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MUTENESS AND MODERN DRAMA

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION
MUTENESS AND MODERN DRAMA

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“Muteness and Modern Drama” asks what became of the mute figure and, broadly, muteness on the melodramatic stage. Melodrama frequently communicated through means other than dialogue, such as music, tableaux, gesture, and character physiognomy. The latter three are silent communicants—visual means of engaging the audience—while music is seemingly antithetical to silence. Or is it? “Muteness and Modern Drama” argues that melodrama’s audio-visual semiotics—which equate silence with stasis and sound with motion, so much so that the audience involuntarily experiences silence through, for example, a frozen pose or (later) a singular object or commanding set—carried through to modern drama. Moreover, music in melodrama plays or swells during moments when dialogue subsides, linking it to the unspoken or silence.

Chapter one considers the monster in Peake’s *Presumption; or, the Fate of Frankenstein* as a development of melodrama’s mute figure. I analyze the characteristics of mute figures from early melodramas and argue that Peake contrasts the mute role’s traditionally innocent gestures with the monster’s terrifying costume in order to create a silent character who resembles Shelley’s protagonist/antagonist and fractures the typical division between hero and villain on the melodramatic stage. Chapter one explores the complexities of melodrama’s mute figure and

language, and chapters two through four trace how Symbolism and Expressionism adapted this language into avant-garde theater. Chapter two argues that Strindberg and Ibsen's Symbolist plays, *Ghost Sonata* and *When We Dead Awaken*, utilize mute figures in order to convey silent pauses in narrative. They also relate their mute figures to statues, engaging melodrama's association between muteness and stillness, while indicating the mute figure's evolution into Symbolism's emblematic object. In chapter three, Wilde's Symbolist play, *Salome*, alternates between incantatory dialogue and silent pauses that Loie Fuller develops into choreography for her Salome dances, which translate her body into symbolic objects. Chapter four turns to Expressionism, focusing on O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones*' simultaneous staging of the thumping tom-tom and the silent, still forest. From melodrama through Symbolism to Expressionism, the mute figure permeates the stage, making silence and visual communication the language of modern theater.

“Muteness and Modern Drama”

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INTRODUCTION

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7C5qfMfhjZk&feature=related>

—John Cage, *4'33"* (1952)¹

John Cage's *4'33"*—composed in 1952 for any instrument (or instruments) and premiered by David Tudor on 29 August 1952 in New York—instructs the performer not to play for the piece's three movements, which, for the first performance, were divided into thirty seconds, two minutes and twenty-three seconds, and one minute and forty seconds. Tudor closed the piano lid to mark the beginning of the piece, then briefly opened it to mark the end of the first movement, and repeated this process for the second and third movements. *4'33"* is at once silent, full of sound, and spatially structured. The musician(s) signals the piece's start by, for example, closing the piano's lid, at which point we are cued to listen and expect to hear sound. At first we experience silence—the absence of the anticipated music; however, as the silence extends, we notice sound—the ambient noise surrounding us. The performer, seated at the piano and opening and closing its lid, organizes this intertwined silence and sound with his body. We are experiencing an experimental and controversial work whose origin, in a sense, lies about 150 years earlier in the popular theatrical genre of melodrama. If we understand silence as sound-ful, and the audible as signaled visually, it is because melodrama—as pervasive as today's blockbuster movies whose audio-visual format derives from its theatrical predecessor—wrote the script and score that blurs the boundaries between the aural (sound and silence) and material and visual.

Silent film, the obvious precursor to today's "talkies," derives from melodrama: for example, its gestural acting style and integration of music. But as this connection has been abundantly proven by literature and film critics (such as David Mayer),² I would prefer to turn to a contemporary film that, in a sense, reverses our expectations, Michel Hazanavicius's *The Artist* (2011).³ *The Artist* is set in Hollywood between 1927 and 1932, and focuses on the relationship between a silent film star and his young protégé as talkies replace silent cinema. The film is primarily silent except for its non-diegetic soundtrack. Although I have seen plenty of silent films, while watching *The Artist* I became particularly aware of the pleasure of silent cinema. Upon leaving the theater, it was almost shocking to experience sound as noise and speech, and it made me aware how silent film, and (prior to silent film) melodrama, fused silence with music, so that we experience silence musically and music silently. More precisely, we see the actors' lips moving but not producing words—a visual form of silence—and instead we hear music. Conversely, the continuous music quickly becomes a sort of invisible background; we lose acknowledged awareness of it. Silence and music become a single unit in opposition to speech and noise. Hazanavicius explicitly plays with this contrast when he breaks the film's silence *and* music in two memorable "talkie" scenes.

What I hope has become apparent in my descriptions of *4'33"* and *The Artist* is how we experience silence as music and music as silence, how unacknowledged this phenomenon is, and yet how pervasive. But the union of silence and music requires one further component: sight. In order to know that *4'33"* is silent music (or musical silence), we must *see* the pianist. Similarly, in order to understand that music supplements onscreen silence, we must observe the film. These statements seem obvious, yet what they point to is less self-evident: that, at least within

performance, audio and visual perception have become so intertwined that perhaps one can even substitute for the other.

This is, after all, not a dissertation for a musicology or film studies department, so let's turn to contemporary theater to explore this possibility of replacing audio with visual and vice versa: Sarah Kane's *Blasted* (1995).⁴ *Blasted* takes place in an expensive hotel room in Leeds, where Ian, a middle-aged man, rapes Cate, a young woman. After a knock on the door, a soldier enters and interacts with Ian until:

There is a blinding light, then a huge explosion.

