable themselves. Nevertheless, *Random Harvest* wishes to *present* its value system as a radical one. This inflects the sorts of melodramatic gestures that we have seen already (in its valuation of the worthless beads over the famous emerald), and it will also inflect the melodramatic operations of the music.

On the whole, when compared to the sort of music we generally find in Hollywood films of the 1940s, Herbert Stothart's score evinces a wealth of musical excesses, including mode mixture, dissonant clusters, collage-like modulations between unrelated keys, and a few passages suggestive of bitonality. To my mind, there is a similarity to all of these techniques, in that they incorporate material not derived from the music's proper key, but what matters more

is that they are all unusual, even within the liberal musical grammar of classical Hollywood film scoring, and that each is typically employed in a way that lets it seem out of place in its local context.¹⁵⁴ If the general language of a cue is diatonic, Stothart will include a few borrowed chords, if the general language is chromatic, he will add clusters, and the collage and bitonal effects stand out against the general language of the score as a whole.

The overture, like many film overtures from the era, exhibits a rough three-part structure, with a relatively active first section, a more lyrical second section, and a return to the more active texture that leads into the film proper. After a brief fanfare (over which we see the MGM logo), we hear a sweeping main theme in the strings. The most striking sonority is the E-flat dominant 7th 4/2 chord on the downbeat of the example's fourth measure. Note, however, that as powerful as this gesture is in sonic terms, it is no functional harmony, but simply an *appoggiatura*: that is, an entirely contrapuntal decoration of the following C major chord. Further excess, of an orchestrational kind, comes in the continuation of the theme, with the rapid thinning out of the texture and the use of a humming chorus in measures seven and eight. The most interesting of the music's excesses, however, is the unusual way that it interpolates the hymn tune "Oh Perfect Love." Rather than being allowed to stand as an independent theme, as such quotations almost invariably are, the tune is here seamlessly spliced into a new melodic structure, the head motive of the hymn becoming the consequent of the title theme's opening phrase. As a result, the hymn's harmonic rhythm and hypermetric properties are reversed, and the music seems to halt or float in the fourth and fifth measures of the transcription as the pulse of Stothart's original melody gives way to that of the hymn. The middle section of the overture (not transcribed here) is more straightforward setting of the hymn "O Perfect Love" for

154 On the whole, when film composers of this era want to evoke emotional intensity, they use the kind of freely chromatic writing we find in the excerpt from *Penny Serenade* in Music Example 2.9. Mode mixture is arguably more restrained, but it stands out within the style because it is more unusual.

"O perfect love" begins here.

Richly orchestrated: legato strings and chimes, melody doubled 8va

Add brass on harmonies

Brass out - replaced by wordless chorus

Music Example 2.2: *Random Harvest*. The overture draws from “O Perfect Love” in an interesting and unusual way.

children's choir, and the brief third section, which uses original melodic material again, returns us to the harmonic language and orchestration of the opening. With only a little ingenuity, then, we could read the overture as a microcosm of the film's plot, the harmonically adventurous opening and closing sections representing Smitty's bliss with Paula, and the foursquare Anglican hymn in the center representing Rainier's more socially normative but ultimately doomed relationship with Kitty.

But this specific programmatic reading (rather facile, as specific programmatic readings often are) is less important than the general hermeneutic principle on which it depends. In introductory harmony courses, we learn that chromatically altered chords are extended techniques used to decorate a fundamental diatonic skeleton – that however colorful a piece of late romantic music may sound, the *true* harmonic structure is something altogether simpler and less surprising. Our basic training in rhythm and meter is generally less systematic, but the

same principle applies to the hypermetric alteration of the hymn tune: what deviates from the system can ultimately be reconciled to the system as a decoration, more or less conceptually equivalent to a passing tone. An implied value judgment often attaches to this as well. We must take care not to mistake surface flash for genuine creativity.

In a melodramatic film score such as this, however, the terms are reversed. It is not the harmonically and metrically adventurous framing sections that have the effect of a passing tone, but the diatonic and metrically regular middle, which in this context is musically non-normative, and in a sense "false." The implied value judgment reverses as well. There is always a sense in melodramatic entertainment that the surface of any system – typically a social system, but also an artistic system such as diatonic harmony – is concealing a fundamental truth that is wilder and woolier, and presenting a placid surface in the face of this turbulent reality becomes a kind of moral cowardice. Kitty's farewell to Smitty/Rainier is telling: "You could make me perfectly happy, if I was selfish enough not to care, or stupid enough not to know." What she knows is that despite his willingness to enter into a socially mandated marriage with her, Rainier is on a deeper level still committed to another – a knowledge denied at this point even to Rainier himself! By facing up to the impingement of the unconscious on the conscious, Kitty fairly redeems her character, which up to this point is thoroughly unsympathetic (if only in that she is an obstacle to the central romantic relationship).

This should not suggest that melodrama scores are always more chromatic and metrically irregular than other sorts of film music. All of the techniques listed above are found in the late-romantic idiom of film scoring more generally. We do find excessive gestures somewhat more frequently in melodramas (as part of melodrama's generally turbulent aesthetic surface), but really what shifts is our interpretive framework. A hermeneutic principle that focuses on points of rupture in the underlying system, and recognizes these as bearers of a higher truth, is *itself melodramatic*. If you get in the habit of watching enough melodramas, you will also get in

the habit of reading them melodramatically.

The films, however, will not take this for granted. They often have a highly didactic tone, and perhaps necessarily so: even seasoned melodrama viewers may sometimes make the mistake of approaching the texts as if up were up and white were white. *Random Harvest* is particularly noteworthy for the way that it slowly reminds us to stand on our heads.

The first important musical cue in the main body of the film is the brilliantly structured armistice celebration sequence. Music example 2.3, below, gives a rough transcription of the music heard under Smitty's escape from the asylum. As he approaches the gate, we hear an ascending whole-tone scale in the low brass (harmonized in block chords), below a shrill sustained high F (scored for piccolo and tremolo strings). As the scale reaches the upper octave, the music builds to a climax, but then it shies away – the drone drops to an E, and the linear ascent dissolves in an oscillation between two dissonant chords. The whole sequence then repeats, but this time the ascent of an octave is expanded to a twelfth, and rather than shying away from the climax, the scale builds to a cadence on D-flat on the downbeat of measure 22, just as Smitty steps through the abandoned hospital gate. (This involves abandoning the whole-tone scale on the downbeat of measure 21, where the drone slips down to E again.) Following the cadence, the cue dissolves into oscillating harmonies again, although this time the chords are more consonant.

The cue is an effective illustration of triumph – the synchronization of the ascending scales with Smitty's approach to the gate is brilliantly aligned – and yet it is also undeniably disturbing, thanks to the eerie whole tone scale and the dissonant fanfares that follow each climax (in measures 11 and 26). Furthermore, the scene is altogether menacing in visual terms (all expressionist Dutch angles and billowing fog), and the non-musical elements of the soundtrack are ambiguous. People are celebrating the end of the war, but the shouts, sirens, and wildly pealing church bells all sound alarming in purely sonic terms.

Shouts - "The war is over!"

6 8va, shrill

11 At pitch, normal tone

16 8va, shrill

The image displays four systems of musical notation for piano accompaniment. Each system consists of a grand staff with a treble and bass clef. The first system (measures 1-5) features a vocal line in the treble clef with the lyrics "Shouts - 'The war is over!'" and a piano accompaniment in the bass clef. The second system (measures 6-10) is marked "8va, shrill" and shows a high, sustained melody in the treble clef and a complex, rhythmic accompaniment in the bass clef. The third system (measures 11-15) is marked "At pitch, normal tone" and shows a more conventional piano accompaniment with a melody in the bass clef and chords in the treble clef. The fourth system (measures 16-20) is marked "8va, shrill" and returns to the high, sustained melody in the treble clef and complex accompaniment in the bass clef. Dynamics include *mp*, *f*, and *mf*.

Music Example 2.3 (continued on following page): *Random Harvest*. Smitty's escape from the asylum, and the disturbing montage of celebratory songs.

21 Smitty walks through the asylum door

26 Deafening steam whistles "Vive la Compagnie"

[inaudible] Vi-ve la compa-
Orchestra fades out

31 "Mademoiselle from Armentières"

gnie! and drink to the he-ro-ic sac - ri - fice. Hin-ky din-ky par - lez vous? —

37 "Keep your head down, Fritzie boy."

— Oh, Par - lez vous? Oh, ...head down, — Fritzie boy! — Keep your

42 head down, — Frit-zie boy! late last night in the pale moon-light, we

46 "God Save the King"

saw you! We saw you! Send him vic - to - ri - ous,
(This song continues to its final cadence.)

Music Example 2.3, continued.

The extended musical sequence that follows Smitty's escape (example 2.3, above) amplifies this ambiguity. We see Smitty stumbling through the streets, bouncing off revelers, his eyes hunted, terrified by the crowd and by the noise. The music presents us with a cheerful collection of patriotic songs, and yet these are presented in a bewildering tonal collage: a single rhythmic pulse is maintained throughout, but we first hear "Vive la Compagnie" in D-flat major, then (breaking off mid-phrase) "Mademoiselle from Armentières" in A-flat, then "Keep Your Head Down Fritzie Boy," which begins in A major but then arbitrarily modulates to E-flat for the song's bridge, and finally "God Save the King" in A-flat as Smitty flees from the crowd into a tobacconist's shop, where he first encounters Paula. The fragmented, dissociated treatment of the victory songs diagnoses Smitty's amnesia as a kind of anomie, in Robert Merton's sense.¹⁵⁵ The whole world celebrates, but Smitty's access to the communal goal is blocked, and therefore he rejects the goal itself. There's a diegetic excuse for this, in that he can't remember the fighting, but the emotional experience that we're meant to identify with is not the amnesia, but the painful sense of standing outside of the group.

Slightly later, as Smitty continues to flee from another celebrating crowd, another diegetic performance of "Vive la Compagnie" is interrupted by a new non-diegetic melody, based on material from "Vive la Compagnie," which I will call the "madness" theme. (See Music Example 2.4, below.) This pushes the disorienting quality of the soundscape to new heights, most obviously through the sudden registral shift, the ghostly and mechanical timbre of the barrel organ, and the dissonant supporting harmonies (which are drawn from the parallel minor – another use of mode mixture, although here the effect flirts with bitonality). There are also some more subtle effects, which are worth pointing out. Music Example 2.5a, below, juxtaposes the harmonic basis of "Vive la Compagnie's" opening with that of the madness theme. They

155 Robert Merton, "Social Structure and Anomie," in *On Social Structure and Science*, ed. Piotr Sztompka (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 132-152.

begin identically, but where “Vive la Compagnie” ends its first phrase on the tonic, the madness theme ends on the dominant (implied by the melodic A). Similar reversals appear when we compare the madness theme to the bars of “Vive la Compagnie” that are cut off by its interruption (Music Example 2.5b). Both melodies begin on B-flat, but where “Vive la Compagnie” moves up to C, the madness theme descends to F, and again an expected tonic at the end of the four-bar phrase is replaced with an implied dominant. In this case, in fact, the harmonic motion V-I is replaced with the motion I-V. Although there is nothing peculiar about moving directly from I to V, in this context the normal harmonic motion seems to be running in reverse. Finally, we should note the visual context of this cue: Smitty pushes his way out of the crowded street into an alley that is conveniently decorated with prison-bar like fences and banisters, which he clutches, staring into the empty distance, as the jubilant crowd streams past behind him. As depictions of anomie go, this is about as vivid as they come.

And yet we cannot claim that this music simply gives us unmediated access to Smitty's internal state. Certainly we sympathize with him, but his aphasia and lack of affect make him difficult to identify with. Although he seems more frightened than frightening, for the first half-hour of the film it is by no means clear that Smitty's escape from the asylum is a positive development. (Escaped mental patients in cinema have a less-than-brilliant track record.) And so if the music in this sequence to a certain extent allows us to share Smitty's terrified incomprehension of the world he is confronted with, it gives us equal access to that world's terrified incomprehension of Smitty. Most notably, the madness theme plays when Paula finds him standing over the unconscious body of her employer. We could even read the transition from “*Vive la Compagnie*” to the madness theme transcribed in measures 12-13 of example 2.4 as the precise point at which we shift from viewing the situation from Smitty's perspective to viewing it from that of society. Significantly, this takes place shortly after we have been

"Vive la Compagnie" -- brass band and chorus

The image shows a musical score for a brass band and chorus. It is divided into five systems of music. The first system (measures 1-5) is titled "Vive la Compagnie" -- brass band and chorus. The melody is in the treble clef, and the bass line is in the bass clef. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The lyrics are "[Inaudible]" and "and drink to their he-ro-ic". The second system (measures 6-10) continues the melody and bass line. The lyrics are "sac - ri - fic", "Vi - ve la com - pa", "gnie!", "Vi - ve la Vi - ve la", and "Vi - ve l'a-mour". The third system (measures 11-16) is titled "Madness" leitmotif -- barrel organ. The melody is in the treble clef, and the bass line is in the bass clef. The lyrics are "Vi - ve l'a Vi - ve l'a" and "vi - ve l'a mour". The fourth system (measures 17-22) continues the "Madness" leitmotif. The fifth system (measures 23-28) continues the "Madness" leitmotif.

[Inaudible] and drink to their he-ro-ic

6
sac - ri - fic Vi - ve la com - pa gnie! Vi - ve la Vi - ve la Vi - ve l'a-mour

11 "Madness" leitmotif -- barrel organ
Vi - ve l'a Vi - ve l'a vi - ve l'a mour

17

23

Music Example 2.4: *Random Harvest*. The “madness theme” as it first appears, interrupting “Vive la Compagnie.”

"Madness" melody with implied harmonic structure

I V I V

"Vive la Compagnie"

I V I V I

Music Example 2.5a: *Random Harvest*. Comparison of the openings of “Vive la Compagnie” and the madness theme.

Implied continuation of "Vive la Compagnie"

Vi-ve l'a Vi-ve l'a vi-ve l'a mour Vi-ve l'a Vi-ve l'a Vi-ve l'a-mour, Vi-ve la com-pa-gnie!

I ii V I

Implied harmonies: I V I V

Music Example 2.5b: *Random Harvest*. Comparison of the madness theme with the bars of “Vive la Compagnie” that it replaces.



Image 2.2: *Random Harvest*. Smitty stands apart from the celebrating crowd.

introduced to Paula as an alternative focalizing character for the film.¹⁵⁶ Rather than simply being worried for Smitty, we are now partially worried about what he might do to her.

The theme largely vanishes from the film, however, when Smitty and Paula retreat to the country, at which point the film abruptly abandons the premise that Smitty might be dangerous or sinister. The madness theme returns only in the film's penultimate sequence, when this music appears again, along with the ascending block chords from Example 2.3 and a whole

156 For a thoroughgoing discussion of the steps *Random Harvest* takes to establish Paula as the main character – or at least, to establish that Smitty cannot be accepted as the main character uncritically – see Alison McKee, “It Seems Familiar but I Can't Quite Remember,’ Amnesia and the Dislocation of History and Gender in *Random Harvest* (1942),” *Bright Lights Film Journal* 69 (2010), http://brightlightsfilm.com/69/69randomharvest_mckee.php

constellation of diegetic visual, narrative, and sonic elements, as Smitty's recovers his memory. Some of these are conscious triggers for Smitty, some he ignores – all, however, are meant to provoke the sensation of memory in the audience. In that Smitty is engaged in the process of remembering, it is at this point that the audience is most nearly welded to his subjectivity.¹⁵⁷

The most fascinating aspect of this later cue is that the musical character of the madness theme is not substantially altered: it becomes the “goal” of the ascending whole-tone motif, but it is nearly as incongruous in this context as when inserted into the normal version of “Viva la Compagnie,” and no attempt is made to soften the music's inherent strangeness. The harmony is not sweetened, the melodic goals are just as arbitrary, the timbre (a shrill clarinet) is nearly as harsh, and the performance nearly as mechanical. Many of the menacing visual elements also recur, including the jail-like alleyway.

At first blush, these unaltered repetitions of the armistice sequence could seem like miscalculations. At the start of the film, this music powerfully evoked anomie and delirium. Surely some happy music is appropriate now, when Smitty is finally coming back to himself? Or if we wanted to preserve the melody for its mnemonic effect, wouldn't a harmonically normalized version of the theme have served? Why use exactly the same music (the same images, the same mood), to represent Smitty's return to the asylum as was used for his escape? Why use the music that showed him losing his mind to show him finding it? Why mark the film's happy ending with the same aesthetic constellation that marked its ominous beginning?

¹⁵⁷ The suturing process is never complete, however. Unlike Smitty, we are powerfully aware that he could recover his memory too late: Paula could leave for South America, or die in a sudden accident, or find that she has fallen out of love with him, etc. Twists of this kind, and the general sense of “too late,” are quintessentially melodramatic, as is the informational asymmetry between the audience and the characters, which Elsaesser describes as ironic (although the effect is perhaps not quite the same as that of dramatic irony). “Tales of Sound and Fury,” 88.

Very quiet, especially upper voices, but building throughout.

5

mp

11 Slightly faster "Madness" theme mezzo-forte, lower voices very soft

mf *f*

16

Music Example 2.6: *Random Harvest*. Reappearance of the madness theme.

We might answer these questions by asking another one: is this ending, in point of fact, happy? It is, of course. Paula's happiness with Smitty and her suffering without him are so convincingly wrought that no other answer is possible. But the overwhelming force of the romantic plot can make us forget that the life Smitty's remembering here is not his *real* life. It is not the life where he's a captain of industry and a rising political star, fêted by the populace and surrounded by his loving family. It's the life where he's a struggling writer, living alone in a rented cottage, without friends or family save for Paula. We are not specifically told that he has

lost his Rainier memories again, or that he plans to abandon Rainier's life, but the sequence is clearly staged as a return to his earlier existence. If he is not quite going out of his mind, at the end of the film, he is going out of the world, rejecting the existence that the dominant ideology holds up as desirable. The theme I have assigned to “madness” in the end becomes the theme of melodramatic rupture itself, a kind of leitmotif of departure from convention. Melodrama trains us to recognize this as desirable.

PENNY SERENADE, (George Stevens, 1941)

Random Harvest was made in the 1940s, and is sometimes (although not universally) classed as a woman's film.¹⁵⁸ *Penny Serenade* is a much clearer case: the female lead, Julie (Irene Dunne), is unquestionably the film's central character, and has a certain agency in the telling of the story itself. As the film begins, we see her packing up her apartment, apparently in the process of leaving her husband. She comes across a folio of vinyl records titled “Scenes from a Happy Marriage,” which she proceeds to play one at a time, each disc triggering an extensive flashback. This film thus achieves a kind of narrative pointillism, with large stretches of time, and entire currents of the psyche, condensed into individual gestures or vignettes, each of which contains enough dramatic incident for an entire film conceived along more economical lines. Julie falls for a man, Roger (Cary Grant), who strings her along without proposing – and then marries her. She becomes pregnant, but miscarries during an earthquake and is rendered infertile. Roger and Julie lie to the adoption agency in order to adopt a baby girl, Trina, and the family is briefly happy. In the sixth flashback, they do nothing but celebrate, first for Julie's birthday and then at Christmas, with Trina singing the offstage role of “the Echo” in her school's Christmas pageant performance of “Silent Night.” But then, between flashbacks, Trina dies, and

¹⁵⁸ McKee, for instance (“It Seems Familiar”), considers *Random Harvest* to be a woman's film, but feels the need to justify this by describing the various techniques that are used to establish Paula, rather than Smitty, as the central character.

the grief drives Roger and Julie apart. Matters come to a head when the new “Echo” turns up on their doorstep on the night of the Christmas pageant, and they are forced to drive him to the school. Finally, in the present, as Julie prepares to walk out, a happy ending is miraculously provided. Roger suddenly appears, and apologizes to Julie for his financial instability and emotional coldness. Julie, for her part, openly tells him what she wants for the first time in the entire film.¹⁵⁹ And then the adoption agency calls to tell them that they're being offered another child. In the film's closing shot, the two walk together into Trina's empty nursery, full of plans for the future.

Penny Serenade is a particularly useful test case for the relationship between melodrama and the woman's film. As noted above, the woman's film is generally described as stylistically sedate, burning off its excess desire in narrative circumlocutions and instabilities. Caryl Flinn's reading of *Penny Serenade* complicates this account, arguing that in this case non-representational musical signs work hand in hand with the narrative both to present a utopian vision of the nuclear family, and to challenge that same vision.¹⁶⁰ The main thesis of her book is that music's meaning in film is always conditioned by the kind of transcendent wholeness that was so important to 19th-century aestheticians like Hoffmann and Schopenhauer.¹⁶¹ One of her most interesting and well-argued insights is that this plenary wholeness is fundamentally nostalgic in character – music always seems to be searching for a lost chord, not an absolutely new one – but that, especially in narrative contexts, it is often used to project this half-remembered blissful past into a half-imagined blissful future. For Flinn, in *Penny Serenade*,

159 All she asks for is emotional support, which is a pretty nebulous concept. The more important point is that this is the first time she has made *any* kind of direct demand of him, however poorly defined.

160 Flinn, *Strains of Utopia*, 137-151.

161 *Ibid.*, *passim*. Flinn remains agnostic as to whether music actually *has* this quality, contenting herself with the claim that this is music's culturally determined meaning.

music's utopian aspect aligns with Julie's conventional desires: the film's broadly nostalgic music produces “a utopian desire for a homespun stability,” and in that the music is frequently associated with Julie's desire for a classical nuclear family, it tends to bathe this ideological artifact in the same idealized light.¹⁶²

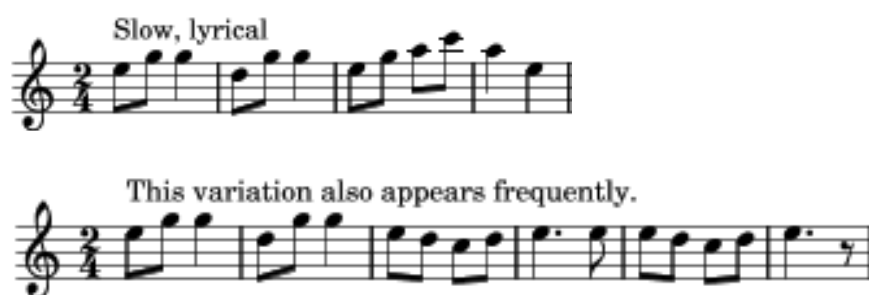
However, Flinn also notes (and this is, to my mind, the crux of her argument) that the utopian visions music can produce are limited by their narrative context. Music always represents an image of utopian wholeness for her, but that image can be framed as false, or dangerous, or limited, or qualified. Flinn holds that the narrative instabilities of the woman's film – in this case, Julie's self-conscious triggering and manipulation of her own nostalgic reverie – will destabilize the utopia projected by the music. And here, as part of her broader claim that *Penny Serenade's* plot and non-representational content work hand in hand, Flinn also points out some destabilizing tendencies in the music. (It's not entirely clear whether Flinn believes *Penny Serenade* is an atypical woman's film in its use of music, or whether she is challenging the general notion that the Woman's Film is aesthetically sedate.)

Flinn's reading of the film offers an attractive model for our purposes. However, although her analysis of music's utopian tendency is thorough and vital, she does not seem to be familiar with the equally powerful tradition of melodramatic (or nearly melodramatic) accounts, which we saw exemplified in Taruskin and McClary. Perhaps as a result, she looks for a fundamental coherence and perfection in the film's music that are simply not evident. Most of the examples of “musical” coherence that she describes are in fact paramusical, such as the lyrics of “My Blue Heaven,” or the various mementos that are attached to the record jackets in the frame story.¹⁶³ The most specifically musical detail she musters is that “the leitmotiv associated with Julie is often played when Julie longs for [Trina],” thus musically reinforcing the

162 Ibid., 140.

163 Ibid., 139.

fundamental wholeness of the family unit. But in fact, this motif is associated *only* with the culturally determined desire to reproduce, and is never associated with Julie in any other context.¹⁶⁴ (This is reflected in the music itself: although the melody is in duple, the melodic structure makes it something very like a cradle-rocking song.) Rather than a stabilizing connection between family members, then, it evokes a fundamentally *unstable*, unfulfilled desire.



Music Example 2.7: *Penny Serenade*: the “desire-for-a-child” motif (based on motifs from Edward MacDowell's “To a Wild Rose.”)

Flinn's treatment of the film's musical excesses is also occasionally marred by inaccuracies, but here she is generally on firmer ground. In the New Year's Eve proposal sequence, for instance, “the scene erupts in an unpleasant outburst of non-representational signs... cacophonous non-diegetic music is heard; diegetically, noisemakers, horns, and whistles clutter the soundtrack.”¹⁶⁵ In fact there's no music on the soundtrack here. Nevertheless, there is something odd and menacing about the scene, and certainly this menace derives from both the narrative – for Roger's proposal is far from the happy ending Julie was hoping for – and from the visual and sonic excesses that frame the event. Narrative and aesthetics do work hand in hand in *Penny Serenade*, then, but only in that their excessive moments tend to be synchronized. And this is exactly what we should expect from a melodrama.

164 Ibid.

165 Ibid.

But if *Penny Serenade* is a melodrama, it also challenges our understanding of the genre as exemplified by *Random Harvest* and theorized by Nowell-Smith. Specifically, we find that the melodramatic break is not necessarily linked to desires that the dominant ideology would reject. The film never suggests that the dream of the nuclear family, with the financially successful father and the reproductively successful mother, is anything less than ideal. It does suggest, however, that it's an *impossible* ideal – that good people, through no fault of their own, will repeatedly fall short of these goals – and that we therefore have a duty to offer our sympathy and support to those who do fail. (This is probably the film's most interesting and ambiguous ideological wrinkle.) Flinn writes that in *Penny Serenade* “the law... is benign and poses no real threat to Julie's maternal fantasy.”¹⁶⁶ And why would it? The “law” after all is not merely the legal apparatus but social respectability writ large, and Julie's maternal fantasy therefore an integral part of it. In most melodramas the dominant ideology is utterly pitiless to those who fail to live up to its expectations, but in *Penny Serenade*, figures of the law (such as Julie and Roger's avuncular friend Applejack, the adoption agency head, and the judge in family court) are constantly having mercy on the couple's shortcomings. The film may prompt us to expect, and ask for, and dole out, a similar mercy. More cynically, these various “mercies” could of course be seen simply to dangle the brass ring further and further out of reach, ensuring that Julie will continue to pursue it rather than finding some more attainable goal. Or one could approach the film from a fundamentally ironic perspective, viewing each of these little mercies as a ludicrous *deus ex machina* solution to the couple's problems, thus making each act of mercy a melodramatic break in its own right.

In any case, it is not a conflict between Julie's desires and social convention that tends to provoke melodramatic excess in the soundtrack – for no such conflict exists. Rather, it is a conflict between her desire and our sense of what is *possible*. There are two particularly

166 Ibid., 143.

noteworthy examples of this. The first appears at the start of the fourth flashback, when Julie and Roger tour their new residence and place of business. (The entire sequence takes place without dialogue or sound effects, which was already an excessive gesture at that point in the sound film era.) As they approach the print shop, we see them from inside, through the glass of the door. Roger is happily gazing through at the press in operation, grinning and ducking his head to get a better view. Meanwhile Julie is frozen, staring vacantly at something in the lower half of the frame. Perhaps she is simply staring off into space, disengaged and lost in thought? In the previous flashback, she told Roger that, having lost her unborn child, she could no longer make herself care about his publishing venture. Then the glass door opens, and the camera whips to the right to show the image painted on the glass: a smiling infant. The music surges with affect. (See Images 2.3a and 2.3b, and Music Example 2.8, below.)

Three elements conspire to make this cue excessive. First, the music that leads up to the reveal uses unfamiliar melodic material, but the music we hear over the shot of the painting is a leitmotif, and therefore calls attention to itself. (This is a tiny excess, but as noted above, *anything* that calls attention to the music exceeds the “normal” practice.) Second, the volume surges as the leitmotif appears. It may seem almost silly to call attention to such an elemental feature of the music, but the hairpin lurch from soft to loud (and even more so the rapid diminuendo that follows) is definitely the most prominent way that the melodramatic passage stands out from its context. The third excessive element, and perhaps the most interesting in purely musical terms, is the fragmentary and isolated way in which the leitmotif is presented. Only the first six notes of the melody appear, arresting the music's forward motion. The strings make a halting and tentative attempt at continuation, but this quickly fades out, and then a new section based on a different motif begins, in a new key. This feels like the beginning of a new cue despite the fact that the music is more or less continuous. The dead-end treatment of the leitmotif not only threatens the large-scale coherence of the cue as a whole, then, but also

violates the convention that melodies should follow logically from each other, making it a musical excess of a more fundamental kind.

We should briefly revisit Laing's notion that this music is produced by, or gives us unmediated access to, Julie's subjective experience. After all, of the three characters present, she is the only one consumed with melancholy thoughts of infants, and it is only she who – like the audience – got a good look at that painted baby face. But although the music may help us identify with Julie to a certain extent (just as the fragmentary collage of patriotic songs provoked a certain degree of identification with Smitty in *Random Harvest*), the very features that make the music melodramatic – the surge in volume, and the appearance (and collapse) of the leitmotif – are not synchronized with *her* noticing the painting, but with the image's exposure to the audience. (This is a perfect example of the “for-us” quality that separates Gorbman's recension of suture theory from the classic version associated with Daniel Dayan.)¹⁶⁷ And so the emotion is Julie's, and is not, and ours, and not, in a way that (despite the spilling of much ink) ultimately remains somewhat mysterious. The precise nature of the emotion itself is also difficult to pin down – or at least difficult to express. Earlier, I suggested that this leitmotif is associated with desire for children. This is true, but its particular use in this scene is something more than that. It is Julie's desire for children, but also our knowledge that she *can't* have children, and also the fact that she is bombarded with messages telling her she *must* have children, and also the fact that she feels constrained from expressing any of this to her husband.

167 Daniel Dayan, “The Tutor-Code of Classical Cinema,” *Film Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (1974): 22-31, and Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies*, 59. Simply put, Dayan describes an attempt to efface the audience's subject position through editing, while Gorbman describes a powerfully *reinforced* audience subject-position of voyeuristic narcissism. The theories are similar, though, in that they believe that the basic experience of spectatorship would make audiences uncomfortable if cinematic technique did not intervene, that cinematic texts are inherently fragmentary unless they are artificially forced to cohere (again by cinematic technique), and that these illusions of comfort and wholeness are inherently politically regressive.



Image 2.3a: *Penny Serenade*. Roger cheerfully looks at his new printing press. Julie apparently lost in thought, looks at something unseen in the foreground.



Images 2.3b: *Penny Serenade*. Just as the object of Julie's attention is revealed (via a startling whip-pan), the “desire-for-a-child” theme appears in the music.

The image displays two systems of musical notation for a piano piece. The first system is marked "Moderately slow" and "mp". It features a treble staff with a melodic line containing triplets and a bass staff with a more rhythmic accompaniment. The tempo changes to "molto rit." in the final measure. The second system is marked "f a tempo", "p rit.", and "more lively". It continues with a treble staff featuring chords and a bass staff with a more active line. Dynamic markings include "pp" and "mf".

Music Example 2.8: Penny Serenade. The “desire-for-a-child” motif in context. The leitmotif and the painting appear in the sixth measure of the transcription.

All of this is there in the music (and in the equally melodramatic close-up of the painting), in a way that it is not in her dialogue, and it is the tangled *contradictions* between these various impulses that give the moment its intense affective force. (For Laing, the music would presumably be an essentially monovalent expression of desire, and the contradictions would lie between the music’s desire on the one hand, and Julie’s failure to openly express that desire on the other.)

Similar contradictions give force to an even more powerful (if somewhat more obvious) use of music in the sixth and seventh flashbacks. The school’s Christmas pageant is the most visually excessive sequence in the film: its staging is bizarre, with most of the children turning their backs to the audience, and its *mise-en-scène* is improbably ornate. The sound, too, is excessive. Trina’s solo voice is as penetrating as the full choir that answers her, which seems improbable, and the chorus sounds as if it’s singing in a cistern (although this may be a function of a poor audio transfer on my copy of the film, which sounds quite muddy throughout even by 1941 standards). In the context of the sixth flashback, which shows us the family at its happiest,

one tends not to focus too much on this strangeness. But this music is perfectly calibrated to *become* disturbing, which it certainly does in its second appearance, during the seventh flashback.

We first hear “Silent Night” again when Julie and Roger drop off the new Echo and his mother outside of the school. (This is ostensibly diegetic, but seems spatially and temporally dislocated. The scene takes place in the parking lot, as a line of children dressed as angels is processing into the building, but what we hear is exactly the same as what we heard inside the school, and at the climax of the pageant, during the sixth flashback, right down to the muffled, echoey blurring of the sound.) The hymn is performed in D-flat major. Pained by their memories, Roger and Julie rapidly drive away, to the sounds of an ominous passage for strings in the relative minor, B-flat. This builds to a climax at the end of the 6th measure of the transcription (landing on an ambiguous chord, the harmonic significance of which is discussed in more detail below). After a momentary break, “Silent Night” appears again, but this time what we hear is Trina's solo performance of the words “holy night.” On the word “night,” the lighting suddenly dims, and there is a strange, jarring dissolve to a later point in their drive.¹⁶⁸ Clearly, then, the music is conspiring with other aesthetic and narrative elements to create a melodramatic rupture. The ominous string music begins again, this time rapidly drawing to a halt on a sustained low G as Roger stops the car. “What's wrong?” Julie asks. Roger exits the car and shuts the door loudly, as a melancholy and enigmatic figure in the horns and low woodwinds plays, coming to rest on a bare G-C# tritone. “Roger...” says Julie. The tritone resolves to D minor, and a dirge-like series of chords plays as Roger tells her “I'm not coming home. I don't ever want to see anything or anyone that reminds me.” The harmony slides down

168 Specifically, we dissolve from a close-up of Roger and Julie in the car to a shot of their car driving into the frame, which winds up essentially identical to the previous shot. The effect is similar to a jump cut, in that we recognize that we have moved forward in time without really moving in space; also like a jump cut, it causes a jarring visual stutter.

to a C# minor chord (enharmonically equivalent to the parallel minor of “Silent Night,” but here functioning as an unresolved dominant), with an added tremolo in the strings. “All right,” says Julie, her first word synchronized almost precisely with the harmonic shift. “Goodbye.” The music fades out as she drives away, and then, as the flashback draws to a close, we hear an incongruously cheerful performance of Ray Henderson's “We Strolled the Lane Together” (in F, the parallel major of the local key of D minor).

We should note, first of all, that this sequence has more than local significance. This is the first flashback that has been unambiguously tragic throughout: even the Japanese episode, with the earthquake and Julie's miscarriage, begins cheerfully. By the same token, this music is quite different – more chromatic, more unambiguously “classical” in style, more harmonically unstable, and less melodic – than any of the other extended cues in the film. (Flinn accurately notes that *Penny Serenade's* soundtrack consists of an interesting mélange of Tin-Pan Alley songs, light classical music, modern folk music (like “Happy Birthday”), and standard late-romantic Hollywood film scoring, but does not discuss the way in which these are dispersed over the course of the film. For the fifth and seventh flashbacks, which are the melodramatic high-points of the film, the record that Julie plays is “classical,” and the lighter pop styles hardly appear.) Even within this context, the hallucinatory “Silent Night” fragment in measures 7 and 8 of the example is probably the most forceful melodramatic break in the entire film. It is excessive in purely musical terms – the shift in register, instrumentation, and rhythm being altogether too abrupt – and also in sonic terms, in that it shares the eerie blur that characterizes all of the pageant music. Most striking, however, is the intrusion of this previously diegetic music into a non-diegetic musical texture. Due to the flashback structure, music that is diegetic in the frame story frequently becomes non-diegetic within the main plot, but this is the only case where sounds that are diegetic in the flashback make the same leap, and the only case where this kind of operation is used for purely expressive effect rather than to ease a transition between

organ and choir

...ten - der and mild.

strings

// organ and child solo

Ho - ly night...

Julie: "What's the matter?"

(clarinet and horns)

(car door slams) Roger: "Take the car on home."

Julie: "Roger..."

Roger: "I'm not coming home. I don't ever want to see anything or anyone that reminds me."

Julie: "All right. Goodbye."

(strings)

The musical score is divided into four systems. The first system features a piano accompaniment for organ and choir, with lyrics "...ten - der and mild." and a string section. The second system shows a piano accompaniment for organ and child solo, with lyrics "Ho - ly night..." and a string section. The third system is a piano accompaniment for clarinet and horns, with lyrics "(car door slams) Roger: 'Take the car on home.'" and "Julie: 'Roger...'". The fourth system is a piano accompaniment for strings, with lyrics "Roger: 'I'm not coming home. I don't ever want to see anything or anyone that reminds me.'" and "Julie: 'All right. Goodbye.'".

Music Example 2.9: *Penny Serenade*. The hallucinatory reappearance of “Silent Night” is the film's most melodramatic cue.

narrative levels.

The harmony of the entire sequence is carefully planned. The ambiguous chord that leads into the hallucinatory “Silent Night” fragment could be understood as a contrapuntal elaboration of an F minor chord that never appears (and thus part of a descending minor chromatic tetrachord, a venerable musical emblem of lament), making it a predominant in B-flat minor. On the other hand (as it actually happens), the ambiguous chord could be heard as a Cdim7 chord with a missing third, making it a dominant in D-flat. There is no question of the “Silent Night” fragment sounding like anything other than an interruption, but by making it harmonically plausible, the composer makes the surface incongruities all the more powerful.¹⁶⁹ Seduced by the harmonic plausibility of the cue, our ears strain to reconcile all of its other implausibilities – and inevitably fail.

Just as in the example from the fourth flashback, this melodramatic break hinges on a hopeless desire to have children (and participate in the communal ritual of childrearing) coupled with the factual impossibility of that desire. What's more, in this case we have a specifically nostalgic desire to have things go back to the way they were last year, coupled with past's fundamental irretrievability. And once again, we have fate and society rubbing Julie's nose in her failure to create a perfect family unit – and this time Roger's nose as well. In light of the seventh flashback, the pageant stands revealed as a kind of communal celebration of childrearing, the call and response between Trina and the rest of the children serving to demonstrate the social inclusion granted to Roger and Julie for their successful parenting. It is not simply the fact that Trina is dead that provokes the melodramatic break in the seventh flashback, then, but the fact that the communal celebration will go on without her. And finally, a

¹⁶⁹ W. Franke Harling is the credited composer on the film. Without viewing the cue sheet, it can be difficult to know whether the cue is actually his or not – especially in a film like *Penny Serenade* which uses so many arrangements of preexisting tunes.

certain portion of the music's affect must arise from the viewers' own internalized sense that of *course* a childless family must be miserably childless.

To a certain extent, the intimate harmonic connection of the string music with the repeated “Silent Night” excerpt (which, in that it was originally diegetic, we quite naturally read as remembered or imagined by one of the characters), supports the notion that the whole of this musical sequence is a metadiegetic record of a character's subjective experience. There are certain problems of synchronization, again: we do not hear the “Silent Night” music until after the apparently non-diegetic string music has been playing for some time, and I have found that even after multiple viewings one does not come to associate the initial appearance of the string music with any character's point of view.¹⁷⁰ Nevertheless, at least for the music that follows the “Silent Night” excerpt, the boundary between the score and the characters' subjectivities is thin to say the least. This may give us cause to reconsider the specifically gendered nature of Laing's theory. Elsaesser refers to the aesthetic excesses of melodrama as “punctuation,” and that metaphor is rarely so apt as in measures 10 through 16 of this example, where the music seems to shadow and highlight every gesture and every line of dialogue. But the gnomic series of thirds for clarinet and horns in measures 11 and 12 seems to sublimate not Julie's inability to verbalize her excessive emotional state, but Roger's. (The phrase falls in the pregnant pause following her question, and highlights his failure to respond. We could of course hear the music as her unspoken reaction to his lack of response, but this seems difficult to sustain.) The entirety of the cue cannot be easily understood as a product of Roger's experience, however: the final descent to C# minor (here heard as a deeply unstable vii of i in D minor) is timed *precisely* with Julie's terse farewell, and here, as in the image from *Splendor in the Grass* discussed earlier, the crushing emotional force of the moment comes not only from the immense hidden pain that her

170 The fact that the camera is so comfortably external, in this case, framing both characters from outside of the car (rather than giving us a POV shot for either), tends again to mitigate against a metadiegetic reading.

trivial words are asked to express, but from the triviality of the words themselves.

We cannot do without the idea that both Roger *and* Julie are somehow contributing to this music through their excessive desire. But neither can we do without the idea that the music is provided in part by the social structures of their society (the pageant music being quite literally the voice of communal respectability), nor can we escape the idea that some part is played by our own sense that their desires are futile. Furthermore, we cannot help but notice that this sequence is quite floridly melodramatic, even by the standards of a quite melodramatic movie – perhaps even too melodramatic to be accounted for by the tensions described above. There's something a little bit too sudden about that drop in the lighting levels, something a little too precious about the sonic gloss of the pageant music. We do feel an emotional connection to the characters, and we do feel the social pressures that their lives founder against – but although this information, and this emotion, are conveyed to us by the aesthetic surface, the surface excess remains excessive all the same.

PICNIC (Joshua Logan, 1955)

Thus far, both of the melodramas we have discussed could be listed as woman's films. With *Picnic*, we move to the family melodrama of a particularly Oedipal kind. The films it most resembles, such as *Young at Heart* (Gordon Douglas, 1954) and *East of Eden* (Elia Kazan, 1955), all focus on angry young men who feel cheated of financial success and come into conflict with a father figure who, thanks to the films' strong undercurrent of Americana, comes to stand for the social order as a whole.¹⁷¹ *Picnic's* protagonist, Hal (William Holden), is typical, an aimless hobo

171 Interestingly, while the central characters of *Young at Heart* and *Picnic* eventually dedicate themselves to being useful cogs within the system, the protagonist of *East of Eden* essentially makes the same choice that Smitty makes in *Random Harvest*, abandoning his dreams of success and respectability in favor of family and emotional wholeness. It would also be interesting to compare any and all of these texts to Kazan's *Splendor in the Grass* (1961), which contains many of the same plot elements (and the Americana aesthetic) while staying

living mainly off of memories of his glorious college football career and nebulous dreams of some future success, while carefully concealing his family's legacy of failure (his alcoholic father's death in prison, and his own stint in juvenile detention for theft).

As Thomas Schatz notes, *Picnic* also fits an even more specific model, in which a domestic situation dominated by women is intruded upon by a male interloper who brings long-simmering anxieties and antagonisms to the surface.¹⁷² Here the women are Flo Owens (Betty Field), a single mother, her two daughters Madge (Kim Novak) and Millie (Susan Strasberg), and their boarder Rosemary (Rosalind Russell), an old maid schoolteacher. Flo has been pressuring Madge to marry a wealthy local boy, Alan, whom she sees as the family's financial salvation, but Madge is less than willing. Millie is brilliant and sensitive, but jealous of Madge's beauty; Madge is tired of being seen as merely “the pretty one.” And Rosemary – a supporting role, but structurally important, and brilliantly acted by Russell – is a veritable pressure cooker of contradictory resentments, prudish but oversexed, resentful of children but desperate to regain her youth, scornful of men but eager for male attention. (By no means is the character merely a ghoul, however. Her internal contradictions mirror the external contradictions of her society, which she sees and understands better than any of the other characters.) Flo views Hal as a threat, presumably because he reminds her of her own unreliable and ultimately unfaithful husband, but the rest of the women are drawn to Hal's confidence and physicality. All of the conflicts come to a head during the town's annual Labor Day picnic, which ends with Rosemary browbeating her gentleman caller Howard into marriage, and Madge running off with Hal.

firmly focused on the female protagonist, and consigning the considerable Oedipal tensions to a subplot.

172 Thomas Schatz, “The Family Melodrama,” in *Imitations of Life*, ed. Marcia Landy (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), 155-158. Schatz derives his model of the male interloper variation only from *Picnic* and *Young at Heart*, but there are additional examples, not all of them melodramatic: consider Alfred Hitchcock's horror film *The Birds* (1963), or Don Siegel's genre-blending *The Beguiled* (1971).

If I wanted to write a traditional film-musicological account of *Picnic*, I would probably begin by noting the historical significance of the score, which generated the jazz standard “Theme from Picnic” and stands as an excellent representative of the 1950s Hollywood sound. I would discuss the stylistic links to Aaron Copland in the score's shimmering string and wind chords, and cite Frederick Sternfeld and Alfred Cochran on Copland's own film scores.¹⁷³ Above all, I would attend to the leitmotifs. I would relate the bluesy, diatonically dissonant fanfare used for the protagonist Hal both to Copland again (via *Fanfare for the Common Man*) and to Jay Gorney and Yip Harburg's “Brother Can You Spare a Dime,” noting that the Great Depression shaped the early lives of William Inge (upon whose play the film is based), Joshua Logan (who directed it) and George Duning, who provided the score. I would note the gendered opposition of Hal's theme and the one used for Madge, an arpeggiated 11th chord that works equally well as an avant-garde orchestral flourish or as the opening phrase of a jazz standard, giving brief analyses of cues in which it plays each role. I would also point out the hidden similarities between the two themes – reduced to pitch collections, they are nearly identical – which could be taken (with a grain of salt) to suggest that Madge's and Hal's frustrated desires are somehow



Music Example 2.10: *Picnic*. The “Madge” and “Hal” leitmotifs. (The chords at the end of each staff show the melody condensed into a collection of pitches.) The themes are presented without key signatures to highlight their similarities, but in fact this version of Madge's theme would be in E-flat major, and Hal's in a bluesy F minor.

173 Frederick Sternfeld, “Copland as a film composer,” *Musical Quarterly* 37, no. 2 (1951), 161-175. Alfred Cochran, “Style, Structure, and Tonal Organization in the Early Film Scores of Aaron Copland” (PhD diss., Catholic University, 1986).

linked: perhaps the financial struggle of the lost generation and the romantic longings stifled by bourgeois respectability arrive at the same point by different roads, or perhaps romance offers a new and open channel for stifled economic desires, or perhaps these are gendered male and female versions of identical struggles. I would also point out the formal symmetry of the film – the main plot is bookended by a matching series of shots of trains and screen doors, and the climactic dance sequence falls at the golden section of the film's overall running time – and finally I would imply that all of this demonstrates the aesthetic value of the text.

This would not be a bad analysis, and indeed, many of these findings are already somewhat melodramatic, especially the notion that the music and the film are shaped to some degree by the lingering “hidden” trauma of the Great Depression. Considered specifically as an example of melodrama, however, the film draws our attention to a different set of musical concerns.

Thomas Schatz describes the film's overall aesthetic structure well: the “myriad sociosexual tensions” established in the first half of the film are brought to light at the titular picnic “beneath the surreal glaze of fireworks, Japanese lanterns and the full moon. At this point, director Logan and cinematographer James Wong Howe depart from naturalistic style and begin to use camera angles, movement, and lighting to create an artificial, stylized narrative-visual tone.”¹⁷⁴ The vast majority of the film's visual melodramatic breaks, therefore, are clustered in the second half of film, and the music, too, enters an entirely different register. Music is used extremely sparingly in the first half of the film, appearing only in a handful of scenes where the hidden tensions come dangerously close to the surface: once in a scene where Madge and her mother argue – in highly veiled terms – about Madge's duty to use her sexual capital to secure an advantageous marriage with Alan; once in a scene where Hal does some

174 Schatz, *ibid.*, 157.

yard work with his shirt off and is ogled successively by Rosemary, Millie, and Madge; once under Hal and Madge's first meeting; and once in a scene where Hal gripes to Alan – again somewhat obscurely – about his economic marginalization. Once the picnic begins, however, music becomes nearly omnipresent. The picnic sequence as a whole, then, is a kind of rupture in the “normal” use of music and sound established earlier in the film.

But this new texture is subjected to ruptures of its own. The bulk of the music that we hear at the picnic is the kind of diegetic music that we might expect from a 1950's town celebration: brass band marches, a dance band, choral singing and the like. This is interrupted by a different musical texture, a luminous jazz string arrangement of Madge's theme, when Hal and Madge dance together on an isolated dock beneath a string of paper lanterns. Several elements of this sequence are excessive. The music is almost exclusively string-based, and we have not heard strings in the film for a solid fifteen minutes, although music of one sort or another has played almost continuously. (Both of the score's main leitmotifs have also been absent for this interval.) The diegetic status of the music is also ambiguous. Characters are dancing to it, and the beat of the song is carried over from the clearly diegetic performance of “Moonglow” that precedes it.¹⁷⁵ But on the other hand, this is a melody that we have come to know as non-diegetic, and Hal and Madge do seem to have almost left the diegesis behind. Just as the melody appears, we move from a long shot (in which Howard, Rosemary, and Millie are also visible) to a close-up of Madge and Hal against the paper lanterns, at which point they actually *stop* dancing for a long moment before drawing each other into a clinch and continuing

175 The medley of “Moonglow” and Duning's “Theme from Picnic” has become a familiar jazz standard in its own right, which makes *Picnic* a tricky score to grapple with, in some ways. It's hard to know what an audience that didn't already know this song by heart would think of the dance sequence. My guess is that the surprise of recognizing a non-diegetic melody in an ambiguously diegetic state would be amplified. But on the other hand, the theme's appearance during the dance sequence is surely meant to trigger a thrill of recognition, and this for the modern audience is likely more potent.

to move.

Furthermore, the strings do not seem to share an acoustic space with the rest of the music we have been hearing. From the beginning of the picnic, the music has been very drily and distantly recorded, evoking with great verisimilitude – although I do not say accuracy – the experience of hearing music performed in a large outdoor space. This diegetic music has also been overlaid with a noticeable buzz of crowd noise. But in the dance sequence, the crowd noise slowly fades out before Madge's theme begins, and the strings, when they enter, are ethereal, celestial, *studio* strings, close-mic'ed and luxuriant.¹⁷⁶ The performers hang back from the beat, and the arrangement uses the famous Mantovani “cascading strings” effect (a sort of luxe-jazz hocket in which individual pitches of each melodic line are assigned to different groups of players, allowing the notes to overlap and blur). Joseph Lanza aptly calls the Mantovani sound “cathedralized,” but we should note that it does not involve the kind of sonic decay we would associate with an actual cathedral, or indeed with any *real* space.¹⁷⁷

If the picnic as a whole is a carnivalesque territory in which impossible desires can be acted on, Hal and Madge's dance is a still more rarified space in which romantic love – the greatest of goods in the film's profoundly conflicted value system – is allowed to blossom in full force. But even this space is ruptured as Rosemary interrupts them, first demanding that Hal dance with her and then launching into a magnificent, quasi-musical tirade which is worth transcribing in full (in Music Example 2.11, below).

176 String arrangements of this particular kind are traditionally associated with recordings rather than live performances: Nelson Riddle, in his book on arranging, indicates that strings are best suited to the recording studio, and refers to their sound as a “velvet cushion.” Nelson Riddle, *Arranged by Nelson Riddle: The Definitive Study of Arranging by America's No. 1 Composer, Arranger, and Conductor* (Van Nuys: Alfred Music Publishing, 1985), 114 and 124.

177 Joseph Lanza, “Zing! Went the Strings,” in *Sound Unbound*, ed. Paul D. Miller (Boston: MIT Press, 2008), 161-170.

The vocal "pitches" reflect only contour.

You've been stom - ping a - round here in those boots like you

owned the place. Thin-king ev-ery wo-man-you saw _____ was gon-na fall mad - ly in love! Well

Music Example 2.11 (continued on following pages): *Picnic*. Rosemary's tirade is the film's most melodramatic sequence, and prompts a brilliant musical response from Duning.

5 here's one wo-man di-dn't pay you a - ny mind! Brag - ging a -

5 *mf* slowly cresc. from here to end

5 Piano

7 bout your fa-ther! Bet he was - n't a - ny bet - ter than you are. Strut -

7 Piano

Music Example 2.11, continued.

9
- ting a-round here like some crumb-y A-pol-lo! You think just 'cause you

9
9

11
act young, why you can walk in here and make off with what-e-ver you like!