Blackout.

The sound of summer rain.

Scene Three

The hotel has been blasted by a mortar bomb.

There is a large hole in one of the walls, and everything is covered in dust which is still falling.

*The **Soldier** is unconscious, rifle still in hand.
He has dropped **Ian's** gun which lies between them.*

Ian *lies very still, eyes open.*

Ian Mum? (Kane 39)

I have attempted to reproduce the script typographically so we can *see* Kane's intention. She blinds us, audibly blows apart the stage, blinds us again (this time with darkness), we hear a sound (summer rain), and then she provides the visual: the blasted hotel. My second chapter, "Muted Music," addresses in detail the musically accompanied alternations between stasis and motion in melodrama's poses and tableaux. For now I would just like to note that this fluctuation, particularly in relation to temporal and spatial shifts, is a classic melodramatic

technique.⁵ Kane transitions from motion (the explosion) to stillness (the unconscious Soldier, and Ian, lying prone). She accompanies this transition with sound, the explosion and summer rain, which signifies shifts in time and space. Time has sped up—it is now summer—and a brutal war has crossed into a hotel in Leeds. The hole in the hotel wall frames the space and moment where two previously separate worlds penetrate one another.

Neither Cage, Hazanavicius, nor Kane expressly employ melodrama in their productions, yet all three artists engage practices that developed and proliferated on the melodramatic stage: Cage and Hazanavicius's union of visually signaled silence and music, and Kane's oscillations between motion and stillness coinciding with sound and silence. Interestingly, all of these works are, if not *avant-garde*, then at least unorthodox. In 1952, Cage's piece was experimental and controversial. Kane's play was inflammatory, and is still disturbing even to read, and Hazanavicius could barely scrape together funding to produce *The Artist*.⁶ None of these are "popular" works, yet melodrama was popular theater. What I find fascinating, and what this dissertation explores, is how the popular theater of melodrama established an audio-visual semiotics so cutting edge that it translated into modern, *avant-garde* theatrical practices, specifically Symbolism and Expressionism.⁷

* * *

My dissertation takes as its critical springboard Peter Brooks' "The Text of Muteness" in his *The Melodramatic Imagination*—the most thorough examination of muteness, and specifically the mute figure, in melodrama.⁸ Melodrama, he argues, seeks "total articulation." Words are "not wholly adequate to the representation of meanings, and the melodramatic message must be formulated through other registers of the sign," including mute tableaux and gesture, and the mute role (Brooks 56). In the mute role lies "the hidden truth that must by the

end of the play be revealed,” and it “is both concealed and suggested by [the character’s] muteness” (59). Silence (or muteness) in melodrama functions as a signifier; it directs the audience to seek beyond the spoken words for further meaning, for “the truth.” Outside of dialogue, we observe mute tableau, gesture (melodrama’s poses or attitudes), character physiognomy, and, of course, the music that reinforces these visuals. However, I have just listed a number of perceptible signs and, whereas early melodramas typically aligned these features, *I* think things get interesting in 1823 when Richard Brinsley Peake’s *Presumption; or, The Fate of Frankenstein* adapts Mary Shelley’s novel for the stage by *contrasting* the visual fields of gesture and physiognomy in a *mute* monster.

* * *

My first chapter addresses the mute figure of melodrama. I analyze traditional mute figures from early melodramas like Thomas Holcroft’s *Deaf and Dumb; or, The Orphan Protected* (1801) and his *A Tale of Mystery* (1802), both adaptations of earlier French melodramas. I also examine the origin of melodrama’s gestural acting style in Enlightenment theories (and stage practices) of language development, like Rousseau’s and Diderot’s, and eighteenth-century acting guides, all of which suggest that gesture communicated incontrovertibly, and, when performed by a mute character, indicated innocence. Peake, however, chooses to make Shelley’s complex monster mute. But he doesn’t simply visually declare the monster’s innocence; rather, he contrasts the traditional mute role and gestures (and the famous and attractive actor playing the monster, T. P. Cooke) with hideous makeup and costume. In other words, Peake takes two of melodrama’s visual signifiers—gesture and character appearance—and juxtaposes them to physically embody the sympathetic murderer

from *Frankenstein*. It is a fracturing of melodrama's visual semiotics that modernizes muteness on the nineteenth-century stage.

My second chapter considers what becomes of this fractured mute figure in later melodrama, specifically Leopold Lewis's *The Bells* (1880). I argue that in *The Bells*, the *memory* of a murder victim assumes the mute role—silently gesturing to the unspoken truth. However, that memory is embedded within the mind of the murderer; thus, the murderer is also a component of the mute role. This makes sense in terms of Brooks's definition of the mute: the other character in possession of the secret (who knows the crime) is the criminal—not just the mute victim (unable to betray the secret), but the villain (unwilling to betray the secret). The mute role thus transforms into character interiority—interiority made exterior through another of melodrama's mute techniques: tableau. I analyze how the movement and stasis in tableaux corresponds with the start and cessation of music, such that we (the audience) begin to relate the visual component with its audio counterpart—music indicates motion, and silence equates to stillness—a technique put into practice on the Symbolist stage, particularly in August Strindberg's *Ghost Sonata* (1907) and Henrik Ibsen's *When We Dead Awaken* (1899). What troubled me most about *Ghost Sonata* was its title (how is a music-less play a “sonata”?), until I realized that Strindberg was playing with the embodiment of sound already available on the melodramatic stage. The *ghosts*—the play's characters—comprise the sonata. Strindberg peoples his scenes with silent, still characters that signify musical pauses, the way music in melodrama pauses to register stasis. The silent, still characters are at once descendants of melodrama's mute figures and *symbols*. In particular, in *When We Dead Awaken*, we can see the relationship between reading the paused and posed melodramatic body for truth, and the

symbolizing body—somewhere between actor and art object—that points us to meanings outside the spoken narrative and even the play text.