11
11

Music Example 2.11, continued.

13

Let me tell you some - thing. You're a

13

13

15

fake! You're — no jive kid, you're just scared — to act your

15

15

Detailed description: The image shows a musical score for three systems. The first system (measures 13-14) features a vocal line with lyrics 'Let me tell you some - thing. You're a' and a piano accompaniment with triplets and slurs. The second system (measures 15-16) features a vocal line with lyrics 'fake! You're — no jive kid, you're just scared — to act your' and a piano accompaniment with slurs and a fermata. The third system (measures 17-18) shows a vocal line with rests and a piano accompaniment with rests.

Music Example 2.11, continued.

17

age! Buy your-self a mir-ror some time and take a look at it. Won't be man-ny years

17

19

now be-fore you're coun-ting the gray hairs, if you've got a-ny left! And what-ll be-come of you then?

19

harp

The musical score consists of three systems. The first system (measures 17-18) features a vocal line with lyrics, a piano accompaniment with chords and a bass line, and a guitar accompaniment with a single chord. The second system (measures 19-20) continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment, with the guitar accompaniment also present. The piano accompaniment includes a 'harp' section in the right hand. The guitar accompaniment includes a 'harp' section in the right hand.

Music Example 2.11, continued.

21

3

You'll end your life in the gut-ter, and it'll serve you right! cause the gut-ter's where you came from and the

21

21

23

gut-ter's where you be - long!

23

fff

brass

23

Music Example 2.11, continued.



8va, strings, flutes, and xylophone

25

26

Brass, tympani, and cymbals.



27

28

Music Example 2.11, continued. The half-step string figures and answering brass chords in these measures are synchronized with the beginnings of shots, and with dramatic gestures by Hal and Rosemary.

Here, although the music is once again firmly non-diegetic, and the action firmly diegetic, the aesthetic surface of the diegesis has become so agonized, and the music follows its contours so closely, that the distinction between them hardly seems meaningful. One of Rosalind Russell's great strengths as an actress has always been her intensely rhythmic, machine-gun vocal delivery (which has been normalized in the transcription below, but only slightly.) Duning catches this rhythm, and provides melodramatic “punctuation,” again in a more-than-usually-literal sense, answering each of her most damning charges with a crashing, dissonant piano chord. If the usual relationship of narrative and music is one of “mutual implication,” as Gorbman suggests, this is something nearer still – perhaps call and response.¹⁷⁸

This astonishing sequence, already a rupture in the film's general musical surface, is also marked by internal fissures of various kinds. The rapid and regular rhythms of Russell's voice are periodically interrupted by clusters of accents or by longer rhythmic values that ratchet up the tension (notably on “you're no jive kid, you're just scared” and “you'll end your life in the gutter!”). The piano chords, which as already noted are splendidly synchronized with Russell's dialogue, also serve as momentary points of purely musical rupture: in a texture primarily composed of sustained string harmonies, these sudden and irregular points of musical verticality push the listener further off balance. And even this fundamentally unbalanced texture is interrupted at the climax of the cue, where the strings and piano are joined by winds and brass, the melody, after its long ascent, leaps up an octave and begins to descend, now doubled by flute and mallet percussion, and the piano chords are transmuted into two dissonant shrieks for massed brass and cymbals, each of which is synchronized with a stylized gesture of anguish in the image track (first from Hal, then from Rosemary).

That the sequence is excessive, I think, has been established. The question then becomes, to what is it excessive? And none of the theories of melodrama outlined above give us

178 Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies*, 15.

an easy answer. Elsaesser would say that this music, and Russell's stylized performance, allows for narrative tensions to be put into play without any character taking decisive action to alter their situation. But in fact this is not the case: Rosemary's public shaming of Hal is melodramatic in that it is destructive and regrettable, but it is most certainly a productive action, and drives the development of the remainder of the plot. (More melodramatic in Elsaesser's sense would be the film's early running, in which the various tensions merely percolate.) Nowell-Smith would suggest that it is either sexual tension or class resentment that is at work here, and that these issues, unspeakable by the standards of the dominant ideology of the time, have been sublimated into heightened aesthetic gestures. But it's hard to know what hidden tensions are left to sublimate: Rosemary, in her lust, has literally ripped Hal's shirt off, and her speech grimly exposes the middle class's scorn for economic outsiders who try to better themselves. Laing's suppressed female discourse model also applies poorly here (although again we must recall that it was not designed for films of this kind) in that the greatest musical excess lies at precisely the point where a woman *does* speak – and unlike Marylee from *Written in the Wind*, there is no sense that this is not Rosemary's true face. She *does* believe these things, what's more, they're true (“She saw through me like an X-Ray machine,” Hal later admits), and it is clear from her performance (and later dialogue) that she is entirely aware that many of the charges she levels at Hal could be leveled at herself as well.

What we find in *Picnic* is that the conflict between a character's desire and the collective “must” of society will trigger melodramatic breaks, regardless of whether the character acts on that desire or not. Music is used where the tensions are suppressed, and then used again (more excessively) when they are released. Furthermore, as in both *Random Harvest* and *Penny Serenade*, it's not simply that the music, the character, and the audience's sympathies are united against an uncaring world: a melodramatic break of this kind does appear during the dance sequence, but Rosemary's speech, in which the music seems to be aligned with society's

condemnation of the characters, is even more melodramatic. More than either of the earlier examples, however, *Picnic* demonstrates what close reading of specific melodramatic breaks can contribute to the study of melodrama. Schatz's reading of *Picnic* effectively sketches the film in broad strokes. But it does not account for the essential *crescendo* of melodramatic effects that occurs over the course of the picnic, and as a result the picnic itself, Hal and Madge's dance, and Rosemary's tirade are seen in his reading as a single extended rupture in the drab and dowdy respectability represented by Alan and his father. As we have seen, Rosemary's speech punctures the dance sequence's seductive bubble of romantic love just as thoroughly as it violates the community's rules of decorum. That this break is *more* melodramatic than the dance sequence shows us that it is more fundamental, and if less desirable, more *necessary*, than the earlier break of the dance itself. It retroactively exposes the dance sequence – and thus the ideology of romantic love as a whole – as precisely the kind of repressive consensual fiction that melodrama has traditionally sought to destabilize. Schatz notes that during the closing morning-after sequence, most of the townspeople make uneasy attempts to repair the status-quo as “the community neuroses return to their subliminal realm.”¹⁷⁹ I would argue that the central love scene between Hal and Madge, which follows Rosemary's speech, but still takes place in the night-world of the picnic, is a similar attempt to paper over the break.

Like so many melodramatic happy endings, the pair of weddings that close off *Picnic* are more or less unbelievable, and fail to fully contain the tensions released by the melodramatic episodes earlier in the film. Hal asks Madge to run off with him because he believes that, with her by his side, he will finally be able to establish himself in the lower ranks of society, and abandon all futile dreams of climbing higher. Rosemary demands that Howard propose to her mainly because she's desperate to marry *someone*, and this in turn is only because she is so disgusted with her current existence. Neither of these motivations is particularly palatable to the

179 Schatz, “The Family Melodrama,” 157.

ideology of romantic love, or to the ideology of modern feminism. But Hal has lived as an outcast on the margins of society, and Rosemary as an outcast in the heart of it, and the film makes it clear what an awful, grinding strain their lives have been. *Picnic*, for me, has one of the most depressing happy endings in all of cinema, but it's hard to begrudge these characters a chance at a better life, even if the odds are long.

Conclusions

To summarize our findings on melodrama: although the term is a hotly contested one, there is a general consensus in the critical literature that melodramas involve a particularly heightened kind of aesthetic surface and a deeper ideological significance to which this surface reacts. The standard approach to melodrama, then, is more or less the same as the standard approach to film music. One seeks out points of aesthetic rupture, and focuses on these as evidence for some sort of claim about the hidden psychological experience of the characters or the deeper social order – likewise, hidden – of the story-world. Although my survey of melodrama scoring has not been exhaustive, it has detected a general trend, which holds across a substantial swathe of film history: at the points of melodramatic rupture, the music not only depicts and evokes the emotions of the characters (as is widely recognized), but also may speak with the voice of the film's “normal” social order. An individual cue may jump back and forth between these subjectivities (as in Music Example 2.9 where the interjection of the pageant music seems to function as the voice of respectability). Furthermore, in film after film, melodramatic ruptures are presented as a kind of problem or threat – perhaps ultimately desirable (as in *Random Harvest*), but nonetheless menacing.

Much work remains to be done, especially with regard to the distinction between the 1940s woman's films and the 50s family melodrama, and although many aspects of Melodrama's fundamental structure were carried forward into the 21st century, further historical divisions

within the scoring practice will surely be detected. In all cases, a careful attention to the details of the aesthetic surfaces (including the music) will give a fuller understanding of the sorts of breaks privileged within a given group of films, and the sorts of ideologies with which they grapple.

Chapter 3. Terror Chords and Jungle Drums: Music in the Horror Film

Louder and louder, wilder and wilder, mounted the shrieking and whining of that desperate viol. The player was dripping with an uncanny perspiration and twisted like a monkey, always looking frantically at the curtained window. In his frenzied strains I could almost see shadowy satyrs and bacchanals dancing and whirling insanely through seething abysses of clouds and smoke and lightning. And then I thought I heard a shriller, steadier note that was not from the viol; a calm, deliberate, purposeful, mocking note from far away in the West.

- H. P. Lovecraft, "The Music of Erich Zann"

Introduction

There is already a sizeable film music literature on horror, which generally focuses on the ways in which music can sound scary.¹⁸⁰ Several writers note that dissonance is more horrific than consonance in the context of tonal music. Scheurer, for instance, explores this at some length, listing tritones and seconds as the characteristic intervals of horror melodies.¹⁸¹ Other writers have noted that certain instruments have become cultural markers of the horrific. Donnelly and Julie Brown note the importance of the pipe organ, and Kay Dickinson that of the

180 Systematic accounts of horror scoring are provided by Scheurer, *Music and Mythmaking* 176-204, Brownrigg, "Film Music and Film Genre," 112-148, and Kevin Donnelly, *The Spectre of Sound: Music in Film and Television* (London: BFI, 2005), 89-95. There are also two important collections of essays on the scores of individual horror films which, while making no claims about the nature of horror scoring as a whole, can be used to derive a sort of lexicon of horror scoring techniques: *Music in the Horror Film: Listening to Fear*, Neil Lerner, ed. (New York: Routledge, 2010), and *Terror Tracks: Music, Sound, and Horror Cinema*, Philip Hayward, ed. (Sheffield: Equinox, 2009).

181 Scheurer, *ibid.*, 185. But the presence of these intervals certainly does not guarantee that we are dealing with a horror film: c.f. Janet K. Halfyard, "Mischief Afoot: Supernatural Horror-comedies and the Diabolus in Musica," in Lerner, *Music in the Horror Film*, 21-37. To my mind, Halfyard's use of the term "horror-comedy" is a little misleading: these are not films that function as both horror and comedy, but rather comedies featuring traditional horror characters such as witches and ghosts.

curiously affectless 1970s era synthesizers.¹⁸² There are also musical *topoi*, created for individual films, which have taken on a life of their own as horror clichés. Herrmann's main title music for *Psycho* is of this kind, having appeared in slightly altered guise in a good half dozen later movies.¹⁸³ We could also speak of more general tendencies such as the "scare chord," a sudden blast of music designed to make the audience jump in their seats, and its opposite number, what Donnelly calls the "tension ostinato," which is perhaps best thought of as the careful drawing back of the rubber band which will, on the jump, snap against the audience's wrist.¹⁸⁴

Throughout this literature, music in horror is deemed to be interesting in that we find it frightening. The most common structure for an essay on horror music seems to be to identify a prominent musical feature in a horror film (or a group of related films), to assert that its function is to cause anxiety, and then to attempt to account for this scariness by examining the role of similar music in the broader culture. Accounts of the scariness of dissonance usually mention the medieval concept of the *diabolus in musica*; Julie Brown's excellent essay on the pipe organ in horror relates the immensity of the organ's sound to the "awe and terror" of the Burkean sublime, and relates the typical invisibility of the organist (whether the isolation of the church organist in his/her loft, or the agentless sounding of the fairground Calliope) to the automatism of the Freudian uncanny.¹⁸⁵

Valuable though the existing literature on horror music is, two revisions to this account

182 Donnelly, *The Spectre of Sound*, 91. Julie Brown, "Carnival of Souls and the Organs of Horror," in *Music in the Horror Film: Listening to Fear*, ed. Neil Lerner (New York: Routledge, 2010), 1-20. Dickinson, *Off Key*, 119-154.

183 *Re-Animator* (Gordon, 1985) and *Vacancy* (Nimrod Antal, 1985), use blow-for-blow pastiches of the theme, while *Friday the Thirteenth*, *Sleepaway Camp* (Robert Hiltzik, 1983), and many others have used versions that are only slightly less blatant.

184 Donnelly, *ibid.* Brownrigg discusses the technique of the scare chord at some length, referring to it evocatively as a "BOOM!" ("Film Music and Film Genre," 126-7.)

185 Julie Brown, "Organs of Horror," 5 and 16.

are suggested by the existing film literature on horror, and by careful attention to the films and their scores. First, although horror films do often try to scare us with music, this isn't the only thing that their scores will do. Rather, we find an essentially polarized structure, with one kind of music used to startle, or to represent danger and the monster, and a different sort of music used to demarcate safe narrative spaces, and to represent the monster's innocent victims. (This polarization is recognized by Scheurer, although there are some difficulties with his account, which will be addressed below.) The second weakness in the current accounts of horror scoring is that they are, for the most part, depoliticized. But for most film theorists, horror is a deeply political genre.¹⁸⁶ The anxiety that it provokes is not simply a pleasurable adrenaline rush, and its structural polarization is directed along political lines. Not every piece of horror scoring confirms this hypothesis, but those that do will often do so in extremely forceful terms – and this aspect of horror's relationship to music has thus far gone largely unnoticed.

This chapter focuses on the political dimensions of horror scoring's polarization. First, I will explain the underlying structure and ideological meaning of the genre, drawing primarily on the theorist Robin Wood. Next, I will address the genre's musical polarization, tracing the essential structural opposition of the genre through a number of historical periods. The purpose here is mainly to demonstrate the durability of the structure, but this chronology will also begin to demonstrate that the "monstrous" aspect of horror music is concerned with something more involved, and more troubling, than a mere startle reflex. Finally, I will address the political aspect of horror scoring, with a particular focus on the Voodoo zombie movies of the 1930s and 1940s, and their spiritual successors, the Italian cannibal films of the 1970s and 80s. At the outset of this study, it was suggested that one of the benefits of a genre-based approach to film music is that it can help us ask better and more nuanced questions about individual films and their scores. In this case, the problem that we are confronted with is the use of music to depict

186 "Political" here should be understood in the sense of identity politics, not electoral politics.

minority ethnic groups in film. The general consensus has been that in these cases, the more authentic a given representation is, the better it is, from both aesthetic and ethical points of view.¹⁸⁷ Against the backdrop of horror scoring's politically polarized syntax, however, this consensus cannot be sustained. The purpose is not merely to expose the underlying racism of these films, although to be sure they are more than a little troubling. Rather, I hope to show that the films produce a surprisingly wide range of meanings by interacting with the generic model.

Horror, Polarized and Political

Unlike melodrama, with its shifting and discontinuous canon, horror is one of the most consistent and durable of cinematic genres. Regardless of when and where they were made, regardless of the changes in censorship laws and cinematic technique, horror films are always built around the contrast between the victim and the perpetrator, the threat and that which is threatened. Noël Carroll defines the structure as follows: "We are supposed to share certain elements of the emotive responses to [the monster] with the positive [i.e., sympathetic] human characters in the relevant fictions. Specifically, we share with characters the emotive evaluations of monsters as fearsome and impure – as dangerous and repulsive – and this causes the relevant sensations in us."¹⁸⁸ Unless both categories operate within the text (i.e. a monstrous threat and a

187 Representative accounts include Royal Brown, *Overtones and Undertones*, 52, Kassabian, *Hearing Film*, 58, Robynn Stilwell, "The Sound is Out There: Sound Design and Exoticism in the X-Files," in *The Sound of Popular Music: Analysis in Context*, ed. Allan F. Moore (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 60-79, and Mark Brill "Reinterpreting Fantasy and Nostalgia: James Newton Howard's *King Kong*" (paper presented at the annual Music and the Moving Image conference, New York, New York, May 21-23, 2010).

188 Noël Carroll, *Philosophy of Horror, or, Paradoxes of the Heart* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 53. It should be noted that Carroll is quite specific about the nature of the identification we feel with the protagonists. We do not share all or even most of their emotions, but we must share their evaluation of the monster as monstrous. It could be argued to the contrary, that many horror fans pride themselves on rising above mere fear to view the work on purely aesthetic grounds. But in my own experience, watching horror usually involves a kind of

“positive human character” to be threatened thereby), we can scarcely call the work horrific.

Popular film critics, and studio marketing departments, are generally content to map these structural poles neatly onto the concepts of good and evil, or safety and danger. The consensus on the genre's ideological meaning among film theorists, however, is quite different. The most influential account is that of Robin Wood, who claims that that which is threatened in horror is not merely the physical wellbeing of the protagonists, but the unary self, rationality, masculinity, patriarchy, the nuclear family, “normal” sexuality, and, in short, *normality* as such.¹⁸⁹ By the same token, the monstrous threat, depending on the film in question, will represent any of a cornucopia of political *Others*: women, poor people, marginalized ethnic groups, children, religious minorities, and so on.¹⁹⁰ Thus understood, *Carrie* (Brian De Palma,

vacillation between amused detachment and sudden, horrified, and embarrassed engagement. There are moments where our attempt to master the film is unsuccessful, where the film masters us.

189 Robin Wood, “An Introduction to the American Horror Film,” in *Movies and Methods Vol. 2* ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 195-220.

190 The religious element is of particular note: writing in 1985, Wood apparently viewed Christianity as the “norm” and all horrific spirituality as the inversion of that norm, i.e. Satanism. A closer look at the films reveals that even Christianity, when fervently believed, is viewed as a deviation, and therefore as a threat. Normal Americans (or at least the ones we see in movies) go to church on Christmas and Easter, and keep their beliefs to themselves. And so the second scariest character in *The Exorcist* (Friedkin, 1973) is Max von Sydow’s Father Merrin, and the Bible thumping mother in *Carrie* (De Palma, 1976) is just as dangerous – and within that movie’s value system, just as hysterical, just as toxically female – as Carrie herself. To find a horror film where religion is seen as an unambiguous positive good, one has to search pretty widely indeed. Even *The Bride of Frankenstein* (Whale, 1935) places the blind religious hermit with the monster in a community of outsiders, where, together, they delight in a performance of Schubert’s *Ave Maria*. I depart from Wood, then, with regard to this category: rather than “Satanism,” I label it “deviant religion,” defined as any religious belief that seems to threaten the bourgeois norm. Carroll, interestingly enough, traces the roots of modern horror to Enlightenment philosophy, in which “religion was a special object of distrust because it valued faith and revelation over reason.” *Philosophy of Horror*, 55.

1976) is not really about the physical threat posed by telekinetic teenagers, nor is *Cat People* (Val Lewton/Jacques Tourneur, 1942) about the physical threat of lycanthropy: rather, both are concerned, although in rather different ways, with the existential threat posed by female sexuality. *The Hills Have Eyes* (Wes Craven, 1977) and its various sequels and remakes are about the existential threat posed by economic difference. The Voodoo zombie films discussed at length below are mainly about race. There is probably no end to the number of things that seem to threaten the status quo, although we can perhaps judge the perceived severity and relevance of those threats at any given cultural moment by the number and success of the horror films that grapple with them.

The classic explanation for horror's representation of otherness, as advanced by Wood and many others, is a kind of collective psychological repression.¹⁹¹ Wood in particular draws from Herbert Marcuse's concept of "surplus repression," according to which the same psychological and social apparatuses that allow us to repress truly harmful urges will also inevitably be applied to the repression of innocent desires, and – more saliently – minority groups within society.¹⁹² As Wood puts it:

Basic repression is universal, necessary and inescapable. It is what makes possible our development from an uncoordinated animal capable of little beyond screaming and convulsions into a human being; it is bound up with the ability to accept the postponement of gratification, with the development of our thought and memory processes, of our capacity for self-control, of our recognition of and

191 See for instance Barbara Creed, *Phallic Panic: Film, Horror and the Primal Uncanny* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2005), or the collection *Horror Film and Psychoanalysis: Freud's Worst Nightmares*, ed. Steven Jay Schneider (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

192 Wood, "Introduction to the American Horror Film," 188-204. Marcuse puts forth the concept of surplus repression in *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1974); the specific account referenced by Wood is that of Marcuse's student Gad Horowitz in *Repression: Basic and Surplus Repression in Psychoanalytic Theory: Freud, Reich, and Marcuse* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977).

consideration for other people. Surplus repression, on the other hand, is specific to a particular culture and is the process whereby people are conditioned from earliest infancy to take on predetermined roles within that culture. In terms of our own culture, then: *basic* repression makes us distinctively human, capable of directing our own lives and co-existing with others; *surplus* repression makes us (if it works) into monogamous heterosexual bourgeois patriarchal capitalists... *if* it works; if it doesn't, the result is either a neurotic or a revolutionary (or both)."¹⁹³

He goes on to suggest that surplus repression is the source for all social oppression:

One might define repression as fully internalized oppression... thereby suggesting both the difference and the connection. A specific example may make this clearer: our social structure demands the *repression* of the bisexuality that psychoanalysis shows to be the natural heritage of every human individual, and the *oppression* of homosexuals: obviously the two phenomena are not identical, but equally obviously they are closely connected. What escapes *repression* has to be dealt with by *oppression*.¹⁹⁴

Of course, not every marginalized group can be so readily affiliated with the disavowal of some universal drive. (Is there a general repressed desire to be poor? A desire to be ethnic?) But Wood suggests that disavowed libidinal desires are projected onto political others in order that the desires "can be discredited, disowned, and if possible annihilated. It is repression, in other words, that makes impossible the healthy alternative: the full recognition and acceptance of the Other's autonomy and right to exist."¹⁹⁵ This displacement onto the Other, incidentally, is perhaps the most important structural difference between the horror film and the melodrama: both devote substantial screen time and dramatic energy towards a certain kind of forbidden desire, but where the melodrama seems to delight in depicting the *experience* of a disapproved

193 Wood, *ibid.*, 197.

194 *Ibid.*, 197-8.

195 *Ibid.*, 199.

or impossible desire, horror tends to reify the desire as a diegetic being, action, or object, which then is characterized as monstrous. What we see in the horror film is therefore akin to the Freudian concept of hysteria, in which an underlying psychological disturbance manifests itself as a somatic malady. It is surely not insignificant that Doane's Freudian taxonomy of the 1940s woman's film finds its paradigmatic "hysterical" text in Val Lewton and Jacques Tourneur's *The Cat People*, a horror film through and through.¹⁹⁶ (This also helps us distinguish the horror film proper from the related genre of the thriller: both genres attempt to elicit fear from the audience, and both do so by threatening the bodily safety of the protagonist, but the villains in a thriller like *North by Northwest* (Hitchcock, 1959) are only mooks with guns, whereas Norman Bates is a *monster*.)

Horror films, then, are held to be a symptom of a collective social neurosis, which in turn is both the mechanism by which individual neuroses are produced, and the mechanism through which political Others are so effectively demonized. The heroic critic-analyst can use the films to articulate a diagnosis, and perhaps – in the most idealistic accounts – to prescribe a social cure. The corollary: a truly healthy society, with no surplus repression, would produce no horror.

Wood is cited everywhere, but few engage with his specific reading of Marcuse, and therefore the specific sort of relationship that horror has with the unconscious is still something of an open question (if one that is rarely raised). However, the basic notion that repression is a key mechanism of the horror film can scarcely be contested. Indeed, there are often layers within layers of repression: Manny Farber writes that Val Lewton, "while skittering daintily away from concrete evidences of cat women or brutality, would concentrate with the fascination of a voyeur on unimportant bric-a-brac, reflections, domestic animals, so that the camera would take on the faintly unhealthy eye of a fetishist."¹⁹⁷ Thus, the cat woman (a figure of repressed

196 Doane, *The Desire to Desire*, 44-52.

197 Manny Farber, "Val Lewton and the School of Shudders," in *Focus on the Horror Film*, ed. Roy Huss and T. J. Ross (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1972), 142.

female sexuality) is repressed in turn only to bubble back up as a panther, or a statue, or a painting. Lewton is, along with Dario Argento, perhaps the most fetishistic of horror auteurs, but the tendency is firmly established within the genre as a whole. Consider the ease with which horror icons can be metonymically reduced to a prop or costuming element such as Freddy's glove from the *Nightmare on Elm Street* series or the puzzle box from *Hellraiser* (Clive Barker, 1987). The fetishistic quality of this operation is most plain in the robust tradition of horror masks (Jason Voorhees, Michael Myers, Leatherface, the Phantom of the Opera), which, while hiding the horror of the monster's *true* face, become themselves invested with horrific energy to such a degree that the audience would feel cheated by their absence.

These horror fetishes can take sonic or musical form as well. The main title theme from *Halloween* (John Carpenter, 1978), for instance, has become an object of horror in its own right. Leitmotifs are generally understood to attach their emotional or thematic "contents" to any scene in which they appear. In *Halloween*, however, one often feels that the experiencing-subject of the film (the Kino-eye that is always also a Kino-ear) is lingering over an otherwise unimportant sequence precisely in order to linger over, and fetishistically luxuriate in, the *Halloween* leitmotif itself. But this motif is, like the mask, a fetishistic screen for the character of Michael Myers, and Myers himself is only a sort of sin-eater for the violent and lustful urges of the audience... and it is these urges (our own!) that we truly fear. So at least the theory goes, and although it involves a number of striking psychological claims, it accounts for horror films and the experience of watching them remarkably well, and has been almost universally accepted by later writers on the genre's ideological significance.¹⁹⁸ However, most current theories of horror film music do not account for these mechanisms of repression.¹⁹⁹ And although the *Halloween*

198 For a criticism of Wood's approach, see Carroll, *Philosophy of Horror* (160-1). Note however that Carroll is primarily troubled by Wood's aesthetic philosophy, not by his ideological analysis.

199 Kevin Donnelly, whose work on horror music has been highly influential, rejects

example listed above is associated with sex only in that it is associated with Michael Myers, who is in turn equated with the sexual drive, much horror music represents the repressed horrific matter quite directly.

The Polarization of Horror Scoring

As noted above, the lion's share of the existing literature on horror scoring is concerned with musical mechanisms for generating fear, which – for our purposes – double as musical expressions or representations of the monstrous Other. We must remember, however, that horror has not one but two structural poles, and that therefore the musical Other will always be balanced against a music of normality within any given horror score. (Indeed, the persistence with which both monster and victim are granted musical representation is strong evidence in favor of the basically polarized syntax of the genre.) Scheurer's discussion of horror film music recognizes this basic opposition, which he characterizes as a distinction between "marked" and "unmarked" musical terms, borrowing the language of linguistics.²⁰⁰ However, Scheurer's terminology is potentially misleading – and indeed, it seems to have misled Scheurer somewhat.

An Excursus on Markedness

In its original, linguistic sense, the marked/unmarked distinction is used in situations

psychological approaches to film music altogether for reasons that he does not make entirely clear. Interestingly enough, he does believe that music (in horror specifically) speaks to something other than the rational mind, but claims that this is a bodily response, not a psychological-unconscious one. *The Spectre of Sound* (London: British Film Institute, 2005), 89-90 and 94-95. Even if we were to choose, like Donnelly, to reject the notion that any actual psychological mechanism is at work in our response to horror scores, this does not mean we can afford to turn a blind eye to the textual patterns identified by Wood. Filmmakers are at least loosely aware of Freudian concepts, and in some cases have quite consciously patterned their films around them.

²⁰⁰ Scheurer, *Music and Mythmaking in Film*, 179 and 208.

where there are two versions of a phoneme or a word, one of which encompasses the entire class, and is seen as more usual, and one of which is limited to the subclass, and is less usual.²⁰¹ The salient aspect of this is that the unmarked term can encompass the marked term. “Woman” is marked for gender with respect to the unmarked term “man.” Therefore, in contexts that are indifferent to gender, “man” can be used to refer to all humans, male and female alike.²⁰² Likewise, the term “tomcat” is marked for gender with regard to the unmarked term “cat.” In music, we can observe something like this by comparing the terms “dissonant fanfare” and “fanfare” (which, although implying consonance, can refer to any fanfare in a context that is indifferent to consonance), or “plagal cadence” and “cadence” (which implies a V-I motion, but can be used more generally to refer to any sort of phrase-ending gesture).

Notice, however, that both of my “musical” examples are actually examples of markedness in the language we use to describe music. It is not entirely clear to me that any example of a marked-unmarked relationship, in the sense described above, can exist in actual

201 Although this is the sense of the concept that has been most widely embraced outside of linguistics, there is no one universally acknowledged theory of markedness, and some linguists have advocated dispensing with the concept altogether. See Martin Haspelmath, “Against Markedness (And What to Replace It With),” *Journal of Linguistics* 42 (2006): 25-70, especially the table on page 26, which lists a solid dozen mutually incompatible ways in which the term has been used by linguists. The sense of the term generally used by Scheurer (and Hatten – see the following note) is no. 2, “semantic markedness.” Even if markedness were to become entirely discredited in linguistic circles, this specific concept might still have some value in musicology – but we had better be wary of adopting the term without rigorously defining it, or of defending its use in music by relying on its applicability to language.

202 Robert Hatten offers this example and the marked/unmarked pairing “bull/cow” in his influential treatment of musical markedness, *Musical Meaning in Beethoven: Markedness, Correlation, and Interpretation* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1994), 34-5. What Hatten does not emphasize quite enough, to my mind, is that this encompassing function only applies in contexts where the distinction in question is thought to be irrelevant: dairy farmers buy bull semen, not cow semen, and while one might say “for early man, the most common causes of death were hunger and disease,” there's something odd about the claim that “early man often died in childbirth.”

sounding music. Robert Hatten, whose *Musical Meaning in Beethoven: Markedness, Correlation, and Interpretation* seems to have introduced the term into musical discourse, describes numerous ways in which musical gestures can become marked, and accordingly lists the opposite terms as unmarked when laying out his theoretical approach, *viz.* minor-marked/major-unmarked.²⁰³ However, in his descriptions of actual sounding music, he focuses on the marked terms almost exclusively, describing a passage as “unmarked” only rarely, and then only to indicate blandness.²⁰⁴ Rather than functioning in the particular and multivalent way that an unmarked word would function, then, Hatten's unmarked musical terms do nothing at all. If we can observe anything like linguistic “unmarkedness” with regard to actual sounding music, it would be in cases where much is left to our imagination. With regard to the major/minor distinction, the bare fifth C-G at the very start of a piece will seem to imply C major until we are given reason to suspect otherwise.²⁰⁵ A major triad, however, is *marked* as major – perhaps redundantly marked, like the phrases “male man” and “female cat,” but marked nonetheless.

203 Ibid.

204 Ibid., 122-136.

205 In this instance, the phenomenon may be a result of acoustics (in that the C-G fifth will produce a reasonably strong overtone on E). However, it seems more likely that this is a matter of stylistic competence: if we imagine instead a piece of Gregorian chant that begins with the melodic fifth D-A, we are going to be more surprised by a continuation to F# than by a continuation to F. The fanfare/dissonant-fanfare binary might allow for a similar case: suppose that one had never heard Igor Stravinsky's dissonant *Fanfare for a New Theater*, which opens with a characteristic fanfare rhythm, and a characteristic fanfare instrumentation (the trumpet), on an isolated B-flat. At this precise moment – assuming that we know something about fanfares, and nothing about Stravinsky – we might assume that we are going to hear a consonant fanfare, only to realize an instant later that it is a dissonant one. By the same token, an unaccompanied melody that ends by moving from scale degree 4 to scale degree 3 could be supported by either a IV-I plagal cadence or a V7-I “normal” cadence. All else being equal, we might tend to assume the latter.

In any case, Scheurer's use of the term is quite different. He seems to begin by dividing all possible musical gestures into two broad categories based on whether they tend to evoke negative or positive emotions, and then refers to these as marked and unmarked respectively. His "unmarked terms" are in fact typically marked for some positive quality (most typically some version of innocence, such as "gentleness and wistful innocence" or "simplicity and innocence, much in keeping with pastoral topics" or "childhood innocence").²⁰⁶ Furthermore, his marked terms are not marked *with regard to* some specific unmarked term, and as a result, he also loses the sense that the unmarked term can encompass the marked term. Although Hatten's division of the musical field is both more context-sensitive and less Manichean than Scheurer's, he could be accused of the same basic misunderstanding of the concept.²⁰⁷ (Where Scheurer seems to use marked to mean "spooky," Hatten uses it to mean "expressive.") They seem to have arrived at this misunderstanding through the linguistic concept of "markedness assimilation," which suggests that marked terms tend to cluster together regardless of the nature of the marks in question. As a result, we would expect marked grammatical constructions to use marked phonemes, and marked emotional states to be associated with marked musical constructs, and indeed, for marked cinematic characters to be scored with marked leitmotifs. From this, it is but a short step to reifying "markedness" as a kind of invisible essence shared by all marked elements. Hatten refers to markedness assimilation as a "fundamental" aspect of signification, citing the linguist Edwin L. Battistella, who for his part simply asserts that the

206 Scheurer, *Music and Mythmaking in Film*, 190, 193, and 200.

207 For example, Hatten describes the dominant seventh chord as "marked" because it contains a tritone, and is the only chord with the form [major triad]+[minor seventh] that one can form from the pitches of the diatonic scale (*Musical Meaning in Beethoven*, 47). There is no unmarked term to which this is opposed: he simply means that the dominant seventh has some unusual properties *vis-à-vis* all of the other seventh chords. Elsewhere, he refers to the diminished third as "a particularly marked interval" (156).

phenomenon occurs.²⁰⁸ This is, however, controversial. Edna Andrews, who describes markedness assimilation as a “myth,” has demonstrated that linguists often vary in their accounts of which term in a particular pair is the marked one, which means that a phenomenon that proves markedness assimilation for one theorist would disprove it for another.²⁰⁹ Even if we side with Battistella, this particular aspect of linguistic markedness is difficult to apply to a musical composition. If a marked grammatical tense uses marked phonemes, we may need to invoke markedness assimilation in order to explain this link, but using this same concept to explain the fact that the introduction to Beethoven's *Pathétique* Sonata combines minor mode, dotted rhythms, and emotional intensity (all marked terms, in Hatten's account), violates Occam's Razor pretty severely: these traits did not gravitate together, they are combined because Beethoven chose to combine them.²¹⁰

If this were simply a matter of a musicologist having misappropriated terminology from a different discipline, it would hardly bear mentioning. Such borrowings are common and must be judged by their fruits: pointing out the flaws in Hatten's use of linguistic vocabulary does nothing to discredit the insights he was able to draw from Beethoven using these terms, which are generally quite fine. Scheurer's misappropriation of “markedness,” however, ties directly into what I see as his misunderstanding of the basic relationship between music and film genre. By assigning each individual musical gesture a value in a vacuum (in this case, classifying them

208 Hatten, *ibid.*, 37. Edwin L. Battistella, *Markedness: The Evaluative Superstructure of Language* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990), 7.

209 Edna Andrews, *Markedness Theory: The Union of Asymmetry and Semiosis in Language* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 145-147. Similarly, Haspelmath (“Against Markedness”) suggests that markedness assimilation is not universal, and that the instances in which it does occur can be understood through other means. For Haspelmath, then, markedness assimilation is not a fundamental aspect of signification, but a statistical trend.

210 The same objection would hold for literature, or for any other consciously created string of signs.

as “marked” or “unmarked” without regard to any other specific term), he prevents the visual, narrative, and musical contexts of the cue from shaping its meaning. This leads to a number of specific misreadings. In that chromaticism is predetermined to have the quality of markedness, it is described as a feature of the musical Other in high-Hollywood scoring.²¹¹ But in fact, as the examples below demonstrate, both the musical Other and the music of normality are frequently chromatic. In that musical simplicity is predetermined to have the quality of unmarkedness, Scheurer mistakes the simple children's rhyme from *A Nightmare on Elm Street* as the music of normality, but in fact it is quite clearly a horrific signifier of the terrible child.²¹²

Therefore, although Scheurer is right to point out that horror films always have two distinct *kinds* of music, one of which is associated with the monster, we cannot make sweeping statements about what these musics will sound like in any particular film. Surveying the chronology of the horror score in the following pages, we will find variations within a single musical language (such as the consonant/dissonant and major/minor distinctions within common practice tonality, which Scheurer and others have described), but we will also find contrasts between two different styles (such as, for instance, a contrast between classical and popular music), and a number of more specifically ideological oppositions. There is more to scary music than dissonance alone.

The Model in Action Within and Beyond Tonality

The early sound horror film *Chloe, Love is Calling You* (Marshall Neilan, 1934, with a score by Ernő Rapée and George Henninger) lays out the structural polarity of horror scoring extremely clearly. The score has three important themes, which are given a firm leitmotivic significance in the film's opening credits sequence. The main character, her love interest, and

²¹¹ Scheurer, *Music and Mythmaking in Film*, 185.

²¹² Horror's musical treatment of children will be addressed in greater detail below.

her family are all scored with variations on the melodies shown in examples 3.1 and 3.2.²¹³ Both of these tunes are in major, and could be described as lyrical (if not somewhat drippy). The forces arrayed against the heroine, including the villain of the piece, pictured below, but also bats, snakes, and crocodiles, are all scored with variations on the loop of anxious, minor-mode “hurry music” shown in example 3.3. This kind of binary opposition is the very heart of horror scoring. A musical Other never exists in a vacuum: it must be defined against more straightforward and soothing music that can be associated with the protagonists, normality, and the dominant social order. The “danger” motif from *Chloe*, considered in its own right, is a fairly ordinary piece of music: in fact, it is more diatonic, harmonically straightforward, and rhythmically regular than either of the two “normal” themes, although these are all “unmarked” features in Scheurer's sense of the term. The music becomes menacing partially through its narrative context – that is, through its persistent association with menace – and partially due to its persistent opposition to the music of normality. But this normality too is contextually defined. “To have a violation of nature, one needs a conception of nature,” Carroll writes.²¹⁴ But what that concept is, when it comes to music, can vary greatly.

Nevertheless, if we reduce the difference between *Chloe's* leitmotifs to the difference between major and minor, the score can be understood fairly well through Scheurer's lens, and his theory does apply fairly well to a good many horror scores, especially from the studio era. In

213 Although this description is accurate in the main, it does not account for two particularly interesting cues. 1) During Mandy's oath of vengeance early in the film, we hear a more ambitiously conceived cue that, although still menacing, momentarily threatens to elevate this stock villain to the status of tragic heroine, as does Harvey's performance throughout. 2) In the sequence where Chloe visits the town, and is physically and sexually menaced by the villainous Mose, we see and hear a diegetic blues performance, reinforcing the association of menace and ethnicity detailed below. When the situation lapses into actual violence, however, this music is replaced with the “danger” motif.

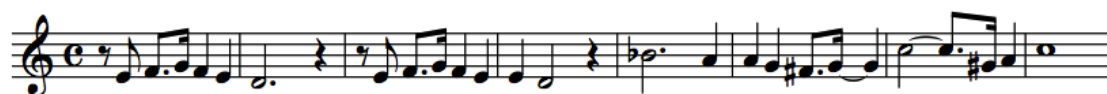
214 Carroll, *Philosophy of Horror*, 57.



Image 3.1a: *Chloe, Love is Calling You*. Olive Borden's heroine dreams of a life of normality, but is menaced by a variety of threats, monstrous and otherwise.



Music Example 3.1: *Chloe, Love is Calling You* – Chloe's theme no. 1, music by Ernő Rapée and George Henninger.



Music Example 3.2: *Chloe, Love is Calling You* – Chloe's theme no. 2, melody taken from a 1927 song of the same title (by Gus Kahn and Neil Moret), upon which the film is very, very loosely based.



Image 3.1b: *Chloe, Love is Calling You*: The villainess of the piece, Mandy, represents the primary threat standing in the way of Chloe's happiness.



Music Example 3.3: *Chloe, Love is Calling You* – Danger motif, music by Rapée and Henninger.

the Universal horror cycle of the 1930s, the RKO cycle of the 1940s, and the Hammer cycle of the 50s and 60s, the sonic vocabulary is largely that of late 19th- and early 20th-century classical music.²¹⁵ Harsh dissonances and murky orchestration are used for the monstrous threat, while lyrical string writing is used for the threatened protagonists. These musical formulas served well for many years, with particularly distinguished examples including Franz Waxman's score to *The Bride of Frankenstein* (Whale, 1935) and Elisabeth Lutyens's avant-garde music for *The Skull* (Francis, 1965). Examples 3.3 and 3.4, below, are drawn from Hammer's *Dracula* films.

But the trouble with having a musical representation for the weird and supernatural is that, over time, it inevitably becomes familiar, pushing the boundaries of weirdness to new and weirder extremes. We can observe this in the films mentioned above – Lutyens pushes dissonance to levels Waxman would never have countenanced. It is not the purported ugliness of dissonance that troubles us and therefore makes it effective, but rather its strangeness, or as Royal Brown has pointed out, the frustration of its need within a given stylistic context to resolve to a consonance, its literal sonic dis-ease.²¹⁶ As categories of dissonance grow more

215 Detailed chronologies are offered by Neale, *Genre and Hollywood*, 92-99, Robin Wood, "Introduction to the American Horror Film," 209-20, and Keith Hennessey Brown, "Notes on the Terror Film," *Forum 2, Fear and Terror*, <http://www.forumjournal.org/site/issue/02/keith-brown>. Some information on the history of horror film scoring can be found in Scheurer and Donnelly, *loc. cit.* The music of the Hammer/Amicus tradition has been studied in unusual depth (historically, at least), for which see Randall Larson, *Music from the House of Hammer* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 1996), and David Huckvale, *Hammer Film Scores and the Musical Avant-Garde* (Jefferson: McFarland Press, 2008).

216 Royal Brown, "Hitchcock, Herrmann, and the music of the irrational," *Cinema Journal* 21, No. 2 (Spring 1982): 14-49. Note however that this argument requires us to make a clear distinction between *musical* dissonance – the perception of certain sounds as unpleasing or unstable – and *acoustic* dissonance, which is simply a certain relationship between waveforms. What is at issue is not our ability to recognize a sonority as dissonant, but our judgment of the dissonance as troubling. (c.f. Donnelly, *The Spectre of Sound*, who claims that horror scoring is entirely dependent on the startle reflex, and therefore prior to judgment as such.)

Heavy and deliberate

Brass

Bass Drum

The image shows a musical score for Brass and Bass Drum. The Brass part is written in a grand staff with two staves (treble and bass clefs). The time signature is 3/4. The tempo/mood is 'Heavy and deliberate'. The dynamics are marked 'ff'. The Bass Drum part is written on a single staff with a drum clef and a common time signature 'c'. The rhythm consists of a series of 'x' marks indicating drum hits.

Music Example 3.4: *The Horror of Dracula* (Terence Fisher, 1958) – Dracula’s Theme, music by James Bernard. The music is characterized by chromatic motion, stridency in timbre and volume, unresolved and unprepared dissonances, dissonant leaps, and a slightly off-kilter meter.

Moderate, flowing

Strings

The image shows a musical score for Strings. The score is written in a grand staff with two staves (treble and bass clefs). The time signature is 3/4. The tempo/mood is 'Moderate, flowing'. The dynamics are marked 'mp' and 'pp'. There is a section labeled '(Dialogue)'. The music features chromatic motion and dissonant intervals.

Music Example 3.5: *Dracula has Risen From the Grave* (Freddy Francis, 1968) – Love Theme, music by James Bernard. This music too is quite chromatic and contains very dissonant intervals. But the articulation and dynamics are soothing, the dissonances resolve appropriately, and the chromaticism decorates an underlying diatonic structure.

familiar, they grow less strange, and the need for their resolution grows weaker, and so horror films enter into a kind of arms race with the musical uncanny, finding with each new trend that, as Thiel puts it, “an old, clumsy and outmoded cliché had only been replaced by a new one.”²¹⁷ As early as 1947, Adorno and Eisler were complaining that

Forty years ago, when musical impressionism and exoticism were at their height, the whole-tone scale was regarded as a particularly stimulating, unfamiliar, and 'colorful' musical device. Today the whole-tone scale is stuffed into the introduction of every popular hit, yet in motion pictures it continues to be used as if it had just seen the light of day. Thus the means employed and the *effect* achieved are completely disproportionate... The whole-tone scale, so overworked in the amusement industry, can no longer cause anyone really to shudder. The use of clichés also affects instrumentation. The tremolo on the bridge of the violin, which thirty years ago was intended even in serious music to produce a feeling of uncanny suspense and to express an unreal atmosphere, today has become common currency. Generally, all artistic means that were originally conceived for their stimulating effect rather than for their structural significance grow threadbare and obsolete with extraordinary rapidity. Here, as in many other instances, the motion-picture industry is carrying out a sentence long since pronounced in serious music, and one is justified in ascribing a progressive function to the sound film in so far as it thus has discredited the trashy devices intended merely for effect. These have long since become unbearable both to artists and to the audience, so much so that sooner or later no one will be able to enjoy clichés. When this happens there will be both need and room for other elements of music.²¹⁸

However, it should be noted that the association of dissonance with the uncanny is at least in part a social construct. One of the ostensible goals of the musical avant-garde in the early and mid-twentieth century was the “liberation of the dissonance,” i.e. the creation of a context within which dissonant intervals would be heard not as troubling sounds, but simply as

²¹⁷ Thiel, *Filmmusik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, 309. Translation mine.

²¹⁸ Theodor Adorno and Hanns Eisler, *Composing for the Films* (New York: Continuum, 2007), 10-11.

sounds like any others. Whether this was ever truly successful is open to debate. The broader context provided by hundreds of years of tonal music (and by omnipresent popular music, muzak, etc.) is hard to ever get out of your ears. But it is unquestionably true that dissonance can be normalized within certain *local* contexts.²¹⁹ A score that is entirely atonal will have a less dissonant effect, paradoxically, than one that mixes its dissonance with tonality, and there are cases (such as the stage band music in Alban Berg's opera *Wozzeck* and the folk song in Leonard Rosenman's score for *East of Eden*), where isolated tonal gestures within a broadly atonal context become eerie for their local strangeness. The tonally consonant becomes *conceptually* dissonant – and it is conceptual dissonance above all which we find inherently disturbing. Bernard Herrmann's famous score for *Psycho* marks a kind of logical limit: the famous "murder" cue is about as dissonant as music can possibly get while still remaining notionally connected to the language of the European classical tradition. For a good many films of this era, the distinction between the music of normality and the musical Other maps onto the distinction between tonality and atonality. But as harmonic dissonance lost its ability to shock in the horror scores of the 1960s, composers were able to find new sources of conceptual dissonance by reaching out to pop and jazz traditions. (This is part of a broader trend towards the use of non-classical music in film during this period, which in turn was perhaps provoked by the failure of various traditional classical devices to fulfill their traditional expressive roles.)

219 If we follow Scheurer in his adoption of the term "markedness," we can find theoretical support for this. As one linguist writes "If a feature is non-distinctive for a segment in which its phonetic analog is nonetheless present, then the MARKEDNESS VALUES otherwise assigned to the polar terms of that feature WILL BE REVERSED... Distinctive features are unmarked for distinctiveness; hence, when features are redundant for a segment, the normal markedness values will be reversed in the context of a marked state, viz. Redundancy." Michael Shapiro, "Explorations into Markedness," *Language* 48, no. 2 (June 1972): 348. Note again that the local reversibility of markedness is not something Scheurer accounts for. It does feature in Hatten, however – see for instance the table in *Music and Meaning in Beethoven*, 42.

Post-Studio Horror: Jazz, Minimalism, Rock, Noise

The West German *kriminalroman* films of the 1960s form an important and often overlooked chapter in the history of the horror film and horror scoring.²²⁰ They are marked by a distinctive combination of horror and police procedural, for typically including a madman or mastermind character that is somewhat alien to both the cops and the robbers, by a deliriously stylized visual and auditory language, and by the complete absence of any supernatural element. Although the subgenre could be stretched to include a number of peripheral texts (including Fritz Lang's classic early sound film *M* (1931), and one of Douglas Sirk's first American films, the Lucille Ball/Boris Karloff vehicle *Lured* [1947]), the core of the genre is also a cycle: thirty-two adaptations of Edgar Wallace novels produced by Rialto studios, sharing many of the same actors, writers, directors, and composers.²²¹ As a result, the scores (many by the gifted and prolific Martin Böttcher) have a very identifiable sound. They are jazz inflected, using hard-charging uptempo tracks for scenes of violence, more relaxed ballad styles for scenes of seduction, and avant-garde electronics for the madman/mastermind figure.²²²

The *krimi* films are largely unknown in the United States, and probably did not affect American horror scoring directly. However, they were profoundly influential on the 1970s cycle

220 For a discussion of the *krimi*'s general features and importance to later horror, see Ken Hanke, "The 'Lost' Horror Film Series: the Edgar Wallace *Krimis*," in *Fear Without Frontiers*, ed. Steven Jay Schneider (Godalming: FAB Press, 2003), 111-24. Hanke describes his own essay as an introductory primer, and laments the absence of adequate scholarship on these films.

221 Listing *M* as a *krimi* is a self-consciously heterodox move. The standard definition of the *krimi* (to the degree that one exists) requires that it be an Edgar Wallace adaptation, which *M* is not, and *M* is such a fixture in cinema history that anachronistically assigning it to an unfamiliar genre may seem risible. However, it does share many traits with the later *krimis*. It would be possible, were one so inclined, to draw a fairly straight line from *M*, through the *krimi* and the *giallo*, to the early slasher movie, bypassing the Universal and RKO horror cycles entirely.

222 Already in *M*, the madman figure is musically marked – although here, he is the only character with any kind of musical identity whatsoever.

of Italian exploitation films known as *gialli*, which were in turn an important source for the American slasher cycle of the 1980s. The earliest *giallo* films borrow many stylistic elements from the *krimi*, including the scoring practice outlined above.²²³ But as the Italian genre became more firmly defined, moving more and more towards the slasher film, its musical Other changed. The love scenes hold on to the *krimi*-jazz feeling, typically losing some of the music's erotic edge in favor of a sweeter, more romantic sensibility.²²⁴ But the violence motifs move towards a progressive rock style that draws on (and to an extent prefigures) the loop-based classical minimalism of Philip Glass and Steve Reich.²²⁵ The example below is taken from the

223 Hanke, "The 'Lost' Horror Film Series," 122-3. *What Have You Done With Solange* (Massimo Dallamano, 1972) may show the clearest influence. Hanke also notes that the early *gialli* were marketed in German markets as *krimis*: the producers would find pretexts to attach Edgar Wallace's name to the films.

224 It would be a grave error to assume from this that the love scenes in the *giallo* films are less sexualized than their German precursors. Quite the opposite is true. Perhaps music in the *krimi* must be more sensual in order to say what the images cannot, or perhaps the *gialli* must undercut their frank sexuality with musical sweetness in order to separate the normative relationships from the perverse ones.

225 Progressive rock and classical minimalism are, as it were, two great tastes that taste great together. Both arose in the 1960s and 1970s within elite aesthetic communities (the New York art scene for minimalism, and British college campuses for prog rock), that were alienated by the increasingly recondite aesthetics of integral serialism, a complicated and dissonant style that could be considered, paradoxically, the mainstream avant-garde of 1950s classical music. Minimalism and prog are therefore *alternative avant-gardes*, and it is important to realize that their use in horror films can indicate the filmmakers' bid for artistic respectability. *Halloween* is ambiguous – the music is perhaps too stripped-down, and too idiosyncratically bound to Carpenter's auteurist identity – but it is certainly the music's ambiguous status as "art" that explains its function in *The Exorcist* and in Argento's later *Profondo rosso* (1975), *Suspiria* (1977), and especially *Inferno* (1980), where the score is a prog-rock fantasy on Modeste Mussorgsky's classical war-horse *Pictures at an Exhibition* written by the prog-rock icon Keith Emerson. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to fully explore the filmography of any genre auteur, but it should be noted in passing that Argento's central concern as a filmmaker is making horror artful and art horrific.

The image displays two systems of a musical score for the theme 'Torso!' from the movie 'Killer's'. Each system consists of five staves: Flute, Electric Organ, Piano (with two staves), and Tom toms. The Flute part is written in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. It features a repetitive eighth-note melody with accents. The Electric Organ part is in treble clef, playing sustained chords with a 'mp' (mezzo-piano) dynamic. The Piano part is in bass clef, with the left hand playing a steady eighth-note bass line and the right hand playing a similar eighth-note line. The Tom toms part is in a drum set notation, showing a consistent rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The second system is identical to the first, with a '5' written above the first staff of each system, likely indicating a measure number.

Music Example 3.6: *Torso!* – Killer's theme, music by Guido and Maurizio De Angelis. This obsessive, repetitive theme is used for the most violent and frightening sequences.

The image displays two systems of musical notation for the main title theme of the movie *Halloween*. Each system consists of three staves: Piano (top), Synth (middle), and High percussive drone (bottom). The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 5/4. The Piano part features a melodic line with eighth notes and some chromatic movement. The Synth part consists of long, sustained notes with a tremolo effect. The High percussive drone part is a rhythmic pattern of sixteenth notes, appearing as a series of 'x' marks on the staff.

Music Example 3.7: *Halloween* – Main title theme, music by John Carpenter. This similarly obsessive theme is more ambiguous in its associations, but remains solidly horrific. The music is denser than it sounds: its off-kilter time signature, chromatic voice leading, and timbral harshness all contribute to its unsettling effect. It could even be argued that the division of the music into three distinct temporal planes (the rattling drone moving in steady sixteenth notes, the piano in eighth notes, and the low synth in long tones) is the sonic equivalent of the film’s systematic use of rack-focus to create multiple visual planes.²²⁶ This last claim is perhaps a bit extravagant – but certainly, when the bassline does move, it seems to leap suddenly out of the background.

226 For this visual effect, see Sheldon Hall, “John Carpenter’s Widescreen Style,” in *The Cinema of John Carpenter: the Technique of Terror*, ed. Ian Conrich and David Woods (New York: Wallflower Press, 2004), 73.

1973 Sergio Martino film *I corpi presentano tracce di violenza carnale*, known in English simply as *Torso!* Of note, first of all, is the repetitive nature of the theme. One cycle is transcribed in the example, but in the film it is typically repeated three to four times in each appearance. Equally important is the shifting two-against-three rhythm created by interaction of the flute with the other instruments. Finally, there is the combination of the sustained, droning organ with the isolated, bell-like articulation of the other instruments. Taken together, these three elements – shifting rhythm, obsessive repetition, and bell-like sonorities with drones – form the core of this horror scoring trope. Absent, however, are the traditional markers of “Otherness” charted by Scheurer. In terms of its intervallic content, the music of *Torso!* is positively sedate, especially when placed next to something like Lutyens’s score for *The Skull*. Yet the cue feels powerfully “other” nonetheless, precisely because it is so foreign to the conventions of classical film scoring. We read these cues not merely against the context of the films in which we find them, but against the standard provided by all films.

When this style is mentioned in discussions of horror scoring, it is usually traced to the Academy Award winning American film *The Exorcist* (William Friedkin, 1973), which uses a preexisting minimalism-inflected progressive rock track, Mike Oldfield’s “Tubular Bells.” The roots of the style do seem to lie in the *giallo*, but it was likely Friedkin’s version that had the most direct effect on later slasher scores such as that of John Carpenter’s *Halloween* (1978), which in turn established this sort of music as a horror music cliché *par excellence*.²²⁷ The mellow jazz ballads that served as the music of normality in the *krimi* and *giallo* cycles did not appear in the American slashers: usually the music of normality in these films is diegetic popular music. The fact that it is diegetic, and therefore controllable and temporal, may be the more salient detail here. In *Halloween*, one of the characters watches the classic Hollywood

²²⁷ Shades of this can be found in *Phantasm* (Don Coscarelli, 1979), *Madman* (Joe Giannone, 1982), *Witchboard* (Kevin Tenney, 1986), and with a poppier edge in *The Burning* (Tony Maylam, 1981), to name only a few.

monster movie *The Thing From Another World* (Christian Nyby, 1951) on TV. Obviously, if we consider the dissonant soundtrack of the film within the film in isolation, we would expect it to function as a musical Other. In context, though, its traditional orchestral instruments, its conventional categories of dissonance, and its limited dynamic range (the sound is heavily compressed) limit an entirely safe musical space. The music associated with *Halloween's* monstrous other, which includes the theme transcribed in example 3.7, is opposed to this earlier musical language on every front: synthesizers predominate, it uses non-functional, non-resolving dissonances, and it is often jarringly loud. Music thus plays into horror's broader engagement with its generic past: in *The Hills Have Eyes*, a torn up poster for *Jaws* (Spielberg, 1975) is visible in the background, a wink to the audience as if to say "If you thought *that* was bad, wait'll you see this!" Tobe Hooper's *The Funhouse* (1981) uses *The Bride of Frankenstein* (Whale, 1935) much as *Halloween* uses *The Thing from Another World*, and features a central scene where the antagonist removes a rubber Frankenstein mask to reveal his own far-more-monstrous face.²²⁸

Despite the popularity of this new style, it should be noted that the older model never vanished completely. Many films from this period continued to mine the dissonant strings of *Psycho*, which can be heard in *Friday the 13th* (Sean Cunningham, 1980), *Sleepaway Camp*, *The Brood* (David Cronenberg, 1979), and *The Evil Dead* (Sam Raimi, 1987), just to name a few. Scores as late as *Scream* (Craven, 1996) and *Hostel* (Roth, 2005) still operate primarily through the opposition of consonant and dissonant cues.²²⁹ By the millennium, these styles were joined by a third, heavy metal (a development which also shows the influence of the *giallo*, and has been documented by Lee Barron and Ian Inglis),²³⁰ and all of these have recently begun to yield

228 Craven's use of the poster was referenced in turn in Sam Raimi's *The Evil Dead* (1981). http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0083907/trivia?ref_=tt_ql_2

229 For a closer reading of *Scream*, see Brownrigg, *loc. cit.*

230 Lee Barron and Ian Inglis, "Scary Music, Scary Movies: Uses and Unities of Heavy Metal,"

to soundtracks in which recognizably *musical* music shares the stage with carefully sculpted sound design comprised of machine noise, bursts of static, the squeak of metal on metal, and other disturbingly non-ordered sounds, as in Rob Zombie's *The Devil's Rejects* (2005).

Typically in these scores, the *musique concrète* of sound design becomes the musical Other, while "normal" music, however dissonant, becomes the music of normality. An important early example of this model, and much more artful than most, is the collage of metallic percussion effects that forms the musical Other in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Hooper, 1974), where it is counterpoised with diegetic radio broadcasts of country music.²³¹ (There may also be a precedent in some of the less rhythmically active cues in the synth-based *giallo* and slasher scores.)

Boundary Transgression

The musical "otherness" of the *musique concrète* scores is not simply a matter of sonic assault (although this is certainly a feature), but also one of boundary transgression. Neither clearly music nor clearly sound-effect, these noises frustrate our ability to neatly categorize what we are hearing. Carroll considers horror to be founded on the concept of impurity, "the conflict between two or more standing cultural categories," and this musical trait could be seen as a

in *Terror Tracks*, ed. Philip Hayward (Sheffield: Equinox, 2009). Examples can be found quite early, as in *New Year's Evil* (Emmett Alston, 1981), *Graduation Day* (Herb Freed, 1981), *Dèmoni* (Lamberto Bava, 1985), and *Nightmare on Elm Street III* (Chuck Russel, 1987). The music of normality in these films, like in those that use the prog-minimalism style, is typically diegetic popular music.

²³¹ See Rebecca Coyle and Philip Hayward, "Texas Chainsaws: Audio Effect and Iconicity," in *Terror Tracks: Music, Sound and Horror Cinema*, edited by Philip Hayward, (Sheffield: Equinox, 2009), 125-136. This article, although very useful, misses the balancing of these quasi-musical sounds against the music of normality, which takes the form of diegetic radio broadcasts of country & western music. In this case recognizably *musical* music, representing normality – or rather, a false dream of normality – is balanced against sound, which is positioned as horrific but ultimately more "real."

specific instance of the general pattern.²³² Boundary transgression features in earlier horror music as well, if not so systematically. Notable examples include the squealing strings of *Psycho*'s famous "Murder" cue, *Friday the 13th*'s sonic tattoo of "Ki-ki-ki Ma-ma-ma-ma," and the curiously mechanical laugh of the killer in Dario Argento's *L'uccello dalle piume di cristallo* (1970), which precisely echoes the rhythm of the non-diegetic music. The unease provoked by this music (and by boundary transgression in general) can be explained in a variety of ways. Mikhail Bakhtin claims a fixation with purity as a defining feature of modern society: we "conceive of being as something finished, stable, completed, clear, and firm," we draw "a dividing line between all bodies and objects," and we reject anything which crosses or erases these boundaries.²³³ Julia Kristeva suggests a psychological rather than a social explanation, holding that our distaste for boundary-transgression in general derives from our need to police the borders of the psychological and biological subject (that is, that our distaste for human waste, corpses, fingernail clippings and the like comes from a desire to segregate that which is human, and more particularly, that which is one's self, from that which is merely inert matter).²³⁴ And Mary Douglas, having traced some version of this anxiety through a great many cultural contexts, concludes that "the yearning for rigidity is in us all," and that it is distinctively human to "long for hard lines and clear concepts."²³⁵ Regardless of the precise mechanism, the unease provoked by this music is very keenly felt.

But screeching static and boundary confusion, like the violins of *Psycho*, represent a kind

232 Carroll, *Philosophy of Horror*, 43.

233 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 109. Bakhtin here is speaking specifically of the 17th century critic Jean de la Bruyère, but using him as a spokesman for post-Renaissance aesthetics up through the modern era.

234 Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: an Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

235 Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London and New York: Routledge, 1966), 200.

of logical end point. When musical dissonance has reached this level, with music pressing against the very boundaries of the musical, how is it that composers are still consistently able to shock us? Answering this question requires us to explore the musical aspect of horror's underlying structure of repression, which, as Wood has shown, depends on more complicated and troubling categories than ugliness and wickedness. Although there is much music written for horror films that can be understood primarily in terms of harmonic dissonance, rhythmic asymmetry, and unusual timbre, there are also many cues that depend on horror's underlying *ideological* oppositions, a source of conceptual dissonance that has thus far proved inexhaustible.

Horror Score Syntax: Politicized Musical Others

In fact, one of the most characteristic musical strategies in the horror film is to use the musical "Other" associated with the monstrous threat to signify one of the social anxieties catalogued by Wood. Like the monsters themselves, these musical Others can be overt or covert: some are well-worn film music clichés that unambiguously depict the marginalized social group in question, while others are unusual musical gestures that – without seeming to depict anything in particular – nevertheless appear again and again linked to a certain class of monster. Sexually predatory female monsters, for instance, have been depicted with sultry jazz, as in *Lair of the White Worm* (Ken Russell, 1988), which as Kalinak has noted is a standard way to depict female sexuality in any kind of film, but also with shrill high drones and arrhythmic scraping sounds, as in *Carrie* (De Palma, 1976), or with both, as in *The Witch who Came From The Sea* (Matt Cimber, 1976 – see example 3.8, below).²³⁶ Deviant religion is often scored with religious or quasi-medieval music, as in *The Omen* (Richard Donner, 1976), *The Car* (Elliot

236 Kathryn Kalinak, *Settling the Score: Music and the Classical Hollywood Film* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 76-9.

Silverstein, 1977), and *The Toolbox Murders* (Dennis Donnelly, 1978). Monsters coded as homosexual are often scored with distorted musical material, “bent” either in melodic contour or through direct manipulation of the recorded sound, as in *The Bride of Frankenstein* (Whale, 1935) and *Sleepaway Camp* (Robert Hiltzik, 1983 – see example 3.9, below). The poor are scored with various kinds of popular and folk music, as in *Deliverance* (John Boorman, 1972), *Last House on the Left* (Craven, 1972), or *The Wicker Man* (Robin Hardy, 1973). The terrible child is represented by childish music, children singing, or music-box textures, which will be treated more fully below, as these techniques have been somewhat misunderstood in the critical literature. Most striking, however, and perhaps most troubling, is the musical treatment of ethnic otherness, which frequently draws directly on the music of a marginalized ethnic group. (This aspect of horror scoring will be the focus of the case studies later in this chapter.)

It should be noted that, although the scoring techniques described above usually accompany their “proper” monstrous threat, many of them have become horror signifiers in their own right, and will pop up, quite unmotivated, in films that are primarily concerned with another kind of difference. Mitchell Lichtenstein’s *Teeth* (2007) is self-consciously obsessed with religion and with sexual difference, but prominently uses pseudo-ethnic music in its score. Nora Orlandi’s score for *The Strange Vice of Mrs. Wardh* (Sergio Martino, 1971) uses religious music as its Other despite being a film about non-normative sexuality (in this case sadomasochism). These exceptions do not disprove the broader trends outlined above. We should ask, rather, what cases like this tells us about these specific films: is *Teeth*’s use of the “wrong” music a knowing wink to the audience? The film is already a borderline horror comedy. Is *The Strange Vice of Mrs. Wardh* attempting to make a point about the potentially transcendent quality of its protagonist’s desire? As is so often the case, understanding the genre’s musical syntax does not give us a ready-made interpretation of individual films within the genre, but rather provokes us to read them more carefully.





Image 3.2, a-f (Previous pages): Female Sexuality: *The Witch who Came from the Sea* (Cimber, 1976). In this sequence, Molly (Millie Perkins) stares lustfully at muscle-bound bodybuilders on the beach, and then, unable to process her desires, fantasizes about their deaths.

Moderately fast

Flute

Trumpets (in C)

Trombone

Electric Bass

High-hat

Fl.

C Tpts.

Tbn.

E.B.

High-hat

mf

Harmon mute

ppp

f

pp

Music Example 3.8: *The Witch Who Came From the Sea* – Beach dream sequence cue, music by Herschel Gilbert. Note the jazzy elements and the shrill high drone in the flute, both musical markers of the monstrous feminine.



Image 3.3: Deviant Religion: *The Toolbox Murders* (Donnelly, 1978). As the masked killer (veteran actor Cameron Mitchell), stalks his victims, he obsessively hums the popular hymn tune “Bringing in the Sheaves.” According to producer Tony DiDio, this was a conceit of Mitchell’s own: neither DiDio nor director Dennis Donnelly seem to have recognized the song, or even that it was a hymn.²³⁷

Image 3.4: Ethnic Otherness (following page): This horror convention dates back at least into the silent era. Ernő Rapée’s *Encyclopedia of Music for Pictures*, a guide for silent film organists, lists film scoring topics such as, “Aeroplane,” “Aesop’s Fables,” and “African . . . see ‘Cannibal.’” Another manual for silent film accompanists, Hans Erdmann, Giuseppe Becce, and Ludwig Brav’s *Allgemeines Handbuch der Film-Musik*, advises musicians not to bother depicting non-western cultures too specifically: “at best, one makes the distinction between cultivated exoticism and – shall we say – cannibal Negro-music.”²³⁸

237 DVD Commentary by Tony DiDio, Gary Graver, and Pamelyn Ferdin.

238 Ernő Rapée, *Encyclopedia of Music for Pictures* (New York: Belwin, 1925. Reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1970), 164. Hans Erdmann, Giuseppe Becce and Ludwig Brav, *Allgemeines Handbuch der Film-Musik*, vol. 1 (Berlin and Leipzig: Schlesinger'sche Buch- und Musikhandlung, 1927), 40.

ABYSSINIAN
AFRICAN

CHAPTER 16

ENCYCLOPEDIA SECTION

ABYSSINIAN MUSIC

Title	Composer	Publisher
.....SHOE (March)	<i>Laurendeau</i>	FISCHER, CARL
.....NATIONAL SONG	<i>Mammoth Coll.</i>	"

Also See "Oriental"

AEROPLANE

.....SONG OF THE BROOK	<i>Baron</i>	BELWIN
.....RONDO CAPRICCIOSO (After Intro.)	<i>Mendelssohn</i>	FISCHER, CARL
.....MIDSUMMERNIGHT'S DREAM (After Intro.)	"	"
.....ROUET D' OMPHALE	<i>Saint Saens</i>	"
.....WITCHES DANCE	<i>MacDowell</i>	JUNGNICKEL
.....SCHERZO	<i>Mendelssohn</i>	"
.....IN THE CLOUDS	<i>Rapee-Axt</i>	ROBBINS-ENGEL

AESOPS FABLES

See "Comedy Pictures"

AFRICAN

See "Cannibal"

The Narrative Erotics of Horror

Earlier, we raised the question of how, in a world where the scores of *Psycho* and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* already exist, composers could still create soundscapes with a genuine power to terrify. We might well generalize this to other aspects of filmmaking. Gore effects, like categories of dissonance, tend to leave audiences desensitized over time, and as Wood points out, people tend to watch horror films “obsessively or not at all.”²³⁹ As a result, horror fans have ample opportunity to become desensitized, and often cultivate a jaded, can’t-be-shocked attitude towards the genre – and yet, all horror fans are intimately familiar with the experience of being shocked. At this stage of historical development, in this corner of the cinematic landscape, with so few taboos left to be shattered, how is it that filmmakers continue to achieve this effect?

Generalizing still further, we might ask how it is that horror films of this kind manage to function as narratives at all. Peter Brooks has argued that the basic map of storytelling, in which one or more central narrative mysteries are gradually laid bare, is functionally equivalent to the unclenching and possession of the erotically desired body, the penetration of a narrative mystery serving as a sublimation of another kind of penetration.²⁴⁰ This, he argues, is why so many narratives turn on the reveal of the body or of markings on the body (such as scars, tattoos, and wounds), or close with a kiss and the implication of marriage. Brooks's theory works marvelously well for the studio-era horror film. But in the later tradition, in which all manner of bodies are regularly laid bare, sexually or violently, the theory seems to collapse. In the absence of a bodily erotics, how do these films maintain narrative tension?

One answer would be to simply disclaim Brooks' theory, using horror as evidence that a

239 Wood, “Introduction to the American Horror Film,” 202.

240 Peter Brooks, *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993). The term hermeneutic is used here in the sense introduced by Barthes in *S/Z*.

narrative erotic need not be mapped onto a bodily erotic. And yet imagery of penetration and exposure – of "knowing," in the quasi-biblical sense that Brooks seems to favor – does quite often lie at the heart of the horror films both old and new. The most gleefully exploitative slasher films are still constructed around a central "reveal" of the nature of the monstrous Other. In late horror, this often takes on overtly psychoanalytical trappings. The most obvious examples are films like *Psycho*, where a friendly psychologist is brought in at the end to "explain" Norman/Mother's psychosis, or *The Witch who Came From the Sea*, in which the serial murderer literally has a flashback to her repressed memories of child abuse. We could also point to Mrs. Voorhees' auditory hallucinations of her dead son at the end of the original *Friday the 13th*, or the surreal flashback/dream-sequence that lies at the heart of Hiltzik's *Sleepaway Camp* (1983).



Image 3.5 a-d (continued on following pages): *Sleepaway Camp*: Angela's conflicted sexual anxiety triggers the flashback to her childhood, where she spies on her two fathers. Note, as in *The Witch Who Came From the Sea*, the central role played by voyeurism and the gaze.



The image displays two systems of musical notation for Piano and Strings. The first system shows the initial part of the flashback cue, with a piano part in 4/4 time. The right hand plays a melodic line with some grace notes, while the left hand provides a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The string part consists of sustained, arpeggiated chords. The second system continues the piece, showing a change in the piano part's melody and a specific annotation: "Tape delay applied to left hand, creating a phasing effect". This effect is indicated by a bracket and a 'y' symbol under the left-hand notes in the final measure of the system.

Music Example 3.9: *Sleepaway Camp* – Flashback cue, music by Edward Bilous. The music for the central flashback sequence gets even stranger and more distorted as it goes along.

Sleepaway Camp is one of the more arch and self-mocking imitators of *Friday the 13th's* “summer camp kids in peril” model. It is ostensibly structured as a mystery: we know teenagers are being murdered hand-over-fist, but we don’t know who the culprit is. However, although there are a couple of token misdirections, it becomes obvious extremely quickly that the killer is Angela, an introverted, emotionally awkward girl scarred by some unspecified childhood trauma. The real mystery quickly becomes, then, what has driven her to kill. Her flashback sequence is our first hint of the answer. As it begins, we see a little boy and girl peeking around a bedroom door and laughing – innocuous enough, although the sound is close-mic’ed and

processed with reverb, hinting at the scene's unusual status. Hiltzik then cuts to the reverse shot, revealing two men in bed together in a tender embrace. This is revelation number one: Angela was raised by a homosexual couple. (The risible implication that this would lead to a killing spree is undercut somewhat by later plot developments, and by the tenderness of the embrace itself.) In the surreal final shots of the sequence, the boy and the girl sit opposite from each other on a revolving bed, the boy pointing at his sister as the camera repeatedly dissolves back and forth between them, blurring their features together. This isn't the most subtle way to establish that Angela's gender identity is troubled – but subtlety was never one of *Sleepaway Camp's* many charms.

As the images show, the shot composition and lighting in this sequence are strange and artistic, especially when compared to the remainder of the film, which has all the visual panache of a TV sitcom. The musical component is no less unusual. We hear a dissonant string drone on open strings (yielding a distinctively pungent sound), over which a simple, self-consciously childish piano melody plays. As the cue continues, the piano begins to hit “wrong notes,” losing control of both the rhythm and the melody. The string drone increases in volume, and then Angela snaps back to the present with a shout. This cue combines two perennial musical Others: the obvious evocation of childhood in the music-box piano texture, which is typically used for the trope of “the terrible child,” and the deformation or bending of an apparently tonal melody, which, although it has no obvious semantic referent, frequently appears in films that deal with non-normative sexuality.²⁴¹

Most of *Sleepaway Camp's* score, including the music for the murder scenes, is a moderately effective but undistinguished *Psycho* pastiche, which leaves no lasting impression on the audience. The music from example 3.9, (which appears only in this sequence), is legitimately

241 There is a certain similarity, of course, between the bending of a melody and the notion of sexual deviance. But we do not instantly think of sexual deviance upon hearing this melody in the same way that we instantly think of children.

unsettling by contrast. Furthermore, although *Sleepaway Camp* does still have a love theme to represent the threatened state of normality, this becomes increasingly rare in later slashers. Therefore, although we do still find the basic binary in which a relatively “normal” music is contrasted with a threatening musical Other, the music of normality in these films is the very stuff that we intuitively recognize as horror clichés: the scare chords, tension ostinatos, and pastiches of the *Psycho* prelude.

This seemingly counterintuitive claim requires further explanation. To begin with, we should recognize that the division between the Other and normality in classical Hollywood horror to a certain extent maps onto the division between the film’s narrative and its non-narrative, purely sensational aspects, i.e. what Tom Gunning refers to as the “cinema of attractions.”²⁴² Gunning’s theory (which is widely accepted) is that the very earliest films, such as those of the Lumière brothers and George Méliès, presented us with the cinema of attractions in its pure form, and that D.W. Griffith and his followers – all later cinema, essentially – present us with a latent cinema of attractions masked by an overarching concern with narrative. (We have already seen one version of this latent cinema of attractions in melodrama, where the various aesthetic ruptures seem to contend with the narrative unity of the plot.) In horror, the “attractions” surround the monstrous threat: scenes devoted to the exposition of the monster, or to generating the emotion of fear, generally do not move the narrative forward. They may be

242 Tom Gunning, “The Cinema of Attraction,” *Wide Angle* 8, no. 3-4 (1986): 63-70. Gunning’s cinema of attractions has two aspects: that it is spectacular, and that it is self-conscious, only one of which is active here. The early “attractive” cinema explicitly calls attention to itself as cinema in a way that these horror films generally do not (which, as Gunning’s research shows, is probably related to early audiences’ interest in the cinematic apparatus as a technological marvel). But the spectacular aspect is equally important. Notably, the primary example of the attraction for Eisenstein (from whom Gunning borrowed the term) was the spectacular bloodshed of the Grand Guignol theater. See Wanda Strauven, “Introduction to an Attractive Concept,” in *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*, Wanda Strauven, ed. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 11-27.

Figure 3.1: The role of traditional horror signifiers in classical Hollywood cinema vs. the role of the same sounds in later films. Note that the historical division is far from absolute: politicized otherness appears in many earlier scores, and it is not uncommon for later films to revert to an essentially classical scoring practice.

	<u>Music of Normality</u>	<u>Musical Other</u>
<u>Much Studio Horror</u>	<p>“Safe” tonal music, love themes, consonance, etc. Indication: Absence of danger, absence of the monster</p>	<p>Scare chords, tonal dissonance “chase” music. Indication: Presence of danger, presence of the monster.</p>
<u>Much Post-Studio Horror</u>	<p>Scare chords, tonal dissonance, “chase” music, i.e., the music of classical Hollywood horror. Indication: We are watching a horror film, a “safe” (if exciting) state for fans of the genre.</p>	<p>Something excessive to the “normal” sounds of horror, most notably musical depictions of political otherness. Indication: Severe existential threat.</p>

points of narrative arrival or departure, and therefore will seem narratively salient when reduced to a single sentence (i.e., “Norman kills Marion”), but if we make a detailed list of the various elements of the scene that contribute to our experience of fear (i.e. “the room fills with mist,” “a shadowy figure appears behind the curtain,” “Marion screams,” “the strings scream,” “he stabs her,” “he stabs her,” “he stabs her,” “he kills her,”) we will find that most of these are nugatory from a purely narrative perspective. Filmmakers have occasionally noted the division between the narrative aspect of the horror film and its purely horrific aspect: Val Lewton described his formula as “A love story, three scenes of suggested horror, and one of actual violence. Fadeout.”²⁴³

However, this same quotation shows that the attractive excesses of horror tend themselves to be organized into a sort of linear progression (much like the melodramatic

243 Quoted in Joel Siegel, *Val Lewton: The Reality of Terror* (New York: Viking Press, 1973), 31.

excesses described in the previous chapter). Where Lewton's films could get by with a single scene of actual violence, the body count of later horror has risen precipitously, to the point where mere “actual violence” can no longer serve as a narrative climax. As Julian Hoxter notes, the scene of violence in the modern horror film is akin to the slapstick gag in the comedy of Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton: although these events are manifestly attractive *points* that interrupt a broader narrative line, they are also quite clearly what the filmgoing experience is about, and “signify... in a curious way the return of normality in these films.”²⁴⁴ As a result the narrative frame – Lewton's “love story,” that which we would express with the music of normality – withers into insignificance, as in *Sleepaway Camp*, or even vanishes altogether.

In horror films of this sort, rather than a conventional narrative punctuated by a series of scenes of physical menace, we have an escalating series of physically menacing scenes punctuated by a handful of scenes of *existential* crisis – and while these can simply be scenes of more-than-usually emphatic violence, they are usually also scenes of difference as such (like the bodybuilding sequence from *The Witch Who Came From the Sea*), and the violence may even be elided (as in the *Sleepaway Camp* dream sequence). Of particular note are the ways in which these scenes engage with time and causality. Although the individual scenes of violence do not generally contribute to a well-formed plot in the classical sense, they do tend to be energetic, to occupy well-defined physical spaces, and to consist of well-defined chains of cause and effect. Thus while jettisoning Barthes' hermeneutic code, they still rely on his proairetic code.²⁴⁵ The

244 Julian Hoxter, “The Evil Dead, Die and Chase: From Slapstick to Splatshtick,” in *Necronomicon Book One*, ed. Andy Black (London: Creation, 1996), 71-83. Hoxter is here referring specifically to Sam Raimi's *Evil Dead* franchise (1981, 1987, and 1992), horror comedies in which the anti-narrative effect of the “death gag” is amplified by the films' comedic tone.

245 Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, 18-19. The hermeneutic code, for Barthes, refers to the mysteries (large and small) that propel a text forward. The proairetic code refers to the succession of events that take place in the text.

existentially threatening scenes, on the other hand, tend to extend a single lyrical instant. It has sometimes been asserted, due to Hollywood's tendency to shoehorn a love interest in to any sort of narrative, that all genres are hybrid romances, and that therefore we never encounter a pure Western, but rather a Western romance, and so on.²⁴⁶ Indeed, the classical studio horror films usually are horror romances. But post-studio films are usually hybrids with *action*: there are scenes where the heroes do something, anything (even if it's as simple as running away from the monster), and purely sensational scenes where they fail to act.

To the extent that they tend to create forward motion, the traditionally dissonant cues are generally reserved for the narrative, “action” sections of the film, and although these do still generally cause libidinal fear – that is, excitement, an adrenaline rush – they do not disturb the audience, which, well trained by its experience with the genre, comes to the theater in search of that excitement. These scenes, and their music, may still startle us, or energize us, but they do not disturb us. That role is reserved for the musical Other, which in turn is *not* associated with the chase scenes and casual stabbings, but with particularly puissant ideological threats – that is, with unambiguous scenes of non-normative sexuality, racial difference, class difference, and so on. Horror in its modern, blood and guts incarnation is radically Cartesian. However much it is exposed, however cruelly it is manipulated, the body remains merely body. To filmmakers and audiences of this stripe, dramatic tension revolves on an attempt to penetrate beyond the body, into some kind of psychological or spiritual territory. Peter Jackson's gross-out zombie film *Dead Alive* (1992) provides a particularly telling example: following an escalating series of physical degradations that begins with the accidental consumption of a human ear, and culminates in an extended set piece for zombies and lawnmower in which fake blood was sprayed onto the set at “fire-hose pressure,”²⁴⁷ the audience will become entirely desensitized to

246 See Barry Keith Grant, *Film Genre: From Iconography to Ideology* (London: Wallflower Press, 2007), 23. He attributes the idea to Janet Staiger and Steve Neale.

247 Ian Pryor, *Peter Jackson: From Prince of Splatter to Lord of the Rings* (New York: St.

physical violence. Jackson tops himself, however, when the protagonist's zombified mother appears and, rather than attempting to *eat* him, as all of the other monsters have done, crams him through a gaping rent in her abdominal wall, thus staging an unusually literal Oedipal crisis. It is this that manages to shock us: not the narrative's surface, but its psychoanalytical and politicized syntactical underpinnings. And it is this, musically, that is typically marked as "other." The coordination of rupturing music with the moment of narrative rupture is of course a standard technique of melodrama scoring as well, as we saw in the previous chapter. But the particular, politicized form that it takes in these films is horror through and through.

The Otherness of Innocence: Scoring the Terrible Child

Horror's musical treatment of the "terrible child" motif is particularly revealing, because it demonstrates how a lack of attention to underlying generic syntax can distort our readings/hearings of a film. Scheurer's chapter on the horror film closes with a reading of the score to *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (Craven, 1984), in which he claims that Elmer Bernstein uses a variety of musical textures (including a child's skipping-rhyme) to draw a contrast between "the world of childlike innocence that actually precedes adolescence. . . and the world of adult fears and latent violence."²⁴⁸ Scheurer therefore holds that childhood, as represented by the skipping rhyme, is *threatened* by the monstrous Other. But as James Buhler notes, the brief passage from Elgar's "Pomp and Circumstance" heard in *A Nightmare on Elm Street's* graduation sequence serves as an image of the adult *normality* that the film's teen protagonists must attain in order for there to be a happy ending.²⁴⁹ It is the adult world, not the child's world,

Martin's Press, 2004), 114. Pryor is here quoting an anonymous witness to the filming of the sequence.

²⁴⁸ Scheurer, *Music and Mythmaking in Film*, 198.

²⁴⁹ James Buhler, "Music and the Adult Ideal," in *Music in the Horror Film: Listening to Fear*, ed. Neil Lerner (New York: Routledge, 2010), 175. Out of the existing literature, Buhler's account of this film comes closest to the general model of horror scoring I am advancing here.

that is held up as desirable – and the children’s skipping rhyme (sung slightly out of tune and entirely without affect, beginning with the words “One, two, Freddy’s coming for you,”) is every bit as much of a threat to this adult ideal as is the more obviously menacing synthesizer music associated with Freddy. In fact, throughout the history of the genre, there has been a marked tendency to associate childish music with violence and the monster, rather than with the threatened victim. *Profondo rosso* (Argento, 1975), perhaps the greatest of the Italian *giallo* films, foregrounds this by having the killer carry around a cassette tape of a children’s song to play before every killing, in a rare example of a diegetic leitmotif.²⁵⁰

Stan Link, in his “The Monster and the Music Box,” recognizes the correlation of violent scenes and childish music, and acknowledges the horrific potential of the childish at least in part.²⁵¹ While primarily focusing on the “childish innocence threatened by monstrous menace”

The image shows a musical score for three parts: Child vocals, Glockenspiel, and Piano. The music is in 3/4 time. The Child vocals part has the lyrics "La la la la la la la (etc)" written below the notes. The Glockenspiel part has a *gza* marking below the first few notes. The Piano part consists of a steady eighth-note accompaniment.

Music Example 3.10: *Profondo rosso* – Killer’s diegetic leitmotif, music by Giorgio Gaslini, Walter Martino, Fabio Pignatelli, and Claudio Simonetti.

He does not seem to recognize the horrific aspect of the skipping-rhyme, however.

²⁵⁰ Another example, and a potential source for the effect, is Fritz Lang’s *M* (1931), which has the killer whistle Grieg’s “In the Hall of the Mountain King.” Notably, whistling is a childish timbre, and the film even opens with a menacing children’s rhyme much like the one in *A Nightmare on Elm Street*.

²⁵¹ Stan Link, “The Monster and the Music Box: Children and the Soundtrack of Horror,” in *Music in the Horror Film: Listening to Fear*, ed. Neil Lerner (New York: Routledge, 2010), 48-9.

model posited by Scheurer, he also suggests that in some extreme cases the juxtaposition of horrific imagery and “innocent” music creates a sense of horrific distance, the imagery being made more horrific by the anempathetic failure of the music to engage with or comment on it, and by the mechanistic drive typical of much children’s music. Link’s specific example is the merry-go-round music from *The Omen*, which, through its “inevitable unfolding,” makes us conscious of our inability to prevent either the onscreen deaths or (eventually) our own. In some cases, the music “has shed any pretense of innocence, now consciously performing the anempathetic indifference.”²⁵²

In the examples that Link describes, the anempathetic aspect of the music certainly contributes to its overall effect. However, his reading depends on our recognition of childish music as fundamentally innocent and soothing, making these few cases a perversion of its basic nature. This is far from the case. If the basic meaning of childish music is perverted in horror, it is a genre-wide phenomenon. At least one of Link's examples of “innocent” music – the opening wordless lullaby from *Rosemary's Baby* (Roman Polanski, 1968) – is in fact thoroughly disturbing. Horror films that focus on threatened children, such as *The Sixth Sense* (M. Night Shyamalan, 1999), do not typically feature any musical representation of childhood. Similarly, although there are cases where we might read the childish musical material as menaced within the music by an alien harmonic or contrapuntal context, such as the opening theme from *Pet Sematary* (Dale Midkiff, 1989), this is by no means the general rule. Most tellingly, childish music appears in horror films where there are no children to be found, threatened or otherwise! Roy Webb’s score for *The Cat People*, for instance (Music Example 3.11, below), is based around a standard children’s tune, here performed without any of the mechanistic effect so common to children’s music, indicating that the horrific element of children's music lies not in its anempathetic performance (or at least not only there), but in its dissociation from the rational

252 Ibid, 52.



Music Example 3.11: *The Cat People* – Irina’s theme, music by Roy Webb. This theme reads primarily as childish, but it could also be heard as a folk motif. This is no accident. One of the primary traits of “folksong” (as it is portrayed within the language of romantic symphonic music) is its naïve simplicity: the *volk* are imagined as a population of permanent children.

world of adulthood.²⁵³

Childish music that presents childhood in a positive light – as threatened innocence rather than the threat itself – does appear in some few horror films. For *The Cat People’s* sequel, *Curse of the Cat People* (Fritsch, 1944), Webb repurposed his original theme to fit a narrative about an innocent child in peril. Here, although the childish melody is still associated with a non-rational world inhabited by children, ghosts, and the mad, it is not used in the sequences where the child is in danger. But it should be noted that *Curse* is one of the very least horrific films in Lewton’s RKO cycle, in part *because* of this use of the music.²⁵⁴ *Curse of the Cat People* sets up a conflict between the rational world, represented by a patriarchal nuclear family, and the world of the child, who is aided (but also occasionally threatened) at various times by a loose coalition of outsiders: a Serbian ghost, the family’s Trinidadian housekeeper, and a neighbor who is a woman, old, mad, and an actress. Most intriguingly, this outsider community is portrayed in a largely *positive* light; it is dangerous, but also necessary, and the happy end can

253 Leonard Bernstein, in his Harvard lectures, claimed that the basic form of this tune is a musical universal (by analogy to Chomsky’s linguistic universals), immanent in the overtone series and used all over the world by children from every culture. Whether this is true or not, it is certainly recognizable to those raised in *American* culture as “Nanny nanny foo foo,” “Rain rain go away,” or any number of other songs. Leonard Bernstein, *The Unanswered Question: Six Talks at Harvard* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 9-10.

254 To a certain degree, this also applies to the opening sequence of *Don’t Look Now* (Nicholas Roeg, 1973), which is another of Link’s major examples.

only be achieved when the girl's father agrees to engage with his daughter's fantasy life. This stands quite outside of the general conventions of horror. Intriguing comparisons can be drawn to other not-quite-horror films such as *Pan's Labyrinth* (Guillermo Del Toro, 2006), and to the related genre of children's fantasy, such as *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (Chris Columbus, 2001), which often put childish music-box textures to very similar use.

Therefore, although it is possible for childish music to portray an unambiguous and positive innocence, this is not a distinctively horrific use. In a horrific score, childish music is a threat, a musical Other, a marker not of innocence but of menace. If all that a musical gesture needed to do was signify children, there would be no need for the music to be marked by such extreme simplicity of harmony, melody, and rhythm, or by the unusual and unsettling timbres of the music box and the child vocalist. Any music that is paired with a child onscreen can come to metonymically represent childhood: such is the nature of leitmotif. Childish music, therefore, represents not a character but a world entire, the child's world, a mode of existence which the filmmakers and the (presumably adult) audience have experienced themselves, but which to them is forever blocked. Like any alternative reality, it is a threat to the societal norm, even if only in that it is an alternative. As Wood writes,

When we have worked our way through all the other liberation movements, we may discover that children are the most oppressed section of the population (unfortunately, we cannot expect to liberate our children until we have successfully liberated ourselves). Most clearly of all, the otherness of children (see Freudian theories of infantile sexuality) is that which is repressed within ourselves, its expression therefore hated in others. What the previous generation repressed in us, we, in turn, repress in our children, seeking to mold them into replicas of ourselves...²⁵⁵

And, I might add, into people whose music doesn't sound so creepy.

255 Wood, "Introduction to the American Horror Film," 200.

In many ways, this brief discussion has only scratched the surface of the scoring of the terrible child. Certainly, many other films could be discussed, such as *The Bad Seed* (LeRoy, 1956), *The Innocents* (Jack Clayton, 1961), and *The Changeling* (Peter Medak, 1980). Connections could be made to the ambivalent role of childish music outside of and prior to cinema (building on Link's treatment of the final scene of *Wozzeck*).²⁵⁶ Finally, close attention to the use of childish music in genres other than horror might allow us to revisit, with greater clarity, the question of whether childish music in horror is simply childish, or always “made wrong” in some other way. However, rather than continue to develop this point, we will now turn to another way in which horror films use music to evoke an alternate “monstrous” mode of being: the use of “ethnic” or pseudo-ethnic music in horror films that are built around fears of racial difference.

II. Music in the Voodoo Zombie Film

Even now a vagrant breeze brought faintly the throb of a savage drum which whispered its obscene tale of hate and blood-hunger and belly-lust across miles of jungle and grassland.

– Robert E. Howard, “Wings in the Night.”

The association of ethnic music with the monstrous Other has not gone entirely unnoticed in prior scholarship, but it has generally been described as a kind of unfortunate epiphenomenon of standard film scoring practice. The general theory is that composers see ethnic people on screen and respond by providing them with ethnic music – or, more frequently, with “ethnic” music – and that in horror, this winds up linking the music (and by association, the people), with the monstrous other. Robynn Stilwell, for instance, writes that in Mark Snow’s score for the quasi-horrific television series *The X-Files* (Chris Carter, 1993-2002),

²⁵⁶ Link, *ibid.*

The use of identifiably ethnic elements... demonstrates a politically dangerous but culturally potent slippage between 'others'. The depiction of an ethnic supernatural manifestation is linked to a musical representation of that ethnic group. A term somehow drops out of this equation, and the ethnic becomes 'exotic' through the supernatural and its musical representation.²⁵⁷

The assumption here is that we derive our impression of the music as horrific purely from its association with horrific beings and acts within the text. For Stilwell, this is more or less harmless as long as the borrowed musical material is justified by a cultural link to the monster (and here she points to the episode "*El Mundo Gira*," which sets the Mexican legend of the *chupacabra* to a "fragmented, almost cubistic representation" of mariachi music), and remains attached to that specific culture. Ethnic horror scoring only becomes ideologically dangerous when the sounds are detached from their cultural context and used purely for their weirdness.²⁵⁸ Stilwell writes that in these cases "the ethnic (and female) becomes the supernatural other, and it is only a short step then, to the alien, even the extraterrestrial. Music appears to be an efficient lubricant for such slippage."²⁵⁹

Stilwell is worried that, having learned to associate this music with an unspecified sense of menace in the context of *The X Files*, we will encounter it in real life, in its proper ethnic context, and therefore learn to fear the people who make the music. This could well happen, and is worth worrying about. But Stilwell's analysis does not account for horror's more general association of monstrous difference with political difference. The particular ethnic music in "*El Mundo Gira*" was surely chosen to reflect the Mexican origins of the particular monster, but in terms of the music's horrific effect this kind of accuracy is superfluous. Therefore, although it is a commonplace in musicological circles that separating music from its proper cultural context does violence to both the music and the culture, this rule can have only tenuous purchase on the

257 Robynn Stilwell, "The Sound is Out There," 74-75.

258 Ibid.

259 Ibid.

use of music in horror films. Might it not be the case, in fact, that “ethnic” sounds in horror music become most ideologically unpleasant precisely when they are most specifically justified by the narrative, thus attaching horror's undefined “ethnic” other to a particular ethnicity? This is the sort of question that a genre-conscious approach to film scoring allows us to address.

My primary laboratory for this investigation will be the voodoo zombie movie, a subgenre that essentially died out in the post-studio era thanks to changing standards of racial discourse and the ever-increasing popularity of flesh eating zombies in the literally deracinated George Romero vein. Perhaps the first thing that must be understood about this subgenre is that it relates but tangentially to the actual religion of *vodou*. *Vodou* is a syncretistic religion which is (and here I quote John Bartkowski) "a positive force in the lives of its mainly African-American and Afro-Caribbean adherents," and one which "has played a pivotal role historically in sustaining the African cultural continuum and in promoting Haitian liberation from colonial domination."²⁶⁰ To say that the films considered here do not usually portray it in this light is a gross understatement. Throughout what follows, I will keep coming back to the question of how best to represent *vodou* in a horror film. The answer, of course, is probably not to do so at all, or failing that to create a film that is intended for an audience of *vodou* practitioners, and fits their own criteria for a good depiction of the culture. None of the films considered here were intended for such an audience, however. Indeed, many of them can scarcely be said to portray *vodou* at all (and I will follow Bartkowski in using *vodou* to refer to the actual religion and voodoo to refer to the films' crude approximations of its practices). Rather, the films are addressed to an audience that views the religion from outside, and although this in itself is objectionable, there is still great value in considering the range of messages about voodoo that these movies offer to outsiders. (Of course, I speak as an outsider myself.)

260 John Bartkowski, "Claims-Making and Typifications of Voodoo as a Deviant Religion: Hex, Lies, and Videotape," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 37, no. 4 (Dec., 1998): 559.

As noted above, religion is a perennial topic for horror films. But the voodoo zombie movies are not concerned with this. Rather, they are concerned with the problem of racial difference. These films even offer their own specific twists on the black Hollywood stock characters catalogued by Donald Bogle: the zombies, with their great physical strength and lack of willpower, are “black brutes,” the perpetually terrified, greedy manservant sidekicks are “coons,” and the vengeful and murderous voodoo priestesses present an interesting inversion of the selfless and long-suffering “mammy” type.²⁶¹ The voodoo zombie movie is at its heart a portrayal of whiteness beset and besieged by blackness. Its most characteristic image and narrative trope is that of a white woman who is robbed of her willpower by black magic, and turned into a murderous puppet. “Stay away from Haiti,” says a character in Wes Craven’s *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (1988 – one of the very few post-studio voodoo zombie movies), but in fact Haiti has nothing to do with it. What is at stake here is an essentialized, all-encompassing ethnic Otherness... and, as a corresponding figure of normality, the sort of essentialized whiteness that this Otherness always implies.²⁶²

However, it also must be said that the films’ depiction of this racial binary can be quite complex. As is so common in horror films, the monstrous Others are often compelling as well as threatening, and sometimes more sympathetic than the notional protagonists of the films. Details of plot and style also complicate the surface racism of the plots. For instance, in many of the voodoo zombie movies the leader of the murderous cult turns out to be a white colonial aristocrat, suggesting that the danger associated with racial difference can ultimately be traced to white men or women. Then again, these villains are often undone at the end by the very forces

²⁶¹ Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: an Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films* (New York: Continuum International Publishing, 2001).

²⁶² Cultural depictions of whiteness are often only implicit: they are, in a sense, the shadow cast by depictions of other racial identities. Making these depictions explicit, therefore, is valuable cultural work. See Richard Dyer, “The Matter of Whiteness,” in *Privilege: A Reader*, Michael S. Kimmel and Abby L. Ferber, eds. (Boulder: Westview Press, 2003), 21-32.

they set in motion, suggesting that although the main villain may be white, the real threat is posed by the black world into which they so foolishly strayed. Different films mix these elements in different proportions. We cannot claim any of the voodoo zombie films as progressive, but we should recognize that their treatment of race is in most cases not entirely devoid of nuance or ambiguity.

Pan-African Otherness: *Chloe, Love is Calling You* and *King of the Zombies*

Chloe, Love is Calling You, however, is as thoroughly unabashed in its racism as it is transparent in its musical treatment of these themes, and so again offers a convenient starting example. As noted above, in Music Examples 3.1 and 3.2, *Chloe*'s musical Other for the bulk of the film is a single insistent loop of music, which has no particular connotations aside from menace. At the climax of the film, as the villain prepares to sacrifice Chloe in a voodoo ceremony, we hear this music instead:

The musical score consists of three staves. The top staff is for Flute, written in treble clef with a common time signature (C). It features a melodic line with a dynamic marking of *mf* (mezzo-forte). The middle staff is for Cello, written in bass clef with a common time signature (C), featuring a lower melodic line with a dynamic marking of *ff* (fortissimo). The bottom staff is for Tom Toms, written in a drum clef with a common time signature (C), showing a rhythmic pattern of 'x' marks representing drum hits.

Music Example 3.12: *Chloe, Love is Calling You* – Danger leitmotif combined with “Wade in the Water,” music by Rapée and Henninger.



Image 3.6a: *Chloe, Love is Calling You:* Whiteness beset and besieged by blackness.



Image 3.6b: *Chloe, Love is Calling You:* The voodoo ceremony.

The “danger” theme is still present in the background, as part of a generic jungle drum texture, complete with pounding tom-toms. But over this, we hear a harmonically distorted version of the African-American spiritual “Wade in the Water.”²⁶³ This is the only place in the film where we hear music of this kind: the musical Other is made *more* other, brought to its highest intensity at the climax of the film. In terms of musical-cinematic form, this is very skillfully done (and absurd though the content surely is, this is also the most interestingly photographed sequence in the film by a comfortable margin). More important for our purposes, however, is the way that the music lays bare the racism inherent in the film’s depiction of voodoo. There is no attempt to connect the onscreen violence with the specific motivations of the villainous characters within the story, no attempt even to limit the film’s censure to *vodou* (which would of course still be highly objectionable). The “slippage” described by Stilwell seems to operate here in reverse: rather than an ethnic music gradually coming to be associated with the monstrous Other, a gradually established aura of menace is suddenly and emphatically tied to an ethnic identity (although to be sure, the film’s politics were never very far below its surface). The use of “Wade in the Water” makes it clear that the monstrous threat in *Chloe* is black people, full stop.

This lack of specificity is typical. We see it again in *King of the Zombies* (Jean Yarbrough, 1941) where the music in question is a New Orleans jazz funeral march. Again, this music is utterly divorced from its proper cultural context. Second-line brass bands are associated specifically with New Orleans, not with the film’s unidentified Caribbean island, and although New Orleans does have a *vodou* tradition, this music has no explicit ties to it.²⁶⁴ Therefore the music’s use could be seen to suggest the existence of a single universal and undifferentiated pan-

263 My thanks to Professor Gillian Anderson for calling this feature of the music to my attention.

264 Some scholars have in fact found structural similarities between *vodou* and New Orleans street festivals, but the connection is far more subtle than anything presented in this film. Helen Regis, “Second Lines, Minstrelry, and the Contested Landscapes of New Orleans Afro-Creole Festivals,” *Cultural Anthropology* 14, no. 4 (Nov. 1999): 472-504.

African culture, a suggestion which is at best problematic, and made far worse here by the implication that this shared culture is both primitive and toxic.

But *King of the Zombies* is a rather uneasy fit with the rest of the films under consideration here, in that it seems to vacillate back and forth between being a horror film and a comedy.²⁶⁵ In many ways it is a typical example of the voodoo zombie subgenre: the zombies are almost universally black, but controlled by a white aristocrat, Miklos De La Sangre, the villain is eventually hoist by his own petard, and superficially “African” music is associated with the macabre. But this is not the only music used for this purpose in the film. In addition to zombies, *King of the Zombies* features magic potions, hypnotism, ghosts, and spirit possession. The scenes involving ghosts and hypnotism, in particular, are always scored with high tremolo figures in the strings. Since these scenes always involve female characters, this music could be seen as a figure of the monstrous feminine.

In *King of the Zombies*, then, we seem to find two musical Others, defined not against some music of normality but rather in opposition to each other. (This musical structure is quite unusual, even though films with multiple antagonistic monsters are far from rare.) The best explanation for this conflict, it seems to me, is to view *King of the Zombies* as two films awkwardly sandwiched together, a thoroughly average horror film about ghosts, hypnotism, and gender (starring the white characters, and thematically concerned with gender roles), and a broad horror-comedy about race. Intriguingly, only the black characters in the film are allowed to be funny. The main villain, and the nominal “heroes” of the piece, play everything straight. Furthermore, the two most important black characters, the manservant Jeff Jefferson (Mantan Moreland) and his love interest Samantha (Marguerite Whitten), seem to *realize* that they are in a comedy, periodically breaking out into routines that could have been lifted from a vaudeville

²⁶⁵ James Wierzbicki holds back from labeling this film as a horror-comedy, but does describe it as “a film that treats the zombie as a figure in whose presence laughing is at the very least permissible.” “*Undead* and its Undecidable Soundtrack,” *Screen Sound* 1 (2010): 11.

performance.²⁶⁶

Samantha [Serving Jeff a slice of pie]: Boy. You's the most pie-ous man I ever did see.

Jeff: Ain't it the truth.

Samantha: And I bet you none of them gals in Harlem never baked you no pie like that.

Jeff: Well, I don't know...

Samantha: Oh, you ain't so smart. I had me a beau once. And he wasn't no common ol' valet like you, neither.

Jeff: Is that so?

Samantha: He was an ex-porter.

Jeff (impressed): An exporter?

Samantha: That's right.

Jeff: Now that's fine! What did he handle?