Chapter three is a deeper exploration of Symbolism in which I consider Maurice Maeterlinck's *L'Intruse* (1890) and *Intérieur* (1894), Oscar Wilde's *Salome* (1893), and Loie Fuller's Salome dances (1895, 1907). What I seek to understand is how Symbolism, a poetry-based movement that claimed to reject the material world, appeared and even thrived on stage. I argue that, as in melodrama, Symbolism presents its most important moments, moments when what must be conveyed extends beyond the bounds of verbal language—its dramatic action, so to speak—in materialized silence. Wilde, in particular, grounds his Symbolist drama in the corporeal, making the body itself a symbol in a play centered on an iconic dancer, Salome. I move from theater to dance, examining the Symbolist Salome dances of Loie Fuller: the woman turning her body into a symbol representing a silent subtext relates to the gesturing, silent characters in Maeterlinck and Wilde's dramas through their use of non-verbal, embodied communication. At play within Symbolist texts is melodrama's declamatory speech (speech that was intended to blend with the music), and the melodramatic technique of filling silent moments with music, such that the audience associates silence and music. Wilde's *Salome* suggests a musical score, and Fuller's dances turned Wilde's symbols into embodied, blossoming objects. In Fuller's Symbolist dances we can see how melodrama's poses suggest the relationship between body, (art) object, and symbol.

Finally, I conclude with an examination of Expressionism, including Georg Kaiser's *Von morgens bis mitternachts* (*From Morn to Midnight*) (1912), Eugene O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* (1920) and *The Hairy Ape* (1921), and Elmer Rice's *The Adding Machine* (1923). Each of my chapters' key texts presents a problem I sought to unravel. How does *Presumption*'s monster

fit into the traditionally innocent mute role? How is *Ghost Sonata* a sonata? What happened to the dance at the heart of the Salome legend in Wilde's play? What struck me with *Emperor Jones* is O'Neill's incongruous insistence on the continuously thumping tom-tom and the forest's utter silence. How can we understand the stage as silent despite ongoing sound? Again, and with all of these plays, I see the key in melodrama's audio-visual semiotics, and specifically melodrama's technique and development of muteness. Like all of these plays, in *The Emperor Jones*, O'Neill limits language and instead substitutes gesture, pantomime, and tableaux-like sequences. However, he also concentrates on setting. As in *The Bells*—when we enter the protagonist's tableaux visions, we are entering his head—here too the scenes are Jones' interiority made exterior. As such, and as I demonstrate with *The Bells*, they are *mute* spaces: the silent contents of the protagonist's head. The reason why we can apprehend silence despite sound on the Expressionist stage is twofold: the setting signals embodied silence (mute interiority), and, through melodrama, we have come to equate music with silence to such an extent that one flows into the next making them nearly indistinguishable.

¹ John Cage, *4'33"*, 1952.

² See, for example, David Mayer, *Stagestruck Filmmaker: D. W. Griffith and the American Theatre* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2009).

³ *The Artist*, dir. Michel Hazanavicius, Warner Bros. France, 2011.

⁴ Sarah Kane, *Blasted, Complete Plays* (London: Methuen, 2001) 1-61.

⁵ For an unequivocal example, consider *The Corsican Brothers*, where the tableaux concluding Act I and opening and closing Act II, Scene IV transfer the audience across time and location. Dion Boucicault, *The Corsican Brothers, Selected Plays of Dion Boucicault* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of American Press, 1987) 99-133.

⁶ Neda Ulaby, "In *The Artist*, a Silent Look at Old Hollywood," "Monkey See," National Public Radio, 22 Nov. 2011.

⁷ Although I believe I could trace the impact of melodrama's audio-visual semiotics in other experimental dramas, such as Antonin Artaud's.

⁸ Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976).

CHAPTER ONE

Frankenstein and the Mute Figure of Melodrama

In Mary Shelley's novel, when Victor Frankenstein first encounters his creation, the Monster "muttered some inarticulate sounds, while a grin wrinkled his cheeks. He might have spoken, but I did not hear; one hand was stretched out." By their second meeting, however, Frankenstein's monster has progressed beyond this near muteness and instead eloquently pronounces, "All men hate the wretched; how, then must I be hated, who am miserable beyond all living things! Yet you, my creator, detest and spurn me, thy creature, to whom thou art bound by ties only dissoluble by the annihilation of one of us."¹ The Monster then narrates his tale, including a detailed account of his education in language. In contrast to Shelley's uniquely expressive monster, however, the Frankenstein monster of twentieth and twenty-first century popular culture—represented by Boris Karloff in Universal Studios' 1931 *Frankenstein*—never develops beyond muttering and outstretched hands, causing critics to deride "the transformation of the creature from Shelley's articulate being who defines himself through Milton to the bolt-headed half-man, half-machine monster of the film tradition."² But an important chapter in the evolution of the Monster's "long and strange" saga is the story of Richard Brinsley Peake, the forgotten "hack" playwright who, in initially adapting Shelley's novel for the stage, fractured melodrama's visual communicants to produce the theater's first modern mute figure.