Samantha: Bags. On the Pullman train.

When Moreland floats the set-up line "What did he handle?" it is clear that he's already in on the joke. So is the audience. Whitten telegraphs the punchline flagrantly with her emphasis of the line "He was an *ex-porter*." The humor doesn't lie in the pun. Instead, it lies in the suave, performative delivery: in the familiar, inevitable rhythms of the gag, which the actors deliver with a fond and knowing wink. This provides these characters with a certain agency that the other characters (both white and black) are denied. As Henry Jenkins points out, early

²⁶⁶ Another possible referent here is the minstrel show, which relied very heavily on puns of this kind (and powerfully influenced vaudeville). Scholars of minstrelsy debate whether these jokes are meant to make us laugh at the clown who is using the word wrong – Samantha, in this case – or at Jeff, the befuddled straight man. Especially in the later minstrel show, only the clown character (the endman) would have been wearing blackface and rags, while the straight man (the interlocutor) was often marked as "white," and always well-dressed. Some of these class issues are preserved in the current instance: both Jeff and Samantha are servants in livery, but she is in the act of serving him, and he's evidently from Harlem, which makes him fancy. For a discussion of humor's ambivalent role in minstrelsy, see William John Mahar, *Behind the Burnt Cork Mask: Early Blackface Minstrelsy and Antebellum African-American Culture* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1999), especially 157-194.

sound comedies often borrowed their gags, rhythms, and talent from the vaudeville stage, and in many cases, there is a sense that the vaudevillian characters inhabit a different aesthetic universe than the more serious elements of the film.²⁶⁷ The actors use a different performance register – more presentational than representational – and tend to reprise essentially the same character in film after film (which is certainly the case for Moreland). Although Moreland’s performance is in many ways the stuff of racial stereotype, he retains the curious brand of narrative agency typical of vaudevillian comic characters. He is able to stand outside of the film and comment on it. When other characters want to investigate a noise in the zombie infested cellar, he flatly refuses to put himself in danger. Upon meeting the villainous Dr. De La Sangre, Jeff pulls his friends aside and tells them, “We have to get out of here! That’s no doctor, that’s a Svengali!” His (white) (rational) companions snicker and hush him, but the viewer instantly recognizes that Jeff is right, that De La Sangre is a Svengali, that going down in the cellar is a recipe for disaster, and that Jeff’s employers are idiots. It is hard to know exactly how 1942 audiences, both white and black, would have responded to this, but we shouldn’t assume that it would have been lost on them.

The humor of the film could be seen to partially redeem the musical choices as well. Considered in the broader context of how ethnic music is used in horror, it seems certain that the New Orleans funeral music has been chosen to emphasize the “blackness” of the supernatural other. But one could also read it against the grain, hearing the music as a space in which hilarity and funereal gloom are combined. This is certainly a fair portrayal of the musical tradition that the score is drawing from, and it is as appropriate for *King of the Zombies* as it would be for any other horror-comedy. However, in the most outrageous voodoo sequences, the New Orleans street-band music is replaced with the crudest sort of generically “ethnic” and

267 Jenkins, *What Made Pistachio Nuts*, especially 96-126. Note that minstrel acts were an important part of the vaudeville theater at this time.

“primitive” drumming. This obvious and extreme example of musical othering almost forces us to hear the music on a continuum in which it becomes more Other as it becomes more ethnic, just like the climactic sequence in *Chloe*. In comedy films, it is often the role of music to repair the ruptures created by the anarchic actions of the comedic protagonist, reestablishing the normality (whether narrative or political) that their antics threatened to destabilize. *King of the Zombies* is no exception. Moreland and Whitten’s performances carve out a space for black subjectivity within the genre, but the musical cues close this off, reinforcing the equivalence of black culture, voodoo, and the monstrous threat.

The Limits of Authenticity

Not every voodoo zombie movie is so cavalier about its depiction of the religion and its music. *I Walked With a Zombie* (Lewton/Tourneur, 1943), one of the finest films to emerge from producer Val Lewton’s horror unit at RKO, is notable for the effort it makes to understand *vodou* as it is actually practiced. The shooting script indicates that the film’s voodoo ritual is based on a description of the religion printed in *Life Magazine* in 1937.²⁶⁸ One of the film’s writers, Ardel Wray, would later claim that “Lewton sought all the information [he] could possibly find on the subject of Haitian voodoo, and hired “genuine Voodoo musicians.”²⁶⁹ In October 1942, shortly after shooting began, the trade journal *The Hollywood Reporter* announced that “LeRoy Antoine, who is one of the country’s leading authorities on Haiti and Haitian folk music and voodoo, will be the technical advisor on *I Walked with a Zombie*. Antoine will also teach the negro actors Haitian rhythms for use in the voodoo ceremony.”²⁷⁰ In

268 Kim Newman and Steve Jones, DVD commentary for *I Walked With a Zombie*, by Val Lewton and Jacques Tourneur, 1943. DVD Release 2005, Warner Home Video.

269 Quoted in Edmund Bansak, *Fearing the Dark: The Val Lewton Career* (Jefferson: McFarland Press, 2003), 147.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

1938, Antoine and Laura Bowman had published a collection of Haitian music, *The Voice of Haiti*, which does contain two of the choral numbers used in *I Walked With a Zombie*.²⁷¹ It is also manifestly true that the filmmakers made an effort to understand the religion. The *vodou* dance is often, as depicted in the film, an all-night affair. It does take place in a *hounfort*, and is led by a *houngan*. Spirit possession is an important aspect of the religious practice. Legba can be thought of as the chief and father of the gods, or at least of some of them. The dance often does begin with an invocation to Legba coupled with a characteristic shoulder-rolling dance step.²⁷² By the same token, while the music in this scene is more foursquare by far than any actual *vodou* music I have encountered, it does demonstrate certain features (call-and-response vocals and a 12/8 meter with asymmetrical phrase structures) that speak to a non-trivial understanding of *vodou*'s ritual music.²⁷³ Although the film does not attempt to recreate or capture the complex cross-rhythms created by the master drummer's *kase*, it does show that a master drummer plays an important role in guiding the progression of both the music and the dance.²⁷⁴ There are inaccuracies and lacunae in the film's depiction of the religion as well as its

271 LeRoy Antoine and Laura Bowman, *The Voice of Haiti: an Unusual Collection of Original Native Ceremonial Songs, Invocations, Voodoo Chants, Drum Beats and Rhythms, Stories of Traditions etc. of the Haitian People* (New York: C. Williams Music Publishing Company, 1938).

272 Lois Wilcken, *The Drums of Vodou* (Tempe: White Cliffs Media Company, 1992), 21-25.

273 For detailed descriptions and transcriptions of actual *vodou* music, see Gerdès Fleurant, *Dancing Spirits: Rhythms and Rituals of Haitian Vodun, the Rada Rite* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1996), 51-55, and Wilcken, *Drums of Vodou*, 49-91.

274 Briefly, the *kase* (meaning "break") is a special rhythmic pattern played by the master drummer, against the continuing background of the song's beat, which typically triggers major aspects of the ritual (for instance inviting or dismissing a *lwa*). As Wilcken notes, each song has its own proper *kase*; furthermore, although the structural role of the *kase* in the music seems to be universal, the nature of the musical interruption varies by region. In *I Walked With a Zombie*, the master drummer does seem to trigger a dancer's possession, but the music he performs is only an accelerating three-stroke roll, and the other drums fall silent as he performs it.

depiction of the music: for instance, the film makes no mention of the important division of the *lwa* into nations associated with various African ethnic groups, and therefore homogenizes both the religion and its practitioners.²⁷⁵ And of course, *I Walked With a Zombie* is still quite consciously designed for an audience for whom *vodou* is foreign. Much of the film's accurate information on the religion is presented in an explicitly didactic fashion, as the main character, a white Canadian nurse, is introduced to her new island home. Nevertheless this is about as far from the generalized, denatured "blackness" of *Chloe* and *King of the Zombies* as it is possible to get.

It would be very easy to claim, based on this, that *I Walked With a Zombie* is as progressive in its treatment of race as *Chloe* is reactionary. This is the conclusion we would arrive at if we extended Stilwell's discussion of the *X-Files* score to account for *I Walked With a Zombie*, and it is more or less the argument advanced by Louise Fenton, who writes that Lewton's film "had good intentions and put the mechanisms in place to present a serious representation of voodoo."²⁷⁶ But while the dangers of inauthenticity are easily demonstrated, it is by no means as clear that the opposite term, authenticity, is a positive good.

Anthony J. Parker, writing on the importance of authenticity in classroom demonstrations of a culturally foreign music, describes a hypothetical ideal of authenticity as follows:

- 1) Performance by the culture's practitioners, recognized generally by the culture as artistic and representative;
- 2) use of instruments as specified by the composer or group creating the music;
- 3) use of the correct language as specified by the composer or group creating the music;

²⁷⁵ For this aspect of the religion, see Wilcken, *ibid.*, 1-49.

²⁷⁶ Louise Fenton, "Representations of Voodoo: The history and influence of Haitian Vodou within the cultural productions of Britain and America since 1850" (PhD.diss., University of Warwick, 2009), 222. Fenton goes on to state that *I Walked With a Zombie* is

- 4) for an audience made up by the culture's members; and
 5) in a setting normally used in the culture.²⁷⁷

Certainly this seems attractive. But although Parker lays out detailed criteria for authenticity, he never directly tells us why authenticity is desirable, or really even that it is desirable. Instead, he warns against the dangers of inauthenticity:

At worst, a classroom experience can so misrepresent a music tradition that its musical values are seen as boring or uninteresting, or poor quality in substance or performance, incoherent in structure, simple-minded because of didactic simplifications, lacking in cultural values, and laughable in its pretense at being 'music'. Under this worst scenario, the student is discouraged from pursuing any further listening and other interactive experience with that particular music.²⁷⁸

What Parker does not say – and need not say, because it is axiomatic to his discipline – is that there is *no* music tradition which, authentically represented, would be boring or incoherent. In the context of the World Music survey, then, authenticity is a kind of transparency: if the music is presented in its specificity, our students (who in Parker's account are neutral, culturally vacant observers) will love it. This, presumably, is the best of all possible results.

That authenticity is valued primarily for its effect on the student is revealing. Elsewhere, Parker writes that the search for musical authenticity is equivalent to “the attempt to retain sufficient content of the original to serve its purpose as representing a group of people in time and place that give a music – in all its specificities – meaning.”²⁷⁹ Note that although the “purpose” of the music is to *represent* the people, time, and place that gave rise to it, the “meaning” is still what the music meant *in* that original spatial, temporal, and cultural context.

277 Anthony J. Parker, “World Musics in Music Education: The Matter of Authenticity,” *International Journal of Music Education* 19 (1992): 32-33.

278 *Ibid*, 34.

279 *Ibid.*, 32.

More simply put, Parker argues that the "purpose" of the music is that of the anthologizer or the teacher, while the "meaning" is that of the music's original producers. But we have to recognize that the music had a purpose in its original context too... and that, once placed in the anthology (or a film), it will acquire a new "meaning" based on a new nexus of culture, time, and place, regardless of the "authenticity" with which the music is depicted.

The purpose of the ethnomusicology survey classroom, if we accept Parker's account, is to impart to the students, partially *through* the music, a rich and nuanced understanding of the specific context from which that music arose.²⁸⁰ The "meaning" of a piece of music in this context, then, is primarily the culture from which it derives. The *vodou* song "O Marie Kongo," should it be included in such a collection, would have the meaning "Haitian *vodou* practitioners" (as would any other *vodou* song), although that three-word phrase does not adequately represent the degree of nuance, specificity, and empathy that the song's "meaning" would ideally convey. The song's purpose in that context – if we arrive at Parker's ideal result by reversing his worst-case scenario – would be to prompt students to seek out additional engagement with that culture and its music. And thus, on a deeper and more axiomatic level, Parker's concept of value depends on the notion that the world is there to be learned about. Authenticity is valuable not for the culture that is observed, but for the culture that does the observing.

I have selected Parker's account to represent the academic consensus on musical authenticity not because it is easy to find fault with, but because it seems at first blush so self-evidently correct. Assumptions such as these undergird the ways in which scholars typically engage with other cultures. I suspect that "authentic" ethnic film music is attractive to scholars

²⁸⁰ Many ethnomusicologists would rankle at the assertion that "the music" exists as a reified substance independent of its context. This does not alter our basic understanding of the course's purpose, however, but only requires a more prolix vocabulary. To wit: the purpose of the ethnomusicology survey classroom is to impart to the students -- partially by means of the music's purely sonic features -- a rich and nuanced understanding of the music in its totality, including the specific context from which it arose.

precisely because we are so used to these assumptions. But although the ethnomusicology survey and the voodoo zombie film are both, in their ways, attempts to represent a musical culture to an audience of outsiders, the films have no interest in prompting further engagement with *vodou* and its music. They are devoted to creating fear, and an “authentic” musical Other is only likely to function as a site of resistance if it can be demonstrated to buck this general trend.

With this in mind, let us return to *I Walked With a Zombie*. The limits of authenticity are more clearly laid out in the film’s treatment of a different kind of music, Trinidadian calypso. Early in the film, the heroine Betsy Connell (Frances Dee) and one of her suitors, Wesley Rand (James Ellison), sit in a café near a calypso singer played by the real life calypsonian Sir Lancelot (who appeared in a number of Val Lewton’s RKO films). At first, the singer performs “The British Grenadiers,” a famous British army marching song that explicitly celebrates the virtues of imperial colonialism. It is not necessary for the audience to recognize the song’s source to understand the connotations. The harmony and rhythm are thoroughly Euro-American, and the lyrics that we hear list western cultural heroes: “Some talk of Alexander, and some of Hercules.” The next song that Sir Lancelot performs is a calypso, apparently written for the film, which explains the unwholesome past of Rand, his brother Paul Holland (Tom Conway), and Holland’s catatonic wife (Christine Gordon). American audiences in 1943 would not have been likely to recognize calypso as such: Harry Belafonte’s breakthrough album *Calypso* (which is not true calypso in any case, but rather repackaged Jamaican mento), did not appear until 1956. Nevertheless the lilting melody and the characteristically calypsonian 3+3+2 meter (marked with brackets on the example) would mark it as something “ethnic,” and therefore alien.²⁸¹

²⁸¹ Nick Davis suggests that calypso itself, as a creole art form, should be seen to accomplish the film’s project of blending European and African cultural spheres, thus echoing Wood, “Introduction to the American Horror Film,” 209-10 (although he does not cite him). This would be a tenable and even an attractive reading, were the calypso not so starkly juxtaposed with “The British Grenadiers.” Davis, “Inside/Outside the Klein Bottle,” *Music, Sound, and the Moving Image* 6 no. 1, (2012): 18.

Music Example 3.13 shows a musical score for the traditional song "The British Grenadiers." It consists of two staves: a voice staff and a guitar staff. The key signature is one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 2/4. The voice part begins with the lyrics "Some talk of A - le - xan - der and some of Her - cu - les." The guitar part provides a rhythmic accompaniment with chords and eighth notes.

Music Example 3.13: *I Walked With a Zombie* – “The British Grenadiers,” traditional.

Music Example 3.14 shows a musical score for the song "Shame and Sorrow on the Family." It begins with a guitar introduction labeled "(Guitar intro)" in the key of D major (two sharps) and 2/4 time. The guitar part features a complex rhythmic pattern with triplets and pairs of notes, indicated by "3 + 3 + 2" and "3 + 3 + 2 etc." above the staff. The voice part follows with the lyrics: "There was a fam - i - ly that live on the isle ___ of Saint Se - bas - tian a long ___ long while The head of the fam - ily was a Hol - land man, ___ and the youn - ger bro - ther his name ___ was Rand. ___ Ah, woe! ___ Ah, me! ___ Shame ___ and sor - row on the fam - i - ly. ___". The score includes measure numbers 9, 12, and 16.

Music Example 3.14: *I Walked With a Zombie* – “Shame and Sorrow on the Family,” music presumably by Sir Lancelot (although I have located no record of the song’s genesis). The lyrics excerpted here are harmless enough, but become increasingly scandalous as the song continues.



Image 3.7: *I Walked With a Zombie*: Sir Lancelot's curtain call.

Sir Lancelot also brings out his Trinidadian accent in this performance.

The effect this music has on the narrative is instantaneous. Rand becomes furious, and the pleasant mood sustained throughout his earlier flirtation with Dee is shattered. After the scene described above, the narrative jumps forward a few hours to show Dee and Rand alone in the restaurant, with Rand having passed out in his cups. Then, in one of those delirious lyrical interruptions that make Val Lewton movies so compelling, Sir Lancelot reappears for a sort of curtain call. Silhouetted against the ocean, he performs another verse of his calypso for Dee alone as he slowly advances on her. His unexplained appearance, the stark contrast of his white suit against the dark backdrop, his inexorable advance, the editing (which cuts back and forth between the singer and Dee as though they were in conversation, although she says nothing), the

menacing tone of his lyrics, and the mere fact that the scene is such an interruption join with the “ethnic” music to reinforce the association of the island’s black residents with the supernatural other.

This calypso fits most of Parker’s criteria of authenticity. It is an accurate example of the style, and performed by a real calypso musician. It is even presented in something like its proper cultural context: although the island of San Sebastian was invented for the film (and clearly modeled after Haiti in most respects), calypso-like songs have been used throughout the Caribbean as “oral newspapers, with social and political comment, and satirical treatment of scandal,” often giving disenfranchised groups a forum in which to mock social elites.²⁸² Therefore, from a musicological standpoint, the film’s use of calypso is again quite sensitive. Nevertheless, it would be difficult for an American audience to experience the song as anything other than menacing in this context. The authentic quality of the lyrics may actually contribute to this for a modern audience, as most Americans are only familiar with the whitewashed “calypso” of the “Banana Boat Song” and “Under the Sea.” Even a Trinidadian audience, for whom the song would be normal, might have trouble separating it from the scene’s overdetermined sense of visual and narrative menace.

The Music of Normality(?): Salon piano in *I Walked With a Zombie* and *White Zombie*

Balanced against this treatment of “black” calypso, we have the film’s treatment of “white” classical music. Like many voodoo zombie films, *I Walked With a Zombie* eventually shifts the blame off of the black characters and onto aristocratic whites. In this case, it is revealed that Wesley Rand’s mother, Mrs. Rand, had been co-opting the voodoo ceremonies in a

²⁸² Jan Fairley, “Calypso,” in *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/04624>, accessed 3/21/2011.

paternalistic effort to improve the lives of the islanders (convincing them to sterilize their water by invoking Shango, the *lwa* of fire and thunder, and so on). Having meddled with powers beyond her understanding, she inadvertently invokes a potent curse on her other son's wife, Jessica Holland, which eventually causes the deaths of both Jessica and Wesley, who were adulterously linked. The film goes on to explicitly attach the blame to Jessica herself: the closing voiceover (which is, significantly, delivered by an accented, "black" male voice) informs us that Jessica and Wesley's deaths were caused by her quasi-incestuous desires. But white European culture is still valorized by the film's musical politics. The sound of classical music is associated firmly throughout with the love story between Paul Holland (Mrs. Rand's other son, Wesley's half-brother, and Jessica's husband), and the heroine Betsy Connell. In one key scene, she overhears him playing a Chopin etude (Op. 10 No. 3) on the piano. The normality of this scene is as strongly reinforced as the eeriness of Sir Lancelot's earlier serenade. From a narrative perspective, the scene is about romantic love (and indeed *self-sacrificing* romantic love, the most valorized kind). In a standard Hollywood move, the music is presented as pure sonic pleasure while the camera lingers on Betsy's attractive form. In terms of the musical argument, this use of Chopin makes it very hard to sustain a critique of European culture elsewhere in the film.

At the same time, there are some bizarre undercurrents to this scene. In the 19th century, the piano was seen explicitly as a woman's instrument, and while male pianists have always been common, the instrument retains a certain symbolic femininity when it appears in film and literature.²⁸³ (Consider how different the affect of this scene would be if Holland were playing

283 Amédée Guillemin, for instance, called the piano "*par excellence* a woman's instrument." *The Applications of Physical Forces*, trans. Winifred Lockyer (London: MacMillan and Co., 1877), 161. More generally, chordal instruments such as the piano, the guitar, the harp, and the concertina were typically seen as feminine or gender-neutral, while melodic instruments were seen as masculine. See Allan W. Atlas, "Ladies in the Wheatstone Ledgers: The Gendered Concertina in Victorian England, 1835-1870," *Royal Musical Association Research Chronicle*,

the trumpet.) Furthermore, as Lawrence Kramer notes, “the cultural image constructed for Chopin has regularly identified him as variously feminine, effeminate, or otherwise lacking some important piece of masculinity.”²⁸⁴ The same holds true of the other quintessential 19th-century virtuoso pianist composer, Liszt, whose music we shall shortly encounter in *White Zombie* (Edward and Victor Halperin, 1932). “Liszt often behaved in a way that we, as gender-conscious postmodernists, understand as 'feminine' in a certain culturally constructed sense of that word. Not 'effeminate,' not 'gay'; *feminine*. Liszt was aesthetically sensitive, often passive in his behavior, and unusually receptive to influences of several kinds (although he was also 'his own man,' as the saying has it). He even fainted in public! In terms of stereotypical American masculinity... Liszt simply was not altogether 'butch.’”²⁸⁵ The tradition of hysteric/effeminate/feminine male piano virtuosos continued well into the 20th century, with Liberace serving as its crowning example.

Of course, these cultural associations are not universally accepted. Liszt in particular is occasionally depicted as a much more macho figure, notably in the films *Lisztomania* (Ken Russell, 1971) and *Impromptu* (James Lapine, 1991). Whether this particular culturally coded understanding of piano music will apply, then, depends to a great degree on the music itself. But in the case of the films in question, the music is thoroughly “feminine,” marked by strumming chordal accompaniment, relaxed tempi, heavy use of rubato, long lyrical lines, etc. It should go without saying that the identification of such music as feminine depends on, and may reinforce, a whole constellation of harmful and limiting gender roles. Nevertheless, this is what the music

No. 39 (2006): 2, and Dave Russell, *Popular Music in England, 1840-1914: A Social History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), 180.

284 Lawrence Kramer, “Review of *Chopin at the Boundaries: Sex, History, and Musical Genre*, by Jeffrey Kallberg,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 8, no. 2 (Oct. 1997): 318.

285 Jolanta T. Pekacz, *Musical Biography: Towards New Paradigms* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 106.

communicates in this context.

The piano sequence in *I Walked With a Zombie*, then, though strongly marked as “normal,” absorbs the musically “feminine” in that depiction of normality. And this is actually consistent with Lewton’s overall ideological project. Lewton’s female characters are a decidedly mixed bag, but his male heroes often suffer from a surfeit of masculinity, and are redeemed or doomed according to their ability to embrace their own femininity or effeminacy. *The Cat People*, *Curse of the Cat People*, and *The Body Snatcher* (Robert Wise, 1945) all follow this pattern. It is best expressed in *The Leopard Man* (Tourneur, 1943), in which the emotional arc of the hero and the heroine climaxes with her line, “Confession: I’m a complete softie,” and his response, “If that’s what it takes to make a softie, there’s two of us.”

It is interesting here to compare *I Walked With a Zombie* to the film that kicked off the 30’s zombie boom, Victor and Edward Halperin’s *White Zombie*. In many ways the apparent model for *I Walked With a Zombie* and *King of the Zombies*, *White Zombie* removes the ethnic elements of voodoo from the equation almost entirely. As in the other films, the main villain is a white witch doctor (here played by Béla Lugosi), but in this case his zombie servants are also white, and the voodoo congregation is altogether absent. The few black characters in the film, who are scored with generic “ethnic” drumming, are all benign, and are associated with zombies mainly in that they try to protect themselves from zombification by burying their dead at a crossroads. (We also do find some apparently black zombies working as slaves in the witch-doctor’s sugar mill, but here they are figures not of fear but of wretchedness, and rather than scoring this scene with any sort of ethnic music, the filmmakers chose to use only the deafening mechanical screech of the sugarcane press.)

White Zombie too pits pseudo-African music against salon piano music, in this case Liszt’s *Liebesträume*. And yet here the piano music is played by a woman, who has been zombified, and is therefore – most horrifically, within the film’s value system! – emotionally

unavailable to her male onlooker, even as he showers her with jewels. The emotional effusion of the music, contrasted with the vacancy and frigidity of the performer, fits the late-Romantic conception of female music-making described by Laing in *The Gendered Score*, in which “a woman taking control of her own musical voice is an obvious sign of danger,” and female musicians are often “monstrously selfish and unfeminine, devoid of humility, sympathy, and, most heinous of all, the maternal instinct.”²⁸⁶ It is this “feminine” music which forms the movie’s musical Other: carefully prepared, aesthetically overwhelming, and synchronized with the film’s most ideologically threatening sequence. (As we see, it is not *only* in post-studio horror films that the musical Other can become intensely politicized and dissociated from physical violence). The pseudo-African music, on the other hand, is here deployed more or less promiscuously, with a single pentatonic fanfare used at various times to represent both villain and hero. Most notably, a gospel-inflected humming chorus is used over the scene in which hero and heroine are reunited in a mystical dream vision, serving as a welcoming image of female availability to match the threatening unavailability of the Liszt performance. One film’s music of normality, then, can become the musical Other in a different context. *White Zombie* turns out to be a film about gender that only purports to be about race. The same cannot be said of *I Walked With a Zombie*, although certainly its treatment of gender is not its least interesting feature.

Music as Counter-Narrative

It is important to note that my analysis thus far has been essentially tone-deaf. I have focused only on the perceived “ethnic” source of the music, and not at all on its quality, or its specific musical traits. As Rick Altman notes, many genres provide the audience with a

²⁸⁶ Laing, *The Gendered Score*, 102 and 107. In applying Laing’s theories to horror, it is extremely useful to contrast *White Zombie*’s treatment of music and performance to those of Karl Freund’s *Mad Love* (1935), and Rupert Julian’s *Phantom of the Opera* (1925), where the performers are masculine and the listeners feminine.

characteristic vacillation between a radical, socially unacceptable “generic pleasure,” which in horror often entails a sense of identification with the monstrous Other, and the equally pleasurable sense of closure involved with the restoration of the status quo, i.e., the monster’s inevitable defeat.²⁸⁷ Depending on the film, and depending on the audience’s taste for the specific status quo in question, it is entirely possible that these ruptures will *not* be papered over: that the message of the film, for us, will not simply be the last thing it says (the way the plot turns out, which has priority of structure), but rather whatever it says most forcefully at any point throughout the film (the overwhelming aesthetic gesture, which has priority of strength).²⁸⁸ Music, traditionally construed as a mode of communication transcending all structure, is particularly suited to this task.²⁸⁹ And so in the horror film, a musical Other that is particularly beautiful or moving, could in itself be a radical gesture, destabilizing the prosocial closure inherent to the basic horror plot. This avenue of thought leads inevitably into matters of personal taste, but no truly successful discussion of the music can afford to ignore it.

With this in mind, we return yet again to *I Walked With a Zombie*. The binary opposition of “native” (although actually Trinidadian and pseudo-Haitian) and “European” (although actually Polish-French) music in *I Walked With a Zombie* is obviously problematic on the face of

287 Altman, *Film/Genre*, 145-151.

288 Royal Brown points this out with regard to the narrative of *Psycho*. *Overtones and Undertones*, 168. It is literally inconceivable for any audience to be satisfied by the psychologists’ pat, rationalizing speech. What convinces us, what we remember, is the message of the overwhelming filmic gestures: the shower, the staircase, the cellar; the window, the skull, the knife.

289 A number of scholars have noted music’s potential to create this kind of rupture with regard to the almost universally regressive plots of opera. See for instance Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), which refers back to Paul Robinson, “A Deconstructive Postscript: Reading Libretti and Misreading Opera,” in *Reading Opera*, ed. Arthur Groos and Roger Parker (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 328-46.

it. But as noted above in the discussion of the terrible child, the use of “othered” music in horror films (whether ethnic or otherwise) evokes not simply a monster, but a world and a mode of being. The most radical element of *I Walked With a Zombie* may be the steps it takes, both in the music itself and in the filmic elements through which the music is contextualized, to make the “native” mode of being understandable, compelling and even appealing. The world the music evokes is sympathetically depicted and allowed to develop fully. The film does not attempt to elide the real-world struggles of the people that created this sort of music, for a minor character early in the film points out that the island's current social structure arose from slavery, and a number of brief scenes are devoted to the casual trials and joys of black islanders (although these are still only the background for the more consequential actions of the white protagonists). Similarly, the voodoo music succeeds aesthetically *as music* because it is allowed to develop at length, over more than six minutes, with multiple formal sections, melodies, rhythms, and points of arrival. During this sequence we are implicitly invited to join the community, experience the ritual, and forget the difference on which the film otherwise so strongly depends.

Interestingly enough, however, this effect would probably obtain regardless of the accuracy or inaccuracy of the music! The problem with the New Orleans funeral march in *King of the Zombies* was that, because it was not specifically associated with any cultural context, it suggested that one black population was equivalent to any other black population, and therefore that voodoo is metonymically equivalent to blackness in general. This would be just as much of a problem if we replaced the faux-jazz that appears in the film with a field recording of an actual second-line brass band. The same indifference to authenticity obtains for *I Walked With a Zombie's* more-or-less “authentic” use of calypso music: although a calypso fan or a musicologist might realize that these taunting lyrics have a rich cultural heritage, in the film the music simply serves as, and is presented as, a menacing alien thing for the heroine to be bothered by. If the voodoo sequence can function as a site of resistance, it is not due to the

music's similarities to the music of actual *vodou*. Rather, it is because the music is presented as *if* it were grounded in the experience of a specific culture, and because the music's inherent aesthetic interest might prompt the audience to seek out further engagement with the culture and its music (which is a neat reversal of the worst-case scenario imagined by Parker). This is a case, then, where the music's aesthetics impinge directly on its ideology, and challenge the normal ideological operations of music within the genre. And if, upon our first exposure to the actual music of *vodou*, we are struck by how different it sounds from the music of *I Walked With a Zombie* – if, that is, we realize that for all its elaborate detail and apparent concern with accuracy, the film's account of *vodou* is *not* an accurate depiction of the religion and its adherents – this is surely something to celebrate rather than to lament. There is obviously still something unsavory about judging the music primarily for its effect on an audience to whom *vodou* is foreign. Nevertheless this is a step in the right direction.

The death scene from late in *I Walked With a Zombie* shows another way in which the film complicates its own politics of musical representation. It ends with a variation on one of our culture's most unpleasant stock images: the helpless white woman menaced by the towering black brute. But in this case, the woman, Jessica, is already dead, killed in fact by her white would-be protector, Rand. After stabbing her, Rand tries to keep her body out of the hands of the voodoo practitioners, eventually carrying her out into the ocean where he is borne down by her weight and drowns. The visuals in this sequence are splendid: the expressionistic lighting, the close shots of the zombie's shuffling feet, the surge of the ocean waves, the subtle acceleration and deceleration in the editing patterns as the scene reaches its emotional peak, and above all the sublime final shot of the zombie silhouetted against the receding surf, are the very stuff of cinema. The emotive force of the sequence has little if anything to do with the plot. That this sequence stays with us long after the movie ends, has little if anything to do with what slight narrative closure it provides.

The image displays a musical score for the piece "I Walked With a Zombie". The score is arranged in three systems. The first system features a Harp and piano part, marked *ppp*, with a tempo of $\text{♩} = 75$. The second system includes Strings (*p*), Chimes, Viola (*soli.*), and Basses. The third system continues the Harp and piano part and the Basses part. The score is written in common time (C) and includes various musical notations such as triplets, sixteenth notes, and dynamic markings.

Music Example 3.15 (continued on following pages): *I Walked With a Zombie* – Rand’s Drowning Sequence, a musical blend of the “European” and “African” musical worlds. As the chimes enter, and the music begins to take on a slow march rhythm, the zombie Carrefour appears in the distance, walking in time with the music.

5 rit.

Harp continues essentially throughout, in various figurations.

8 a tempo

mf Low brass

12 *mf* Viola soli. Violin soli. *f*

pp Bases *f*

Music Example 3.15, continued: First entrance of the “O Marie Kongo” theme in the low brass in measure 8. The downbeat of measure 12 is punctuated, visually and aurally, by the crashing of a wave as Rand retreats into the ocean.

Brass and woodwinds

French horn

Slowing greatly

Faster, quarter note c. 108

Harp

Music Example 3.15, continued. In measures 19-22, the music builds to its dissonant climax using the language of European classical music. The “O Marie Kongo” melody is now absent. Where does this place the monstrous threat?

28 Chorus of fishermen (diegetic)

O Ma-rie Kon-go O Ma-rie Kon-go (etc.)

28

Strings and low woodwinds

Music Example 3.15, continued. In measure 25 (previous page), the dissonance resolves *to* a texture that contains the most “African” music in the cue. If not quite the music of normality, this is at least the music of safety and release.



Image 3.8: *I Walked With a Zombie*. At the structurally important cadence (mm. 24-25), we dissolve from Carrefour, silhouetted against the surf, to Mrs. Holland’s body as it is discovered. The plot resolution coincides with the musical resolution.

The music in this sequence, too, is gorgeous, rich in counterpoint and orchestration, and more harmonically adventurous than any cue heard in the film thus far. The rhythmic interplay of its ascending harmonic sequence with, on the one hand, the accelerating pattern of cuts in the editing, and on the other, with the pounding of the surf, is a marvel of vertical montage.²⁹⁰ But most striking is the melody, which is derived from one of the songs published in Antoine and Bowman's book, "O Marie Kongo." (This is also used in a slightly less adventurous arrangement for the opening credits, and sung in its original form by the islanders in two scenes that bookend the main action of the film.) By giving this melody a full romantic-orchestral treatment, without lapsing into any elements of trivializing exoticism, composer Roy Webb here neatly manages to unify the "European" and "African" spheres – an achievement which Wood claims, in his reading of *I Walked With a Zombie*, is the covert ideological project of the film as a whole.²⁹¹

Sequences like this one are seductive. The piercing beauty of the audiovisual tapestry makes it tempting to read the film as the kind of high art that transcends its potentially dodgy political implications. If *I Walked With a Zombie* were a melodrama, a genre in which moments of visual and sonic excess frequently coincide with a desirable rupture of the dominant social narrative, there would be no other way to read the sequence. And yet, although the film is at times markedly melodramatic, it remains a horror film, in which "attractive" moments like this are typically reserved for moments of ideological crisis, and although it is possible to step back

290 Vertical montage is a term coined by Eisenstein to describe the interaction of the audio and visual components of cinema. The concept has been elaborated upon at length by Royal Brown (*Overtones and Undertones*, 135-145), among others. Montage was for Eisenstein something of an all-controlling metaphorical concept, and therefore vertical montage is not strictly limited to sounds interaction with editing. Other cinematic elements such as cinematography, performance, and *mise-en-scène* can be implicated as well. But in practice, the interaction of musical rhythms with the rhythms of the editing does seem to be particularly fertile, perhaps due to the temporal nature of both arts. Sergei Eisenstein, *The Film Sense*, trans. Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt & Brace, 1970 and 1975), 74-78.

291 Wood, "An Introduction to the American Horror Film," 209-10.

and read this sequence, analytically, as a kind of confounding of the cultural categories of whiteness and blackness, it's hard to know what, if anything, it's supposed to make us desire. If the beauty of this scene is to become a point of rupture that escapes its narrative context (as the equivalent melodramatic scene likely would), it will need to escape the context of its generic frame as well. Whether it succeeds in doing so is probably best left to the judgment of each individual viewer.

Later developments: Cannibal-Exploitation, and Voodoo Zombies Post-Romero

In the explosion of horror films that followed the fall of the studio system and the collapse of the Hays code, the unwritten rules about the depiction of race changed drastically. Zombie movies still address issues of race, but the zombies themselves are almost never associated with voodoo, although there are some exceptions such as *Zombi 2* (Lucio Fulci, 1979), *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (Craven, 1988), and *The Zombies of Sugar Hill* (Paul Maslansky, 1974, all of which will be discussed below. Furthermore, the use of ethnic music in American horror scores has become quite rare, even when it might be justified in Stilwell's sense. For instance, the only aspect of *Candyman* (Bernard Rose, 1992) that *isn't* racially inflected is Philip Glass's score. However, the racial politics associated with the earlier zombie films lived on, albeit transfigured, in the Italian cannibal films of the late 70s and early 80s, a small but notorious subgenre related stylistically to the more famous and marginally more respectable *gialli*. These films differ from their predecessors in many ways. Like many post-60s horror films, they emphasize sex and gore over suspense and atmosphere, and human evil over supernatural menace. In the cannibal films, the supernatural is entirely absent, and even in *Zombi 2* and *The Serpent and the Rainbow* there are hints that the monsters may have been created by science. By contrast, *I Walked With a Zombie* is probably the most pointedly supernatural of Val Lewton's RKO horror films.

Another major change in the later style is the musical treatment of ethnic difference. Here we must pause to consider Kay Dickinson's analysis of the 70s and 80s horror sound, which helps explain some of these changes.²⁹² Dickinson, who has examined the scores to some of the cannibal films in detail, holds that many composers in this era systematically used synthesizers to score the most horrific acts depicted in the films. She locates a putative arthouse source for this practice in Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), and traces it through several films by Dario Argento, the Italian cannibal boom, and Lucio Fulci's *The Beyond* (1981). In fact the practice predates Kubrick's film. *Night of the Living Dead* (Romero, 1968) is a textbook example: as noted in the opening chapter, most of that film (including many violent and horrific scenes) is scored with dissonant romantic-orchestral library music, but for the most shocking sequence, in which a zombified little girl devours her father and stabs her mother to death with a trowel, this musical language gives way to synthesized tones and manipulated vocal samples.

For Dickinson, the synthesizer essentially represents the filmmakers' failure to pass judgment on the monstrous actions they depict. Following the model established by Kassabian, Dickinson holds that traditional film scoring techniques serve as a guide for the audience's subjective identification, modeling appropriate emotional responses to the images onscreen.²⁹³ Therefore, by associating the uniquely gruesome visuals of a film like *Cannibal Holocaust* with the uniquely neutral sounds made possible by late-70s synthesizers, the filmmakers make it more difficult for the audience to step back and condemn the onscreen acts from a morally uncompromised vantage point that they share with the film's authorial voice, and thus with its

292 Dickinson, *Off Key*, 119-154. As is generally the case in horror music scholarship, Dickinson is concerned only with the monster music, and gives little attention to the sorts of music it is juxtaposed with.

293 For more on this, see Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies*, 83, or Kassabian *Hearing Film* (throughout).

score. This places the audience in a curious bind: denied a comfortably remote position of appalled spectatorship, they have a choice of engaging with the onscreen violence even more closely (accepting it as more “real”), or of rejecting the spectacle entirely. Dickinson finds the second possibility more likely, and judges these scores to be dysfunctional, although in an interesting and productive way.

One could find fault with details of Dickinson’s essay. Her concept of the synthesizer is at once too limited and too powerful: while the synthesizers popular at this time were *capable* of incredibly affectless sounds, they were used in different ways by different musicians, and close examination of 70s and 80s horror scores reveals little evidence of the sonic flatness she describes. Furthermore, for Dickinson, the mere presence of a synthesizer somewhere in the texture overrides all other musical criteria, which is not an accurate description of the audience’s experience of the music (or at least not of my own). However, Dickinson’s observation that composers in this era preferred to score the most extreme carnage with synthesizers is accurate, and the potential “neutrality” of synthesized sound is a serious challenge to the politicized reading of musical otherness that I have suggested above.

I begin my discussion of the later horror films with *Zombi 2*, first because its thematic similarity to the older films is more explicit, and second because, although it is not one of the films treated in Dickinson’s essay, it fits her model particularly well.²⁹⁴ Randall Larson’s description of the score as “highly inappropriate, accompanying dramatic and suspenseful scenes (such as the girl’s underwater fight with the zombie, and the zombie’s subsequent evolution into sharkmeal) with a mellow pop motif which hardly accentuates the visuals” clearly

²⁹⁴ Romero’s *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) was marketed internationally as *Zombi*, and Fulci’s film was given the title *Zombi 2* in an attempt to cash in on its success. The films are otherwise unrelated – but this is a good example of the ways that economic concerns shape genres over time.

betrays the spectatorial discomfort that Dickinson finds so interesting.²⁹⁵ In fact the theme Larson describes here is not associated with drama or suspense, but quite specifically with carnage. The fact that the cue is exactly the same each time it appears problematizes Dickinson's theory somewhat: the first few times that this music is connected with violent images (as in the delightfully ludicrous zombie-vs.-shark sequence), it might be jarring, but when the combination reoccurs later in the film we begin to expect and even welcome it. However it should be noted in Dickinson's defense that the cue is scored entirely for analog synths and drum machines, and that is as affectless and detached a piece of synth-pop as one is ever likely to encounter.

Much of the remainder of the score, however, consists of various pastiches of non-western music: versions of reggae and Javanese gamelan music both appear, as do several more generically "ethnic" percussion-based cues.²⁹⁶ Most of these cues are extremely brief, unlike the main theme, which is usually presented in full and probably accounts for more than half of the music played in the film by duration. Although the most gruesome parts of the film are consistently scored with synthesizers, most of the "ethnic" excerpts appear in at least moderately horrific scenes. Identifying a musical Other in the score of *Zombi 2* is therefore quite difficult: both the "ethnic" music and the synthesizer theme would seem to have a defensible claim. Ambiguity is the main trait of the film's racial politics. We never do learn what has caused the zombie outbreak: some characters blame the curses of a "new voodoo man," while Dr. Menard's wife hints that her husband may have created the zombies through medical research. Neither possibility is confirmed or denied. The new voodoo man never appears onscreen, and the doctor dies without having addressed the accusations. At the end of the film, we see that zombies have spread from Matool to Manhattan, and yet many of the zombies on Matool are long-dead

295 Randall Larson, *Musique Fantastique*, 211.

296 The ethnicity depicted, such as it is, is thus merely "island." Java and Jamaica are separated by a language, a cultural heritage, and more than 11,000 miles.

Spanish conquistadors. Is the monstrous Other created by the incursion of non-western culture onto western culture, or vice-versa? The music preserves and amplifies this ambiguity. By scoring all of the violence with gamelan music, the composer Fabio Frizzi could have placed the source of the infection firmly outside of the Euro-American sphere. By excluding “ethnic” music altogether (or by using it in peaceful scenes and interrupting it with the synthesizer theme when violence began), he could have blocked that line of interpretation entirely. His decision to take neither of these routes amplifies the fundamental incoherence of the text, which is also its main attraction. (Note, however, that the film's ambiguity does not allow for any peaceful mingling of the European and South-Pacific spheres.)

Riz Ortolani's music for *Cannibal Holocaust* is more complex and less ambiguous. The score features several distinct musical registers, including a wordless pop ballad, a neo-romantic elegy for string orchestra, more dissonant string writing clearly informed by *Psycho*, and stereotypically “ethnic” percussion. Synthesizers are used almost throughout the score, sometimes as an important structural element, and sometimes as a kind of aural leavening. But Dickinson's argument has less purchase here. Most of the truly horrific scenes are scored for a combination of synthesizers and strings, and the entire score is highly emotive. Furthermore, Dickinson hears the synthesizer as a failure to judge, and *Cannibal Holocaust* is first and foremost about the filmmaker's judgment. This is, after all, a movie in which violent acts are often interspersed with bursts of blinding light, either bright blue from brief pans away to the sky, or the searing white of overexposed film, as if first the cameraman, and then the film stock itself had rebelled, refusing to bear witness to the atrocities they were asked to record.

Again, the treatment of “ethnic” percussion in this film is difficult to parse. It first appears early in the film, as Argentine soldiers engage in a firefight with Yacumo tribespeople, and then disappears from the soundscape for a good hour or so, before finally reappearing at the very end as the documentary filmmakers who serve as *Cannibal Holocaust's* antiheroes are

butchered by the Yanomami cannibals.²⁹⁷ This mimics one of the film's formal arcs. At the beginning and the end, we see the Indians and the outsiders in conflict. But in the main body of the film, where "ethnic" music is largely absent, the two groups maintain an uneasy truce, and all the violence that does occur is inflicted on the natives or on animals. Thus we could see the ethnic percussion as a musical Other associated with the violent potential of the natives.

Another possibility exists, however, which is perhaps more interesting. In the gunfight at the start of the film, the Argentinian soldiers make short work of their adversaries, and we are given every reason to see this as a good thing. Before the battle, we see the natives eating flesh off of an arm with fingers, and although we later discover that this was probably a monkey, there's no reason why we should expect monkeys in a film called *Cannibal Holocaust*. The atrocities that take place in the middle of the film (which are not scored with "ethnic" instruments) are altogether senseless, with both the characters and the filmmakers apparently indulging in violence for violence's sake. At the end of the film, however, the Yanomami's attack on the documentary filmmakers is justified by that most ancient of patriarchal narratives, the rape-revenge plot, and extreme though their vengeance is, one cannot help but feel a certain sense of horrified vindication. Thus, the "ethnic" music could be seen to represent not simply "ethnic violence," but "justified violence."

Support for this interpretation can be found in a specific musical cue that serves as a kind of leitmotif of atrocity in the middle of the film (example 3.16, below), underscoring very nearly all of the unjustified horrific acts. This is a melancholy piece for strings, punctuated by occasional synthesized drum sounds and a low, oscillating and extremely slow synthesized

297 The actual Yanomami seem to lend nothing more than their name to the group depicted in the film. It is very interesting, however, that the film makes a clear distinction between the relatively peaceful Yacumo and the more dangerous Yanomami: in this film, at least, there is not a single monolithic "native" ethnicity... but this is undermined by the music, which associates both groups with essentially similar music.

bassline. Although this cannot be easily identified with any of Wood's dimensions of politicized otherness, it is by far stranger than the film's "ethnic" music. The synthesizer coo, in and of itself, is unsettling both for its microtonal pitch content and for the bizarre flatness of the sound, and has at prompted some to reject (or consider rejecting) the film.²⁹⁸

The contrast of the synthesizers with the passionate and entirely tonal string music reinforces the strangeness of the synth timbre, forcing us to grapple with it continuously (whereas we might eventually become acclimated to an entirely synth-driven texture, like that of the *Zombi* theme). The pitch-language of the cue is also rather otherworldly. Obviously, we find stressed melodic tritones and stridently dissonant appoggiaturas (often sounding simultaneously with the pitch to which they will resolve). On a more subtle level, the combination of the highly linear string writing (which often sustains non-chord tones, such as the G-sharp in the second measure) with the ostinato bass (which alternates between scale degree 4 and scale degree 3) often leaves the harmony ambiguous: we can parse measure 30 of the transcription as an A major 9th chord, for instance, but if we follow this forward to measure 32, we see that the sonority was actually a contrapuntally altered F-sharp minor chord (i.e. the G-sharp resolves down to an F-sharp, and the B resolves up to a C-sharp). Even at the points where the harmony is clear, it is often tormented, as in the abrupt swerve to F major in measures 23 and 24. And finally, on a very subtle level, the piece is unsettling because it is just

298 Eric Henderson, "Film Review: Cannibal Holocaust," *Slant Magazine*, October 6, 2005. <http://www.slantmagazine.com/film/review/cannibal-holocaust/1763>. Henderson actually has high praise for the score in general, but reports that the audience he watched the film with simply laughed at it, and especially at the synth coo, which he describes as "like the backing track for a dour Karen Carpenter cover of Anita Ward's 'Ring My Bell.'" Interestingly, Henderson suggests that the sound is an artifact of the film's era, and that the proper audience response would be to tune it out, so that we can recognize the rest of the score as a "moving, string-driven requiem for civilization; so far as the grindhouse curve goes, the pathos rivals Charles Ives's 'The Unanswered Question' or Bernstein's *On the Waterfront* cue for the discovery of Charlie in the alleyway."

regular and tonal enough to make us want the harmonic closure that it ultimately denies us. The melody in measures 9-16 traces a slow linear ascent from F# to C#, and measures 17-24 (excluding the indigestible swerve to F major), gives us a linear descent from C# back to F#. But when this arc repeats in bars 25-42, we are left hanging: at the end of the cue, as the strings gradually melt back into the synth ostinato, the final linear descent from C# stalls halfway through, on the synth's low A. Of course, the cue does not appear in its entirety every time it appears in the film. Nevertheless, the fundamental tension between the tonal implications of the string music and the fundamentally unresolved bass ostinato is always made salient (generally by allowing the ostinato to sound several times before the strings enter).

Slow, passionate, funereal.

The musical score consists of two systems, each containing five measures. The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 7/8. The first system includes three parts: Strings, Synth Coo, and Synth Bass. The Synth Bass part begins with a *mf* dynamic marking. The second system continues the same parts, with the Strings part starting in the fifth measure of the system. The Synth Coo part features a melodic line with some grace notes and rests. The Synth Bass part continues its ostinato pattern.

Music Example 3.16 (continued on following pages): *Cannibal Holocaust* – “Atrocity leitmotif,” music by Riz Ortolani.

The image displays three systems of musical notation for Music Example 3.16, continued. Each system consists of three staves: Strings, Synth Coo, and Synth Bass. The music is written in a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#) and a 7/8 time signature. The first system covers measures 10-13, the second covers measures 14-17, and the third covers measures 18-21. The Strings part features a melodic line in the treble clef with dynamics markings of *mf* and hairpins. The Synth Coo part uses a treble clef with various rhythmic patterns, including a quintuplet in measure 16. The Synth Bass part uses a bass clef with a steady, low-frequency accompaniment. Measure numbers 10, 14, and 18 are indicated at the start of their respective systems.

Music Example 3.16, continued.

The image displays three systems of musical notation for Music Example 3.16, continued. Each system consists of three staves: Strings, Synth Coo, and Synth Bass. The music is written in a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#) and a 7/8 time signature. The first system starts at measure 21 and ends at measure 23. The second system starts at measure 24 and ends at measure 26. The third system starts at measure 27 and ends at measure 29. The Strings part features complex rhythmic patterns and dynamics, including a *mf* marking in the first system and a *f* marking in the second and third systems. The Synth Coo part is mostly silent, with some percussive or rhythmic markings in the second and third systems. The Synth Bass part provides a steady bass line with some melodic movement.

21
Strings
Synth Coo
Synth Bass

24
Strings
Synth Coo
Synth Bass

27
Strings
Synth Coo
Synth Bass

Music Example 3.16, continued.

The image displays three systems of musical notation for Music Example 3.16, continued. Each system includes three staves: Strings, Synth Coo, and Synth Bass. The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 4/4.

- System 1 (Measures 30-33):**
 - Strings:** Features a melodic line in the upper register with dynamic markings *f* and *ff*. The lower register provides harmonic support.
 - Synth Coo:** Plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with 'x' marks, indicating muted or percussive sounds.
 - Synth Bass:** Provides a steady bass line with quarter notes.
- System 2 (Measures 34-37):**
 - Strings:** Continues with sustained chords and melodic fragments, marked with *mf* and *mp*.
 - Synth Coo:** Maintains the rhythmic pattern, with some notes marked with 'x'.
 - Synth Bass:** Continues the bass line, with some notes marked with 'x'.
- System 3 (Measures 38-41):**
 - Strings:** Features a melodic line in the upper register, marked with a fermata over the final measure.
 - Synth Coo:** Continues the rhythmic pattern, with some notes marked with 'x'.
 - Synth Bass:** Continues the bass line, with some notes marked with 'x'.

Music Example 3.16, continued.

This is not the most *dissonant* music in the score. That honor goes to the ethnically inflected uptempo cue that we hear during the deaths of the filmmakers. But the atrocity leitmotif, although more tonal, is more unsettling – and one could well argue, despite the persistent association of both dissonance and ethnic difference with the monstrous in the horror

genre, that the atrocity leitmotif serves as the film's musical Other. And there is one final contextual wrinkle to consider. *Cannibal Holocaust* is built around a found-footage conceit, such that the second half of the film consists for the most part of footage taken by the doomed documentary crew. We are specifically told, by the projectionist of this film within the film, that the music is not a real part of the cannibal world: he has laid down a temp track to make the documentary footage more interesting. There are two potentially monstrous groups in *Cannibal Holocaust*, the filmmakers and the cannibals. The atrocity leitmotif is explicitly associated with the former.²⁹⁹

More or less the same dynamic appears in a more schematic – and less interesting – form in *Cannibal Holocaust*'s filmic doppelganger, *Cannibal Ferox* (Umberto Lenzi, 1981), where a central flashback depicting violence perpetrated against natives by a white man is scored with a dissonant and arrhythmic synthesizer cue, while the scenes of violence perpetrated by the natives are scored with quasi-orchestral rock (peppered with just a hint of ethnic percussion), and the framing scenes in New York are accompanied by disco and funk, which serve as the film's music of normality. *Cannibal Ferox* creates a sliding scale of musical alterity, ranging from the most normal, the safety of New York, where the only people who get killed are drug addicts, to the most "other," violence perpetrated by white men in the Amazon. Of the 1970s scores considered here, *Cannibal Ferox*'s music is the most explicit in its attempt to place the source for violence within mainstream white society. However, its depiction of the natives is far less sympathetic than that of *Cannibal Holocaust*. And there is a more unsettling question posed by the judgmental use of music in *Ferox* (and to a lesser extent, *Holocaust* as well). When ethnic music is associated with more justifiable, "normal" scenes of violence, does this mean that it is more normal for violence to be perpetrated by "ethnic" people? If we are told that the

299 Logically, the projectionist's comment should refer to all of the music in the second half of the film, including the non-diegetic "ethnic" cues. But it is the atrocity music that he refers to specifically.

violent acts perpetrated by the white characters are more horrific, are we meant to be outraged by the violence itself, or by the characters' failure to take up the white man's burden?

At this point, it is possible to begin identifying some broader trends. Stripped of all nuance, my historical argument boils down to this: In the older films, on the level of plot, the monstrous Other is at first associated tenuously with the ethnic other, but then explicitly identified with white elites. However, in the musical argument, the association of the ethnic and monstrous Others is almost never seriously challenged. By contrast, in the 1970s films, the alignment of the monstrous with western culture is much more ambiguous, but can be detected in both the plot and the music. This probably reflects changing attitudes towards race; it also probably reflects changing attitudes towards the role of music in the production of cinematic meaning.

The later films also allow us to revisit the question of the role of musical authenticity in horror scoring. The example of *I Walked With a Zombie* showed us that when it comes to ethnicity-driven horror, accurate depictions of ethnic music cannot be assumed, purely on the basis of their accuracy, not to play into the genre's inherently problematic racial politics. Turning to Craven's *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (1988), we find a case where musical authenticity is actively harmful, serving only to tar real people with a monstrous brush. Few films are less apologetic than *The Serpent and the Rainbow* about their demonization of voodoo. Although lip service is paid to the positive role the religion plays in the lives of its adherents, the bulk of the plot is devoted to the struggle between a white botanist, Dennis Alan (Bill Pullman), and Dargent Peytraud (Zakes Mokae), a menacing black Haitian witch doctor with ties to the Duvalier regime. More than once, white characters are victims of voodoo curses, and at the climax of the film, the villain is defeated by Alan's superior magic. This takes the specific form of a protective animal spirit he acquired during an earlier adventure in the Amazon – but we had already seen Alan's tutor defeated by Peytraud's voodoo, meaning that the magic

in question is specifically Alan's, and thus unambiguously white. In short, *The Serpent and the Rainbow* has the most regressive racial politics of any of the films considered in this chapter by a comfortable margin. And yet its depiction of voodoo music – limited to a handful of brief scenes during which Peytraud levels curses at his enemies – is the most accurate out of any film described in this study. The dazzlingly complex polyrhythms characteristic of the style, so pointedly absent in *I Walked With a Zombie*, are here brought out in force.

Most notable is the memorable dinner party sequence, in which Peytraud reaches out magically from Haiti to possess Alan's dinner companion in America. (This too is a throwback: rather than the flesh-eating ghouls of *Zombi*, the cannibal films, and all later zombie movies, we see again the white-woman-enslaved-by-black-magic complex characteristic of the earliest voodoo zombie films.) The sequence unfolds as follows: first we see Peytraud conducting a fanciful voodoo ceremony, scored with densely polyrhythmic diegetic drumming. As he approaches the camera, the diegetic sound is gradually joined by a menacing electronic drone. We then cut to Alan's dinner, where this music is replaced with a faint and apparently diegetic performance of Domenico Scarlatti's D Major piano sonata, L. 14. The juxtaposition of voodoo music and classical piano is a familiar one; two things, however, have changed. First of all, there is no longer any sense that the piano music could itself be the bearer of socially transgressive emotional excess. Scarlatti was a brilliant composer, but his music does not inspire abandon of this kind (especially not in uptempo major key sonatas such as L. 14). Second, in the post-studio sonic regime, classical music has lost any claim that it might have once had to being the universal music of subjective experience. The result is that the identification of this music with whiteness (and specifically high-class, cultured whiteness) is far more explicit than even in *I Walked With a Zombie*. As Peytraud's curse begins to take effect, and Alan's friend begins to lose control of herself, the synth drone enters on the soundtrack gain, slowly building in volume until it drowns out the Scarlatti. When she lunges across the table at him with a knife, the

voodoo drums reenter (although here they do not seem to be playing specifically *vodou* rhythms). “You are going to die!” she shouts, as Alan frantically tries to fend her off. “You have been warned!” But it is not her voice – it is Peytraud's.

The Serpent and the Rainbow is based on Wade Davis's book of the same name, an ostensibly non-fiction ethnobotanical study on the culture of Haitian *vodou*. Davis has been widely discredited, but nonetheless the film claims to be based on a true story, and Alan is clearly meant to be a fictionalized version of Davis himself. Rather than the Caribbean composite culture of many of the studio-era products, we travel to Haiti. And rather than an ambiguous voodoo-ish ceremony (which is all that we see, for instance, in *Chloe*), we are told that we are witnessing actual *vodou*. In short, despite its openly fantastic elements, the film is presented to us as a kind of reportage. As a result, the elements that ground the film in reality – including its authentic music – tend to make its ideology far more troubling. It's also worth noticing what is absent in the dinner party sequence: the entire “voodoo” cue lasts some fourteen seconds, so the music never gets a chance to develop over time (or even to establish much of a groove). As a result, we are unlikely to process the music as a distinct aesthetic good. There is also no attempt made to ground Peytraud's voodoo ceremony in the lives or the community of the practitioners, so the music never gets to establish itself as part of a social context. We could of course claim that this is, in itself, a kind of inaccuracy: as we have seen, Parker holds that the audience and performance context of a music are as important to its accurate presentation as any merely sonic detail.³⁰⁰ Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that *I Walked With a Zombie*, despite its inaccuracies and limitations, succeeds precisely where *The Serpent and the Rainbow* fails in both aesthetic and ideological terms.

It is also instructive to compare *The Serpent and the Rainbow* to one last film of the later tradition, Paul Maslansky's *The Zombies of Sugar Hill*, a blaxploitation horror piece from 1974.

300 Parker, “World Musics in Music Education.”

The film opens with a haze of electric piano chords and a synthesizer drone. We see the American International Pictures logo, superimposed over a flickering light in the distance, and then, when the image clears, a voodoo ceremony. Dancers gyrate, their faces painted, their bodies glistening with sweat, one bearing a snake. The camera dances too, now spinning, now swooping low, now losing the action through the thick jungle foliage. And over all of this, we hear – what could be less appropriate? – “Supernatural Voodoo Woman,” a light Motown funk number by The Originals. Eventually, a dancer falls to the ground, screaming, possessed. The air is full of menace. The stage seems set for another exploitative treatment of the religion and its adherents.



Image 3.9a: *The Zombies of Sugar Hill:* The artificial voodoo ceremony...



Image 3.9b: ... revealed as artifice.

And then suddenly, there is applause. The lights dim, and when they rise again we realize that this was not a religious service, but a performance, and that we are not in the jungle but rather watching the floor show at a nightclub. What the opening sequence of *Sugar Hill* gets right, that every other voodoo zombie movie gets wrong, is that it acknowledges its depiction of voodoo as a depiction. It pulls back the curtain, making the audience conscious of our status as spectators, and the onscreen treatment of voodoo as spectacle. The ghostly separation of the visual elements from the flagrantly inappropriate Motown music only serves to highlight this.

Although our investigation of musical appropriation in horror scoring has focused primarily on what the music means to outsiders, it must be remembered that *vodou* is a real religion, practiced by real people. The ethics of its representation do not depend on a nebulous treatment of "whiteness" and "blackness" but on its potential effect on the people involved – and the same basic argument holds true for the depiction of *other* ethnic others (such as the Yanomami, for instance), and indeed for a politicized monstrous Other of any kind: children,

women, religious minorities, etc. If "authenticity" makes us forget this, authenticity becomes a dangerous narcotic. The strength of *Sugar Hill*'s nightclub sequence is that, by foregrounding the spectacle as spectacle, it denies us this solace. Considered as a whole, *Sugar Hill* is not necessarily a very good movie, and its racial attitudes are nothing to emulate. (Any depiction of *vodou* that ends with the important *lwa* Baron Samedi dragging an unwilling white woman off to sexual torment in hell has gone pretty thoroughly off the rails, somewhere along the line.) But its opening scene, in its elegant brevity, tells us more about the politics of "ethnic" music in horror than any further words I could write.

Conclusion

Not every horror score is overtly political. As noted above, there are still many films that simply map good and evil onto consonance and dissonance, or onto the division between tonality and atonality, or that between music of any sort and disordered sound. If Wood's specific theory of horror is correct, even these may have a covert ideological basis, and it may be that by applying the lens I have developed here – that is, by searching the scores for a polarization between a music of normality and a musical Other that can be associated with some marginalized social group or disavowed internal desire – we will be able to tease this basis out. But this search may also be futile. Some films may in fact be ideologically neutral, or their ideological basis may be so deeply hidden that no musical analysis can drag it into view. It is more important, therefore, that we remember this approach when we encounter films like the ones treated above, where the music is (I think) self-evidently implicated in the genre's politics of alterity. For it would certainly be possible – easy, even – to write a depoliticized account of each of these scores, focusing purely on the relative harshness and suavity of the various musical gestures. Such an analysis would not even be wrong: certainly, these films do contain dissonance, and sudden jumps in volume, and horror timbres such as bells and organs. But such

an analysis would miss most of what makes these films compelling, and exciting, and in some cases even what makes them horrific.

Chapter 4. Music in the Western: The Cowboy's Epic Situation

Once she thought the stars were wishful. Once she asked the stars to watch, the close, warm, happy stars that drew off now to shame her. Music had sounded then, and feet skipped in a dance, and it had sounded tonight and other feet had skipped, making of the fiddle's wail the opposite of sorrow, and Hig had sung a song of love and death that smiling people said was mighty pretty. Lost echo of music and sh-h-h of the spring and cold eyes of the stars.

– A.B. Guthrie, *The Way West*

Introduction

Far more so than those of any other genre, Western scores constitute a closed system. Not coincidentally, out of the genres treated in this study, Westerns are by far the least concerned with depicting the characters' emotional lives, musically or otherwise. Music in the Western is marked by a curious externality, given to appearances rather than essences, performance rather than underscoring, abrupt stops and starts rather than subtle builds and fades, and song forms rather than either static textures or organic development. At their most characteristic, Western scores give the lie to standard accounts of film music as unheard, supplementary, and psychological. It is for this reason that Western scores above all others require us to understand a distinct *system* of musical meaning. But these differences notwithstanding, the first step in our approach will be the same as for every other genre. Before we find a framework that will account for Western scoring, we must account for the Western in itself.³⁰¹

³⁰¹ As ever, this requires us to define a generic corpus, although all such definitions are subjective (as noted in the opening chapter), in this case I will pause to defend two important points. First, I will exclude the singing cowboy phenomenon out of hand (save for a few references here and there to specific films), in part because our experience of watching Westerns today is not informed by an expectation that cowboys will burst into song, and partially because I think the singing cowboy must be considered against the backdrop of the musical proper, which is not treated in this dissertation. Second, I make no firm distinction between national schools. The Italian “spaghetti” Westerns are too important to our current understanding of the genre and its music to allow any other approach.

I. The Western as Epic

Existing Theories

To the extent that there is a dominant theory of the Western, it is Jim Kitses's claim that the films can be reduced to a series of binary oppositions between the archetypes of Garden and Wilderness, but there are many other approaches.³⁰² Some hold that Westerns are about the struggle of individual and society, others that Westerns are about the proper use of violence and the conflicting demands of justice and the law, and still others that Westerns arrange the socioeconomic groups of frontier society into the stark binary oppositions that Levi-Strauss found characteristic of myth.³⁰³ Many of these theories obviously can be mapped onto each other; what is at issue is which opposition (if any) is fundamental. Interestingly enough, *all* of these structures are at various times reflected by Western film scoring practice. Scheurer, Brownrigg and Kalinak have each in their own ways documented the Western's limning of different socioeconomic groups through music, and Kalinak also provides an excellent discussion of the Western's musical treatment of the conflict between individual and society.³⁰⁴

302 Jim Kitses, *Horizons West: Anthony Mann, Budd Boetticher, Sam Peckinpah: Studies of Authorship Within the Western* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969), especially pages 7-25.

303 The conflict of individual and society, and the treatment of violence, have both been mentioned by numerous writers, but in particular see Robert Warshow "Movie Chronicle: The Westerner" in *The Immediate Experience: Movies, Comics, Theatre and Other Aspects of Popular Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 105-124. and Andre Bazin "The Western: Or the American film Par Excellence," *Film Theory: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies* 2 (2004): 130-6. The diversity of frontier society appears frequently in passing, and is discussed at somewhat greater length in the existing scholarly research on the genre's music, such as Kathryn Kalinak's *How the West was Sung: Music in the Westerns of John Ford* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

304 Scheurer, *Music and Mythmaking In Film*, 140-175. Brownrigg, "Film Music and Film Genre," 62-111. Kalinak, *ibid.*, 77-86. Kalinak's book is generally excellent, but most of the traits she identifies as Fordian are in fact simply Western. (She herself notes that Ford's work casts a long shadow over the genre, making it difficult to zero in on his personal style.)

The musical treatment of violence has received less attention, but is sometimes discussed as a property of Ennio Morricone's scores for the stylized Westerns of Sergio Leone.³⁰⁵ (Even a cursory survey of the genre shows that this trend is actually much broader, however: limiting ourselves to extremely clear examples, we would only need to view the musical buildup to the showdowns in *High Noon* (Fred Zinnemann, 1952), *Red River* (Howard Hawks, 1948), *Duel in the Sun* (King Vidor, 1946), and *Rio Bravo* (Hawks, 1959)).

Nevertheless, although current theories have great explanatory value for certain aspects of the genre and its music, they do not quite hit on what is to my mind the single most characteristically *Western* element of the Western, which is the genre's status as an epic, marked less by its content than by a characteristic narrative *voice* which is reflected as much in the music as in any other aspect of the filmmaking.

Wilderness and Garden

As noted in passing above, Jim Kitses claims that the Western is concerned with the idea of manifest destiny and the particular vision of U.S. history as a process of "making a Garden of the Wilderness."³⁰⁶ This line of thought leans heavily on Levi-Strauss, and makes the Western

305 Scott MacKenzie, "Closing Arias: Operatic montage in the closing sequences of the trilogies of Coppola and Leone," in *A Danish Journal of Film Studies* 6 (1998): 109-123.

306 The use of Garden-Wilderness imagery to describe the American national character predates Kitses, and in fact predates America. It seems to originate as a biblical reference to Isaiah 51:3 "For the LORD shall comfort Zion: he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the LORD." Early modern commentators generally understood this language as a metaphor, with the Garden representing a church and the Wilderness representing civil society, but some of the New England Puritans de-metaphorized the "Wilderness" part of the opposition and applied it to the American landscape. See for instance Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana* (Hartford: Silas Andrus, 1820), 74. In the early 20th century, the imagery became associated with Western expansion, and the association of the Garden with the church essentially disappeared. Brigham H. Roberts, in his confusingly titled *History of Joseph Smith, the Prophet, by himself* (Salt Lake

into a kind of national myth in which the master tropes of Garden, on the one hand, and Wilderness, on the other, are expanded into an array of binary oppositions between town and desert, train and horse, farmer and cowhand, and so on.

Figure 4.1: Garden-Wilderness oppositions, after Kitses

<u>Wilderness</u>	<u>Garden</u>
Gunslinger	Sheriff
Saloon Girl	Schoolmarm
Horse	Railroad
Desert	Town
Cowhands	Farmers
Native Americans	White (specifically Anglo) Men

We should note that the Garden-Wilderness dichotomy does not imply an opposition of good and evil, for there are vices and virtues proper to each pole.³⁰⁷ Nor are Westerns always triumphalist celebrations of Westward expansion. Triumphalist Westerns do exist, but the genre more typically greets the closing of the frontier with melancholy and unease. The Western rarely asks us to believe that manifest destiny was good. It merely asks us to believe that it was inevitable.

For Kitses, the structure described above is essentially static, or perhaps more accurately atemporal. The myth of the West, defined by the tension between these poles, is the raw material of the Western. What is *done* with it in any given film is a matter for the individual filmmaker, and does not alter the underlying opposition, which is synchronic and therefore

City: Deseret News, 1902), writes that the Mormons "have subdued the desert, made a garden of the wilderness, and built a thousand thriving cities" (63). The film Western could be seen as the next stage in the evolution of this durable idea.

³⁰⁷ This stretches back into the Puritan usage of the terms: see for instance Samuel Danforth, *A Brief Recognition of New-England's Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge: S.G. & M.F. 1671), <http://declaringamerica.com/danforth-a-brief-recognition-of-new-englands-errand-into-the-wilderness-1670/>.

unchanging. (We should remember that Kitses is one of the best advocates for the fruitful combination of ritual and auteurist genre criticism: to an extent he needs the myth to be a static tension so that his chosen auteurs can move within it.) To my mind, however, this misses a critical point. The relationship between Garden and Wilderness in the Western, and indeed in 20th century thought on the West in general, is not one of opposition but rather of *transition*. And so we must combine Kitses' array of oppositions with another theory, which holds that the Western is not our culture's national myth, but rather its national epic.

Several critics, such as André Bazin, John Cawelti, and Michael Coyne, have referred to Westerns as epics.³⁰⁸ By this, however, they generally mean only that the films are a mirror in which our society sees itself. What existing accounts of the Western's epic-ness miss is that the films never show us what we are, but rather what we once were – and this in fact is the epic's defining quality. As Mikhail Bakhtin writes in "Epic and Novel,"

The epic as a genre in its own right may, for our purposes, be characterized by three constitutive features: (1) a national epic past – in Goethe's and Schiller's terminology the 'absolute past' – serves as the subject for the epic; (2) national tradition (not personal experience and the free thought that grows out of it) serves as the source for the epic; (3) an absolute epic distance separates the epic world from contemporary reality.³⁰⁹

308 Bazin, "The Western." Michael Coyne, *The Crowded Prairie: American National Identity in the Hollywood Western* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998), especially pages 23-29. John Cawelti, *The Six-Gun Mystique* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1971, expanded and revised as *The Six-Gun Mystique Sequel* in 1977). Cawelti's is the closest to the theory I outline here, in that he sees the Western as a way for our culture to conceive of its past. However, for Cawelti this is conditioned by the actual events of American history, which are recast by the films as a Manichean struggle between good and evil. As will become clear, neither of these points have much to do with what makes the Western epic, in my opinion.

309 Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 13.

It is in these terms that we should conceive of the Western as well.³¹⁰ The world of the Western is not simply past. It is a hermetically sealed off long-ago time, fundamentally inaccessible to us. The Western shows us who we must have been, in the old days, to have become who we are now, and if it changes in response to America's changing self-image, it does so only by showing us the *preconditions* for our current state. The characters of the Western are not recognizably human. They are archetypes, tokens, expressions of the foundational values and conflicts that shaped our culture. And we are separated from both the world and the characters by an absolute epic distance – which manifests both in the narrative substance and, crucially, in the method of storytelling. When we look to music in the Western (or indeed to editing, performance, cinematography, dialogue, and so on), we should look for gestures that tend to reinforce this distance.

310 Two objections to the use of Bakhtin's terminology ought to be addressed here. As Masaki Mori has pointed out, Bakhtin, like his major sources, Goethe and Schiller, focuses primarily on the Hellenic epics. His model works much less well on certain later epics such as the medieval *chansons de geste*, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and (Mori's own preferred texts) John Keats' *The Fall of Hyperion* and Kenji Miyazawa's *A Night on the Galaxy Railroad*. There are even greater difficulties inherent in adopting Bakhtin's theory to the living epic traditions of Serbia, Tibet, and West Africa. But this is only a flaw if we expect Bakhtin's construction to apply to everything a disinterested observer could call an epic, which would be a mistake. Any theory of genre is a canon-forming argument: the epics that do not fit Bakhtin's particular model are not epics in Bakhtin's particular sense. Masaki Mori, *Epic Grandeur: Towards a Comparative Poetics of the Epic* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996), 35-44.

The second and more pertinent objection is that Bakhtin's model of the epic cannot possibly have influenced the development of the Western. "Epic and Novel" was not written until 1940, nor widely known even in Soviet circles until the 1970s, and remains obscure outside of academia today. However, I am not arguing for a direct line of influence. Rather, I am suggesting that Bakhtin's explicit theory of the epic is matched in many respects by an implicit theory of the epic that can be derived from Western films and novels. Bakhtin had little enough in common with a writer like Owen Wister or a filmmaker like Zinnemann, but they lived through the same times, and perhaps most importantly, stood at the same distance from the Hellenic epics that seem to have in each case formed their primary model.

Wilderness-Frontier-Garden

With the epic nature of the Western in mind, I suggest expanding the Garden-Wilderness dichotomy proposed by Kitses into three categories. Although images of Manifest Destiny depend on a binary opposition between the Garden and the Wilderness, these terms are not simply alternatives. They are, rather points on a trajectory. Terms move from Wilderness *to* Garden, and the mid-point of this trajectory is by no means less important than the two poles. (Note that in the classic visual depictions of manifest destiny, it is precisely this middle position that is occupied by the allegorical personification of Manifest Destiny herself.) Between the Wilderness and the Garden, there is the Frontier, and although this is generally thought of as a location (“the meeting point between savagery and civilization,”³¹¹ in Frederick Jackson Turner's words), in the Western it is better thought of as a temporal category (i.e., a when rather than a where), that falls between the two more stable conditions. What is depicted in the Western is not a conflict between these forces but rather the interval during which one gives way to the other.

The Wilderness, thus understood, is the infinite sweep of pre-history, epic time, supremely undifferentiated and unbounded, Bakhtin's “absolute past.” The Garden, by contrast, is not the just-settled frontier village but rather our *own* society – as of this writing, my personal Garden is New York City in the year 2012 – and our ordered progression of clock-and-calendar time. Neither Garden nor Wilderness is likely to appear in the Western in its pure form: at best, we see the stable terms briefly evoked at the start or the end of the film.³¹² Rather, the Western

311 Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1921), 3.

312 There is also certain kind of recurring musical cue in Westerns, typically associated with broad shots of the landscape, which may evoke the pure Wilderness in its unspoiled/idyllic aspect. Michael Beckerman, in an exchange with William Rosar, describes this as “pastoral” music, characterized by “drones, prolonged consonances, wide-spaced intervals, and often pentatonic figures,” depicting a universe in which “time is circular, [and] people are primitive

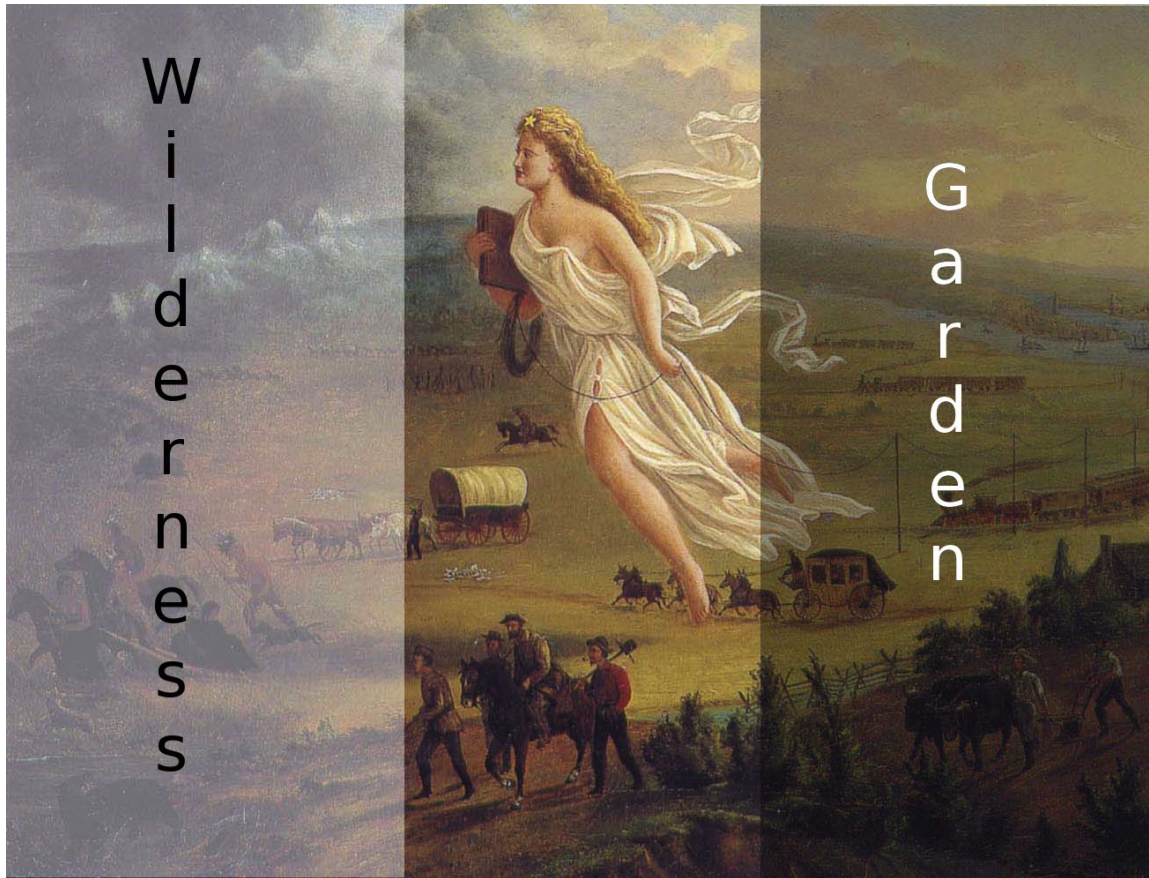


Image 4.1 – Images of Manifest Destiny, such as John Gast's famous *American Progress*, demonstrate the basic ideological structure of the Western.

focuses on the Frontier itself, which is the apocalyptic transition from one state to the other. This middle term is important because the Garden and the Wilderness can't interact with each other directly. This is exactly what Bakhtin means by an absolute epic distance: the Wilderness cannot develop into the Garden of its own accord, because epic time is defined by its non-developmental character. The Wilderness needs to end, pass, die, or fade. Only then do we enter the dim beginnings of our own clock-and-calendar time.³¹³

but syncopatedly elemental.” Michael Beckerman and William Rosar, “The Idyllic Sublime: A Dialogue on the Pastoral Style in Westerns,” *Journal of Film Music* 2, no. 2-4 (2009): 251-262.

313 As is so often the case, we can find here productive cross-linkages with other genres. Consider that the atavistic horror-monster is also prior to time; and that melodrama is firmly ensconced within calendar time, less because of any temporal mechanism than because of the

Of course, real-world calendar time goes back much earlier than the Old West. Indeed, ordered time held sway over our continent before the arrival of Europeans, and even before the migration of the “indigenous” peoples across the Bering land bridge. Our sense that the history of the West begins with its settling by the United States (with time before that point proceeding in a sort of non-developmental cyclical wash) is not a historical fact but an ideological and/or psychological nationalistic construct. It is this construct that explains the short shrift given in Westerns to the various peoples who inhabited the space prior to these events: as part of the long-ago absolute past, their actions can have had no meaningful effect on the virgin landscape, or so the ideology tells us. It is not only Native Americans that are elided thus. Spanish colonists in the American southwest predated American activity in that area by many years, but in Hawks's *Red River* these people exist only as an orientalist other to be conquered and displaced, and in Samuel Fuller's *The Baron of Arizona* (1950), they are presented as essentially *fictional*.³¹⁴ Contrary to the speculations of some theorists, then, the actual real-world events of the settling of the West are only one model for the structure of these stories, and perhaps a rather unimportant one.³¹⁵ Rather, the Western is an expression of a basic narrative structure – an undifferentiated state gives way to a differentiated state after a crisis – which we can trace this through a very wide variety of domains. We see it in Melanie Klein and Jacques Lacan's accounts of developmental psychology, for instance, which depend on the transition from the

marked *absence* of “firsts and bests” in a fallen melodramatic world. Small wonder, then, that in horror-Westerns such as *Ravenous* (Antonia Bird, 1999), the horrific elements are generally properties of the Wilderness, while in melodrama-Westerns such as *Duel in the Sun* (King Vidor, 1946), the melodramatic elements are aligned with the Garden.

314 Briefly, *The Baron of Arizona* involves a scheme to steal land from the United States government by forging documents that prove the land had been granted to the con-man's family by the Spanish crown. Such land grants did exist, but the film dwells exclusively on the forger's activities.

315 The most prominent of these writers are Cawelti, *The Six-Gun Mystique*, and Coyne, *The Crowded Prairie*.

infant’s essentially undifferentiated worldview to the fully differentiated subject-object relations of the symbolic order. Or we could look to cellular biology, where the apocalyptic transition from gametes to embryo (or from healthy tissue to cancerous cell) must precede the cascade of clockwork growth and division that follows. Or to evolutionary biology, and the apocalyptic rise of the first true life from the primordial soup. Or again to cosmogony, with the Wilderness as the primal chaos, God's breath moving on the face of the waters, the Garden as the created universe, and the Frontier as the Big Bang, the Let There Be Light, the entry of *logos* into a world, created, in Augustine's view, "not in time but with time."³¹⁶

Figure 4.2 – Garden-Frontier-Wilderness oppositions/transitions

Wilderness...	F R O N T I E R	... gives way to Garden
Hero isolated from society...		... so that he can be integrated into society
System of personal justice, honor, and vigilantism...		... replaced with rule of law.
Different social groups are highlighted...		... so that they can be forged into a monoculture.

The same basic temporal structure accounts for Kitses' Garden-Wilderness dichotomies, and for the various theories of the Western introduced above. The sheriff does not merely oppose the gunslinger: either he defeats him, or the gunslinger changes course and becomes a sheriff himself. The saloon girl is eliminated or taught to mend her ways, and so on. Andre Bazin argues that the Western turns on the conflict between violence and justice, law and vigilantism.³¹⁷ Reading this through Kitses, we can understand that vigilantism is the Wilderness term and law the Garden term. Our own society (from which our sense of Garden is

316 Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, xi, 6.

317 Bazin, “The Western.”

derived) has no place for vigilante justice, but the pre-symbolic state of nature has only this (for no law can precede the letter), and on the frontier, and thus in the Western, we see vigilante justice *giving way* to law. Robert Warshow holds that Westerns dramatize a conflict between the aristocratic individual and the community.³¹⁸ By doing so, the films suggest that in our own (Garden) world, individuals must check their desires for the good of the collective, and that although there was room in the epic age for people to shape their own destinies, the epic age is past.³¹⁹ The Western doesn't depict the condition of unfettered freedom, rather, it shows the doom of that condition. It is in this light that we should interpret the genre's deaths, its settlings-down, and its iconic image of the hero's slow ride into the sunset. Individualists often triumph in the short run in Westerns, but I have never encountered an example that suggested their world could be sustained. They can only choose whether to accept the rise of the new order gracefully or grudgingly. And finally, the frontier's wide variety of social and economic groups are only shown so that these diverse elements may be integrated into a monoculture over the course of the film, or, more troublingly, purified into one.

Again, much of this has nothing to do with actual history. Rather, it is what the genre is asking us to believe. Our rigidly ordered time (which is not quite as rigid as all that – but the Western tells us it is!) is founded on an earlier timeless stasis. Our orderly and lawbound society (not in fact so orderly) is founded on an archaic order of personal violence. Our peaceful and homogenous culture (a pure confection) depends on the flattening and stratification of a more chaotic polity. In every case, the Western creates a sense of distance between the audience's Garden and the primal Wilderness, and places its own narrative, the Frontier, in the middle.

Of course, referring to clock-and-calendar time as “ours” may make certain assumptions

³¹⁸ Warshow, “Film Chronicle: The Westerner.”

³¹⁹ This aspect of the genre's treatment of individuality is discussed at length by Judith Hess Wright, “Genre Films and the Status Quo,” in *Film Genre: Theory and Criticism*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (London: The Scarecrow Press, 1977), 53-61.

about who “we” are. As Judith Halberstam has written (drawing from the work of Samuel Delany), whatever time itself may be, our experience of time is very much up-for-grabs, and therefore rigidly segmented “scientific” time is not a politically neutral fact of life.³²⁰ Certain groups that are systematically excluded from mainstream social formations have found in alternative temporalities a kind of free ludic space that offers a refuge (if only temporarily) from the inimical mainstream. When I refer to “our ordered progression of clock-and-calendar time,” these alternative temporalities are obviously excluded.

Perhaps the most noteworthy aspect of the “queer time” Halberstam and Delany describe is its *nondevelopmental* character. The normative heterosexual relationship progresses naturally from meeting to dating to courting to marriage to childbirth to sexless senescence. Non-normative relationships, homosexual or otherwise, are generally barred from this progression (although many are fighting to remove these obstacles). In that it is a nondevelopmental time, the Wilderness time is arguably a kind of queer time, and with this in mind it is worth briefly considering the treatment of non-normative sexuality in the Western. Male homosexual relationships in these films are generally depicted as a kind of joyful but juvenile and non-productive ground-state that must be broken out of (typically through the death of one of the partners), before the surviving character can graduate to a more normative sort of sexuality. In *Red River*, once Matt (Montgomery Clift) has put aside childish things and assumed the mantle of adult responsibility, his ambiguous object of desire, Cherry Valance (John Ireland), is conveniently gunned down to make way for a “mature,” that is, matrimonial and procreative, relationship with a woman. The recent remake of *The 3:10 to Yuma* (James Mangold, 2007), though disappointing on the musical front, is fascinating in its treatment of sexuality, juxtaposing a “natural” father-son relationship against an “unnatural” homosexual

320 Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: NYU Press, 2005).

relationship of the *erastes-eromenos* type between the outlaw Ben Wade (Russell Crowe) and his second-in-command, Charlie Prince (Ben Foster), who is sneeringly referred to as “Charlie Princess.” Both of these relationships end with one partner dead – but where the father's death is the *productive* engine of his son's tearful maturation, Wade's killing of Prince is seen as the culmination of an *unproductive* relationship that was, as it were, going nowhere.

There is no tradition of Westerns that deal with lesbian relationships, even coded ones. Perhaps the Western is too fundamentally guy-ish. It's rare enough for two female characters to share screen time, let alone a closer connection. However, we do find a surprisingly large number of female characters who dabble in transvestitism or other signifiers of “mannishness.” (Even *Johnny Guitar* (Nicholas Ray, 1954), which has a certain reputation as a “lesbian camp classic,” may be better understood in these terms.³²¹ Its two female leads, although individually coded as queer, are overtly hostile to each other throughout the film.) Here too, the characters are typically shown as inhabiting a sort of infinite floating time up until the denouement of the film, at which point they are either killed, like Marlene Dietrich's characters in both *Destry Rides Again* (George Marshall, 1939) and *Rancho Notorious* (Fritz Lang, 1952), or stripped of their masculine accoutrements and shoehorned into a marriage, like Angie Dickinson's character in *Rio Bravo*.

Although the transition from Wilderness to Garden in the Western is often viewed with a certain melancholy, the sexualized version discussed above is much less ambivalent. We may shed a tear for the passing of the West, but no one's ever even asked to cry for Feathers' lost independence, or for the death of poor Cherry Valance.

321 Jennifer Peterson, “The Competing Tunes of *Johnny Guitar*: Liberalism, Sexuality, Masquerade,” *Cinema Journal* 35, no. 3 (1996): 9. Peterson's analysis is illuminating: the villain, Emma (Mercedes McCambridge), is depicted as a “maniacal dyke” (14) whose single-mindedness is central to her villainy, whereas the heroine, Vienna (Joan Crawford) is valorized for her ability to move fluidly between gender positions. At the film's end, Emma is killed, but Vienna – whose queerness was arguably a kind of pose – is paired with a male love interest.

Epic Self-Referentiality

Epics – and here I mean epic poems, national epics like the Iliad, the Kalevala, and the Gilgamesh Epic – do tend, like Westerns, to be about violence, and about the foundational periods of nation-states, and the taming of a wild society, and the conflicting demands of honor and law, and the passing of the heroic age. But in addition to their shared subject matter, epics are united by a characteristic *aesthetic* quality, and this is the primary justification for numbering the Western among them. Contrary to the advice of every creative writing teacher ever, the epic privileges telling over showing, thus calling attention to its status as a tale that is told, and to the teller of the tale. Homer interposes himself between us and the Odyssey. The Mahabharata begins with an account of the writing of the Mahabharata. The most extensive version of the Gilgamesh epic begins with a remarkable invocation not only of its writing, but also of its reading:

He had seen everything, had experienced all emotions
 from exaltation to despair, had been granted a vision
 into the great mystery, the secret places,
 the primeval days before the Flood. He had journeyed
 to the edge of the world and made his way back, exhausted
 but whole. He had carved his trials on stone tablets,
 had restored the holy Eanna Temple and the massive
 wall of Uruk, which no city on earth can equal.
 See how its ramparts gleam like copper in the sun.
 Climb the stone staircase, more ancient than the mind can imagine,
 approach the Eanna Temple, sacred to Ishtar,
 a temple that no kind has equaled in size or beauty,
 walk on the wall of Uruk, follow its course
 around the city, inspect its mighty foundations,
 examine its brickwork, how masterfully it is built,
 observe the land it encloses: the palm trees, the gardens,
 the orchards, the glorious palaces and temples, the shops
 and marketplaces, the houses, the public squares.

Find the cornerstone and under it the copper box
 that is marked with his name. Unlock it. Open the lid.
 Take out the tablet of lapis lazuli. Read
 how Gilgamesh suffered all and accomplished all.³²²

This opening passage was written – scholars believe – by an Akkadian scribe named Sin-Leqi-Unninni, who compiled and collated the Gilgamesh legends into a single coherent text sometime between 1000 and 1300 BC. The tale itself predates his writing by as much as a thousand years.³²³ Nothing in the Western is of so ancient a vintage, of course, but it is quite instructive to compare Sin-Leqi-Unninni's introduction to that of another author, Owen Wister, whose *The Virginian: a Horseman of the Plains* (1902) is usually held up as the first true Western novel.³²⁴

Any narrative which presents faithfully a day and a generation is of necessity historical; and this one presents Wyoming between 1874 and 1890.

Had you left New York or San Francisco at ten o'clock this morning, by noon the day after to-morrow you could step out at Cheyenne. There you would stand at the heart of the world that is the subject of my picture, yet you would

322 *Gilgamesh: A New English Version*, ed. and trans. Stephen Mitchell (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010).

323 Sin-Leqi-Unninni's tablets, then, are not the ones referred to in the text, which were carved by Gilgamesh himself. The palpable gap between the text-within-the-text and text-we-have-today is highly characteristic of the epic. The tablets described in the Gilgamesh epic are lapis lazuli, which would be wildly extravagant: we cannot demonstrate that no lapis edition of the text ever existed, but the work comes down to us on clay. Likewise, nobody reading the Mahabharata would assume that *their* manuscript was the one originally transcribed by Ganesha. Most bards who recited the Iliad were not Homer, and their audience would not have forgotten this. We will return to this distinction.

324 Owen Wister, *The Virginian: A Horseman of the Plains* (New York: MacMillan, 1902). On the history of the literary Western, see Cawelti, *The Six-Gun Mystique*, and Richard Etulain, "Origins of the Western," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 5, no. 4 (1972): 799-805. Wister, interestingly enough, saw his own work as a belonging to the genre of historical fiction, and wrote this introduction with the intent of supporting that claim.

look around you in vain for the reality. It is a vanished world. No journeys, save those which memory can take, will bring you to it now. The mountains are there, far and shining, and the sunlight, and the infinite earth, and the air that seems forever the true fountain of youth, – but where is the buffalo, and the wild antelope, and where the horseman with his pasturing thousands? So like its old self does the sage-brush seem when revisited, that you wait for the horseman to appear.

But he will never come again. He rides in his historic yesterday. You will no more see him gallop out of the unchanging silence than you will see Columbus on the unchanging sea come sailing from Palos with his caravels.

And yet the horseman is still so near our day that in some chapters of this book, which were published separate at the close of the nineteenth century, the present tense was used. It is true no longer. In those chapters it has been changed, and verbs like 'is' and 'have' now read 'was' and 'had.' Time has flowed faster than my ink.³²⁵

The equation of the cowboy with Columbus, here, has the same effect as Sin-Leqi-Unninni's claim that the lapis tablets lie beneath the cornerstone of Uruk's wall: these tales, we are told, are the very foundation of the reader's society.³²⁶ Wister goes on to characterize the vanished world of the West as a world of peaks and bests occupied by titans. Of the cowboy, he writes that

325 Wister, *ibid.*, ix. It is worth noting again that Wister wrote this in 1902. Let us not suppose that the retrospective nature of the Western is a baroque post-Hollywood affectation: it is the very stuff of the genre. That said, precisely *because* it is the stuff of the genre, each new generation of Western filmmakers must stage its art as a departure from all past art. It would be foolish, perhaps, to claim Ford's relationship to the West was fresh and naïve, and Peckinpah's valedictory and cynical. But each iteration of cynicism must needs recast its predecessor in the role of the naïf. Should the genre persist, even Peckinpah with time will come to have been naïve.

326 Wister's comparison is the more striking in that there is no actual connection between the cowboy and our nation's origins. He could have written about Columbus, after all! He chose not to. Later in the book, he explicitly equates his cowboy protagonist to the Revolutionary War hero John Stark. He could have written about the Revolution! Instead, he chose to claim that the cowboys were *as* important, simply through the tenor of their lives, as any explorer or founding father.

“Whatever he did, he did with his might.”³²⁷ He also complains that the modern world pales by comparison. “A transition has followed the horseman of the plains; a shapeless state, a condition of men and manners as unlovely as that moment in the year when winter is gone and spring not come, and the face of Nature is ugly.”³²⁸ For Wister as for Sin-Leqi-Unninni, the vanished epic past is both the basis of modern society and qualitatively greater than that society could ever be. Furthermore, strikingly, each work foregrounds its status as a made thing through talk of ink and tablets.

Epics, then, including Westerns, are characterized by self-consciousness as much as by grandeur. They are conscious of their status as stories, and of the distance that separates the story from the events it records. But where older epics focus on images of reading, writing, and bardic recitation, the film Western, in keeping with cinema's status as a multimedia art, uses a broad spectrum of *mise-en-abyme* effects to call attention to multiple media, including the written word, oral storytelling, painting, photography, and cinema itself – and also, of course, music.³²⁹

327 Wister, *The Virginian*, ix.

328 Ibid. Wister goes on to suggest that our current fallen state is only temporary one, and that the golden age will eventually come again.

329 In a recent article on the narratological effects of film music, Nick Davis suggests referring to these sorts of effects as “cognitive mapping” because *mise-en-abyme* originally referred to heraldic devices that contained complete internal versions of themselves, and it would be “uncharacteristic of narrative in a given instance to bid for complete internal self-mapping.” Davis, “Inside/Outside the Klein Bottle,” *Music, Sound, and the Moving Image* 6, no. 1 (2012): 12 and 12 n.3. Considering the broad currency that the term *mise-en-abyme* has acquired, this seems like insufficient reason for discarding it. Nevertheless, we ought to recognize that its narratological application is far less specific than the original heraldic usage, and may include 1) a work of art that contains a complete miniature version of itself, 2) a work of art that contains a work of art bearing overt similarities to the frame narrative, and 3) a work of art that prominently features any other work of art whatsoever, especially if this calls attention to the way that the artwork is constructed. In any of these cases, the point is that when our attention is called to the formal design of the work-within-the-work, we are also made aware of generally

Mise-en-Abyme: The Written Word



Image 4.2: Opening sequence of *Red River*, Hawks (1948)

To open a film with an explicit gesture to its status as a written narrative is by no means a trait of the Western alone (as we can see from, for instance, Disney's *Cinderella* (Clyde Geronimi, Hamilton Luske, and Wilfred Jackson, 1950) and Peter Jackson's *The Fellowship of the Ring* (2001)). Westerns use this device very frequently, however, and by any standard there is something remarkable about a film like *Red River* (Hawks, 1948), which continues to feature cutaways to the pages of the "book" well beyond the opening credits. Reminders of the film's status as text at the beginning and end of its running time, when the illusion of cinematic continuity is weak, are relatively trivial. Including these references in the middle of the film is extremely disruptive.³³⁰

hidden aspects of the formal design of the frame work. Overtly shoddy characterization in the novel-within-the-novel will remind us that the frame novel too has characterization, even if the novels are otherwise unrelated.

330 An interesting example of a non-Western that does something similar is the classic film

Mise-en-Abyme: Oral Storytelling



Image 4.3 – *Destry Rides Again*, Dimmsdale regales the townspeople with the elder Destry's exploits.

Westerns also call attention to oral storytelling. As Sarah Kozloff notes, voiceover narration is a particular trait of the genre, frequently serving as the audible equivalent of *Red River's* book shots.³³¹ Storytelling is also used *within* the diegesis, in ways both subtle and

noir *Double Indemnity* (Billy Wilder, 1944), for which see Royal Brown, *Overtones and Undertones*, 120-132. Here it is not a visual depiction of writing that continues to recur throughout the film, but a returning use of diegetically justified voice-over narration. This doesn't mean that reflexivity does not mark any genre, but rather that it marks more than one. Noir's use of these techniques is generally more subtle than the Western's, however. As Brown notes, each time *Double Indemnity's* narrative is punctured by the narration, we hear a repeated musical cue – but the melodic material here is self-effacing, and seems interstitial at first blush. *Double Indemnity* is self-conscious about its status as a text, but it does not wallow in it the way that *Red River* does.

331 Sarah Kozloff, *Invisible Storytellers: Voice-Over Narration in American Fiction Film* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 73-4.

strident. At the low end of the scale, we have films like *High Noon* (Fred Zinnemann, 1952) and *Destry Rides Again*, where the larger-than-life characters of Frank Miller and Destry's father are established primarily through stories told by other characters rather than through flashbacks or cutaways. Less subtle are films that explicitly use storytelling as a framing device, such as *The Baron of Arizona* (Samuel Fuller, 1950) and the 2010 version of *True Grit* (Joel and Ethan Coen). Least subtle of all, probably, is John Huston's *The Life and Times of Judge Roy Bean* (1972), in which various characters take turns talking about the titular judge, either in voiceover or directly to the camera, always using the special cadence of storytelling. ("The first time I saw Judge Roy Bean. . .") Huston's film is an utterly baroque concoction, and probably functions more as a commentary on the genre than an instance of it, but all genre films are commentaries to a degree.

***Mise-en-Abyme*: Painting, Photography, and Cinema**

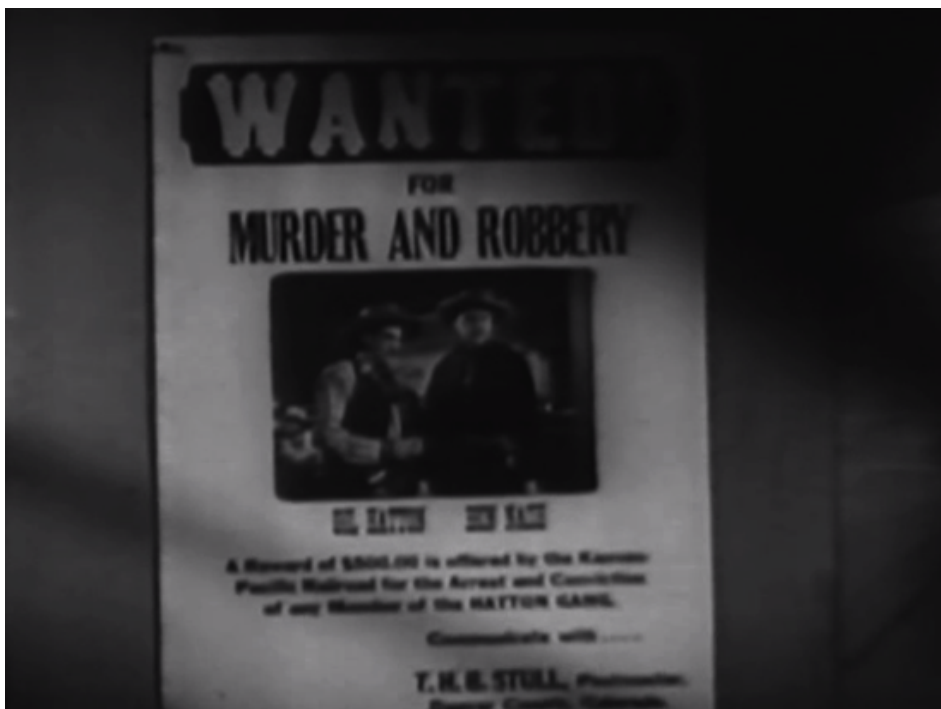


Image 4.4: *The Kansan* (George Archainbaud, 1943). The camera zooms in on the image on the poster, which then bursts into motion, becoming the film proper.



Image 4.5: *Chisum* (Andrew McLagen, 1970). The film opens with a rapid montage of Remington-esque paintings. Skillful zooms, pans, and close-ups stitch the still images into a series of narrative vignettes, blurring the boundary between painting and cinema.



Image 4.6: *Fort Apache* (Ford, 1948). Ford's evocation of cinema in this shot is more obvious when the images are in motion.

Visual media such as photography and painting are cited by Westerns like *Chisum* (Andrew McLagen, 1970), which opens with an elaborate montage of oil paintings after the style of Frederick Remington, and *The Kansan* (George Archainbaud, 1943), in which the camera zooms in on a wanted poster photograph that, once it fills the screen completely, leaps into motion and becomes the film itself.³³² *Fort Apache* (Ford, 1948) not only calls attention to a painting as a representation of the West, but allows the characters to obliquely call attention to the fictional status of the representation. The film's climax is a senseless and disastrous battle between the cavalry and the Apache. In the aftermath, the narrative skips forward in time to find a group of journalists discussing a painting that depicts the same battle as a glorious sacrifice. Ford thus explicitly dramatizes the process by which history becomes story, and story history.³³³

Immediately after calling attention to the "constructedness" of the painting of the west, *Fort Apache* presents us with a *mise-en-abyme* of cinema itself, as Captain York (John Wayne) looks out of the window of his office at his regiment, who are (from the camera's point of view) reflected in the glass and superimposed on York's face. This is not explicitly cinema, of course, but it is very nearly so: we have light projected on a flat surface framed by curtains, John Wayne's face staring out at us, and even background music (in the form of an ambiguously diegetic performance of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic").³³⁴ Interestingly, the role of this

332 Like *Red River's* book shots, the wanted poster effect from *The Kansan* is the more disruptive in that it does not appear until well into the film.

333 The same process is made even more explicit in Valerii's *My Name is Nobody* (1973), a late-in-the-cycle Spaghetti Western which comments explicitly on the development of the genre by having the film's main character engineer a gun battle between a character played by Henry Fonda (representing the classic Western) and a group of desperadoes known as "The Wild Bunch" (representing the genre's bloody present). As Brown notes, Ennio Morricone gets in on the fun, providing a score riddled with quotations of his earlier scores, and a frankly grotesque arrangement of "The Ride of the Valkyries." Brown, *Overtones and Undertones*, 232-235.