In this chapter I trace theater's impact on Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), including her manipulation of proto-melodramatic stage techniques theorized and utilized by Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Denis Diderot, and how Peake's 1823 adaptation, *Presumption; or, The Fate of*

Frankenstein, embodies Shelley's monster by contrasting two of melodrama's established visual fields: character physiognomy and gesture. I examine melodrama in order to bridge the gap between *Frankenstein* as novel and film—the articulate and inarticulate monster—but also to show how Shelley and Peake's monster impelled nineteenth-century theatergoers to locate villainy and innocence within a single character through the visual techniques of grotesque costume and ingenuous gesture, revising a conception of muteness as locus of dramatic action that would influence modern theater.

Shelley's *Frankenstein* & melodrama's visual semiotics

We cannot understand the Romantic movement if we do not perceive at the heart of it the impulse toward drama.... The romantic mode...is a dramatization.³

Shelley herself wrote, researched, and assisted others in the writing of multiple plays. *Frankenstein* convinced Percy Shelley that his wife had a gift for drama, and he urged her to write a play. She began a reading program in English, Continental, and Classical drama, and, during the summer of 1818, translated Alfieri's *Myrrha* and began gathering notes for a play on Charles I. She performed extensive investigations on the Cenci, but gave her research to her husband to write his play, *The Cenci*.⁴ Upon her return to England in 1823, Shelley attended many performances including "Kean in Richard—His wonderful looks his tones, his gesture—transported me—I said I would write a tragedy—I began one."⁵ She later showed the draft of her blank verse drama to her father, William Godwin, who dissuaded her, despite her belief "that he was in the wrong—I think myself that I could have written a good tragedy."⁶ In 1838 she assisted Leigh Hunt with his play, *Legend of Florence* (Bunnell 13), but perhaps more important than her experiments in stage plays, Shelley regularly infused her non-dramatic works with theatrical conventions, including two of melodrama's primary visual communicants: the silent

tableau and pantomimic gesture. Examining these two visual fields indicates both drama's influence on Shelley and *Frankenstein's* influence on melodrama. Shelley embeds in her novel the silent spectacle and gestural communication that Peake later employs to embody Shelley's monstrous villain-hero.

FRANKENSTEIN & TABLEAU

In *Realizations: Narrative, Pictorial, and Theatrical Arts in Nineteenth-Century England*, Martin Meisel defines the theatrical tableau: "the actors strike an expressive stance in a legible symbolic configuration that crystallizes a stage of the narrative as a situation, or summarizes and punctuates it."⁷ Yet several instances in Shelley's *novel* function similarly; characters assume an expressive stance that is legible and symbolic to the reader, and through which the narrative is crystallized, summarized, or punctuated. Two such tableau-like moments in *Frankenstein* include Victor's creation of the Monster, and the Monster's observation of the De Lacey family, both of which underscore the significance of visual perception in the novel and its relationship to the theater.

Shelley's description of the dream-like origin of her story in her introduction to the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein*, demarcates the creation scene, suggesting the novel itself derives from a tableau:

When I placed my head on my pillow, I did not sleep, nor could I be said to think. My imagination, unbidden, possessed and guided me, gifting the successive images that arose in my mind with a vividness far beyond the usual bound of reverie. I saw — with shut eyes, but acute mental vision — I saw the pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together. I saw the hideous phantasm of a man stretched out, and then...show signs of life.... His success would terrify the artist.... He would hope that, left to itself, the slight spark of life which he had communicated would fade.... He sleeps; but he is awakened; he opens his eyes; behold, the horrid thing stands at his bedside, opening his curtains and looking on him with yellow, watery, but speculative eyes.⁸

Vivid images succeed one another in Shelley's mind, replicating melodrama's tableau technique, what Meisel calls, "serial discontinuity:" "motion in effect was movement to and away from pictures (or, more radically, was the succession of pictures)" — a style that influenced and thus resembles cinema.⁹ Frankenstein repeats this scene in his narrative to Walton and, in doing so, he crystallizes, summarizes, and punctuates Shelley's vision: "By the dim and yellow light of the moon...I beheld the wretch—the miserable monster whom I had created. He held up the curtain of the bed; and his eyes, if eyes they may be called, were fixed on me. His jaws opened, and he muttered some inarticulate sounds, while a grin wrinkled his cheeks. He might have spoken, but I did not hear; one hand was stretched out, seemingly to detain me" (Shelley, *Frankenstein* 57). The moon resembles a spotlight directing Frankenstein's and the audience's gaze on the primary character who, significantly, raises the curtain. Furthermore, both Shelley and Victor concentrate on the Monster's eyes, suggesting his role as audience member or observer, a role he continues to fulfill in the novel's second tableau.