334 Explicit references to cinema do occasionally appear, for instance in *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (George Hill, 1969), where the opening credits are displayed over an off kilter view of a screen playing *The Great Train Robbery* (Edwin Porter, 1903).

quasi-cinematic vision is exactly the same as the oil painting: it replaces the real past with a sanitized and glorious narrative version. York's speech does not lament the senseless brutality of war. Rather, he eulogizes the fallen soldiers by claiming that they will never truly die so long as the regiment lives on. In criticizing the “false” oil painting, Ford is not calling for gritty realism or suggesting that cinema offers unmediated access to the historical facts. He merely calls for a new and more democratic image to replace the old one.

There are many other examples of Western self-consciousness, including some too idiosyncratic to categorize. William Wyler's *The Westerner* (1940) features a gun battle in an opera house, with the villain sitting in the audience and the hero standing in front of a painted “Western” backdrop. At the end of the 2010 *True Grit*, Rooster Cogburn turns in his Marshal's badge and joins Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. A particularly noteworthy example for our understanding of the genre's history is *The Phantom Empire* (Brower & Eason) a 1935 singing-cowboy serial starring Gene Autrey. We should expect, from organicist genre histories like those of Schatz and Bazin, that *The Phantom Empire* would be entirely naïve and direct in its address, but in fact it is positively littered with *mise-en-abyme*, not only featuring diegetic depictions of radio, newsreels, and silent film, but also allowing plot elements to move back and forth promiscuously between the frame narrative and the in-world performances.³³⁵ Self-reflexiveness is not a historical stage that the Western goes through, but a fundamental trait of the genre.

335 Thomas Schatz, *Hollywood Genres* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981), 45 and following. Andre Bazin, “The Westerner.” To be fair, *The Phantom Empire* is – though a fairly early Western – one of the very latest serial Westerns. If these form a complete naïvete-maturity-decadence cycle of their own, it would explain some of *The Phantom Empire*'s more baroque eccentricities. But this would still require a thorough reframing of the argument that “organic” genre historians have generally put forward, in which the serial Western is the naïve stage of the genre as a whole.

***Mise-en-Abyme: Music(?)* – “This whole movie is just a song!”**

Music, too, is put to self-reflexive use in the Western. But how can music function as a *mise-en-abyme* effect? Logically, any scene that contains underscoring would point to the film's tale-that-is-told quality, but in fact underscoring is remarkably good at drawing attention away from itself. More dramatic efforts, therefore, are required. And to an extent this is true of any sort of cinematic *mise-en-abyme*. It's not enough to simply have a book or a photograph somewhere in the shot, after all. We need gestures that say "this whole movie is just a photograph! this whole movie is just a book!" An ideal musical *mise-en-abyme* would be a gesture that says "this whole movie is just a song!"

We find just such a gesture at the beginning of *High Noon* (Zinnemann, 1952). (See Music Example 4.1, below.) The film takes place on the wedding day of Will Kane (Gary Cooper), the just-retired ex-Marshall of a small town in New Mexico. As he prepares to leave on his honeymoon, Kane learns that Frank Miller, a deadly killer that he had sent to state prison, has been released and, having made a vow of revenge, will arrive on the noon train. Kane spends the next ninety minutes trying to gather a posse to take on Miller's gang, only to find himself abandoned by the townspeople he had protected so bravely; meanwhile, his fair-haired wife Amy (Grace Kelly), a pacifist Quaker, threatens to forsake him if he won't run away with her. All of this is included, obliquely or specifically, in the lyrics of the song that opens the film. A clearer *mise-en-abyme* could scarcely be imagined.

Epic Distance in Sonic Context

We should remember that *mise-en-abyme* effects are never used in the Western for their own sake, but rather to create a particular kind of distance – hereinafter, “epic distance” – between the audience and the diegetic characters. Epic distance is not quite the same as the more familiar Brechtian distance in which the characters and narrative become objects of

Voice

Do not for-sake me oh my dar-ling, — on this our wed-ding

4 day — Do not for-sake me oh my dar - ling, wait wait a - long

9 The noon-time train will bring Frank Mil-ler — if I'm a man I must be

12 brave and I must face that dead-ly kil-ler — or lie a co-ward —

16 a cra-ven cow-ard — or lie a co - ward — in my grave.

20 Oh to be torn twixt love and du - ty 'Spos-in I lose my fair-haired beau - ty

22 look at that big hand sweep a - long near - ing high noon.

24 He made a vow while in state pri - son vowed it would be my life of his - n

Detailed description: This is a musical score for a voice part. It consists of eight staves of music, each with a measure number (4, 9, 12, 16, 20, 22, 24) at the beginning. The music is written in a treble clef with a key signature of three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and a 4/4 time signature. The lyrics are written below the notes. The score includes various musical notations such as quarter notes, eighth notes, and rests.

Music Example 4.1 (continued on following page): “The Ballad of High Noon,”
music by Dimitri Tiomkin and lyrics by Ned Washington.

26
I'm not a - fraid of death but oh, what will I do if you leave me?

29
Do not for-sake me oh my dar-ling. — You made that pro-mise when we

32
wed Do not for-sake me o my dar-ling Al-though you're griev-ing —

36
I can't be lea-vin' — Un-til I shoot Frank Mil - ler dead Wait a -

40
long! Wait a - long — Wait a - long wait a - long!

Music Example 4.1, continued.

disinterested contemplation. Westerns are not so chilly as that. Even when the films are operating in their epic mode, we do still feel things about the characters, and for the characters. However, one of the things we feel is that they are impossibly remote and inaccessible. There is certainly no question of accessing the character's emotions or identifying directly with a character, during a Western's epic moments, in the way that we are so often invited to do in other genres (especially melodrama).

In the specific case of *High Noon's* opening, the distancing effect of the musical *mise-en-abyme* is intensified by other sonic and visual elements. Visually, the sequence opens with a restrained, poetic series of shots in which three men meet under a tree on an otherwise empty plain and then ride towards a distant town. The sequence takes place in utter silence, save for the music, despite the fact that we see the men speaking together and watch them gallop by on horseback. Both dialogue and sound effects are not only absent, then, but conspicuously so,

opening up a space between the sound and image tracks.

Specific musical traits of the theme song also support this. *High Noon* has one of the most subdued title themes I have ever encountered. Only four instruments are used: percussion, guitar, accordion, and voice. Of these, the drums are strangely muffled, and guitar and accordion are mixed extremely low, leaving singer Tex Ritter's voice isolated and unsupported at many points. There is a certain half-finished quality about the song as well, deriving in part from the unbalanced mix and in part from the loose heterophonic doubling of the vocal melody by the accordion and guitar. All in all, the effect is rather to emphasize than to compensate for the absence of diegetic sound in the sequence, further separating the world of the storytelling (i.e., the singer's world) from the world of the story told (i.e., the screen action).³³⁶

Another interesting aspect of this sequence is the sonic transition from the introduction into the film proper, which takes place in two stages. First, the rhythm of the song, which has always used the characteristic “hoofbeat” rhythm Scheurer and Brownrigg identify in their discussions of Western soundtracks, suddenly aligns with the screen action. (Or rather, the final shots of the riders are carefully timed so that their motion suddenly matches that of the song.) Then, as the song fades out, we hear the ringing of diegetic bells, which is the first sound other than the ballad to appear in the film, and cut to a shot of the town's church. By stages, then, the gap between the sound-world and the image-world of the opening is closed, and we move from the epic distance of narration to a more directly mimetic storytelling style, at least temporarily.

336 One is reminded of Béla Balázs's contention that the depiction of silence in the sound film would require not the absence of sound, but the presence of very faint sound. *The Spirit of Film* trans. Rodney Livingstone, ed. Erica Carter (New York: Berghahn, 2010), 190-192. Thiel makes the same claim, apparently independently: “This dramaturgical quietness [*Stille*] is not synonymous with silence [*Lautlos*] i.e. the complete absence of the acoustic sphere. It's rather that a minimum of quiet sounds create an audible silence.” Thiel, *Filmmusik in Geschichte und Gegenwart.*, 307, my translation.

Again, this sort of thing is not so unusual at the beginning of a movie, or at its end. In Westerns, however, the tension between epic and mimetic storytelling styles is unceasing, and moments of transition between the styles are frequent. Just as *Red River's* book imagery recurs throughout the film, the ballad comes back in *High Noon* again and again, always pulling us away from any sense of the narrative as a directly lived experience. The function of “The Ballad of High Noon,” like that of Western *mise-en-abymes* more generally, is to situate the film in the epic absolute past.

The Western Title-Ballad Tradition

Many of the *mise-en-abyme* techniques described above are one-offs, particular creative solutions to a generally-felt need for epic distance within the genre. The title ballad, however, became a nearly essential component of the Western score in the wake of *High Noon*. This phenomenon has often been described as purely mercenary: *High Noon* was a hit, as was its title song, and it was in fact the success of the song that transformed an initially unpopular film into a box office success.³³⁷ This is certainly a major factor in the trend's success. The number of films with self-referential theme songs exploded post *High Noon*, and both Dimitri Tiomkin and the lyricist Ned Washington were frequently tapped to provide them. Clearly, the studios were hoping to produce another hit song that could help market the film (as well as serving as a separate revenue stream).

But the trend cannot be explained entirely as an economic phenomenon. First of all, the ability of the song to market the film depends entirely on its association with the film in the minds of the audience, and *primarily* for the audience members that have not yet seen the film. It would not have to be worked into the film in any particular way; rather, it would have to be

337 A good historical account of *High Noon's* score and its influence can be found in Peter Larsen, *Film Music*, (London: Reaktion Books, 2008), 148-9.

heavily promoted on radio and in the film's advertising. (In a few cases, this is indeed the song's only role. Burt Bacharach's song "The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance" never actually appears in the film it was written for.)³³⁸ Therefore, similarities in the cinematic treatment of these songs cannot be explained away as a marketing technique. And as it turns out, the ways that these songs work within their films are generally very similar indeed. In the vast majority, the songs appear more or less in full at the start of the film, and then recur throughout, often featuring the portions of the lyrics most relevant to the immediately local plot – in a word, narrating. *High Noon* is actually restrained in its use of music when compared to some of the later films. In *The Gunfight at the O.K. Corral* (John Sturges, 1957), the musical narration becomes nearly compulsive, with plot developments, characters, and bits of scenery all being duly serenaded in their turn. What is being copied is not merely the idea of having a title song, but rather a complex and productive series of aesthetic choices that were thought to contribute to the film's success. We should note here that the vogue for title songs was not limited to the Western alone, but the characteristic integration of the title song with the plot never caught on anywhere else.³³⁹

The second and simpler reason to doubt purely economic explanations for the title ballad phenomenon is that *High Noon* is not the first score of this kind. A perfect example of the technique appears in Fritz Lang's *Rancho Notorious*, which came out three months prior to *High Noon*, and similar tendencies can be seen at least as early as *Destry Rides Again*, in 1939. *Destry* is a particularly instructive film for our understanding of the Western score, but because its use of the technique is only approximate, we will table its discussion until *High Noon* has been examined in more detail.

338 See Kalinak, *How the West was Sung*, 96-7.

339 The odd exception could be dug up, for instance *Convoy* (Sam Peckinpah, 1978) and *Smoky and the Bandit* (Hal Needham, 1977).

Cowboy-Balladeer Personas: Who is making this music?

Although film is a massively collaborative art, we generally assume that there is a single person pulling the strings.³⁴⁰ This implied narrator of the film – the organizing intelligence, the storyteller we imagine to be presenting us with this story – is usually considered to be responsible for both the images and the sounds, and the patterns of editing, and the cinematography, and even the music, which is why we find books written on Hitchcock's music and that of John Ford.³⁴¹ Perhaps the most remarkable thing about “The Ballad of High Noon,” then, is that it does *not* seem to emanate from the film's organizing intelligence, but rather from someone *else*. There is an implied psychological agent at work in the musical text – the sort of shadowy presence that Edward T. Cone calls a musical “persona” – that serves as the author of the song, and speaks to us through it.³⁴²

Cone suggests that whenever music speaks to us, it is always spoken by one or more musical personas. Although he means this to apply even to absolute music, his primary examples are the personas occupied by characters in musico-dramatic works. The persona Don Giovanni inhabits while seducing Zerlina is distinct from Don Giovanni's "real" musical persona, which is distinct from the overarching Mozart-persona responsible for the opera as a whole, which in turn is distinct from the historical/biological Mozart who lived, and breathed, and went to the bathroom, and actually wrote all the notes that the various personas take credit for. Likewise, in Schubert's *Erlkönig*, there are distinct musical and textual personas for the father,

340 This has been widely discussed by film theorists – see especially Christian Metz, “Notes Toward a Phenomenology of the Narrative,” in *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*, trans. Michael Taylor (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974).

341 Kalinak's work on John Ford has been previously cited. Two representative works on Hitchcock are Jack Sullivan, *Hitchcock's Music* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), and Elizabeth Weiss, *The Silent Scream: Hitchcock's Soundtrack* (Teaneck: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1982).

342 Cone, *The Composer's Voice*.

son, and Erl-king, all of which are distinct from the over-arching Schubert-persona responsible for the song.

Among the most interesting of Cone's claims is that the text of *Erlkönig* already contains character-personas governed by the overarching authorial persona of Goethe, but the Goethe-persona is overwritten and reshaped by Schubert's musical setting of the work. Goethe took care to make the stanzas of the ballad the same, in rhyme scheme and meter, regardless of which character is speaking. Thus, Cone argues, Schubert obscured Goethe's intent by making a sharp distinction between the various characters. In the song version of "*Erlkönig*," Goethe can only say as much as Schubert is willing to let him say (and indeed we find cases where composers substantially alter and reshape the very texts they set). It has often been claimed that the ideal of song composition is often to let the text speak, but Cone would have it that the most self-effacing of settings still presents us with only a verisimilar poet-persona. The composer wears the poet's mask and speaks through the poet's words, but be the likeness ever so faithful, the poet can in no case truly speak.

What personas, then, operate in "*Do Not Forsake Me O My Darling*"? From the lyrics alone, we might suppose that the song is by Marshal Kane and addressed directly to his wife, so there is obviously a sort of Kane-persona at work. Even before bringing the music into it, however, we have reason to suspect that the "voice" of the poem is not *truly* Kane's voice. The formalized nature of the text argues against this, for Kane is no poet. When he does make his diegetic appeal to Amy, it isn't in rhyme, or in strophes, or in the cowboy vernacular of "his'n" and "wait-along." At most, the poem could represent a sort of heightened internal monologue, an expression of Kane's emotional life and of the hidden self that he cannot express to the world. Some commentators, such as Deborah Allison, have interpreted it thus, doubtless because expressing a character's hidden emotional life is one of film music's standard (i.e. melodramatic)

functions.³⁴³ But when we actually listen to the music and experience the song in its filmic context, the identification of the Kane-persona with the singer-persona is tenuous indeed. The song appears in scenes where Kane is absent, and at any rate we can tell that Tex Ritter's voice is not Gary Cooper's. Furthermore, the sedate and highly formalized nature of the music (like that of the poetry) tends to argue against it being a direct expression of Kane's emotions, which must necessarily be more intense than this. Therefore, just as Cone suggests that "Erlkönig" presents us with a singer-persona playacting at being an elf, "The Ballad of High Noon" offers a singer-persona playacting at being Kane.

If the figure behind "Erlkönig" is ultimately Schubert, we might expect that the figure responsible for "Do Not Forsake Me O My Darlin'" would be Tiomkin. But although this has the advantage of being factually true, it has little bearing on our experience of the music. Just as we know what Will Kane's "voice" sounds like, and that the singer's voice could not possibly be his, so too we know what Tiomkin's "voice" sounds like. One needn't be a film music buff to understand this. In fact the more invested in film music the audience members are, the more likely they are to hear this kind of Western balladeering as a hallmark of Tiomkin's style. But even the cognoscenti will hear both the cowboy balladeering music and the "normal" high-Hollywood orchestral style in this film's soundtrack, and recognize the separation between them. Obviously it is the latter that we hear as Tiomkin (or "Tiomkin"): how else should we hear the "normal" film music but as the natural voice of the Hollywood composer? As a result, the ballad seems again to derive from some other source. Neither Kane nor Tiomkin, the singer is rather a liminal *cowboy-balladeer-persona* interposed between the two. Tiomkin, creating the song, created the balladeer.

343 Deborah Allison, "Do Not Forsake Me: The Ballad of High Noon and the Rise of the Movie Theme Song," *Senses of Cinema* 28 (2003), http://sensesofcinema.com/2003/28/ballad_of_high_noon/

The Audience-Persona of Cowboy Song in the 1950s

Having partially addressed the question of who is singing this music, we must turn to the even odder question of whom he is singing *to*. Nick Davis claims that music cannot truly narrate because it is impossible for music to be addressed to anyone but ourselves, due to its lack of grammatical markers of address such as the past tense: “Let us say that I am shown film of someone listening to music on a gramophone, while the music in the soundtrack can be taken as corresponding to what this person in the film image hears. I do not and cannot hear the music *as if I were* this other person: I more simply hear the music, it plays through me and not through some other imagined mentality.”³⁴⁴ There is some truth to this, especially in a situation where the character is meant to be very impressed by the gramophone's fidelity while the audience member cringes at its crudeness. This does not mean that the other person's hearing has no effect on our own, however. Instead of imagining one scene, let us now imagine two, one in which the gramophone is new and cutting edge technology, and one in which it is a vintage machine owned by a collector who fetishizes defunct media. Davis would have us believe that our experience of the music would be the same in each case, and this is surely false. Our sense of what the music means to its own proper diegetic audience will inevitably color our own hearing: prompted to hear the record as an antique, we are more likely to focus on sonic imperfections such as surface noise and distortion as a source of sonic pleasure in their own right; prompted to hear it as a technological marvel, we are likely to attend to these issues somewhat less.³⁴⁵

344 Nick Davis, “Inside/Outside the Klein Bottle,” *Music, Sound, and the Moving Image* 6, no. 1 (2012): 11. Though I disagree with many of Davis' particulars, this is a fine and thought-provoking piece.

345 Our precise reaction will depend on a wide variety of contextual factors, and upon the precise treatment given to the sound of the recording. A slightly warped recording of Skip James's “Devil Got My Woman” serves as a fetishized object of sonic pleasure in *Ghost World* (Terry Zwigoff, 2001); significantly, the characters swoon at the brief stretch of surface noise that precedes the first notes of the actual song – a sonic feature that the filmmakers could have simply left out if they wished.

Furthermore, although Davis is right to note that there is no musical equivalent to the simple grammatical marker that separates the past from the present, it is entirely possible for music to mark spatial, temporal, and cultural distance in other ways, as will be immediately obvious to anyone who has ever heard a piece of music as exotic, old-fashioned, or “not really my kind of music.”³⁴⁶

In short, any music that calls up a musical persona will call up an *audience-persona* along with it. Our ability to identify ourselves with the song's notional audience is in some cases critical to our experience of the song. As Lawrence Kramer puts it,

music addresses a determinate type of subject and in so doing beckons that subject, summons it up to listen. The subject is determined by, or as, a position in relation to historically specific possibilities of discourse, action, and desire. The musical summons... may appeal to social, sexual, psychical, or conceptual interests. Listeners agree to personify a musical subject by responding empathetically to the music's summons.³⁴⁷

Kramer's version of this process is – though he does not describe it as such – a subconscious one. He is making a point about the nature of musical pleasure, specifically that we enjoy Mozart in part by construing ourselves as the sort of person who enjoys Mozart. This is partially conditioned by the sort of person that Mozart was, and the sort of society he came from, but we don't have to be aware of these relationships. The phrase “historically specific” is

346 Davis accords too much significance to the grammatical tense marker, in my opinion (as does Abbate, *Unsung Voices*, 53). If I write “here in Vienna in 1791, Mozart is beginning to write his requiem mass,” the shift in time and place is no less complete than the grammatically proper version. Contextual cues and the brute facts of history make it clear, as they do in the musical cases discussed below.

347 Lawrence Kramer, *Classical Music and Postmodern Knowledge* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 21. For more on audience identification with music's lyric “you,” see Thomas Dubois, *Lyric, Meaning and Audience in the Oral Tradition of Northern Europe* (Notre Dame: University Press of Notre Dame, 2006).

meant as a reminder that even the most apparently necessary aspects of our own perceptual grammar are in fact contingent upon all sorts of elements. The possibilities are historically specific to our time, then, not to Mozart's. But although this is very well observed, there exists the possibility that the music may call up an audience-persona which is *not* our own.³⁴⁸ As we shall see, music's addressee can be quite explicitly evoked, and one of the most interesting things about this is that our reaction to that evocation need not be empathetic.

Returning to “The Ballad of High Noon,” we might at first assume that the music is addressed to Amy Kane, who is after all threatening to forsake her husband. However, if Will Kane is not actually the “I” of the song, it hardly makes sense to think of her as the “you.” By the same token, the Tiomkin-persona's audience can be assumed to be the audience of the film (i.e., 1950s cinemagoers, trained to respond to the conventions of Hollywood film music, which are largely speaking the conventions of 19th-century classical music). But could the film audience also be the audience of the balladeer?

Kalinak, in her invaluable study on John Ford's Western soundtracks, points out that the cowboy ballad was quite popular with mid-century audiences.³⁴⁹ She argues that we can assume that they would have recognized individual melodies such as “O Bury Me Not on the Lone Prairie” when these pop up in the orchestral underscoring, and therefore that the meaning of these melodies is equivalent to the meaning of their lyrics and original cultural context, which the audiences would have known.

The classical score depends upon its ability to harness music's expressivity by tapping into powerful musical signifiers encoding specific cultural meanings. Songs, because of their lyrics, function as a kind of shorthand of this process, quickly summoning up cultural associations. This can even be the case when

348 This possibility is in turn one of the discursive possibilities of current listening practice, and thus forms a subset of Kramer's listening-subject.

349 Kalinak, *How the West Was Sung*, 62 (and more or less throughout).

lyrics are left unvoiced, but the audience may know them.³⁵⁰

That these lyrics contribute to the music's overall significance is undoubtedly true. However, the meaning of a song can never be reduced to the semantic content of its lyrics, and certainly an audience member who recognized one of these tunes would carry more of its meaning into the film than the lyrical content alone. There are many ways of liking music, after all. When the 1950s audience bought cowboy ballad records, what did they think they were buying? (Kalinak tells us nothing about this.) I suggest that the meaning of the cowboy ballad, much like the meaning of the Western genre itself, is a complex fantasy of the American frontier, and that it is this fantasy, above all, that these songs convey when we encounter them in film Westerns.

The relationship between the actual music of the cowboys, and the “cowboy music” which found wide popularity in mid-20th-century America is by no means self-evident. It seems likely that, as is so often the case, something that began as a sort of folk music ended up as a sort of pop music. Certainly John Lomax, who compiled the most important early collection of cowboy song texts, saw this music as an expression of the American *volk*. Describing the conditions of ranching and the labor required to bring the cows to market, he writes that

These men lived on terms of practical equality. Except in the case of the boss, there was little difference in the amounts paid each for his services. Society, then, was here reduced to its lowest terms. The work of the men, their daily experiences, their thoughts, their interests, were all in common. Such a community had necessarily to turn to itself for entertainment. Songs sprang up naturally, some of them tender and familiar lays of childhood, others original compositions, all genuine, however crude and unpolished. Whatever the most gifted man could produce must bear the criticism of the entire camp, and agree

350 Ibid. Kalinak hedges somewhat on this point, however, suggesting that the meaning of the music is often the same whether we know the music or not: after explaining that a listener who knows the W.C. Handy song “Careless Love” would have realized that it “encodes transgression, both sexual... and racial,” she then asserts that “listeners do not need to know the origins of the song or its lyrics: the bluesy melody signifies its transgressive nature.” (61).

with the ideas of a group of men. *In this sense, therefore, any song that came from such a group would be the joint product of a number of them* [emphasis mine], telling perhaps the story of some stampede they had all fought to turn, some crime in which they had all shared equally, some comrade's tragic death which they had all witnessed.³⁵¹

The imagined audience in this case, and also the imagined composer and performer, is the community as a whole, which is typical in accounts of “folk music.” Later in the preface, Lomax waxes rhapsodic about the pioneering spirit of these men, and though acknowledging the violence that in the film Western becomes so central to the cowboy ethos, he attempts to downplay this, focusing instead on the camaraderie, the shared labor, and the spirit of freedom.

Such slight scholarly attention as cowboy ballads have received typically aims at confirming or complicating this picture. Typical in this light is Guy Logsdon, who attempts to de-romanticize Lomax's cowboy, asserting that the songs could not have been used during work as Lomax claimed, and pointing out that extant collections of cowboy music omit large numbers of songs concerned with “phallic size and virility, venereal disease, and sodomy.”³⁵² Accounts such as Logsdon's are a necessary tonic, and do much to demonstrate that the “original audience” of a given musical work is always more or less a construct. But his account does no more than Lomax's to explain how cowboy music was experienced by its mid-century audience, which of course is the construct most relevant to our understanding of the music's role in “The Ballad of High Noon.” Our best understanding of this specific fantasy will come not from an examination of song texts, but rather from examining the iconography and framing of the Cowboy ballad for the mainstream record-buying public at that time. Cowboy songs, after all, were sold to their audience in a very specific way. What are we to make of images such as these?

351 John Lomax, *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads* (New York: MacMillan, 1922), xviii-xix.

352 Guy Logsdon, “The Cowboy's Bawdy Music,” in *The Cowboy: Six-Shooters, Songs, and Sex*, ed. Charles Harris and Buck Rainey (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1976): 132.



Image 4.7 a-f: A comparison of album covers for “cowboy” and non-cowboy songs. Pictured are Johnny Cash, *Johnny Cash Sings the Ballads of the True West* (Columbia, 1965) and *Orange Blossom Special* (Columbia, 1965), Marty Robbins, *Gunfighter Ballads and Trail Songs* (Columbia, 1959) and *Turn the Lights Down Low* (Columbia, 1965), Frankie Laine, *Hell Bent for Leather* (Columbia, 1961) and *Frankie Laine with Paul Weston and his Orchestra* (Philips, 1953).



Image 4.8: The Vienna Mozart Orchestra

The last of these images, though not immediately relevant to the Western, may be the most instructive. It depicts the Vienna Mozart Orchestra, a curious Viennese institution that performs Mozart and Haydn in period dress, complete with perukes and lace ruffs. The ostensible intent – beyond the obvious goal of separating tourists from their Euros – is to recreate the original context of the music as nearly as possible, so that the modern audience can experience what the original audience experienced. Or at any rate, this is what is claimed. (The concerts “recreate the very atmosphere” of Mozart’s Vienna, says the travel website www.goldentours.com.)³⁵³ But this misses a crucial point, which is that the strangeness of the period dress is a major part of the aesthetic experience these performers provide. The Vienna Mozart Orchestra does not close the gap between our audience and Mozart’s audience – anything but! The original audience could never have guessed how strange and alien the peruke would eventually become. These concerts emphasize the gap, aestheticize it, and render it expressive. Watching these performances, we do not experience the 18th-century audience’s experience. Rather, we are made aware of the *difference* between ourselves and that music’s original audience.

353 <http://www.goldentours.com/Vienna/Vienna-Mozart-Concerts-in-Period-Costumes>

Furthermore, the “original audience” implied by costuming and performance choices need not in fact be the audience recorded by history – and to an extent, in fact, cannot be. If we really wanted to experience Mozart as his Viennese audience did, we would have to choose between being the Hapsburg emperor, and thus knowing that the music was composed to magnify our own glory, or being a lesser member of his court, and knowing that the music reflected the glory of a political establishment that both privileged and subordinated us, or being someone lower down the ladder – a wealthy merchant attending the opera, or a violinist playing in the orchestra, or a hod carrier wandering past the window of a concert hall, and so on. None of these avenues are very much open to us. When we are asked to commune with the imaginary “18th-century audience,” the internal class divisions of 18th-century society are almost inevitably glossed over. Although the performance capitalizes on the distance between the actual audience and the implied historical audience, the implied historical audience needn't correspond to any actual group of people. It is, rather, a fantasy, nothing less than a collective *persona* implicit in the performance – and although the costume orchestra fairly rubs our noses in it, such a *persona* probably plays some part in our experience of any performance whatsoever.

With this in mind, we return to the cowboy songs discussed by Kalinak, and the iconography with which they were sold. What is significant here is that the cowboy albums require the singer to put on fancy-dress in a way that their “normal” albums do not. Marty Robbins was a country singer, but only occasionally wears a hat on his album art. He never carries a gun! And yet he does both on the cover of *Gunfighter Ballads and Trail Songs*. Johnny Cash wears cowboy hats more frequently (and we should remember that this piece of cowboy iconography is still a regular fashion choice for many), but his stereotypically cowboyish outfit on the cover of *Johnny Cash Sings the Ballads of The True West* is still a marked departure from his usual wardrobe. If we assume that the decision to have Cash and Robbins play dress-up was a rational piece of marketing, we can assume that the sizable audience for cowboy ballads did

not think of this music as their own, but rather as a particular kind of *exotica*. Robbins' "normal" albums were typically marketed only with his face. He dons costumes for only two genres: the cowboy albums, and pseudo-Hawaiian confections like *Song of the Islands*, which depict him sporting Aloha shirts and leis, surrounded by smiling grass-skirted dancers. The popularity of the cowboy ballad demonstrates not that the audience knew and understood the cowboy's life and concerns, but that they valued (and aestheticized) their *distance* from this world. And perhaps the most interesting finding here is that in each case the outfits used to market the "cowboy" music are too stylish, too neatly tailored, and above all too *clean* to be the clothing of actual ranch hands. They are actually more characteristic of the sort of clothes worn by "cowboys" in film Westerns – a clear case of what Roland Barthes would call "cowboyicity."³⁵⁴

We can assume, therefore, that the audience-persona of "The Ballad of High Noon," and of "cowboy music" in the Western more generally, was never the audience sitting in the theater. Indeed, we can probably assume that even the most die-hard fans of "cowboy music" in the 1950s made a distinction between themselves and the style's "real" audience, the cowboys themselves, whose six-guns and Stetsons are always hovering over the genre just as perukes and absolute monarchy hover over Mozart. Whether or not the audience would recognize the melodies, and therefore the lyrics, this music was something that they identified as an emanation of an alien time and place. What they were familiar with, primarily, was the music's unfamiliarity.

Therefore, both the obvious diegetic subject positions (Will and Amy Kane) and the obvious non-diegetic subject positions (Tiomkin and the film audience) have been ruled out. In this particular instance of musical storytelling, the implicit balladeer-persona must perform for an implicit cowboy audience, which we might very tentatively identify with the *volkische* cowboy

354 Roland Barthes refers to an advertisement's vague and fictive evocation of Italy as "Italianicity," and suggests that there is a whole universe of such "-icities." *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 33-51.

communal group posited by Lomax.

The Cowboy's Epic Situation

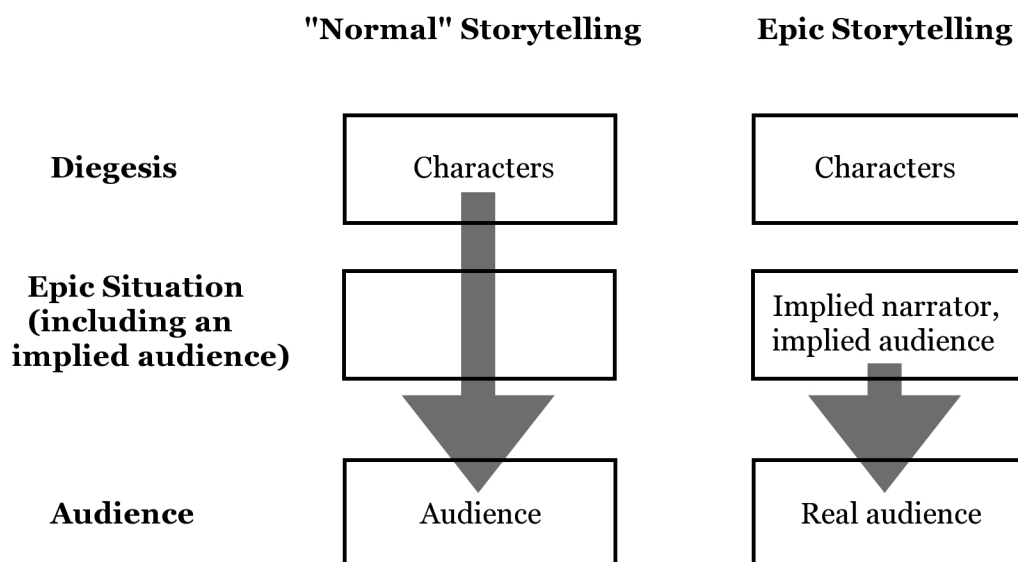
If we accept that there is an inherent performance within the musical text, with a performer and an audience, can we fairly ask *where* these shadowy figures exist? For concert music, and even for opera, this is a question that rarely raises itself. In film music, however, we are accustomed to making a clear distinction between diegetic music (music that exists within the world of the film) and non-diegetic music (music that exists only in our own world). The tidy categories described here are of course an oversimplification, as a number of scholars have noted. The most consequential challenges are those of Claudia Gorbman, who reminds us that narratives often have a whole nested series of secondary and tertiary diegeses, and Robynn Stilwell, who, while accepting diegetic and non-diegetic as fundamental categories, argues that scholarship needs to pay more attention to the specificity of each cue's location between these poles (or its fluid motion between them).³⁵⁵ However, although Gorbman and Stilwell convincingly demonstrate that some cues cannot be neatly labeled as diegetic or non-diegetic, their analyses still depend on these underlying categories. The distinction is not important in every film, but we can ill-afford to ignore it in the ones where it is.

High Noon is certainly one of these, as the careful transition into the diegetic sound world at the start of the film suggests. However, the audience and balladeer personas of “The

355 Stilwell argues for paying more attention to the *trajectories* travelled by music as it bridges the “fantastical gap” between internal and external, diegetic and non-diegetic worlds, describing individual cases in detail rather than getting hung up on which cue belongs in which conceptual bucket. Robynn Stilwell, “The Fantastical Gap Between Diegetic and Nondiegetic,” in *Beyond the Soundtrack*, ed. Daniel Goldmark, Lawrence Kramer, and Richard Leppert (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007), 184-202. Gorbman's concept of the “metadiegetic” (discussed at some length in the second chapter of this book) pertains primarily to stories told by characters within the film: see *Unheard Melodies*, 22-23.

Ballad of High Noon” confound the traditional categories. They are certainly not diegetic – they do not appear in the plot, and there is no room for them in the film's diegetic world – and yet they are not part of our world either, and the music lacks the “for us” quality that nondiegetic film music typically has. “The Ballad of High Noon” seems to exist in a liminal territory *between* diegetic and non-diegetic: another world, not our own world, nor that of the story, but rather the one where the telling of the story takes place and the events that are narrated turn into the narration, inhabited only by the storyteller and his/her implied audience.³⁵⁶

Figure 4.3 – Emotional communication in dramatic and epic storytelling.



356 This is similar to Gorbman's category of metadiegetic, the difference being that her storytellers are themselves figures in the main diegesis, whereas mine are outside of it. We could use Gorbman's terminology for the case of *High Noon* by labeling the ballad as diegetic (diegetic, that is, to the vague frame story of the cowboy balladeer and his audience) and the rest of the film's score as metadiegetic (pertinent to the secondary diegesis – taking place *within* the world of the ballad). I reject this reading, first of all because common sense tells us that this “secondary” diegesis is actually the primary one, and second because, as we shall see, purely musical features make it very hard to accept that the orchestral cues take place “inside” the ballad.

This third location is familiar to narratologists like Sarah Kozloff and Bertil Romberg, who refer to it as the story's "epic situation."³⁵⁷ Theoretically, it is always present in any narrative: any constellation of narrator, narration, and audience will constitute an epic situation, be it ever so nebulous, and every instance of storytelling has all three of these terms, be they ever so hidden. In most narratives, however, the epic situation is made as transparent as possible, to the point of invisibility. Certainly this is the case in Classical Hollywood Cinema. Every care is taken to ensure that we do not distinguish ourselves from the implied audience, that we do not distinguish the storyteller from the creator of the film, and that we do not distinguish the signs created by the storyteller from the events in the diegetic world.³⁵⁸ But when films try to be epic – not merely grand, but *epic*, in the way that epic poems are epic – the implied narrator and the implied audience begin to take on definite characteristics (as in *High Noon*), and the locus of narration is made opaque. The epic situation becomes a kind of secondary diegesis (though outside the primary diegesis rather than within it, like those described by Gorbman), and our traditional categories of “diegetic” and “non-diegetic” music become inadequate.

Epic Situation in the Epic Proper

357 Kozloff, *Invisible Storytellers*, 50-52. Romberg, Bertil. *Studies in the Narrative Technique of the First-Person Novel* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1962), *passim*.

358 Another way to look at this would be to use A.J. Greimas's distinction between enunciations and utterances, the first being the actions that make discourse, and the latter being the objects of which discourse consists. Most narratives try to present themselves as utterances. Those that call attention to their own telling try to present themselves as enunciations. But in fact these two poles are not *options*. All statements are both enunciation and utterance simultaneously. Here I am taking pains to identify the ways in which apparent utterances are in fact enunciations, but it would be just as valid to point out that apparently “pure” enunciations are in fact utterances also. Greimas further distinguishes between what he calls “true enunciations,” which refers to the sense in which any piece of discourse must logically be an enunciation, and “uttered enunciations,” which are “manifestly present in the discourse.” The ballad singing in *High Noon* is an enunciation in this latter sense. A. J. Greimas, J. Court` s and Michael Rengstorf, “The Cognitive Dimensions of Narrative Discourse,” *New Literary History* 7, no. 3 (Spring, 1976): 435.

This again is like Homer, or at least like our belated experience of Homer. When we imagine the blind poet strumming his lyre and reciting the Iliad to a crowd of listeners, we don't imagine them wearing jeans and hoodies. We imagine them in togas, and probably with bangs.³⁵⁹ This implied audience is just as immanent within the text as is the narrator himself, and we should remember that the real audience and the implied audience were already somewhat different when the Iliad was first written down. They were certainly *quite* distinct by the time that Aristotle began using the Homeric poems to make distinctions between epic and drama. The gap between the real audience and the implied, epic audience is very old indeed. In fact, when we look at the epics that come down to us, and especially the ones that inform American culture's particular concept of the epic, an astonishing number of them are self-consciously belated epics. Virgil apes Homer, Dante and Milton ape Virgil, the Finnish *Kalevala* apes the performance of traditional runot singers. In all of these cases, the epic is not just telling a story that is past, but using a form of storytelling that is itself past.

Recognizing this additional layer of distance forces us to reconsider Bakhtin's formulation of the epic. His claim is that "Both the singer and the listener, immanent in the epic as a genre, are located in the same time and on the same evaluative (hierarchical) plane, but the represented world of the heroes stands on an utterly different and inaccessible time-and-value plane, separated by epic distance."³⁶⁰ Granted, Homer did not place himself on the same plane as Odysseus. But who today thinks of him or herself as being on the same plane as Homer? Who thought so, for that matter, in Aristotle's time? There is a layer missing from Bakhtin's account. We have the world of the heroes, to be sure, which is in the absolute past, Bakhtin's inaccessible world of "peak times," "firsts and bests." We have our own world, from which we can never escape. But Homer, and Homer's audience: where are they? Just as the Frontier is the

359 The definitive theorization of Hollywood's Greco-Roman bangs is Barthes' "The Romans in Film," in *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972).

360 Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 14.

transition between Wilderness time and Garden time, just as “The Ballad of High Noon” occupies a liminal space between the diegetic and the non-diegetic worlds, epic narration inhabits a space and time between the age of heroes and the "modern" world.

As it turns out, epics are self-conscious on multiple levels. First of all, storytelling is a feature of the plot itself – Odysseus tells stories to Nausicaä. Then we find Homer referring to his own storytelling – *sing to me o muse!* – which implies the existence of the Old Greek audience. Finally, the scribe writes the text down, for a *later* Greek audience. The modern audience (which includes some later Greeks, to be sure, but not the same ones), gazes back on all of this – but interestingly enough, this does not seem to constitute a fourth, entirely separate layer. Epic distance fills the gap between Odysseus and Homer, and the gap between Homer and the scribe, but the scribe, who alone of all these narrators is *not* supremely self-conscious, is separated from the modern audience by calendar time alone. Similarly with the *Kalevala*, there are three layers: the highly self-conscious diegesis, the mostly anonymous runot singers, and the 19th century compiler Elias Lönnrot, with the modern audience functioning as an extension of Lönnrot's layer, just as the modern audience for the *Odyssey* is an extension of the scribe's.

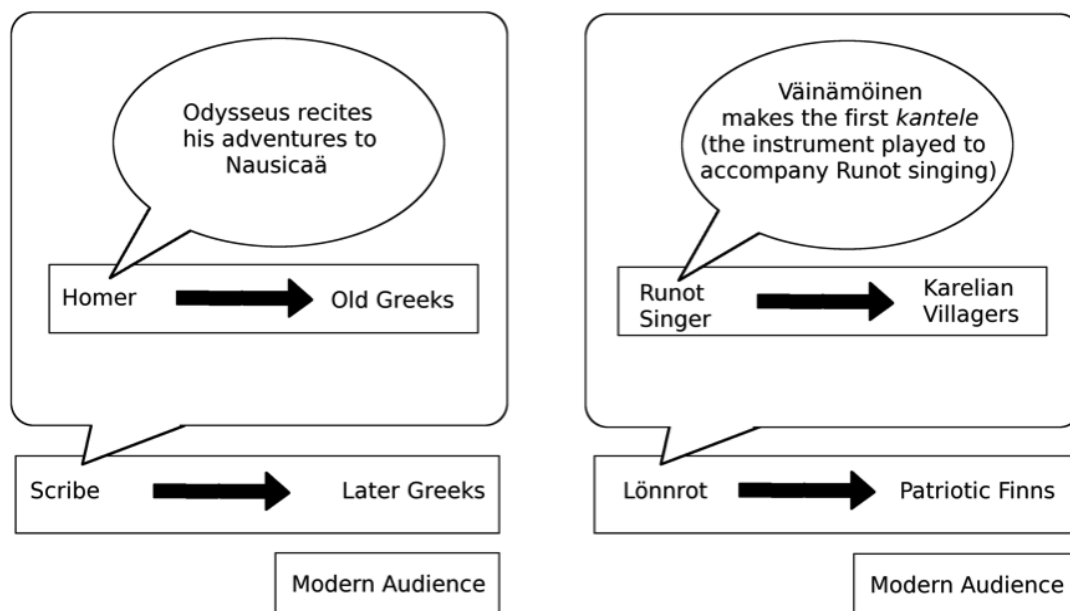


Figure 4.4: Epic Situation in the *Odyssey* and the *Kalevala*.

The assertion that epic distance separates Lönnrot from the runot singers might seem hard to square with the fact that Lönnrot spoke to the runot singers directly, and copied his story from them. However, even in their own communities the runot singers were by that time seen as a relic of an earlier age.³⁶¹ Furthermore, we can always distinguish between an actual rural or “traditional” people and the fantasy mapped onto them by their bourgeois co-nationalists: the *volk* is always an abstraction posited by bourgeois elites, who are themselves self-consciously alienated from their *volkische* national identity.³⁶² Lönnrot saw the runot singers as a way to access this fantasy: it was not the stories of such-and-such a singer that he wished to record, but those of Finland and the Finnish people. The process is analogous to what Kojin Karatani describes as the “aesthetic worship” of a foreign culture, but applied to a culture that the worshipper can claim (if faintly) as his or her own.³⁶³ In that any “traditional” culture that is recognized as such is primarily a pastoralist fantasy, it always manages to have one foot squarely planted in epic time. The *Kalevala* was valuable to Lönnrot's audience, when it appeared, *because* the runot tradition was dead and dying.

361 "Already when the *Kalevala* appeared in 1835, however, rural Finns had left epic song behind in favor of end-rhyming strophic songs and new dances. . . these imports arrived from Western Europe starting in the seventeenth century." Paul Austerlitz, "Birch-Bark Horns and Jazz in the National Imagination: The Finnish Folk Music Vogue in Historical Perspective," in *Ethnomusicology* 44, no. 2 (Spring-Summer, 2000): 188.

362 In his description of Western scoring's pastoral style, Beckerman writes that it is “a middle and upper class urban view of the countryside not shared by its inhabitants.” Beckerman and Rosar, “The Idyllic Sublime,” 255.

363 Kojin Karatani, “Uses of Aesthetics: After Orientalism,” *boundary 2* 25, no. 2 (Summer 1998): 152. Karatani is primarily interested in the ways that Japanese intellectuals have engaged with Korean folk art. We can observe a specific case of the inward-looking aesthetic worship I propose above in the Finnish reception of the folk musician Teppo Repo: Repo was in life a rather cosmopolitan figure, but “the reality of Teppo Repo as a working-class artist alive to contemporary popular culture... was at odds with the cultural nationalists' tastes and agenda,” and as a result his image was commandeered (and substantially reshaped) by this elite audience. Austerlitz, “Birch-Bark Horns,” 90.

Epic Situation in *High Noon*

The narratological situation in *High Noon* is very similar to that of the epics described above. The events recounted in the film take place in the golden epic age (though, even here, Will Kane is qualitatively greater than other men and separate from them, rather as Väinämöinen is qualitatively greater than Joukahainen, or Odysseus greater than Penelope's suitors). "The Ballad of High Noon" seems like a cowboy song, but it is not part of Will Kane's world: the singer and the audience exist in a time when the events of the film have already faded into the stuff of song and story. The song's epic situation, with its performer and his audience, could potentially be seen as part of the larger story created by the film, as in the diagram on the left in Figure 4.5. But as noted above, further layers of epic distance seem to separate the ballad and its audience from the rest of the film, and from the audience sitting in the theater. Although "The Ballad of High Noon" was created by Tiomkin and Washington, it still feels like a citation

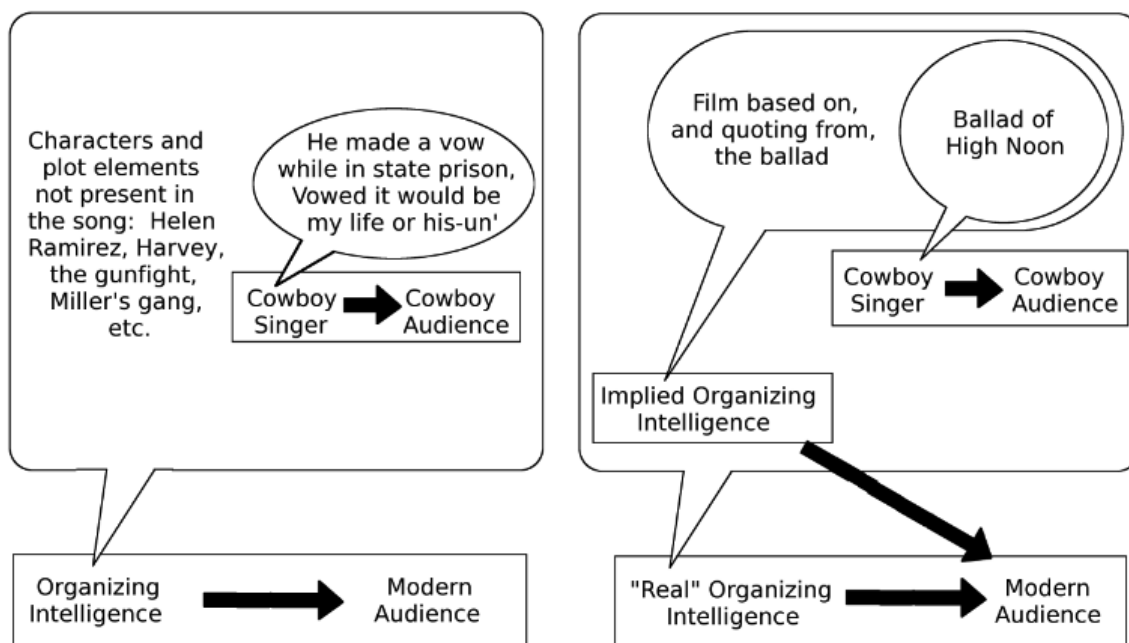


Figure 4.5: Two possible readings of *High Noon*'s epic situations and narrative layers. The version on the left is that implied by most current scholarship on the film, but I find the version on the right more accurate.

of a preexisting text, and provided that the illusion is carried out well enough, there is no effective difference between an original plot-relevant cowboy ballad and an actual cowboy song that has been made relevant to the plot (which we do find in a number of films, including *Destry Rides Again*). As a result, the version on the right in Figure 4.5 is much more like the way we really experience this. The deepest layer is the event narrated by the song, which is lost in the mists of epic time. Then there is the song itself, with its implied performer and an implied audience – these too are part of epic time, but not the *same* epic time. (This is the layer of Homer and the runot singers.) Then there is the film, which cites and seems to be based on the song, and which – although it does have an implied narrator – appears to be addressed directly to the audience in the theater, or rather to an audience-persona made as transparent as possible. Finally, as a kind of logical limit, we recognize that there must be a higher-level organizing intelligence, mostly invisible, which creates both film and song and governs the relationship between them.

II. Music Sings Its Own Distance: Signs of Narrational Music in the Western

So far, we have established that the Western is marked as an epic genre by a wide variety of aesthetic effects that create a sense of epic distance between the story-world and the world of the audience, often by interposing a third layer – that of the epic situation – in between the diegetic and non-diegetic realms. In the Western title-ballad tradition, we have found one example of a way for music to take part in this process. But of course, not every Western has a title ballad. If any of these ideas are to have relevance to the genre as a whole, we will need to find ways for music to signal its own constructedness, and place itself in the film's epic situation, *without* the luxury of a textual reference to the plot of the film.³⁶⁴

364 Although we are here concerned with ways in which music can create this effect, we should note that thoroughly normal music may be shaped into something distant by its generic context. In Phillip Tagg's audience response surveys, the respondents did not recognize minor key

That such techniques exist is established by Carolyn Abbate's study on music and narration, *Unsung Voices*. Where earlier debates of musical narration often tended to focus on the problem of *what* music narrates or can narrate, Abbate sidesteps these concerns and focuses instead on the narrative voice of music, that is, on the ways in which music can signal the presence of a narrator-persona. "Music makes distinctive sounds when it is speaking (singing) *in a narrative mode*, but we do not know *what* it narrates," she writes.³⁶⁵ Having established that Western scores are frequently used to create epic distance, and that signaling the presence of a narrator-persona is music's most characteristic method of creating this effect, we now must seek the specifically *musical* ways in which music can signal this presence.

Abbate begins by suggesting that "normal" music – the kind of music that, according to Cone, we automatically ascribe to the agency of the composer – is *not* narrative, and does *not* imply a narrator. This is an arguable point. It might well be that the implied composer agent must always be a narrator, and that in so far as we hear music as the activity of such an implied agent, we are hearing it as narration. Even the most generous account of music as narration, however, would have to acknowledge that if our normal experience of music is narrated, it is only narrated "in a way," or by analogy, or by logical inference. But it is equally certain that this is not the case for *all* music: for some pieces, at least, the musical narrator is integral to our conscious experience of the music. Abbate calls this special category of music *narrational* as opposed to *non-narrational*. Cone, presumably, would distinguish between music that is self-consciously, intensely, or multiply *narrational* as opposed to merely *narrational* in the ordinary way. Ben Winters, interestingly enough, has suggested that it is only this sort of music which

Western themes as sad. Tagg speculates that this is because the narrative alters our experience of the music: "any sadness. . . would lie not in the musical scenario per se, but in the possibility that the happiness it portrays is no longer, or not yet, in the present tense." Phillip Tagg and Robert Clarida, *Ten Little Title Tunes*, 328.