Like the creation scene—delineated by curtains, punctuated by its status as originary vision, and clearly expressive of Frankenstein's terror at the horrific Monster's need—the Monster's observation of the De Lacey family stands out from the surrounding narrative as a theatrical tableau. From his hovel, the Monster peers through a chink into the De Lacey's cottage, perceiving a single room, much like the stage setting of a domestic drama framed by a proscenium arch. Further highlighting the theatricality of this setting, Shelley's monster, "desire [s] to become an actor in the busy scene" (Shelley, *Frankenstein* 124). Like Shelley's nightmare-vision emphasizing the Monster's "yellow, watery, but speculative eyes," and Frankenstein's ocular horror ("his eyes, if eyes they may be called"), this scene positions the Monster as

observer. He longs to participate in the De Lacey's domestic drama but instead remains a silent audience member, thus mediating the reader to the novel's plot—serving as a surrogate reader.

Shelley also employs a more particular tableau technique that Meisel identifies as “realization” or, “re-creation and translation into a more real, that is more vivid, visual, physically present medium. To...add a third dimension to two was realization, as when words became picture, or when picture became dramatic tableau.” Meisel suggests, “the realization of a particular painting on the stage, especially one of current interest, creates its own kind of audience response.... [U]nlike the simple tableau, it also occasions the pleasures of recognition and ‘truth’” (*Realizations* 30, 93). Shelley utilizes this method in Victor's description of Elizabeth's death: “She was there, lifeless and inanimate, thrown across the bed, her head hanging down, and her pale and distorted features half covered by her hair. Every where I turn I see the same figure—her bloodless arms and relaxed form flung by the murderer on its bridal bower” (*Frankenstein* 189). This scene “realizes” a painting by Henry Fuseli, *The Nightmare* (1781). Maryanne Ward has demonstrated Shelley's sufficient access to, and personal interest in, Fuseli's painting.¹⁰ She compares the novel's scene to *The Nightmare*, noting “striking similarities between Fuseli's painting and the depiction of Elizabeth's murder.” “The melodramatic position of the body was, and is, a Gothic cliché, so that the pose alone really is not sufficient to suggest a direct influence. But the monster in the window pointing to the body is undoubtedly a reference to the painting” (Ward 21). As Victor holds Elizabeth's body, he feels “a kind of panic on seeing the pale yellow light of the moon illuminate the chamber. The shutters had been thrown back, and...I saw at the open window a figure the most hideous and abhorred. A grin was on the face of the monster; he seemed to jeer, as with his fiendish finger he pointed towards the corpse of my wife” (*Frankenstein* 189-90). Again, Shelley replicates a stage scene,

replete with lighting—the moon—and a demarcated space—the shuttered window frame resembling the curtained proscenium arch. The Monster even holds his expressive pose, a melodramatic (and literal) point. “Even given the size of some European windows,” Ward explicates:

the novel’s monster would have to have been reduced in size in order to crouch at first unnoticed in the second story window after the murder. In Fuseli’s original drawing a monster (an incubus) is crouched above the woman on the bed.... In the novel Mary Shelley has merely moved the monster from the bed to the window. The creature’s almost playful pointing and the grin in Mary Shelley’s description of the murder are not characteristic of the isolated and tormented monster elsewhere in the novel, but are certainly in keeping with Fuseli’s incubus. (Ward 21)

Shelley introduces this realization, and tableau in general, at moments when words fail. Frankenstein witnesses Elizabeth’s death scene after her “shrill and dreadful scream” alerts him to “the whole truth” of the Monster’s intended assault, and during the creation scene Frankenstein supplements the Monster’s “inarticulate sounds” with the image of his eyes and “one hand stretched out, seemingly to detain me” (Shelley, *Frankenstein* 189, 57). By observing the De Lacey tableau, in particular their education in signs of the Arabian Safie, the ignorant monster learns speech and writing. Shelley presents novelistic versions of tableau that emphasize sight and observation as theatrical supplements for language. Like melodrama, she establishes visual fields in which her characters can communicate with outstretched hands, flung bodies, or gesture in the face of limited language.

FRANKENSTEIN & GESTURE

The Monster reaches towards Victor in the creation tableau in his first gestural attempt at communication (and community), he produces his first sounds by imitating birdsong, and begins his full initiation into the cottager’s language with Safie who, in order to converse outside her

native tongue, “made many signs which I did not comprehend; but I saw that her presence diffused gladness through the cottage” (Shelley, *Frankenstein* 100, 114). Just as Shelley incorporates melodramatic tableaux into her novel, she also includes the stage technique of gesture—the Monster’s punctuating point. Since Shelley’s journal for 14 May 1815 to 20 July 1816 has disappeared, we cannot know for certain which works she may have read in the months preceding *Frankenstein*’s composition; however, it seems likely that two dramatists and their theories of gesture influenced her development of the Monster: Rousseau’s *Pygmalion* and Diderot’s *The Natural Son*.

When Shelley’s journal resumes on 21 July 1816 she records: “I read ‘Nouvelles Nouvelles’ and write my story,” and she lists the work twice in her summary of reading for the year, the second time as *Nouveaux Nouvelles*.¹¹ *Nouveaux Contes Moraux et Nouvelles Historiques* (1802-03) by Stéphanie-Félicité Ducrest de Saint-Aubin, Marquise de Sillery and Comtesse de Genlis contains her play, *Pygmalion et Galatée; ou La Statue animée depuis vingt-quatre heures*, whose prefatory notes indicate Genlis’s indebtedness to Rousseau’s *Pygmalion*. If Rousseau even indirectly influenced Shelley’s novel, as seems abundantly probable, then *Frankenstein* incorporates the concepts of one of the first melodramatists—again suggesting the text’s saturation with theatrical conventions. Rousseau wrote the play *Pygmalion*, “Scène lyrique,” in 1762 (first staged in 1770), and he used the word *mélodrame* to characterize it in his “Observations sur l’*Alceste* Italien de M. le Chevalier Glück” (1774 or 1775).

In Rousseau’s “Scène lyrique,” Pygmalion exclaims to his sculpture, “I believe that I can hurl myself out of myself; I believe that I can give it my life, and animate it with my soul.”¹² When Galatea transforms from statue to person, Rousseau’s characters turn to gesture: “GALATEA, touches herself and says. Me. PYGMALION, enraptured. Me! GALATEA,

touching herself again. It is Me. [...] She puts a hand on him; he shudders, takes her hand, carries it to his heart, then covers it with ardent kisses” (Rousseau, *Pygmalion* 235-36). Clearly the Monster assembled and vitalized by the “unhallowed art[ist]” resembles the sculpture from the Pygmalion myth, but specifically recalling Rousseau’s *mélodrame*, Shelley’s monster turns to gesture in order to communicate with his creator upon animation. He stretches out a single hand, which Victor interprets as a threat, but the Monster presumably intends similarly to Galatea—a gesture acknowledging origin and love.

In “Philosophical and Literary Sources of *Frankenstein*,” Burton Pollin suggests another lesser-known source for *Frankenstein*: “Diderot...was another likely element in the early shaping of the novel. Shelley knew Diderot’s works and could scarcely have been unaware of the *Lettre sur les sourds et muets*, of 1751.... The journal records Mary’s reading of another work by Diderot, the *Tableau de Famille*, during the ‘gestation’ period of *Frankenstein*.”¹³ In his “Letter on the Deaf and Dumb,” Diderot defines gesture as both natural and supremely artificial—at once inspired by “nature alone” and successfully performed by only the most skilled actors.¹⁴ He attends the theater to examine actors’ techniques: “I...kept my fingers obstinately in my ears as long as the gestures and actions of the actor corresponded with the dialogue which I remembered.... Ah, how few actors there are who can stand such a test.... But judge of my neighbours’ surprise when they saw me shed tears at the pathetic passages, though I had my fingers in my ears” (Diderot, “Letter on the Deaf” 174). For Diderot, successfully performed “gestures and actions” can supplant dialogue and invoke sympathy—techniques he demonstrates and explicates in his play, *The Natural Son*, and dialogue, “Conversations on *The Natural Son*” (1756, 1757), which bear an uncanny resemblance to *Frankenstein*.

Although Pollin outlines Shelley's familiarity with Diderot, no critic considers these particular works of Diderot as potential sources for *Frankenstein* and the Monster's use of gesture in his language development. *The Natural Son* includes three primary characters: Dorval—reserved, melancholy, and acutely conscious of his social isolation; his half-sister, Rosalie, whom he loves; and Clairville, Dorval's aristocratic and only friend. The role of Dorval is structurally similar to Frankenstein, who loves Elizabeth, a woman raised as his sister (and actually his cousin in the novel's 1818 edition). Frankenstein too has only one friend, Clerval, whose name closely resembles Clairville's.

In "Conversations on *The Natural Son*," Dorval illustrates Diderot's concept of gesture. If Shelley knew "Conversations"—and the similarities between "Conversations" and *Frankenstein* abound—then perhaps Diderot's theories inspired the Monster's use of gesture in the novel, and even offered Peake a means of invoking the audience's sympathy for his more unsightly Monster in his melodramatic stage adaptation. Dorval describes a mimed scene: "I saw in it the voice of nature" (Diderot, "Conversations" 17). Gesture, he observes, precedes and supplements "cries, inarticulate words, moments when speech breaks down, when a few monosyllables escape at intervals, a strange murmuring from the throat or from between the teeth" (Diderot, "Conversations" 21), like the Monster's outstretched hand and "uncouth and inarticulate sounds" (Shelley, *Frankenstein* 100). However, through Dorval, Diderot considers, not language's origin or development, but theater's efficacy; these are not the gestures and sounds of a primitive or newborn being, but a highly skilled performer.

Rousseau's and Diderot's theories of gesture and language development influenced Enlightenment and early Romantic thinking—including Mary Shelley's and (through Shelley) Peake's—and dramatic representation of the mute figure. Shelley's Monster begins life with "le

geste et quelques sons inarticulés” that Rousseau describes in his *Essay on the Origin of Languages*,¹⁵ but he progresses, eventually telling Walton and Shelley’s readers the story that sits uneasily alongside Victor Frankenstein’s tale. Later the Monster’s gestures interrupt “moments when speech breaks down,” like the grinning monster “with his fiendish finger...point[ing] towards the corpse” of Victor’s wife. In a sense, these two tableaux containing the Monster’s crystalized gestures, summarize the two tales, the Monster’s and Victor’s, as well as Rousseau’s and Diderot’s theories on gesture: the newly born monster with outstretched hand reaching towards his maker, and the educated monster, speechless with passion, pointing towards his murdered victim. The innocent monster is wordless and gesturing, as is the experienced and guilt-ridden monster. In both instances, however, the gesture functions as truth: the plea for love, and the accusation and pointed punishment after abandonment. And in both instances, the reader experiences these gestures through the cloudy eyes of Victor. The Monster “*seemed to jeer*,” “one hand was stretched out, *seemingly* to detain me” (*Frankenstein* 190, 57). Shelley emphasizes the “seemingness” of Victor’s observations.