365 Abbate, *Unsung Voices*, 27.

would merit the label “diegetic,” arguing that the original narratological distinction between meta-diegetic, diegetic, and extra-diegetic events “is crucial as much for identifying *who* is narrating as it is for the level at which the narrating takes place,” and that therefore if the music is created by the same agent as the rest of the diegetic events, it must be located at the same diegetic level.³⁶⁶ I will adopt Abbate's terminology here, but which label we use is less important than that we make the distinction. There are some passages of music that are marked as events of storytelling, and posit not only a putative source for the music we hear but also a putative audience for it, neither of which can be mapped onto the actual originator of the music (the biological entity that is the composer) or the actual audience (we who listen) – not, at least, without making some kind of accommodation between the composer-persona and the biological composer, and between the audience-persona and the biological audience. Winters writes that “in order for music to narrate the events of the diegesis, surely we would have to posit the existence of a narrator figure one step further removed that (occasionally) interpolates this extra

366 Ben Winters, “Musical Wallpaper?” *Music, Sound, and the Moving Image* 6, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 41-42. Winters' reading of the narratological literature strikes me as accurate, and in a sense his objection to the use of the terms diegetic and non-diegetic is justified. However, banishing the terms from our discourse seems like a quixotic mission, and as long as the terms are understood in their film-musical (as opposed to their strict narratological) senses, no confusion will result. Furthermore, the metaphor he uses to discredit film music's ability to narrate is self-defeating. Borrowing an image from Abbate, he writes that if a bas-relief depicting a murder is later gilded, the gold leaf is not narrating the murder but only tracing it. But Abbate is referring to program music, in which every element of the narrative structure is clothed with musical gilt, and the narrative is the same with the gold as it would be without it. The situation in ever-fragmentary film music is much different: we had better rather ask whether there is anything narrative about the gold leaf if it is applied only to the murder weapon, or used to provide the victim with a halo. Winters writes that “music... is normally unscrolling *as part of* the narrative, tracing its contours mimetically and acting in the present.” But by tracing only certain elements within the narrative, music always threatens to rupture the narrative surface, and quite frequently (if not always) does seem to be imposed from without. This cycles back towards an understanding of film music as a melodramatic break.

layer of musical narration between it and the events recounted,” a possibility he discounts as “bizarre.”³⁶⁷ By the normal standards of film music, perhaps it is bizarre. But in the Western it is commonplace.

Abbate holds that each individual instance of narrational music should be approached individually because narration's “fugitive” signs cannot be counted upon to appear in any particular case. Nevertheless, she points out certain musical patterns that appear in multiple instances, and two of these – the use of a strophic ballad form in a context where more complicated forms dominate, and the presence of virtuosic vocal display – are strong enough signs, for Abbate, that even distorted and concealed versions of them will place music into the narrational register.³⁶⁸ Westerns are somewhat more regular than opera in this regard, and although there are doubtless many fugitive signs of narration, there are also four musical traits that reliably mark a cue as narrational. Not every one of these will appear in every case, but some subset typically does, and all four appear in *High Noon*. These are as follows:

- 1) Non-leitmotivic repetition. The cue uses a theme that has appeared multiple times over the course of the film, but cannot quite be said to function as a leitmotif. (Leitmotifs can become narrational, however, if the other criteria listed below are met.)
- 2) Stylistic Citation. The cue makes specific reference to a style that is different from, and more limited than, the “normal” musical language of the film.
- 3) Performativity. The music is clearly being performed by some non-diegetic or quasi-diegetic agent. Logically, of course, all music is always the product of

³⁶⁷ Ibid., 43.

³⁶⁸ Abbate's distorted and concealed versions are always from Wagner – in essence, her book marshals together evidence from a number of less complicated 19th-century operas in order to arrive at a narratological reading of *Tannhäuser* and the Ring Cycle.

human agency, but these cues call attention to an extradiegetic performing agent. The exuberant vocality Abbate writes about could fit in this category – although for her, the point is more that these effects call attention to *diegetic* performance. (And more generally, the phenomena Abbate describes differ from those under consideration here because they are signs that narration is taking place *within* the diegesis rather than signs that the diegesis itself has *become* narration.)

- 4) Formal lucidity. These cues call attention to formal procedures, either by emphasizing formal boundary points or by presenting complete and readily apprehensible musical forms. Abbate's strophic ballad forms are a subset of this.

Each of these aspects will be examined in turn. At times, this will lead us quite far afield from the Western genre, and therefore it is worth stating here, for the sake of clarity, that what these techniques have in common is that they allow music to clearly show the maker's hand. Narrational music is, at a minimum, music that betrays itself as a constructed thing. By doing this, it engages in the Western's characteristic *mise-en-abyme* construction, and helps to push the film into the epic mode.

Non-leitmotivic Repetition

Taken as an aggregate, film music comes by most of its repetitions through the use of leitmotif technique. Even in densely leitmotivic scores, however, we sometimes encounter a repeated theme that is not leitmotivic in any easily-defined way. One such example is what Royal Brown calls the “floating theme” from *The Sea Hawk*.³⁶⁹ In a score with clearly marked themes for England, Spain, Panama, the hero, the heroine, the hero's ship, combat, torture, and even the hero's pet monkey, we also find a well-defined but thoroughly unmoored theme, which

369 Royal Brown, *Overtones and Undertones*, 98.

– although it appears a good half-dozen times within the film, and in extremely privileged contexts such as the opening credits – never attaches itself to any definite object or idea. It could plausibly represent the ocean, or desire *qua* desire, or love, or freedom (my own preferred interpretation), but all such identifications must remain provisional. The point of the floating theme is that it floats. Our recognition of it as a repeating theme is never comfortably grounded in, and as, signification.

The Sea Hawk is not a Western, of course. But the sort of repetition that is exceptional within that score's densely leitmotivic fabric becomes absolutely standard for the Western, where leitmotif scores are vanishingly rare.³⁷⁰ “The Ballad of High Noon” is likewise a floating theme, for all that its significance would seem to be determined by the lyrics. Is it Will Kane's leitmotif? Hardly – as noted above, it appears in scenes that have nothing to do with him. Does it represent fate? The implacable passing of time? The melody's many appearances in the score (both in its original form and as an orchestral motif) offer no clear answer. It actually appears most frequently in the film's interstitial moments – that is, in establishing shots, transitions between locations and characters, and brief scenes in which Kane walks from place to place. Rather than marking the film's most important elements, as a leitmotif is wont to do, it seems to mark trivialities.

But in *High Noon*, these moments are *not* trivial. Much has been made of the film's unusual temporal strategy – it takes place more or less in real time, over the span of about ninety minutes – but within this superficially “organic” framework the plot of *High Noon* is episodic and cyclical. Kane approaches friend after friend seeking help, and is rejected by each.

³⁷⁰ Exceptions exist, as always. Perhaps the most notable are Martin Böttcher's scores for the *Winnetou* franchise (beginning with *Winnetou* (Harald Reinl, 1963)) and Ennio Morricone's score for *Cera una volta n'el Ovest* (Sergio Leone, 1968). Note however that the *Winnetou* scores share a title theme of no particular leitmotivic significance, which serves as their shared “floating theme,” and that several of Morricone's other Western scores offer us textbook examples of non-leitmotivic repetition.

Various figures – the bartender, the hotel clerk, the fallen woman, Kane's wife, Miller's gang – contemplate the impending crisis. Eventually, the train arrives, and Kane engages Miller and his men in a chaotic running battle through the town. The scenes of preparation in the first half of the film are carefully balanced in order of building intensity, but only a handful show any kind of causal link. Most could be reshuffled at will without altering the plot. To an extent, the narrative structure of the film echoes the temporal structure of the genre's ideology: a period of non-productive, non-developmental and undifferentiated chaos, followed by a moment of catastrophic violence precipitating a new and more ordered progression of events. By highlighting the moments of transition, then – either the scenes of Kane walking from place to place, or the establishing shots that introduce other groups of characters – “The Ballad of High Noon” shows us that the various groups Kane approaches, regardless of their specific reasons for declining to help him, are morally equivalent, and equivalent in terms of their narrative function.

Furthermore, and more importantly, by calling our attention to the episodic and cyclical nature of the plot, the ballad lays bare the formal procedures by which the film itself is constructed. The presence of music at major transitional moments is usually part of film music's suturing function: as Gorbman points out, a dramatic edit without musical cover is, all else being equal, more disruptive than the same edit with music.³⁷¹ But if the purpose were to hide the edits, there would be no earthly reason to use the same music at every transition. The recognition that we feel at the song's every occurrence causes us to think more about the filmic form, not less. It could even be argued that these repeated cues *constitute* the form, turning the film as a whole into a sort of rondo or verse-chorus structure where the various “episodes” of the developing plot are united, and held in check by, the repeated and unchanging ritornello of the

371 Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies*, 73. As noted in the first chapter of this study, “suture” in film studies refers to – among other things – the process through which filmic texts create the illusion that they are unified and coherent (rather than fragmentary and incoherent).

signature tune.

Nearly every Western with a title ballad uses this technique of non-leitmotivic repetition. Frequently, the ballad is the only recurring melody, or one of only a handful, and may be the score's only prominent melodic material of any kind.³⁷² In the 1957 version of *3:10 to Yuma*, there are only two melodies, both of which recur; one is clearly a leitmotif for the hero's wife, and the other is the title theme and no kind of leitmotif at all. More surprisingly, we find non-leitmotivic repetition films *without* title themes. *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964), the first collaboration between Ennio Morricone and Sergio Leone, has a repeated theme that appears no fewer than six times over the course of the film. The cue is foreground music of the first order. A full minute long, with a well-defined AABA form, it is always played in its entirety and usually over scenes with little other sound. But the music has no leitmotivic function. One could call it the showdown theme, in that it does eventually frame the final showdown, and it is clearly in dialogue, musically, with Morricone's other showdown themes, but if we were to try to assign it a meaning based on the scenes in which it appears, we would have to call it the “walking-towards-or-away-from-the-camera-motif.” The formalizing, distancing quality that non-leitmotivic repetition always suggests is reinforced, in this case, by the musical surface, which has the stately gravitas of a slow baroque dance.³⁷³ (See Music Example 4.4, below).

372 A paucity of melodic material in a score does not in and of itself demonstrate non-leitmotivic repetition. David Raksin's score for *Laura* (Otto Preminger, 1944) is instructive here. It is often held up alongside *High Noon* as an example of a “theme tune” score rather than a leitmotif score (and they are similar in that their title songs were financially successful, and inspired many imitators). The *Laura* theme, however, *is* a leitmotif. The fact that it appears constantly throughout the film is a function of the degree to which both the film and its characters are obsessed with the character represented by the theme.

373 Charmed by this idea, I spend a fruitless afternoon searching through catalogs of baroque dance topoi hoping to find the archaic form that Morricone had used to lift the narrative out of its epoch. The tune is a cha-cha, as it turns out. But it's a stately, epic cha-cha, and the melancholy oboe melody is one a Handel or a Scarlatti would not have disdained. I am not alone in noticing the music's baroque flavor: Royal Brown calls it “almost Bachian.” *Overtones and*

By calling attention to the formal processes of the narrative, “The Ballad of High Noon” and the repeated theme from *A Fistful of Dollars* take us out of the narrative slightly. The same can be said for “theme tunes” more generally. Deprived of leitmotivic significance, repeated melodic gestures (and indeed repeated gestures of any sort, whether audible or visible) remind us as we watch that we are watching a movie, and indeed that we are watching *this* movie. By doing so, they call attention to the diegesis as a construct, and create the Western's requisite sense of epic distance. A final point: if one were to approach these films with the dogmatic opinion that all repeated cues in film music must have a leitmotivic function, one would be likely to identify “The Ballad of High Noon” as the leitmotif of fate. The same could be argued for the title theme of *The 3:10 to Yuma*, and the repeated theme from *A Fistful of Dollars*. This is no accident. “Fate,” as it appears in narrative, *is in itself a sign of epic distance*. It separates the audience members (who recognize the grinding of fate's gears) from the characters (who usually don't). Furthermore, the distance is a specifically temporal one: the fated event is always projected into the future, and as a result, those who are unaware of it are thrust into the past.

Stylistic Citation

Abbate suggests that narrational music often hinges on the “unmediated juxtaposition of two unrelated musics.”³⁷⁴ Of course, all juxtapositions are mediated somehow. I take her to really mean that the musics are juxtaposed in a relationship that tends to emphasize rather than to deemphasize the differences between them: there are rhythmic, harmonic, and instrumentational contrasts between the two musics that are not easily explained by standard musical grammar. And when Westerns juxtapose “unrelated musics” in their soundtracks, we find that the styles are never equal partners, nor yet equal rivals.³⁷⁵ One style is always a

Undertones, 228.

³⁷⁴ Abbate, *Unsung Voices*, 148.

³⁷⁵ In everyday speech, the term “musical style” is used to refer to a number of distinct

citation.

Stylistic Citation is a rather general term, but what I mean by it is something quite specific. It refers to the presence in a film score of two distinct musical styles, one of which is simply the “normal” language of film music, and the other of which is a more limited style (constrained both in its musical vocabulary and its emotional expressivity) associated with a particular time, culture, or social function., causing us to interpret the two musical gestures as different musical styles. Christopher Palmer describes an instance of stylistic citation in his article on William Walton's music for *Henry V* (Lawrence Olivier, 1944), which is worth quoting here at some length. (Note that Palmer uses the term “pastiche” to refer to the more constrained, cited style. This is the way the term pastiche is used in everyday conversation, but I have chosen to coin my own term to avoid confusion with postmodern pastiche in Fredric Jameson's sense.)³⁷⁶

[One of Walton's] particular qualities, exemplified in *Henry V*, was that of being able to maintain a discreet [sic] balance between true 'background' music – interpretative and emotive – and those elements of overt musical pastiche that are obviously necessary to evoke the atmosphere and feel of a particular historical period. The opening of *Henry V* offsets these potentially irreconcilable opposites.

personal, generic and geohistorical phenomena. Alan Moore has tried to tidy up this conceptual clutter by relabeling personal style as “idiolect” and generic style as “form” and “genre,” leaving the term “style” for bodies of music that share a time and place of origin, and an audience. Thus Motown, Viennese classicism, and the Ars Subtilior would be styles, while what we think of as Stevie Wonder or Baude Cordier's styles would be idiolects, and what we think of as the torch song or piano concerto style would be aspects of form and genre, even if detached from their original generic context. For our purposes here, however, style could refer to any of these. Allan F. Moore, “Categorical Conventions in Music Discourse: Style and Genre,” in *Music and Letters* 82, no. 3 (Aug 2001): 432-442.

³⁷⁶ Fredric Jameson, “Postmodernism and Consumer Society,” in *Film Theory: Critical Concepts in Media and Culture Studies, Vol. 4*, ed. Philip Simpson, Andrew Utterson, and Karen J. Shepherdson (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 192-207. Note that Jameson's pastiche does imply a similar sense of emotional flatness.

A playbill announcing the production of a new drama *The Chronicle of Henry V* at the Globe Theatre flutters in the breeze to the accompaniment of a flute roulade and then begins a magnificent tracking shot from south to east across a stylized 16th-century London. This allows Walton to proclaim the heroic, spine-tingling tone of the drama to be unfurled in general rather than specific terms.³⁷⁷

There follows a detailed description of the heroic theme, which is not germane to our purposes here. Suffice it to say that this is the “normal” film music, which Palmer calls the “background” for all that it is evidently foregrounded. The stylistic citation comes later:

After the voices and full orchestra have been faded out and a trumpet fanfare has proclaimed the Globe Theatre to be in session, only now does Walton introduce his first piece of 'period' music -- a march-overture using 16th-century phraseology and texture (the scoring includes tabor and harpsichord). In this way the distinction between the 'reality' of the London setting and the 'fantasy' of the stage-play about to be enacted is subtly but distinctly drawn; but, of course, the 'fantasy' now to all intents and purposes becomes 'reality' and the composer is not required to revert to any such self-conscious archaizing in the future. Certainly, there is a discreetly 'period' element in certain passages. . . but in these cases the emotional stuff of the music is sufficient to transcend the stylized matrix into which it has been poured.³⁷⁸

Several elements of Palmer's account are important to our understanding of the technique. To begin with, stylistic citation has the effect of highlighting the boundary between two worlds, one more “real” than the other. Second, the citation *is and must be* emotionally flat: if it has enough “emotional stuff,” as Palmer realizes, it simply ceases to function as pastiche. For the most part, Walton's score makes the emotional life of the setting seem real – and this seems to be the purpose of music in most films that would be described as historical epics (and indeed, the purpose of those films as a whole). Westerns, which I argue deserve the label “epic” more than the epics themselves, do *not* do this. Palmer is quite right to point out that once the setting has

377 Christopher Palmer, “Walton's Film Music,” *The Musical Times* 113, no. 1549 (1972): 250.

378 Ibid.

been established, there's no need for the composer to engage in “self-conscious archaizing.” Why, then, does the score of *High Noon* lapse into stylistic citation at regular intervals throughout the course of the film? The answer is quite simply that the general purpose of music in the Western is not the same as its purpose in the historical epic. Rather than bringing the past to life, it stands guard to ensure that the past stays safely dead.³⁷⁹

A stylistic citation, for our purposes here is a composition or performance that follows certain self-imposed and artificial rules which, for the style being cited, were *not* seen as self-imposed and artificial but rather as “natural,” i.e. universal and organic. In the case of *High Noon*, the cited style is the cowboy ballad, and the normal style is the high-Hollywood film score. Thus whenever we hear the ballad sung by Tex Ritter, we are hearing the citation, and whenever Tiomkin's orchestra takes over the soundtrack, we are hearing the normal style. The spare instrumentation of “The Ballad of High Noon” (accordion, guitar, and vocals) could have been, for an actual cowboy, simply the instruments that were on hand. The simple diatonicism of the melody and harmony, likewise, are requisite elements of that style. Tiomkin, on the other hand, had at his disposal the full symphony orchestra and the elaborate harmonic vocabulary of late Romanticism, and although he made full use of these in the “normal” film music cues, in the ballad he chose – artificially – to discard them.³⁸⁰

The effect of these self-imposed rules is to limit the function and meaning of the music. A musical style is a kind of musical language, or really a musical *langue* in the sense often borrowed from Ferdinand de Saussure: it consists of a set of rules and possibilities which one must internalize in order to communicate to other “speakers” of the language.³⁸¹ Although many

379 Of course, this is not the only use to which citation can be put by a film, as the *Henry V* example proves. It is only the use that is characteristic of the Western.

380 It may be, of course, that the decision was made by a different member of the creative team. From the point of view of the audience, it matters little. It might be better to say that the Tiomkin-persona made this choice.

381 In practice, any piece of music speaks several styles simultaneously. Furthermore, the

today are inclined to pay lip service to the notion that all musical styles have equal claim to truth and beauty, we nevertheless tend to believe in our heart of hearts that some styles are “larger,” and therefore that others are “smaller,” if only by comparison. I prefer the metaphor of size to that of strength because what is at stake here is the range of possible expressions, not the force with which any given one can be expressed. Briefly, a large style is a language in which one can say many different things; a small one, the opposite. The military bugle call is one of the smallest styles, radically circumscribed in instrumentation and pitch, and comprised of a closed corpus of melodies with a mere handful of semantic and affective meanings between them. Wake. Sleep. Fight. Flee. Gather. Eat. Mourn. Exult. (The use to which bugle calls have been put when *cited*, in larger styles, by the Gustav Mahlers and John Williamses of the world, is another thing altogether.) Putting aside the question of whether such evaluations have any basis in fact, I simply claim that we do in fact make them. A scrupulously pluralist listener might only distinguish between the styles that he or she does understand and the ones that he or she does not, never slipping in the conviction that all styles are equally large, and equally good for *someone*. To this position (which I cleave to myself as best as I can), my only response is that reflective moviegoing has a way of disabusing us of our pretensions of evenhandedness. Styles that we would consciously defend as full-fledged languages tend to slip in the back door as thoroughly overdetermined signifiers of this-and-this-alone: it is difficult, when watching a film, and confronted with a piece of music that sounds “cowboyish,” not to think of it as cowboy music first and foremost.

The general case can be laid out as follows: As composers and audiences, we tend think

styles themselves overlap to a degree. To understand a Mozart symphony, we must be well-versed in the classical style, the symphonic style, and Mozart's style – but it is hardly conceivable that one could really master any of these stylistic languages without learning each of the others. The overlap here is particularly pronounced due to Mozart's importance as a composer and that of the symphony as a genre.

of "our" musical style (in *High Noon*, late-Romantic orchestral music) as a complete propositional language within which all musical statements can be made and all other musical styles can be cited. Confronted with another style (here the cowboy ballad style), we tend to think of it as a jargon or argot, with a limited vocabulary (as it were) suited to the specific needs of the population to which that style is natural. Cowboy song suits cowboy needs, whether these are communitarian, per Lomax, or bawdy, per Logsdon. Baroque dance forms allow the negotiation of social relationships without violating the calcified etiquette peculiar to the European aristocracy, expressing stately courtship, stately mourning, stately aggression, and so on. Neither language answers to the needs of the other population. There is no such thing as a bawdy minuet – at least not for us, now, though I say nothing of whether there was such a thing for them, then. There is no such thing as an etiquette-conscious trail song. Not only do these adjectives seem loath to attach to each style's musical surface, they are also loath to attach to the social milieu (the audience-persona, roughly speaking) that each style implies. "Our own" style, by contrast, is capable of answering both needs, and all needs. And this is perhaps why the vast majority of period films are not scored in period style.³⁸² Aaron Copland, in his list of the

382 "Our own" style will vary between populations and between individuals, and can be defined quite precisely as the music which, for us, fits all needs. Late-Romantic classical music was the language of classical Hollywood cinema, no doubt. If a Korngold or a Steiner (or indeed, a Tiomkin) needed to express something sexual, they'd use classical music; if they needed to express something stately, they'd use classical music. In very recent years, this has begun to change. The people responsible for film soundtracks (composers, directors, and music editors alike) have become much more likely to draw from a wide variety of musical styles, with classical music being limited to a handful of more or less well-defined roles. The current dominant style in film scoring, then, is polystylistic. But this by no means implies that current film scoring practice embraces all things and has no distinct properties of its own. The "polystylistic style" still has limits: there's still lots of music that would never be used at all, and lots of music that would never be used for anything but otherness. The polystylistic style still has a codified vocabulary proper to itself (meaning that the original meaning of much of the music has no bearing on the new meaning it takes on in this "normal" film scoring practice).

potential functions of film music, lamented the fact that a standard late-nineteenth-century high-class European style was used to score any time, place, and culture whatsoever, with the sole exception of “the higher grade horse-opera,” which “has begun to have its own musical flavor, mostly a folksong derivative.”³⁸³

In the case of *High Noon*, the relationship between the normal style and the cited style is carefully negotiated through the use of a single melody in two distinct musical languages: that of the cowboy ballad, and that of high-Hollywood orchestral underscore. Significantly, the cowboy ballad version never changes. The cues sound like (or are in fact) repeated excerpts from a single ongoing performance of the song. Again, we must recognize this as a deliberate choice. The filmmakers could have had Tex Ritter sing markedly different versions without violating any canons of the style, or simply had him sing several different songs! The sameness of the ballad cues, therefore, is meant to be read against the extreme fluidity and flexibility with which the melody is used in the orchestral underscore.

A



Oh to be torn 'twixt love and du - ty.

B



What will I do if you leave me?

C



Wait a - long.

Music Example 4.2a-c: Rhythmic cells from “The Ballad of High Noon” which are developed in example 4.3, below.

383 Aaron Copland, “Aaron Copland in the Film Studio,” in *The Hollywood Film Music Reader*, ed. Mervyn Cooke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 318-326.

The musical score is divided into three systems, each with a woodwind part on top and a piano/harp part on the bottom. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and the time signature is common time (C).

- System 1:**
 - Flute & Glockenspiel:** Features a melodic line with a long slur over the first two measures and two eighth-note patterns in the third and fourth measures.
 - Piano & Harp:** The right hand plays a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The left hand plays a series of chords, with a slur over the first two measures.
- System 2:**
 - Flute & Glockenspiel:** Continues with eighth-note patterns in the third and fourth measures.
 - Piano & Harp:** The right hand continues the eighth-note accompaniment. The left hand features a rhythmic cell marked 'A' in the first measure, followed by eighth-note accompaniment and chords.
- System 3:**
 - Trumpets:** Plays a series of chords, with a rhythmic cell marked 'B' in the first measure. The part ends with a woodwind-like flourish in the fourth measure.
 - Woodwinds:** Enters in the fourth measure with a melodic line.
 - Piano & Harp:** The right hand continues the eighth-note accompaniment. The left hand features a rhythmic cell marked 'C' in the first measure, followed by eighth-note accompaniment and chords.

Music Example 4.3 (continued on following pages): *High Noon*. The train pulls in. A, B, and C mark prominent appearances of the rhythmic cells.

13 B (in augmentation)

Brass

13

18 A

18 A

Woodwinds

22

22

Music Example 4.3, continued.

Music Example 4.3, continued.

The orchestral score uses the ballad melody in a number of different moods and instrumentations, and subjects it to substantial motivic development. This builds to a remarkable apotheosis at the climax of the film, a wordless montage in which all of the characters silently await the arrival of Miller's train. Here Tiomkin's treatment of the ballad's melodic material is very free indeed. The cue is built around the three rhythmic cells given as Music Example 4.2, based respectively on the cadence of the phrases "he made a vow while in state prison," "what will I do if you leave me?" and "wait along." In addition to its raw musical power, the orchestral fantasy on the ballad transcribed in Music Example 4.3 is particularly significant in that there is no question of this music, or its free treatment of the musical material

of the ballad, going unheard. The music is mixed to the fore, extended in duration, and isolated on the soundtrack. No one says anything, or even does very much of anything, to distract us from it.

Using music to refer to a different music (as pastiche, as citation, or indeed as any other artificial thing), already implies a certain distance and a certain superiority, and so too does perceiving such a reference. When Tiomkin uses orchestral music to refer to the music of the cowboy ballad, he establishes that music as a sort of raw material, there for the taking. Our ability to perceive these references brings us closer to Tiomkin, even as it opens a distance between us and the audience-persona for whom the style is natural. Folk music has long served as a source of raw material for classical music, and treated with precisely the techniques we find Tiomkin using here. The symphonic style in which Tiomkin generally writes is not actually newer than the folk style he tries on for the ballad, but it would be impossible to experience the orchestral version of the theme as the original version and the ballad as a variation on that theme. On its own, the archaic “cowboy” style of the ballad would already tend to distance the audience from the diegesis. When placed in dialogue with music in “our own” style, which is toying with and building on motifs taken from the “older” style – using the ballad as inert and exploitable raw material in the way that classical music has *always* used folk music – this distance is powerfully reinforced.

Unsurprisingly, most of the Western's citation cues are citations of cowboy music (although the audience's understanding of “cowboy music” has varied pretty wildly over time, resulting in a great deal of sonic diversity).³⁸⁴ Naturally, in addition to creating epic distance

384 At the height of the singing cowboy phenomenon, for instance, even essentially non-musical Westerns understood “cowboy music” to mean acapella close-harmony ballads, provided that the lyrics made some reference to lil' dogies. A song like “The Lullaby of the Herd,” from Archainbaud's *The Kansan*, doesn't really land as “cowboy music” to a modern ear, but this is evidently the role it's meant to play within the film, as we can see from the juxtaposition of this music with the debauched and “civilized” music of the saloon.

through the technique of style citation, these serve the basic purpose of establishing the film's setting.³⁸⁵ But other stylistic citations, entirely inappropriate in historical terms, still appear frequently enough in the Western to constitute a noticeable pattern, especially in post-studio films. (Here the broader history of film scoring practice inflects the history of the genre: post-studio soundtracks in any genre are more likely to draw on many different styles than soundtracks from the studio era.) Morricone provides many of the most remarkable examples. In addition to the ceremonial repeated theme from *A Fistful of Dollars* (Leone, 1964), he gives us a baroque organ fantasia in *For a Few Dollars More* (Leone, 1965) and a spaghetti-Western reworking of Beethoven's "Für Elise" in *The Big Gundown* (Sergio Sollima, 1966). Other styles that appear in Westerns without serving a clear setting-defining function include flamenco guitar in the 1957 *3:10 to Yuma* (among other films), Tin-Pan-Alley songcraft in *Cat Ballou* (Elliot Silverstein, 1965), protestant hymnody in *Cimarron* (Wesley Ruggles, 1931), *The Searchers* (Ford, 1956), and the 2010 *True Grit*, and brass-band marches in *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (George Hill, 1969).³⁸⁶ Not every juxtaposition of styles will be read as stylistic citation, as the previous chapters on melodrama and horror demonstrate. However, when stylistic juxtapositions appear in the Western, care is usually taken to ensure that one style is read as "smaller" and less flexible, that its treatment of the emotional issues in question is understood as a naïve treatment of these issues, and that it is prevented from speaking directly

385 See Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies*, 83.

386 A similar effect is achieved by borrowing specific melodies. Limiting ourselves to examples that are not properly cowboy melodies, we find "She Wore a Yellow Ribbon" in Ford's film of the same name, "I Dream of Jeannie" in Anthony Mann's *The Naked Spur*, "In the Sweet Bye and Bye" and "The Rose of Alabama" in *The Outlaw Josey Wales*, and "Dixie" in a whole slew of films including *Shane*, *The Westerner* and *Dodge City*. Usually, these melodies are iconic enough to suggest a stylistic context (frontier music, parlor song, hymnody, military song, etc.), and can therefore be thought of as stylistic citations as well. Using a recognizable melody will in any case also call attention to the music, which tends to further disturb the illusion of the film text's organic wholeness.

to the audience's own emotional experience. As noted above, “The Ballad of High Noon” uses a curiously stilted and affectless performance style, and this is common in films of this kind. Furthermore, if we review the styles that we find cited in Westerns, we find that they are usually tightly pegged to some aspect of setting or character. Civil war songs are used for ex-confederates, hymnody in films populated by religious fundamentalists. Morricone's examples are even more direct: his organ fantasia takes place in an abandoned church, his *paso-dobles* in symbolic bullrings. Such rigid one-to-one relationships between film and music often have a trivializing effect, as is demonstrated by the term “mickey-mousing.”

Performativity

At first glance, this is the simplest of the Western score's distance-effects. I have taken some pains to suggest that citation and repetition signal the hand of a musical agent, but self-conscious signs of musical performance could hardly mean anything else. This is especially true when the performative music is non-diegetic. If the sounds call our attention to performing agents who are outside of the diegesis proper (whether they seem to inhabit the locus of narration, or to inhabit our own fully non-diegetic world), this must tend to distance the audience from the narrative. The question that confronts us, rather, is how music ever manages *not* to be performative. For all music, surely, is produced by musicians?

Non-diegetic vocal music, indeed, is nearly always heard thus. Our tendency to seek a source for any sound is strong, but our tendency to seek a source for the human voice is stronger yet (as a great many theorists of film sound and music have noted).³⁸⁷ In “The Ballad of High

387 Royal Brown, for instance, records an instance in which Universal Studios forced composer David Shire to remove a non-diegetic vocalise from his score to *The Hindenburg* (Robert Wise, 1975) for fear of confusing the audience. Only vocal music poses this kind of threat: when the vocalise was replaced with a hastily recorded woodwind version of the same theme, the studio was placated, although Shire detested the result. As Brown writes, “whereas a single human voice on the music track for *The Hindenburg* can set audiences to hunting around

Noon,” the performativity is simply that of the non-diegetic human voice. We hear a man singing, we are unable to locate him in the diegesis, therefore, we locate him in the narrative's epic situation. Matters are more complex, however, in the Westerns that use performative instrumental music. There is no logical difference – music is made by someone, whether it's sung or played – but in fact we often hear instrumental music as agentless. This phenomenon has been well-addressed by Flinn and other scholars who trace the typical invisibility of the film score's performers to the invisibility of the operatic orchestra, a developing process that reached new heights with Wagner's innovations in the design of the orchestra pit, and continues to express itself in stronger forms with the piped-in music that characterize modern theatrical performance.³⁸⁸

Although it is likely the case that cinema took its musical cues from opera and other 19th-century stage music, the division between noumenal and phenomenal music (to borrow terminology from Abbate) is more general than this.³⁸⁹ In essence, we are dealing with Lydia Goehr's concept of *Werktreue*: the idea that music exists first and foremost as an idea in the mind of the composer, and that any performance that calls attention to something other than this idea is a corruption of the work.³⁹⁰ This ideology drives 20th century fulminations against performative excess, such as Marc Pincherle and Willis Wager's claim that virtuosity “is

the screen for a consummated source, in *King Kong* even the movement of the visual images in time with the purely orchestral, purely occidental, and therefore “purely” unconsummated music does not suffice to pull Max Steiner's score into the action or even to make audiences wonder about it.” *Overtones and Undertones*, 41.

388 Caryl Flinn, *Strains of Utopia*, 46.

389 Nor is the idea unique to common-practice tonality. Kabuki, for instance, uses both onstage and offstage musicians. The music of the former has a more narrational role – and notably, the most virtuoso *shamisen* playing is always done in front of the audience.

390 Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 227-244, especially 232-236.

understood to mean the total and condemnable subjection of the work to the interpreter.”³⁹¹ The subjection is condemnable because the idea of the musical work is categorically superior to the action of the interpreting body. Heinrich Schenker writes that

When a genius releases a work into the world of appearances, he speaks not just to himself but also to each individual listener, whereas each listener, by contrast, recognizes himself in the genius and feels expressed and culminated only through the genius... nothing else remains for the conductor or performer to do in regard to this effect.³⁹²

We listen to music for the composer-genius-hero's numinous *idea* then, and anything that the performer adds will detract from the experience: Schenker goes on inveigh against the sort of performer who

changes and distorts it, brings things in and leaves things out... behind the genius's back, the conductor or performer places himself in a direct connection with the listener that he has so deeply subdued, and negotiates with him, as it were, for applause at the expense of the work: how much applause, for example, will he give for this exquisite oboe, this dreamy horn, or that sweet flute.³⁹³

Similarly, in the prospectus for the Society for Private Musical Performances (surely a high-water mark for self-consciously “serious” performances), Alban Berg wrote that performers were to avoid

that kind of virtuosity... which makes of the work to be performed not the end in itself but merely a means to an end which is not the Society's, namely: the

391 Marc Pincherle and Willis Wager, “Virtuosity,” *Musical Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (Apr. 1949): 227.

392 Heinrich Schenker, “Genuine and Sham Effects,” in *Der Tonwille: Pamphlets/Quarterly Publication in Witness of the Immutable Laws of Music, Vol. II*, ed. William Drabkin, trans. Ian Bent et. al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 115.

393 Ibid.

display of irrelevant virtuosity and individuality, and the attainment of a purely personal success. . . . The only success that an artist can have here is that (which should be most important to him) of having made the work, and therewith its composer, intelligible.³⁹⁴

And we see the same conflict between suave performativity and austere substance in his teacher Arnold Schoenberg's great anti-phenomenal opera *Moses und Aron*, where Aron changes and distorts the law, placing himself between God and the people, winning much applause but ultimately perverting the divine Idea. The division between the performerly and the properly *musical* has not had the same force in all times and places. Even within the classical canon, we find figures like Frederic Chopin and C.P.E. Bach who at their most musical, according to their contemporaries, were far more performative and bodily than a Schenker or a Berg would have countenanced, and whose music (not coincidentally) can accommodate and to an extent demands a more performative sort of performance to this day.³⁹⁵ Film scoring, however, has never been a style in which broadly performative gestures could easily be accommodated. It draws too heavily on high-Romantic aesthetics. Furthermore, as a recorded medium, it allows for the invisibility of a performer in a way that earlier styles did not: the absence of a bodily agent is more nearly complete in a "normal" classical Hollywood score than it ever could have been before the rise of recording.

But once the notion of agentless music becomes possible, so too does it become possible to musically call attention to agency. The simplest technique is to use actual or virtual musical

394 Alban Berg, "Prospectus of the Society for Private Music Performances," 1918. Quoted in *A Schoenberg Reader: Documents of a Life*, ed. and trans. Joseph Auner (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 152.

395 Eero Tarasti gives an account of the importance of performance (and the performer's corporeality) in Chopin's music, quoting liberally from contemporary accounts, in *Signs of Music: A Guide to Musical Semiotics* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2002), 129-40. C.P.E. Bach addresses these issues himself in his *Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments*, trans. W.J. Mitchell (London: Cassel, 1949), 152.

improvisation, which typically manifests as a richly ornamented melodic line performed by a solo instrument with a great degree of rhythmic freedom. At times, the improvisatory effect is highlighted by combining this technique with non-leitmotivic repetition. The repeated cue from *A Fistful of Dollars* is not particularly performative in five of its six appearances, but in its final statement the already ornate oboe melody is given instead to a trumpeter, who decorates the line even more heavily and toys with the rhythm, hanging well behind the beat. Morricone worked with a number of trained improvisers, and it seems likely that in this case the improvisation is actual, but the effect would be the same if he had written every ornament out. In either case the audience would sense the presence of an improvising trumpeter-*persona* – and it is this *persona* that creates the narrational distance.

A Fistful of Dollars is rather a special case, of course. Not every Western lets us directly compare the performative and non-performative versions of a cue. However, there are other, subtler ways to call attention to the performing agent (many of which are also used in this case), and these do tend to appear across a wide range of films. Incompetent performance calls our attention to the performer, but so too does great virtuosity, such as that of the trumpeter in this instance. Unusual extended timbral effects tend to focus our attention on the physical perdurance of the instrument-as-object (the clarinet reed as a bit of wood, the guitar string as a bit of metal), but so too does the timbre of an instrument that is cheap, badly made, or broken. Indeed, with almost any musical variable, “agentless” invisibility is a kind of ideal mean, and any surfeit or deficit will be experienced as a kind of friction between that mean and the material circumstances of the music's production.³⁹⁶ Small variations in timing and pitch – rubato and

396 Something very like this zero-sum game is suggested by Abbate in “Music: Drastic of Gnostic?” *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 3 (2004): 505-536. The difference between my approach and hers in that article is that she displaces the true *essence* of music onto its corporeality, and argues for a radical reframing of aesthetic experience in which this corporeality is central rather than peripheral. I am far more content with the current state of affairs. Rather than try to found a new aesthetic regime centered on the corporeal, I would like to explore the ways that

The musical score consists of two staves: Oboe and Strings. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and the time signature is common time (C). The Oboe part begins with a half note on G4, followed by eighth and quarter notes. The Strings part provides a rhythmic accompaniment with chords and eighth notes. Measures 3, 5, and 7 are marked with a '3' above the staff, indicating a triplet. Measure 7 shows a wordless chorus joining the strings with sustained chords.

Music Example 4.4a: The repeated theme from *A Fistful of Dollars* in its initial appearance. Each version of the cue is slightly different to adjust to the timing of the scene in question, but the changes are extremely subtle (save that most versions continue to the cadence rather than breaking off, as this one does, on the dominant). Note: a wordless chorus joins the strings at measure 7, reinforcing the harmonies with sustained chords.

corporeality functions in its current role as an aesthetic excess.

Trumpet

mp

mf

slow crescendo

f from here through the end, heavy vibrato on all extended notes *ff*

mf

Music Example 4.4b: Final appearance of *A Fistful Of Dollars*' repeated theme. The accompaniment, not transcribed here, is similar to that of the earlier appearances of the cue. Note that in this version, every part of the underlying musical sentence is expanded or repeated, and that the harmony is enriched by a swerve to the mediant in m. 13. The trumpeter's acrobatic virtuosity is the most obvious way in which the final statement of the theme is made more dramatic, but hardly the only way. (This performance is also a style citation of mariachi trumpet playing – we will see in due course how the musical signs of narration are combined.)

vibrato – are thought of as performer's vices when taken to excess, but so too is a performance style that is lifeless and mechanical. Finally, it should be noted that instrumental solos always convey more performative agency than *tutti* sections, perhaps because agency is inextricably bound up with individuality in the modern imagination, or perhaps simply because mass performance tends to occlude all of the small variations in pitch, timing, and timbre listed

above.³⁹⁷

Performative sonic traits are therefore quite similar to what Roland Barthes refers to as “the grain of the voice.”³⁹⁸ Although Barthes' examples are primarily musical, and he describes the grain as bodily, his real point is about language. The “grain” of a spoken word is whatever is left behind once all the semantic meaning (including its affective significance) has been leached out. Barthes holds that although this residuum is too refined to be perceived in our day to day speech, sometimes poetry and often song can draw the grain out, and push it to the foreground of our consciousness. (This is the “certain culture of the French language” that he claims is characteristic of the *melodie* tradition.)³⁹⁹

However, although Barthes claims that music works to make grain recognizable, he explicitly excludes certain musical traits, specifically “the form (the litany), the melisma, and even the style of execution.”⁴⁰⁰ As so often when literary theorists turn to music, the vocabulary is imprecise, but we can assume that Barthes is ruling out all features of music that are subject to the kind of classificatory control we apply to language's semantic, signifying properties. Classical music has rich analytic vocabularies for harmony, melodic contour, counterpoint, meter, form, instrumentation, and tempo, and a somewhat less focused but still robust vocabulary for describing the affective and semiotic content of the music (e.g., “this music is sad,” “this sounds like a folk song”). Film music carries many of these over, and arguably expands the affective/semiotic vocabulary dramatically. (Though intended for pragmatic use, the Erdmann/Bece/Brav *Handbuch* also constitutes the most extensive *affektenlehre* ever

397 Cone also notes that we are more likely to find a musical persona in a musical gesture performed by soloist, because this allows the musician to “preserve the cantabile character of the line.” *The Composer's Voice*, 78.

398 Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, 179-189.

399 *Ibid.*, 186.

400 *Ibid.*, 181.

developed.)⁴⁰¹ These “conscious” musical traits are generally attributed to the music itself, or perhaps to the composer. Barthes recognizes that much of what lies beyond – timbre, performative skill, and microfluctuations of pitch and rhythm – will be attributed to the performer, or to the “voice.”⁴⁰²

Many performative effects can be heard in the following cue from the 1957 Delmer Daves version of *The 3:10 to Yuma*. For this film, George Duning provided one of the most idiosyncratic of the title-ballad scores to follow in the wake of *High Noon*. Where most of these films feature sung versions of their title ballads frequently throughout the film, *The 3:10 to Yuma* seems content to use only instrumental versions (although these are interestingly divided between a “standard” Hollywood orchestral texture and a soloistic acoustic guitar). As a result, the moments when the score does approach vocality are all the more striking. Once, the antagonist Ben Wade (Glenn Ford) diegetically whistles the melody, and once, in the cue transcribed in Music Example 4.5, which appears minutes before the film's final shootout, we hear the ballad sung by a distant female voice in a duet with the guitar soloist.

Here too, Wade is shown to have unusual access to the music: as the string parts become more active, and the singer shifts to wordless humming, Wade says, apropos of nothing else, “I like a girl singing.” Therefore, there is a strong case for considering this music to be “metadiegetic” in Gorbman's sense, i.e., a record of Wade's subjective experience.⁴⁰³ In a typical example of metadiegetic music, however (such as the sequences from *Vertigo* Gorbman discusses), the intention is to suture us more firmly into identification with the character who

401 Erdmann, Becce and Brav, *Allgemeines Handbuch der Film-Musik*.

402 Which traits count as systematic and musical, and which as performative, will vary with the specific musical culture. Might the medieval scribes who neglected to record the rhythms of troubadour songs have thought of meter as a performative element? Might timbre (a major element of both Barthes' “grain” and my “performativity”) be less performative in systems which provide it with a detailed analytical vocabulary, like Chinese classical music?

⁴⁰³ Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies*, 22-3.

Strings and flutes

Voice

Guitar

Piano

This system shows the first three measures of the score. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The 'Strings and flutes' part features a melodic line with three measures, each containing a half note with a fermata. The 'Voice' part is silent. The 'Guitar' part has a whole rest in the first measure, followed by two measures of a full chord. The 'Piano' part has a whole rest in the first measure, followed by two measures of a triplet eighth-note pattern.

Strng. & Flt.

Voice

Gtr.

Pno.

rit.

I want to ride a - gain _____ on the three ten to Yu - ma...

This system shows measures 4 through 7. The 'Strng. & Flt.' part begins with a dynamic marking of *rit.* and a fermata over the first measure, followed by two more measures with half notes and fermatas. The 'Voice' part starts in measure 4 with the lyrics 'I want to ride a - gain _____ on the three ten to Yu - ma...'. The 'Gtr.' part has a full chord in measure 4, followed by a melodic line in measures 5 and 6. The 'Pno.' part continues with the triplet eighth-note pattern from the first system.

Music Example 4.5 (continued on following page): *The 3:10 to Yuma* – “*I Like a Girl Singing.*”

The musical score consists of three systems, each with three staves: String & Flute (Strng. & Flt.), Voice, and Guitar (Gtr.).

System 1 (Measures 8-11):
 - **Strng. & Flt.:** Four measures of sustained notes, each with a fermata.
 - **Voice:** Four measures of melody with lyrics: "That's where I met my love the man that I can't for - get."
 - **Gtr.:** Four measures of accompaniment, including a double bar line at measure 10.

System 2 (Measures 12-15):
 - **Strng. & Flt.:** Four measures of sustained notes, each with a fermata.
 - **Voice:** Four measures of melody with the instruction "(Humming)" under the first measure.
 - **Gtr.:** Four measures of accompaniment, with a fermata over the first measure and the instruction "(8^{va})" above it.

Each note is sustained here.

System 3 (Measures 17-20):
 - **Strng. & Flt.:** Four measures of sustained notes, each with a fermata, with the instruction "rit. molto" above the first measure.
 - **Voice:** Four measures of melody, with a fermata over the first measure and the instruction "8^{va}" above it.
 - **Gtr.:** Four measures of accompaniment, with dynamics markings "mp" and "f" and the instruction "Nearly inaudible" above the first measure.

Music Example 4.5, continued.

hears the music. We never identify with Wade: his motivations are too unclear, his utterances too cryptic. The focalized character in *The 3:10 to Yuma* is unquestionably the hero Dan Evans (Van Heflin), for whom Wade is an enigmatic and seductive threat, as indeed he is for us. Wade's access to the music, instead, serves to mark him as an outsider. None of the law abiding citizens have this access to the music, but neither do the members of Wade's gang. A true

Western aristocrat (in Warshow's sense), Wade is alone wherever he goes, and part of the reason for this is his access to special knowledge, not only of the music but of the narrative itself. Wade's ability to predict the other characters' actions seems to go beyond a merely keen insight into psychology, and his last minute change of heart, where he joins Evans to take up arms against his own men, makes the most sense if we assume that he understands the mythic stakes of the conflict (in terms of the establishment of the rule of law) on a level that Evans himself does not. In short, Wade views the plot from the outside, from the same perspective as the narrating voice, and so in this particular case, his access to the non-diegetic music does not indicate that we are stepping into his subjective world. Rather, it indicates that he is stepping out of it.

The performative elements of the cue transcribed in Music Example 4.5 (which is the sole appearance of the ballad as a song within the film) help to reinforce this, although naturally the notation fails to capture most of these. Perhaps most notable is the guitarist's free sense of time and volume. The rolled chords in measures two, three, and four are played at markedly different speeds: there is a slight pause after the lowest note of the first of these (which is also strongly accented), and the third is strummed so slowly that it should arguably be transcribed as a series of sixteenth notes. Near the end of the cue, in measures 27 and 28 of the transcription, the guitarist hangs back behind the beat, losing synchronization with the soprano. (I have not seen Duning's score, and it is possible – and likely even, given the professionalism of Hollywood studio musicians – that he wrote this lack of synchronization out. Nevertheless, the effect is to emphasize the agency of the two soloists.) Timbre – specifically the soprano's shift to humming – adds to the cue's performativity, as do the unexpected shifts into the guitar's lower and upper registers in measures 8 and 11, respectively.

All of this has been predicated on the notion that performativity calls attention to the

film as a made thing by calling attention to the performer's non-diegetic status. We should note however that musical performers who appear on screen can sometimes still create epic distance through performativity. In *Cat Ballou*, the cowboy-balladeer persona is an actual character, or rather a pair of characters, two strolling minstrels who appear sporadically throughout the film singing songs that comment directly or indirectly on the plot.⁴⁰⁴ These characters spend all of their time in the epic situation: they speak directly to the audience, and for the most part fail to interact with the other characters. (They engage with some of the minor characters and extras, especially if these characters are themselves musical, but at no point do they interact with any of the major characters.) The epic distance surrounding these characters is strengthened by performative elements, specifically, their tremendous skill and the joy they evidently take in performing. That one of them is Nat King Cole, then already a beloved elder statesman of popular song, may also contribute.

Another interesting example appears in *Cimarron* (Ruggles, 1931), in the remarkable scene in which the gathered population of a frontier boom-town sings the popular song “Who Are You At Home?” during an impromptu church service. As the song progresses, the camera cuts from close-up to close-up, showcasing all of the important characters (as well as a number of minor ones). Somewhat unusually for that time, the sound is not continuous: each character's voice is brought to the front of the mix as the camera lingers on him or her. This sequence becomes performative thanks to the editing, and especially the sound editing. The listener-position depicted here, leaping around the room with the camera from point to point, is an impossible one, and we are therefore intensely aware of its having been constructed for us.

404 *Cat Ballou* is a very funny film, and although I list it as a comedy Western rather than a parody Western, it could be argued that this extremely performative music is meant to be a comic distortion of the Western's typical scoring practice. But this would only tend to confirm the broader point I am trying to make. A feature of genre that's worth mocking is, at minimum, a feature of genre that exists.

Therefore, although each individual character's singing is diegetic, the performance as a whole is something more than diegetic. Unusually (and delightfully), the agent we're made aware of is not a performer-agent or a composer-agent but rather an arranger.

Still, the effect of epic distance in this sequence is strongest with the performances that are performatively excessive. There is an incompetent violinist whose instrument is nearly falling apart, and a comic schoolmarm character whose singing is marred by painfully stylized and cultivated affectations, including a markedly performative portamento – a glissando, really – up to the melody's highest note. Both of these performances struggle *against* the expressive content of the song itself, and what is more, against the expressive content of the film. It's necessary for the schoolmarm's characterization that her singing be bad, but not that it be *that* bad. The humorous discomfort we feel in the scene has nothing to do with her characterization; it is, rather, a response to the music, depending on no context but our sense of how music is supposed to sound. This creates the same kind of friction between the ideal invisible performance and the actual performance that tends to make music performative in the first place. (An ideal “invisible” performance in this case would be one that's just bad enough to mark the schoolmarm as a poor singer, and no worse.) Any sufficiently idiosyncratic performance will break from the diegesis in much the same way.

Formal Lucidity

Form's role in music is to structure the audiences' experience. It calls our attention to certain aspects of the musical material (privileged by their repetition or by their newness), and to certain aspects of the time interval (privileged by being the site of newness or of return). It is one of the most important elements of music – and yet, as many commentators have noted, film music generally eschews form or at least tries to obscure it. Music's formal processes would conflict with the formal processes of the film, and therefore call attention to themselves,

breaking the audience's suspension of disbelief and calling undue attention to the film's status as a made thing. It should come as no surprise, at this point, that Western scores often flaunt the kinds of formal processes that most film music tries so effectively to hide.

Within this category, there are three distinct approaches. The first is to use thematic material of the sort that Eero Tarasti labels “Inchoative” or “Terminative,” i.e. musical gestures that signal either the beginning or the end of a piece of music.⁴⁰⁵ Tarasti's examples include sounds associated with the concert ritual (tuning a violin, for instance), mimetic representations of those sounds (such as the violin soloist's double-stops at the beginning of Saint-Saens's *Danse Macabre*), and purely conventional stock gestures associated with beginnings and endings by the weight of tradition alone. “The Ballad of High Noon,” for instance, opens with a guitar vamp for a few bars before the singer comes in. Then, after all the lyrics have been delivered, there's a coda - or better, an outro – where the lyric “wait a long. . .” is repeated in various melodic figurations as the music slowly fades out. These are, respectively, opening inchoative and terminative formulas within the language of popular song. Stock opening and closing gestures are obviously not universal: they depend on the conventions of the musical style, and therefore on the audience's stylistic competence. As a result, effects of this kind are most common in conjunction with the technique of style citation.

A second way to call attention to the music's formal properties is to call attention to the transition between formal sections. Even more than the previous category, this depends on the audience's understanding of the form in question. The examples I've encountered all use basic Tin-Pan-Alley forms: we hear the move from a verse to a chorus, or from a sectional verse to the song proper, etc. The *3:10 to Yuma* cue transcribed above presents us with the transition from

405 Eero Tarasti, *A Theory of Musical Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 73. Tarasti takes these categories from the semiotics of A.J. Greimas. There is a third category, “durativity,” which refers to gestures that indicate that the music (or for Greimas, the enunciation) is neither beginning nor ending, but persisting.

an instrumental introduction to the song's main melody, and as a result, it also features a number of inchoative gestures, such as the transition from a relatively static chordal texture to a more fluid melodic one. However, even transitions between internal sections would tend to call attention to the music as something that is made, and not merely given.

Finally, we have the most extreme technique: that of presenting a readily apprehensible musical form in its entirety. This also occurs at the beginning of *High Noon*, where we hear the ballad's entire AABA form from start to finish. Formal completion reinforces a number of the effects already described above. Establishing the ballad as a reified thing emphatically blocks off the possibility of interpreting it as an organic element of Tiomkin's score. Likewise, the formal completion of the ballad lyrics tends to separate the balladeer persona from the organizing intelligence of the film. Kozloff suggests that in films that begin with voiceover narration, we typically assume that the entire film is a continuation of that narrative.⁴⁰⁶ However, the same cannot apply to a film that begins with a formally complete narrational song. We know exactly how much the narrator has told us, because we heard their performance end: *High Noon* and “The Ballad of High Noon” must be two complete tellings of the same story. (The later, shorter ballad cues that recur throughout the film never introduce any material that was not contained in the initial complete performance.)

Nevertheless, *High Noon* offers a relatively weak example of this particular technique, again because musically extravagant title themes tend to disturb the narrative far less than the same gesture would later in the story. For the most powerful examples of formal lucidity in the Western, we turn again to the spaghetti Western scores of Ennio Morricone, and in particular to Sergio Leone's *For a Few Dollars More* (1965).⁴⁰⁷

406 Kozloff, *Invisible Narrators*, 47.

407 Morricone's tendency to write complete musical forms has been noted by Royal Brown, who describes it as a function of Morricone and Leone's working relationship, and by Jeff Smith who argues that Morricone's scores featured readily apprehensible forms because this made

Out of Leone's Westerns, *For a Few Dollars More* may be the most conventional in terms of its plot, which concerns two bounty hunters, Monco (Clint Eastwood) and Mortimer (Lee Van Cleef), pursuing a dangerous bandit, El Indio (Gian Maria Volonté). Monco is motivated only by a desire for financial gain, but Mortimer has a personal vendetta against the bandit, who, we eventually learn, raped and murdered his sister. Although the two protagonists are rivals at first, they gradually develop a hard-earned respect and friendship for each other, and it is only by joining forces that they are finally able to defeat Indio and his men. At the climax of the film, it is Mortimer – who by the logic of vigilante justice has the *right* to use violence – that challenges Indio to a duel, and kills him.

This conventional *fabula* is complicated, however, by a convoluted *syuzhet*, and by a style which, as is so often the case with spaghetti Westerns, fairly threatens to overwhelm the narrative altogether.⁴⁰⁸ The final, plot-critical duel between Indio and Mortimer is formally rhymed with an earlier duel (quite trivial to the plot but vastly important to the film's architectonic structure) between Indio and a member of his gang. It is typical in Morricone's Western scores for such duels to be framed by music, which could – in the most prosaic sense –

them more attractive to a record-buying public trained on the forms of pop music. Brown, *Overtones and Undertones*, 227-231. Smith, *The Sounds of Commerce*. Smith also suggests a link between Morricone's formal procedures and the title ballad tradition: “Although Morricone did not use songs per se, the formal parameters of his scores bear certain similarities with these interpolated songs [i.e. the Western title ballads], and often his cues similarly invert the normal hierarchy of image and music... [making] the film's music both noticeable and memorable” (131).

⁴⁰⁸ The terms *syuzhet* and *fabula* are drawn from Russian formalism, and respectively refer to the story as it is told in the text, and the underlying sequence of events in the diegetic world. Most typically the terms are used for matters of time: the timeline of the *fabula* always proceeds at a constant rate from the past into the future, while that of the *syuzhet* can skip around through flashbacks and flash-forwards, repeat events, skip them, or dramatically condense or extend certain episodes.

simply be said to build tension leading up to the violent act.⁴⁰⁹ *For A Few Dollars More* is remarkable, however, in that the duels are framed with music *diegetically*. Indio carries with him a musical pocket watch that plays a simple tune when opened. We first see it during the first duel sequence, relatively early in the film. Having learned that a former member of his gang, Tomaso (Lorenzo Robledo), has turned traitor, Indio captures the man and challenges him to a duel. It is curious that Indio does not simply execute the man outright. Certainly he doesn't hold back for moral reasons: before the duel, he sets the watch playing, and then has Tomaso's wife and child murdered to provide him with motivation. "And now," he says after the sound of the shots, closing the watch "I'm sure that you hate me just enough." He then walks to the other end of the room, orders his men to release Tomaso, and sets the watch to playing again, telling his opponent "When you hear the music finish, begin."

The tune played by the watch is rather prosaic, but here it is incorporated into a highly elaborate musical texture. The chimes are slowly joined by a string orchestra as the melody plays through once in its entirety. The melody then repeats, but here each phrase is answered with a block of non-diegetic music: a characteristic Spaghetti-Western texture of rapidly strummed guitar over strings. (As Charles Leinberger notes, juxtaposed blocks of material are typical of Morricone's style.)⁴¹⁰ This section leads into a powerful and extended solo for pipe organ, which breaks off on the dominant. Following a caesura, the chimes come in again, playing unaccompanied through the end of the melody, at which point the music stops, and Indio handily kills his opponent. One of the gang members laconically spits on the floor, returning us to the prosaically gritty world of the diegesis.

409 As noted above, this tendency is not specific to Morricone. Tiomkin in particular is an important precursor: *High Noon* and *Red River* both feature brilliant and extended musical cues that frame their climactic acts of violence.

410 Charles Leinberger, *Ennio Morricone's The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: A Film Score Guide* (New York: Scarecrow Press, 2004), 72.

This in itself is a remarkable sequence of film music, both for the sheer power and invention of Morricone's melody, harmony, and orchestration, and for its brilliant mixture of diegetic and non-diegetic sound. The blending of a diegetic musical source with an orchestral backing is a fairly ordinary technique, but it is much less usual for the diegetic music to be *replaced* with the non-diegetic music (for we must assume that during the organ solo, Indio and his opponent are still listening to the chimes that we can no longer hear), and it is rarer still for a cue to hopscotch back and forth between the diegetic and non-diegetic worlds. But for our purposes here, what matters is that it is a complete and well-rounded ABA form, with a proper beginning, middle, and ending. Although the emotional force of the cue is great, and the organ solo is (as noted above) an effective style citation, it is the formal lucidity of the cue that connects it to the ritual of the duel itself.

This becomes clearer when we observe the way that the entire complex repeats at the close of the film for the duel between Indio and Mortimer. In the lead-up to the final battle, Indio and the last surviving member of his gang have been trapped in a house by Mortimer. While his accomplice stands by, Indio opens the watch and sets the chimes playing – and now, for the first time, we see that there is a picture of a woman on the face of the watch. The watch is well established as a fetish-object: Indio has toyed with it throughout the film, and we know that Mortimer carries a matching watch, pointing to some kind of shared tragic past. As a result, the audience is burning to understand the story behind it, which is now provided in the form of a flashback, in which we see Indio attack a pair of young lovers, killing the man and attempting to rape the woman before she manages to grab his gun and take her own life. (The flashback itself is silent save for electronically distorted versions of the watch's chime sounds, and serves as a clear intrusion of horror-rhetoric into the Western generic space, of the kind described by Brownrigg.)⁴¹¹ We are then summoned back to the main plot by Mortimer's bellowed challenge

⁴¹¹ Brownrigg, "Film Music and Film Genre," 56. See the discussion on page 40 of this

from outside the house: “This is Colonel Mortimer! Douglas Mortimer! Does the name mean anything to you?”

With the help of his henchman, Indio manages to disarm Mortimer. Again, rather than kill him outright, he begins the ritual of the duel, starting the chimes of his watch and telling Mortimer to go for his gun when the music stops. (As in the first duel, there is no question of Indio being motivated by a sense of fair play: Mortimer's gun is lying on the ground.) But the ritual does not play out as Indio expects it to, for just as the chime melody comes to a close, it is interrupted – by the chime melody! The other bounty hunter, Monco, makes a *deus ex machina* appearance carrying Mortimer's matching watch, which as we only now learn (although we might well have guessed) plays the same melody. Monco hands Mortimer a gun, and then retreats to the sideline to let the duel play out, and it is here that Morricone gives us the soaring melody from the earlier cue's organ solo, this time assigned to a mariachi trumpet. As before, the B section ends on a dominant, leading back into the chimes (which are now interspersed with short percussion tags of the kind that Spaghetti Westerns typically use for suspense).⁴¹² When the chimes stop, Mortimer kills his opponent. And then Monco spits on the ground.

Obviously the repetition of the cue makes its already simple form even easier to grasp. But what is repeated here is not merely a cue! Rather, it is a whole complex of events, symbols, and themes. Some of this ritual repetition is diegetic, for Indio quite consciously uses the watch to stage his duels. Much of it, however – audibly, the instrumental solos, and visibly, the spit – is only staged by Leone and Morricone.

In general, the ritualistic nature of the Western gunfight marks it as something more than random violence. One of the genre's characteristic Wilderness-Garden oppositions is the dichotomy between personal justice and the rule of law. As with all of these binaries, the

dissertation.

412 For an example of this percussion texture, see measures 60-63 and 70-74 of Music Example 4.8, below.

Western does not present us with static poles in their pure state, but with the moment of transition: the founding of the new code and the foundering of the old. With regard to the rule of law, the Westerns remind us that the *argumentum ad baculum* lies behind all jurisprudence. And so quite often, in films as widely separated as *Cimarron*, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (Ford, 1962), *McCabe & Mrs. Miller* (Altman, 1971), *My Name is Nobody* (Tonino Valerii, 1973), and the recent remake of *The 3:10 to Yuma* (James Mangold, 2007), the film hinges on what feels like the final act of vigilante murder that was needed in order to establish the legislative justice we know today.

The Western never portrays the personal violence of vigilantism as something that's entirely morally acceptable. However, it is in the heavily formalized ritual of the duel that the Western most nearly approaches the depiction of vigilante "Wilderness" justice in its pure state. By partaking in the ritual, the heroes and villains elevate themselves out of the realistic world, placing *their* violence – which is personal, vengeful, the violence of *privilege* in its etymological sense – on a different plane from that violence which is merely cruel or willful (or from the audience's perspective, merely exciting). *For a Few Dollars More* is obviously an extreme case, as it is rare for characters to ritualize their own actions (although we do find examples of this in a number of late-period Westerns, such as *My Name is Nobody*, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, and *The Shootist* (Don Siegel, 1976)). Typically the filmmakers provide the ritual, and lucid musical forms are an element among the many elements used to achieve this. Although we find the technique applied to violence above all, it can be applied to any action whatsoever. An excellent example, which would be redundant to describe in detail here, is the beginning of the cattle drive in *Red River*. The anxious expectation is scored with an extended dominant pedal which cadences, at the start of the drive proper, to a non-diegetic male chorus singing a well-tailored song form. The film is meant to dramatize the first attempt to drive cattle from Texas to Missouri, therefore, this is not merely the start of a cattle drive but the willing-

into-being of an important chapter in America's history. The epic past was a golden age. What the cowboy did, he did with his might.

Case Studies: Combining the Signs of Musical Narrativity

***Destry Rides Again* (George Marshall, 1939).**

Already in the discussion of *For a Few Dollars More* we have begun to see the ways that signs of narrational music can be combined. To close, I will consider two further examples: one complete film, *Destry Rides Again* (which, pre-dating *High Noon*, shows some slightly different ways for the same tendencies to manifest), and one isolated cue, the final showdown from *The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly* (Leone, 1966), which shows how efficiently the signs of narrational music can create epic distance when skillfully combined.

Destry Rides Again uses one of the Western's most durable plots, in which a good new lawman moves in and to clean up a bad old town, with the twist that the lawman, Destry (Jimmy Stewart), is a pacifist who seeks to clean up the town without wearing a gun, lest he be dragged into the archaic cycle of vigilante justice. (This places him in essentially the same position as Amy Kane in *High Noon*.) Inevitably, he is forced to abandon his principles in order to avenge the death of his friend, the town drunk Washington Dimmsdale. Once Destry straps on his guns, the villains are rapidly eradicated, although not before claiming the life of one of Destry's love interests, the saloon girl Frenchy (Marlene Dietrich, here not so much inhabiting the archetype as codifying it). The film then ends with a series of gestures meant to establish the closing of the frontier. Destry is ensconced as the face of law and order. His surviving (schoolmarm) love interest contemplates marriage. Smiling children throng the streets. "The old regime is over, and the new regime is here!" one character shouts, and although he's ostensibly talking about his love life, the broader significance is clear.

Destry is nominally based on a book by the important dime novelist Max Brand. In the

book, Destry is a wild man, and a personification of the Western landscape. During an early drinking binge, he makes this explicit:

'Who's there?' asked the sheriff. 'Who's raisin' hell and busting the laws in this here community?'
 'I'm the Big Muddy,' answered the whooping voice within. 'I got snow on my head, and stones on my feet, and the snows are meltin', and I'm gunna overflow my banks. Come on in and take a ride!'
 'Is that you, Destry?'
 'I'm the Big Muddy,' Destry assured him. 'Can't you hear me roar? I'm beginnin' to flow, and I ain't gunna stop! I'm rarin' to bust my banks, and I wanta know what kinda levees you got to hold me back. Wow!'⁴¹³

His love interest, more or less respectable and wealthy, acts as a calming, civilizing influence. When he lays down his guns at the end, it is effectively at her feet. It would probably be a bit much to say that the woman conquers the man in this narrative – Destry moves at his own pace, and to his own ends – but nevertheless, the civilization of the western landscape is equated with a man's yielding up his wild youth to sober married adulthood. (This seems to be a recurring trope for the literary Western, also figuring in Wister's *The Virginian* and Zane Grey's *Riders of the Purple Sage*. It does also appear in film Westerns, especially relatively early ones, such as *Cimarron* and *Dodge City* (Curtiz, 1931), but not as regularly.)

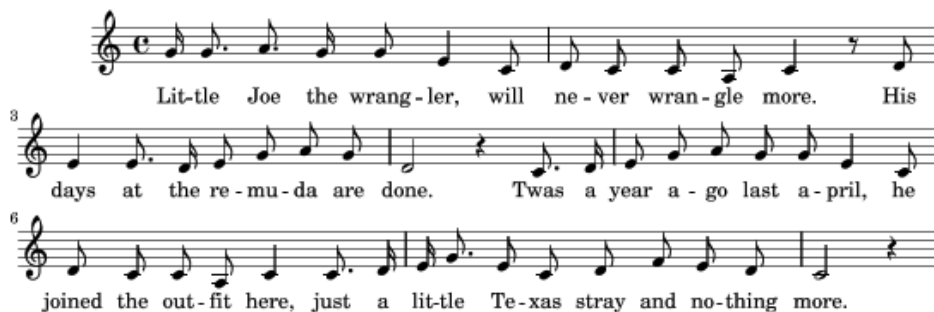
In the film *Destry*, although the title character does settle down to married life at the end, he has always been himself a symbol of civilization and the civilized. The West is personified instead by the colorful Dimmsdale and the uncontrollable Frenchy. (Female characters are routinely associated with the landscape in film Westerns, most explicitly in Wyler's *The Westerner* and Vidor's *Duel in the Sun*.) Both of these characters are highly compromised at the beginning of the film: Dimmsdale is a drunken wreck begging for change in the saloon, and Frenchy is in bed with the town's criminal element both literally and

413 Max Brand, *Destry Rides Again* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1930), 12-13.

figuratively. Destry turns their lives around, civilizing them – and both die heroically in his cause. The masculine hero no longer represents the West, then. Rather, he acts upon the West, completes it, and redeems it.

The ideas about justice, violence, and gender outlined above are the film's central concerns. The music, as we shall see, serves them in a variety of ways, always maintaining the self-consciousness that is so characteristic of the Western genre. Like so many later Westerns, *Destry* is punctuated at regular intervals by a repeated cowboy ballad, “Little Joe the Wrangler.” There are major differences, however. As in *High Noon* and the original *3:10 to Yuma*, the song appears both as a ballad and as a freely developed orchestral motif, but in this case these are strictly divided along diegetic/non-diegetic lines. All of Destry's vocal music is sung by on-screen characters. Furthermore, the lyrics to “Little Joe” do not directly recount describe the plot of the film, as in *High Noon*, or even obliquely reference certain elements of it as in *3:10 to Yuma*. (The lyrics are important, as we shall see, but the resemblance is only thematic.) Finally, “Little Joe” it is not a completely new composition, but rather an alteration of an existing cowboy ballad, written by Jack Thorpe in 1898 and later set to the music of the bluegrass standard “Little Old Log Cabin in the Lane.”⁴¹⁴

414 Thorpe is an interesting liminal figure with regard to the “authentic” cowboy ballad. On the one hand, he worked for many years as a cowboy, and self-identified as a part of that culture. On the other, he was an important early collector and anthologizer of cowboy songs and poetry, and therefore his own contributions may be marked by a certain self-consciousness. Like most collectors of “cowboy song,” Thorpe had very definite ideas about what “authentic” cowboy culture must be: in his preface, he takes care to inform us that “The hundred songs that make up this book are typical and genuine cowboy songs; the river and hobo and outlaw songs that are also a part of the cowboy's repertory having been omitted.” N. Howard “Jack” Thorpe, ed. *Songs of the Cowboys* (1908, Reprint: Applewood Books, 1989), xvii.



Lit-tle Joe the wrang-ler, will ne-ver wran-gle more. His
 days at the re-mu-da are done. Twas a year a-go last a-pril, he
 joined the out-fit here, just a lit-tle Te-xas stray and no-thing more.

Music Example 4.6 – “Little Joe the Wrangler,” first verse. Lyrics by Jack Thorpe, music by Will S. Hays.⁴¹⁵

The lyrics, as set down by Thorpe, are as follows:

Little Joe, the wrangler, will never wrangle more;
 His days with the ‘remuda’—they are done,
 Twas a year ago last April he joined the outfit here,
 A little ‘Texas stray’ and all alone.

’Twas long late in the evening he rode up to the herd
 On a little old brown pony he called Chow;
 With his brogan shoes and overalls a harder-looking kid
 You never in your life had seen before.

His saddle ’twas a southern kack built many years ago,
 An O.K. spur on one foot idly hung,
 While his ‘hot roll’ in a cotton sack was loosely tied behind
 And a canteen from the saddle horn he’d slung.

He said he’d had to leave his home, his daddy’d married twice
 And his new ma beat him every day or two;
 So he saddled up old Chow one night and ‘lit a shuck’ this way—
 Thought he’d try and paddle now his own canoe.

Said he’d try and do the best he could if we’d only give him work,
 Though he didn’t know ‘straight up’ about a cow;

415 “Little Old Log Cabin in the Lane” was published as a minstrel song by Will S. Hays in 1871.

So the boss he cut him out a mount and kinder put him on,
For he sorter liked the little stray somehow.

Taught him how to herd the horses and to learn to know them all
To round 'em up by daylight; if he could
To follow the chuck-wagon and to always hitch the team
And help the 'cosinero' rustle wood.

We'd driven to Red River and the weather had been fine;
We were camped down on the south side in a bend,
When a norther commenced to blowing and we doubled up our guards,
For it took all hands to hold the cattle then.

Little Joe, the wrangler, was called out with the rest,
And scarcely had the kid got to the herd,
When the cattle they stampeded; like a hailstorm, long they flew,
And all of us were riding for the lead.

'tween the streaks of lightning we could see a horse far out ahead—
Twas little Joe, the wrangler, in the lead;
He was riding 'Old Blue Rocket' with his slicker 'bove his head,
Trying to check the leaders in their speed.

At last we got them milling and kinder quieted down,
And the extra guard back to the camp did go;
But one of them was missin' and we all knew at a glance
'Twas our little Texas stray—poor wrangler Joe.

Next morning just at sunup we found where Rocket fell,
Down in a washout twenty feet below
Beneath his horse, mashed to a pulp, his spurs had rung the knell
For our little Texas stray—poor Wrangler Joe.⁴¹⁶

This song was very popular, and spawned many imitations and contrafacta. Its poetic form and melody are both purely strophic, and most recorded versions of the song are calm and

416 Thorpe, *Songs of the Cowboys*, 7-8.

melancholy, as befits the wistful lyrics. The thematic content of the poetry is very much in line with Lomax's description of cowboy music. These lyrics are intimately connected with the labor of herding cattle, the central event is “some comrade's tragic death,”⁴¹⁷ and the systematic use of the first-person plural pronoun “our” tends quite strongly to suggest a kind of collective authorship (although Thorpe listed himself as the song's sole author, and was generally quite careful to provide attributions if possible).

Of particular interest here is the absence of any sort of valediction to the West as a whole: though Joe is dead, the roundup will apparently go on. The amount of specific detail we learn about Joe's family life and duties in the camp ensures that the song is about the death of one specific cowboy, not the death of The Cowboy writ large. It is also noteworthy that the element of debauchery that Logsdon finds in cowboy culture is absent here, as is the sort of violence that we generally associate with Westerns. The song is gruesome enough, but makes no mention of gunplay or lawlessness.

The song that appears in *Destry*, first sung by Frenchy to a drunken crowd in the saloon, is substantially different. The first stanza of Thorpe's song is here incorporated as the sectional verse of a newly composed song by Friedrich Hollander and Frank Loesser, which is given below as Music Example 4.7. The changes to the lyrics are striking. Both versions of “Little Joe the Wrangler” are about the death of a cowboy. But what a world of difference there is between them! Present in Thorpe's song, but absent in Loesser's (and missing, indeed, in the Hollywood Western in general), are the perils and pleasures of the actual cowboy life, which mainly involved the grueling and dangerous work of herding cattle. Present in Loesser's song but absent in Thorpe's, and indeed, absent in the great plurality of “real” cowboy songs, are the tropes of gunfighting and drunken debauchery that are so central to the film Western. Furthermore, although the plural pronoun is retained in the text taken from Thorpe, Loesser shifts to “I” in his

417 Lomax, *Cowboy Songs and Other Frontier Ballads*, xviii-xix.

new lyrics, largely erasing the collective aspect of Thorpe's song. A cowboy dies in each song, but the deaths are so markedly different that we might well question whether the cowboy is really the same. (Note that, as most of the verses have been cut, we lose the specific details about Little Joe's life.)

Thorpe's lyrics and Hays' music do not appear elsewhere in the film. It is the newly composed chorus that is repeated throughout in both diegetic and non-diegetic guises. As is common in Westerns, this repeating theme has no obvious leitmotivic significance, although in this case its significance is not so much free-floating as bifurcated. Immediately, after Frenchy's initial performance, the song is reprised by Dimmsdale, who – after losing a free drink to another barfly – changes the closing couplet of the lyrics to “Well I sure do like my liquor/ but I guess you got it quicker/ and I hope it makes you sick you buffalo!” Later, he sings the “Little Joe!” refrain under his breath while sweeping out the jailhouse, and its most notable non-diegetic appearance is in a sentimental string arrangement during Dimmsdale's death. The tally is three to one in Dimmsdale's favor, and “Little Joe” was always a song about the death of a cowboy. Was it the death of this cowboy?

But the song's final appearance is Frenchy's again. Although it does not appear under her death, “Little Joe” is performed in the film's closing sequence by a group of happy children as they play in the streets of the newly civilized town, with a little blond girl leading the chorus in call and response just as Frenchy did in the song's initial appearance. Watching the performance, Destry nearly breaks down into tears, clearly moved by memories of Frenchy. This makes no kind of sense, of course. Destry was not present when Frenchy sang the song the first

Crowd

Little Joe the wran-gler will ne-ver wran-gle more for his days at the round-up they are
o'er 'twas a year a-go last A-pril when he rode up to our camp, just a lit-tle Texas stray and nothing
more. Lit-tle Joe! Lit-tle Joe! Oh, what - ev-er be-come of him, I don't
know Well he sure did like his li-quour and it would have got his tic-ker but the
Sherriff got him quicker Yee - ho! Lit-tle Joe! Lit-tle Joe! Oh, wher-
ev-er his bo-dy lies, I don't know When the yel-low moon was bea-min' he could
wran-gle like a de-mon and you'd al-ways hear him screa-min' Yee - ho!

Music Example 4.7: “Little Joe,” expanded and altered for *Destry Rides Again*.

time – had not even been summoned to town, in fact! – but it's brilliantly conveyed, and drives home just how economical an actor Jimmy Stewart could be at his best. Was the song always about Frenchy's death, then, which Dimmsdale's only foreshadowed?

In fact, if we had to call “Little Joe” the leitmotif of something, it would be *the leitmotif of the passing of the West*, for as noted above, Dimmsdale and Frenchy both serve as embodiments of the Wilderness. Even this, however, is a shaky identification, for it is only in retrospect and with an analyst's eye that we can connect the characters in this fashion. When we

first hear the song in the film, it expresses cheerful dissipation; later it expresses grief, and in its final appearance (the children's performance) it becomes an empathetic, indifferent to the grief that Destry feels for his fallen friends and their fallen way of life. It is important that the song is sung by children. We don't really know how much time has passed between the climactic gunfight and the final performance of "Little Joe," but we are clearly meant to think that these children are singing about a world they themselves are too young to remember. Therefore, although the song never actually references *Destry's* own plot, the passing of the West into song and story still takes place within the film's diegesis.

To drive the point home, the children's performance of "Little Joe" interrupts a performance of a different kind. Before they enter the scene, Destry is being regaled by another child, who is telling him a story about heroic deeds of the Western past. "Did he ever tell you about the time he shot a whole tribe of Injuns single-handed?" This seemingly interstitial piece of dialogue is in fact very carefully constructed. Destry himself spends a fair amount of the film telling stories about the old West as a way of making moral points. The people he tells stories about, who are all old friends and acquaintances, typically came to sticky ends by engaging in the cycle of honor-based violence. Although the boy's verbal mannerism is similar to Destry's, the substance of the story is now an exaggerated tale of derring-do. The effect is entirely altered as well. Destry's own stories deflate myth by pointing to examples where acting like a storybook hero got someone into trouble. The boy's story is myth, pure and simple. So too, now, is the song.

In addition to its non-leitmotivic recurrence, "Little Joe" often exhibits many of the other traits of narrational music, especially in its first appearance. We find ostentatious lucidity of form, as the song moves from the sectional verse to the refrain, and then from a choral section (sung by the crowd) to Frenchy's solo repetition of the chorus. (The effect is obviously stronger for any members of the audience who recognize that the chorus is not a part of the original song,

but rather a newly-composed citation of that style.) The music also features stock “opening” gestures: sectional verses only ever appear at the beginning of songs, and furthermore this one is introduced with a short instrumental lead-in based on the refrain (not included in the transcription). Finally, we are confronted with the agency of the performers: Marlene Dietrich's “Yee-hooo!” at the end of the verse is so deeply idiosyncratic, performative, and textured, so rich with grain, so purely vocal, that we scarcely hear it as music at all.⁴¹⁸ The bulk of her singing is believable as that of the diegetic character, but the closing whoop unavoidably reminds us that this is *Dietrich* performing, and of her existing star image as the cabaret singer in Josef von Sternberg's *Der blaue Engel* (1930), and so on, fairly shattering the diegesis. Together, these elements firmly establish the performance as narration: it doesn't so much establish Bottleneck as a dangerous town as establish the story of Bottleneck as a dangerous town.

The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly.

We find a similar combination of narrational effects in Morricone's music for the three-way showdown at the end of *The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly*. This cue only appears once in the film, and therefore does not exhibit non-leitmotivic recurrence, but all of the other narrational traits listed above are amply on display. *The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly's* sprawling and episodic plot revolves around the titular characters' race to find a cache of buried Confederate gold. Eventually, the only obstacles standing in each man's way are the other two, and they decide to settle this with a duel. Blondie (the “Good,” Clint Eastwood) writes the precise location of the treasure on a stone, places this in the center of a circular ruined church, and he and the other two men, Angel Eyes (the “Bad,” Lee Van Cleef) and Tuco (the “Ugly,” Eli Wallach) slowly spread out to equidistant points on the circumference of the ring. Eventually

418 A full treatment of this issue would however have to consider the question of generic hybridity, in this case with the film musical, which is not treated in this study.

they draw, and Blondie kills Angel Eyes. (Having provided Tuco with an unloaded gun, he had only one real opponent to worry about, and this gives him all the edge that he needs.) As is so often the case, the duel itself is over almost before it begins. The build-up, however, is a full six minutes of increasingly rapid editing and increasingly close-framed shots (culminating with a series of extreme close-ups on each man's eyes), and one Morricone's most justly famous cues.

Moderato (♩ = c. 80)

Flute *rit.*

Acoustic guitar *rit.*
pp

strings *mf*

Timpani

Music Example 4.8 (continued on following pages): *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*. The Showdown.

9

9

9 *a tempo accel.* *subito f* *slight rit.*

9 *mp*

12 *Adagio* ♩ = 60

12 *accel.* *subito f* *slight rit.*

12

Castanets

Electric Bass

chimes

Music Example 4.8, continued.

15 Adagio

15

15 accel.

15 Timpani

18 Adagio

18 slight rit.

18 Bass Drum

The musical score consists of five systems of staves. The first system (measures 15-17) includes a string section (Violin I, Violin II, and Viola) and a percussion section (Timpani). The string parts are in treble clef, and the timpani part is in bass clef. The tempo is marked 'Adagio'. The woodwind parts (Flute and Clarinet) are present but contain only rests. The percussion part features a series of notes with 'x' marks, indicating a specific drum sound. The second system (measures 18-20) continues the string and percussion parts. The tempo remains 'Adagio'. The woodwind parts still contain rests. The percussion part continues with similar notation. A legend at the bottom right identifies the 'x' mark as 'Bass Drum'.

Music Example 4.8, continued.

The image displays a musical score for Music Example 4.8, continued, spanning measures 27 to 30. The score is written in 2/4 time and consists of five staves. The first two staves are treble clefs, and the last two are bass clefs. The third staff is a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The music begins at measure 27 with a whole rest in the first two staves. In the third staff, the melody starts with a quarter note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, B4, and C5. A dynamic marking of *mp* (mezzo-piano) is placed below the first two notes, and *f* (forte) is placed below the last two notes. The accompaniment in the third staff features a series of eighth-note chords: G4-B4, A4-B4, B4-C5, and C5-B4. The fourth staff (bass clef) contains a whole note chord of G3-B3-D4 in measure 27, which is sustained through measure 28. The fifth staff (bass clef) contains a whole rest in measure 27. Measures 29 and 30 show the continuation of the melody in the third staff, with a triplet of eighth notes (G4, A4, B4) in measure 30. The accompaniment in the fourth staff continues with the G3-B3-D4 chord in measure 29 and then moves to a G3-B3-D4 chord in measure 30. The fifth staff shows a series of four eighth notes marked with 'x' in measure 30.

Music Example 4.8, continued.

The image displays a musical score for Music Example 4.8, continued, consisting of two systems of five staves each. The first system covers measures 33 to 37, and the second system covers measures 38 to 42.

System 1 (Measures 33-37):

- Staff 1 (Treble Clef):** Features sustained chords with a slur over the first two measures. Measure 35 includes a key signature change to one sharp (F#).
- Staff 2 (Treble Clef):** Contains a melodic line with a slur over the first two measures. A *mf* dynamic marking is present below the first measure.
- Staff 3 (Bass Clef):** Labeled "Guitar (heavy distortion) and electric bass", it shows a simple bass line with a slur over the first two measures.
- Staff 4 (Treble Clef):** Labeled "Doubled 8va.", it features a complex, dense texture of chords with a slur over the first two measures.
- Staff 5 (Bass Clef):** Shows a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes marked with 'x'.

System 2 (Measures 38-42):

- Staff 1 (Treble Clef):** Continues the sustained chords from the first system, with a slur over the first two measures.
- Staff 2 (Treble Clef):** Continues the melodic line from the first system, with a slur over the first two measures.
- Staff 3 (Bass Clef):** Continues the bass line from the first system, with a slur over the first two measures.
- Staff 4 (Treble Clef):** Continues the complex chordal texture from the first system, with a slur over the first two measures.
- Staff 5 (Bass Clef):** Continues the rhythmic pattern of eighth notes marked with 'x'.

Music Example 4.8, continued.

Wordless chorus

43

43

43

43

Chimes

48

G.P. (10 seconds)

48

48

48

48

The musical score is arranged in five systems. The first system, labeled 'Wordless chorus', contains four staves: a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) with chords, a vocal line with a melodic line and a triplet of eighth notes, a bass line with whole notes, and a chimes part with chords and rhythmic 'x' marks. The second system, labeled 'Chimes', contains four staves: a grand staff with sustained chords, a vocal line with a melodic line and a fermata, a bass line with sustained notes and a fermata, and a chimes part with chords and rhythmic 'x' marks. The third system, labeled 'G.P. (10 seconds)', contains four staves: a grand staff with sustained chords, a vocal line with a melodic line and a fermata, a bass line with sustained notes and a fermata, and a chimes part with chords and rhythmic 'x' marks. The fourth system contains four staves: a grand staff with sustained chords, a vocal line with a melodic line and a fermata, a bass line with sustained notes and a fermata, and a chimes part with chords and rhythmic 'x' marks. The fifth system contains four staves: a grand staff with sustained chords, a vocal line with a melodic line and a fermata, a bass line with sustained notes and a fermata, and a chimes part with chords and rhythmic 'x' marks.

Music Example 4.8, continued.

53 Glockenspiel *p*

53

53 Electric piano *f*

53 *pp* Electric Organ

Chimes

Timpani *f*

59

59

59

59

Castanets

Ride Cymbal

Processed tom-toms

Detailed description: The image shows a musical score for Music Example 4.8, continued. It consists of seven staves. The first staff is for Glockenspiel, starting at measure 53 with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The second staff is empty. The third staff is for Electric piano, starting at measure 53 with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The fourth staff is for Electric Organ, starting at measure 53 with a pianissimo (*pp*) dynamic. The fifth staff is for Chimes, starting at measure 53. The sixth staff is for Timpani, starting at measure 53 with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The seventh staff is for Percussion, starting at measure 59, and includes Castanets, Ride Cymbal, and Processed tom-toms. The score is in 4/4 time and ends at measure 64.

Music Example 4.8, continued.

63

63

63

63

63

f Timpani *fp*

69

69

69

69

Chimes

Processed Tom-tom

accel. slightly faster

Detailed description: The image shows a page of a musical score, page 336. It contains two systems of music. The first system covers measures 63 to 68. It features five staves: two treble clefs (top two), two bass clefs (middle two), and a percussion staff (bottom). The top two staves have melodic lines with eighth notes. The middle two staves have sustained chords. The percussion staff includes a timpani part with dynamic markings *f* and *fp*. The second system covers measures 69 to 72. It features four staves: two treble clefs (top two), a bass clef (middle), and a percussion staff (bottom). The middle bass staff has a melodic line with dynamic markings *f* and *fp*. The percussion staff includes chimes and a processed tom-tom part. The tempo markings 'accel.' and 'slightly faster' are placed above the middle bass staff.

Music Example 4.8, continued.

72

72

72

Electric Piano

72

Castanets

Ride Cymbal

Castanets

5

77

77

77

77

Timpani

Chimes

Electric Bass

Detailed description: The image shows a musical score for Music Example 4.8, continued, spanning measures 72 to 77. The score is arranged in a system of six staves. The top two staves (72-77) are for strings, with notes and rests. The third staff (72-77) is for Electric Piano, with notes and rests. The fourth staff (72-77) is for Electric Bass, with notes and rests. The fifth staff (72-77) is for percussion, with notes and rests, and includes labels for Castanets, Ride Cymbal, and Timpani. The sixth staff (72-77) is for Chimes, with notes and rests. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, beams, and dynamic markings.

Music Example 4.8, continued.

The image displays two systems of musical notation for Music Example 4.8, continued. Each system consists of five staves: a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) and three individual staves (treble, bass, and a lower bass staff).

System 1 (Measures 91-95):

- Staff 1 (Grand Staff Treble):** Measures 91-95. Measures 91-92 feature a whole note chord with a slur. Measures 93-94 feature a whole note chord with a slur. Measure 95 is a whole note chord.
- Staff 2 (Grand Staff Treble):** Measures 91-95. A melodic line starting with a quarter note, followed by eighth notes, a quarter note, a half note, and a quarter note.
- Staff 3 (Grand Staff Bass):** Measures 91-95. A bass line with a whole note chord in measure 91, followed by a whole note chord in measure 92, and a whole note chord in measure 93.
- Staff 4 (Grand Staff Treble):** Measures 91-95. A series of chords, primarily triads and dyads, in a rhythmic pattern.
- Staff 5 (Grand Staff Bass):** Measures 91-95. A series of 'x' marks representing a percussive or rhythmic accompaniment.

System 2 (Measures 96-100):

- Staff 1 (Grand Staff Treble):** Measures 96-100. Measures 96-97 feature a whole note chord with a slur. Measures 98-99 feature a whole note chord with a slur. Measure 100 is a whole note chord.
- Staff 2 (Grand Staff Treble):** Measures 96-100. A melodic line starting with a quarter note, followed by eighth notes, a quarter note, a half note, and a quarter note.
- Staff 3 (Grand Staff Bass):** Measures 96-100. A bass line with a whole note chord in measure 96, followed by a whole note chord in measure 97, and a whole note chord in measure 98.
- Staff 4 (Grand Staff Treble):** Measures 96-100. A series of chords, primarily triads and dyads, in a rhythmic pattern.
- Staff 5 (Grand Staff Bass):** Measures 96-100. A series of 'x' marks representing a percussive or rhythmic accompaniment.

Music Example 4.8, continued.

The image displays a musical score for Music Example 4.8, continued, covering measures 100 to 102. The score is written in 12/8 time and consists of four systems of staves.

System 1 (Measures 100-101):

- Staff 1 (Treble Clef):** Measures 100 and 101. Measure 100 contains a whole note chord with a fermata. Measure 101 contains a whole note chord.
- Staff 2 (Treble Clef):** Measures 100 and 101. Both measures contain whole rests.
- Staff 3 (Bass Clef):** Measures 100 and 101. Measure 100 contains a whole note bass line. Measure 101 contains a whole note bass line.
- Staff 4 (Piano):** Measures 100 and 101. Measure 100 features a complex piano accompaniment with chords and sixteenth-note patterns. Measure 101 continues this accompaniment. A "Break Drum" label is present in measure 100.

System 2 (Measures 102-103):

- Staff 1 (Treble Clef):** Measures 102 and 103. Measure 102 contains a whole note chord with a fermata. Measure 103 contains a whole note chord.
- Staff 2 (Treble Clef):** Measures 102 and 103. Both measures contain whole rests.
- Staff 3 (Bass Clef):** Measures 102 and 103. Measure 102 contains a whole note bass line. Measure 103 contains a whole note bass line.
- Staff 4 (Piano):** Measures 102 and 103. Measure 102 features a complex piano accompaniment with chords and sixteenth-note patterns. Measure 103 continues this accompaniment.

Music Example 4.8, continued.

The image displays two systems of musical notation, labeled 104 and 106. Each system consists of four staves. The top staff of each system is a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) with a key signature of one flat (B-flat major or D minor). The second staff is a single treble clef staff. The third staff is a single bass clef staff. The fourth staff is a grand staff with a treble clef staff above a bass clef staff. The notation includes chords, melodic lines, and rhythmic patterns. The 104 system shows a key change to two sharps (D major or F# minor) in the second measure. The 106 system shows a key change to one sharp (F# major or D minor) in the second measure. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Music Example 4.8, continued.

The musical score consists of five staves. The first staff is a treble clef with a 9/8 time signature, starting with a whole note chord and a fermata. The second staff is a treble clef with a whole note rest. The third staff is a bass clef with a whole note chord and a fermata. The fourth staff is a treble clef with a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The fifth staff is a bass clef with a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes and a 'Gunshot' symbol.

Music Example 4.8, continued.

As stated above, the epic distance characteristic of the Western it creates is not the same as the famous Brechtian distancing-effect. We do not lose our emotional investment with the story – to the contrary, the showdown from *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* achieves an astonishing emotional intensity. The question, however, is whether our emotions ever touch those of the characters. Of the characters involved, Tuco's emotions are the clearest. He begins the sequence mostly confused, not understanding exactly what Blondie is getting at. Once he understands the game, he steps up to take part in the duel, exhibiting a grim resolve. Then, as the scene progresses, that resolve progressively crumbles. From small gestures, facial tics, and so on, we are given to understand that Tuco is increasingly terrified of the situation, right up until the smoke has cleared. Angel Eyes is harder to read, but his emotional journey is more or less the same: resolve and then fear can be read in his expression, and in the twitching of his fingers on his gun belt. Blondie is a perfect Sphinx throughout. His gaze never wavers, and thus

he might be said to have won the contest before a single shot is fired, the shooting match merely confirming the outcome of the staring match. Having emoted the least, he is the most perfectly masculine man (although of course, he's rigged the game).

Is any of this expressed in the music? Is there fear, at any time? Intensity, yes, and tension. But it is not frightening music, nor can it even quite be described as resolute. The emotional journey taken by the music, which builds steadily towards its final elaborately prepared V-I cadence, carries the awful weight of fate and history, but it is only the audience for whom that weight is palpable. The characters who live within the diegetic world must be blind to it. As in *High Noon* and *Destry*, music helps separate their world from our own.

The duel is specifically a ritualistic violence. In *The Good the Bad and the Ugly*, this is established both visually and audibly through allusions to the ritual violence of bullfighting. The stone circle that the men fight in is an effective visual analogue for the *corrida*, and at one point Blondie flips his poncho over his shoulder for all the world like a matador readying his cape. The music reinforces this identification: although the blaring trumpet lines and *paso-doble* rhythms are typical for Morricone's showdown themes, when they are coupled with these visual elements we realize with a start that these have always been references to the music of bullfighting as well.

The agency of the performer is highlighted by the guitar part. My transcription does a poor job of conveying the effect of the opening gestures: it is not simply that the repeated four-note figures start slow and then accelerate, but rather that the guitarist repeats the figure faster and faster until he reaches the maximum speed at which he *can* play it. (This same gesture is an inchoative evocation of musical form, as the extremely simple and repetitive pitch content gives the effect of the performer noodling around or warming up before beginning to play in earnest.) As these gestures appear over and over again throughout the cue, they place the performer-persona at the forefront of the audience's attention. The timbre of the instrument also reinforces the cue's performativity. By its very nature, acoustic guitar tends not to sound entirely clean:

one often hears the performers' fingers sliding over the strings and the like, and with wire strings there's a jangly, overtone-dense quality to the sound that slightly blurs the fundamental pitch. But even by these standards, the instrument featured on this soundtrack sounds dirty. We are acutely aware of the physical existence of what must be a rather battered or poorly-recorded guitar. (Some of this is also brought out intentionally: the final note of many of the passages is performed almost as a snap-pizzicato.)

Finally, there is the use of musical form. In addition to the inchoative guitar noodling described above, we have the clear transitions between the introductory section and the trumpet melody, and an unusually clearly-defined harmonic syntax (which uses features such as cadential six-four chords that we rarely find in film music). And all of this pales, of course, beside the fact that the cue builds to a climax, cuts off on a substitute dominant (bVII) in measure 50, and starts again from the beginning with altered instrumentation before finally landing on the cadence. We do not have a well-defined cowboy audience here as we do in *High Noon*, and so it is quite possible to understand this music as the work of a Morricone-persona – but nevertheless this persona is clearly standing between us and the action (in its epic situation), commenting on it, and reframing it. Towards the end of the duel, as the cropping and editing of shots becomes ever more baroque, Leone interposes himself between the audience and the action as well.

Conclusion

Above, I have suggested that the ideological undercurrents that film theorists have found in the Western should be seen as manifestations of the Western's status as a national epic. There are two fundamentally important aspects to this. First, the audience always recognizes that the Western's world of righteous violence is lost and gone forever. The pleasure we take in the Western lies not in the fantasy that this world can exist and that we can visit it, but rather in the

fantasy that it did once exist and somehow validates the current social structure. Westerns ask us to believe that modern society – although obviously very different from frontier society as portrayed in the films – arose from frontier society. In order for this to be now, that had to be, once; in order to live as one people in a society of compromise, peace, and law, we must once have been many peoples, in a society of individualism, violence, and honor.

Second, I claim that Westerns place themselves in the absolute past through aesthetic choices intended to make us aware of the cinematic narrator, the implied audience, and their epic situation. And I claim that one of the most important choices involved here is the pervasive use of narrational music, again defined as a cue that recurs without clear leitmotivic significance, cites a musical style that is distinct from the rest of the score, foregrounds the agency and physicality of the performer, and/or calls attention to its own musical form. Or to put it somewhat more poetically, music that hovers between diegetic and non-diegetic, between golden age and calendar time, between Wilderness and Garden.

Could the epic-making function of the Western score appear in other kinds of films as well? Let us not forget that “the epic” is a well attested genre in its own right. Kozloff's brilliant study of voiceover narration, which has heavily influenced this analysis of narrational music, suggests that narration comes up most frequently in Westerns, in Film Noir, and in Sci-Fi and Fantasy of the epic variety (*Star Wars* (George Lucas, 1977), *The Fellowship of the Ring* (Peter Jackson, 2001), and their ilk). Might we expect to find narrational music in these genres as well? My general impression is that these styles tend to be more committed to emotional immediacy. Their voiceover narration is more carefully bracketed off from the narrative: we move *through* the presentational epic register on our way to something more representational and affective, much as Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* briefly touches on the epic register in its prologue before shifting to a thoroughly mimetic register for the bulk of its plot. The Western's insistent reliance on the presentational does seem, therefore, to be something special and unique. But we

find narrational music appearing in other genres in fits and starts.⁴¹⁹ Royal Brown's analysis of *Double Indemnity* shows that narrational effects can appear in noir, and although Sci-Fi and Fantasy epics for the most part restrict themselves to a rigorously leitmotivic scoring practice, we do find narrational cues on occasion, such as the very first cue in Howard Shore's score to Peter Jackson's *The Fellowship of the Ring*. This cue is linked directly to voiceover narration by its first appearance in the film (which, as noted above, also begins with a *mise-en-abyme* of written literature). Furthermore, and not coincidentally, this cue is a theme that recurs without firm leitmotivic significance, it is vocal music (thus pointing to the bodily presence of the vocalists), and its pseudo-oriental, pseudo-primitive musical language is thoroughly alien to, and simpler than, the general romantic-orchestral language of the score. Another site for music of this kind is the historical epic. Again, this genre often strives for a greater degree of emotional immediacy, but there are isolated instances (such as Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible* (1944), with

419 By the same token, although presentational-ness is deeply important to the Western as a genre, there are Westerns where the tendency is minimized, and important Westerns at that. *Duel in the Sun* begins in thoroughly melodramatic territory before moving into something more Western-ish (which we can now recognize as more presentational, and therefore more epic), in its closing sequence. And the psychological Westerns of Anthony Mann lend themselves to epic readings rather poorly (as in *The Far Country*) or not at all (as in *The Naked Spur*). Scheurer recognizes that something unusual is going on with these films, and characterizes the difference accurately enough (i.e. a greater focus on internal characterization), but he falsely ascribes it to a historical trend. When we recall that *The Naked Spur* came out at around the same time as thoroughly presentational, thoroughly epic texts like *The Outlaw Josey Wales*, *Cat Ballou*, and *The Life and Times of Judge Roy Bean*, we cannot honestly entertain the idea that the psychological Western is a historical trend rather than a peculiarity of Mann's auteurist project. Examples by other directors can be found, of course, and it might even be possible to chart a counter-history of the psychological Western dating all the way back into the dime novels from which the genre sprang. But here again we can appeal to the phenomenology of genre: I *experience* the psychological Western as peripheral to the mainstream development of the genre, which indicates that a category exists to which the psychological Western is peripheral. One can argue that this category does not deserve the label "the true Western," but not that it doesn't exist.

its references to Orthodox church music and Russian Grand Opera, its discreet “numbers,” and its intense stylization) that embody the tendency as thoroughly as any Western.⁴²⁰

But I want to make one more thing clear. Although this kind of music shapes our experience of the Western, the Western shapes our experience of the music as well. The “narrational” traits of Western scoring are *all* present in the Simon and Garfunkle songs for *The Graduate* (Mike Nichols, 1967), which even have lyrics that obliquely reference the plot of the film! And while it would be interesting to argue for *The Graduate* as an epic - a kind of creation myth for the 1960s - that's not a case I really want to make. Rather, I would claim that our experience of the music in Westerns as a distancing effect comes in part because we are primed by the films to experience that distance. Westerns are about the impossibility and absence of the West not only on the unconscious level, but on the conscious one as well.

420 For all of these features of *Ivan*, see Royal Brown, *Overtones and Undertones*, 134-147.

General Conclusion: A Half-Made Map

If, as I hope, genre eventually becomes as important to the study of film music as it has long been to the study of film, then the theoretical speculations defended so vigorously above will inevitably, in due course, be superseded by more detailed and sensitive models of genre. Each chapter has outlined potentially vast areas for future research. As noted in the opening chapter, there is important work to be done in the musical aspects of economic and reflexive genre criticism. The basic model of melodramatic scoring developed in the second chapter should be complemented with a better and more systematic genre history, focusing on smaller cycles and subgenres within the melodramatic field. The focused account of the voodoo zombie film in this study's third chapter demands comparison with similar accounts of other musical Others, such as the musical representation of the monstrous feminine. And the Western, too, would benefit from greater historical specificity, for even if we accept that traits such as self-consciousness and nostalgia for a vanished golden age are endemic to the genre throughout its history (as I have argued here), we can still learn much from the changing ways that these concepts have appeared in films over time. Another important avenue for future research lies in the relationships between genres. This has been hinted at throughout the current study: we have noted, for instance, that the musical strategies of melodrama and horror seem like different answers to the same question, and that film noir is both like and unlike the western in its use of narrational music. This suggests that our understanding of music and genre will remain provisional until we are able to account for a much larger number of genres (perhaps beginning with comedy, film noir, and the musical, each of which abuts the territory already mapped out in these pages). But if this dissertation is at best a sort of half-made map, and only the first step in what will be, I hope, a much larger journey, I still flatter myself to think that it a good first step, and a map that points us in the right direction.

As stated at the outset, this investigation of film music and film genre has been intentionally limited, and even so the scope of the field is so vast as to defy neat summarization. If there is any overarching message to this study, it is simply that it is important to consider the interactions of music and film genre. For if genre profoundly shapes both the filmic text and our experience of that text – as both prior scholarship and personal experience suggest – then it stands to reason that it will shape film scores and our experience of those scores. But each chapter demonstrates the importance of this approach in a different way. A genre-inflected approach to film music may help resolve outstanding questions of genre in film, as in the second chapter, which establishes (if only provisionally) that the family melodrama and the woman’s film use a single consistent musical syntax. It may even guide us to entirely novel concepts of a genre, such as the model of Western-as-epic developed in the fourth chapter. It may also help us reconsider purely musical questions of aesthetics and ideology, as in the third chapter’s discussion of markedness and the uses of musical “authenticity.” And it will certainly advance our understanding of the operations of film music, whether by forcing us to problematize the common-sense notion that music represents the characters’ emotional lives (as in the second chapter), or by challenging the notion that music’s meaning in a concert-hall context can simply be imported into a filmic context (as in the third chapter), or by revising and expanding the distinction between diegetic and non-diegetic music (as in the fourth). Finally, if nothing else, a genre-inflected approach to film music will grant us new insights into individual films and their scores – and if the reader has found in these pages some new or noteworthy way to hear or understand the music of *Picnic*, or *I Walked With a Zombie*, or *High Noon*, then the value of this study can rest secure on that insight alone.

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