Rousseau and Diderot theorized the origin of language, locating gesture at man’s birth, but both were also dramatists, integrating gesture into their plays at “natural” moments—for example, Pygmalion and Galatea’s demonstration of love; thus, gesture throughout *Frankenstein*, particularly during moments of theatrical tableaux, at once suggests nature (innocence) and artificiality (experience). When Peake adapts *Frankenstein* for the stage, he incorporates the theatrical techniques Shelley enfolds in her novel, creating a sort of layering effect: a play adapted from a novel that looked to theater. It is this integrative approach to novels and plays occurring with *Frankenstein* and throughout the nineteenth-century that pushes at the formal techniques of both genres, in this instance, reworking the conventions of melodrama’s mute

figure. When Peake places Shelley's monster on stage as a gesturing mute, he asks that the audience—without the mediation of Walton or Victor—understand the Monster as both innocent and experienced through visual (non-linguistic) fields.

Peake's *Presumption* stages Shelley's monster

Mary Shelley commented on her own experience as an audience member at an 1823 performance of *Presumption; or, The Fate of Frankenstein*, Peake's adaptation of her novel:

But lo and behold! I found myself famous. "Frankenstein" had prodigious success as a drama, and was about to be repeated, for the twenty-third night, at the English Opera House. The playbill amused me extremely, for, in the list of *dramatis personae*, came "_____, by Mr. T. Cooke;" this nameless mode of naming the unnameable is rather good.... ("_____") throws down the door of the laboratory, leaps the staircase, and presents his unearthly and monstrous person on the stage. The story is not well managed, but Cooke played _____'s part extremely well; his seeking, as it were, for support; his trying to grasp at the sounds he heard; all, indeed, he does was well imagined and executed. I was much amused, and it appeared to excite a breathless eagerness in the audience.¹⁶

Shelley's review captures the excitement and popularity of this forgotten play by a forgotten playwright. We know the notorious novel and its author, but Shelley herself attributes her fame to the play: "lo and behold! I found myself famous." Her description expresses not just the thrill of witnessing a performance of *Presumption*, but also the physical acting capabilities of the play's lead who "throws down the door," "leaps the staircase, and presents his...person" to the audience, while also "seeking...support" and "trying to grasp at...sounds." T. Cooke's monster is both threatening and helpless, terrifying and dependent. Shelley declares him "unnameable:" literally unnamed in *Frankenstein*, but also departing from traditional characters in both novel and play—the literate monster, breaking down doors to beg for help. Peake's "nameless mode of naming the unnameable" encapsulates the play's use of silence ("nameless") to communicate (name) complex ideas and identities ("the unnameable"). Peake and Cooke stage Shelley's

sympathetic antagonist and his complicated history by developing a standard character from melodrama, the mute.

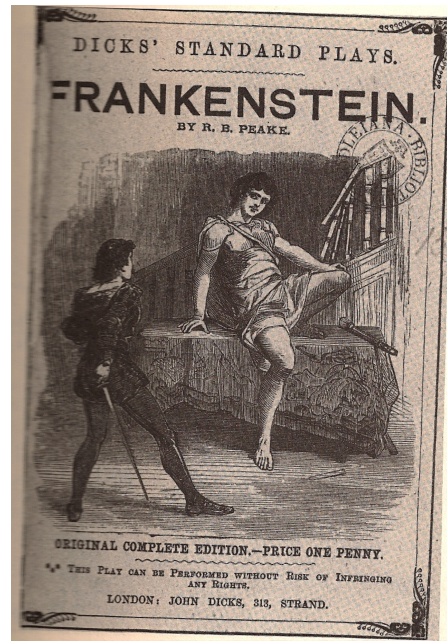


Fig. 1. T. P. Cooke as the Monster in *Presumption*, from the frontispiece of the Dicks' Standard Plays edition (Oxford, Bodleian Library).¹⁷

The frontispiece of the Dicks' Standard Plays edition of Peake's *Presumption* depicts the actor Thomas Potter Cooke as the Monster. He has just broken through the balustrade and leapt onto the stage, pausing for a moment to pose before the startled Frankenstein and the melodrama's audience. Cooke's monster dominates the scene: his flowing hair; his coy smile; and that skimpy toga, taut across his well-built chest, its folds riding up his muscular thighs.

Poor Victor and his sword can barely compete. Instead Victor shrieks:

It lives! [...] What a wretch have I formed, his legs are in proportion and I had selected his features as beautiful—beautiful! Ah, horror! his cadaverous skin scarcely covers the work of muscles and arteries beneath, his hair lustrous, black, and flowing—his teeth of pearly whiteness—but these luxuriations only form more horrible contrasts with the deformities of the monster.¹⁸

Victor lingers on the Monster's well-proportioned legs, muscles, shiny hair and sparkling teeth, only to sputter incongruous insults: "wretch," "horror," "cadaverous," "horrible," "deformities." Then again, the Dicks' Standard illustration diverges from contemporary magazine accounts of the play's monster's costume: his "green and yellow visage, watery and lack-luster eye, long-matted and straggling black locks, with blue livid hue of arm and leg, shriveled complexion, lips straight and black, and a horrible ghastly grin."¹⁹ To simply hear Victor's line, or observe the frontispiece and read the costume description, establishes two perceivably conflicting materialities: the deformed monster costume and the actor's luxurious body.

In fact, Peake substantially altered *Presumption* based on Cooke's performance and physique. In the original manuscript version of the scene depicted on Dicks' frontispiece, the Monster "appears in the light of the Laboratory," then "he looks around cautiously, descends the staircase rapidly—surveys the apartment—crosses to Frankenstein, and lays hands upon him," whereas in the modified, printed edition: "The Monster [is] discovered at door entrance in smoke, which evaporates—the red flame [from the laboratory] continues visible. The Monster advances forward, breaks through the balustrade or railing of gallery...jumps on the table beneath, and from thence leaps on the stage, standing in attitude before Frankenstein."²⁰ Dicks illustrates the amended scene, as influenced by "a performance of T. P. Cooke as the Creature that transformed the playwright's original conception."²¹ Cooke's monster, entering amidst smoke and flame, immediately upstages Frankenstein, as he will continue to do so in the popular imagination, eventually absorbing even his creator's name. The original Monster warily considers his surroundings before his unprovoked assault on Frankenstein; he is both cowardly and violent. However, the revised Monster showcases Cooke's renowned athleticism in his more diplomatic self-presentation before Victor—look Pa, no stairs. In a sense, Victor's response

encapsulates the ambivalence of the moment: “beautiful—beautiful! Ah, horror!” For the first time, Shelley’s monster stands before its audience, at once attractive and terrible, displaying the set of conflicts at the heart of *Frankenstein*: Whose narrative do we believe, the creator’s or the creature’s? Is the Monster an abused innocent or a born criminal? Should we sympathize with a confessed murderer? *Presumption*’s monster, as devised by Peake and Cooke, quite literally embodies Shelley’s novel’s tensions. Rather than utter a word, the Monster “stands in attitude” before his audience and asks that we “read” his body.

In embodying Shelley’s dualistic monster, Peake pushes against the conventions of melodramatic practice. As Steven Earl Forry—who has anthologized the novel’s dramatic adaptations and written the most sustained critique of *Presumption*—points out, *Frankenstein* pre-dates Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair* by thirty years, with its famous claim to have transformed the conventions of the novel to produce a story with no hero and no villain.²² Rather than protagonist and antagonist, Frankenstein and his monster are doppelgängers. “This lack of a crystallized moral perspective presents obvious difficulties for the Manichaeian world of melodrama, which viewed life as a conflict between good and evil, black and white.... [M]elodramatizations of *Frankenstein* had to deal with a story in which the titular hero perished with a being that could hardly be called the black villain” (Forry, “Hideous Progenies” 24). Unfortunately, after discerning this fascinating tension between the novel and melodramatic convention, Forry erroneously concludes, “All early melodramatizations of Shelley’s novel rearranged the characters into ‘types’: the villain (the Creature) [and] the hero (Frankenstein)” (68). But that view is wrong, as we can see in contemporary responses to the performance like a review from the London *Morning Post*:

Whatever may be thought of *Frankenstein* as a novel...there can be but one opinion of it as a drama. The representation of this piece upon the stage is of astonishing, of

enchaining, interest.... T. P. COOKE well pourtrays what indeed it is a proof of his extraordinary genius so well to portray—an unhappy being without the pale of nature—a monster—a nondescript—a horror to himself and others;—yet the leaning, the bias, the nature, if one may so say, of the creature is good; he is in the beginning of his creation gentle, and disposed to be affectionate and kind, but his appearance terrifies even those to whom he has rendered the most essential service; the alarm he excites creates hostility; his miserable frame assailed by man; and revenge and malignity are thus excited in his breast.²³

As aspects of one another, with no clearly defined moral antagonisms, Shelley's Victor Frankenstein and his monster are complex characters that challenge the supposedly binary disposition of characters on the melodramatic stage. Yet, according to *Presumption's* audience members, Peake (and, moreover, Cooke) succeeded at tackling the novel's doppelgänger motif. Cooke's monster manages at once to horrify *and* to portray goodness, gentleness, affection, and kindness.

The few scholarly works on *Presumption* accuse Peake of silencing and thereby dehumanizing *Frankenstein's* eloquent Monster—without recognizing either the mute's traditionally sympathetic role in melodrama or the fact that a sympathetic *monster* challenges that other melodramatic convention, the long-established dichotomy between clearly depicted good and evil. Nineteenth-century stage gesture implicitly claimed to communicate universally, and *Presumption's* mute monster converses through this corporeal language, clearly conveying the character's childlike innocence to his audience: "his seeking, as it were, for support; his trying to grasp at the sounds he heard," as Mary Shelley put it. Peake physically constructs Shelley's villain-victim by juxtaposing innocence, expressed in mute gesture, with evil, conveyed in Cooke's makeup and costume. In doing so, he fractures melodrama's framework by inviting the audience not to hiss the villain but instead to sympathize.

Although Victor Frankenstein occasionally reverts to “demon,” and critics often prefer the more benign “creature,” Peake lists the Monster as “_____” in *Presumption*’s playbill, even muting the Monster’s name with what Shelley called his “nameless mode of naming the unnameable.” By not labeling Cooke’s character “monster” or “demon,” Peake introduces the audience to a villainless play. Instead, a blank space designates an indefinable character. _____’s silence further obscures what might otherwise be an easily compartmentalized and pre-determined role.

Yet, completely overlooking melodrama’s convention of the innocent mute figure, modern criticism finds *Presumption*’s monster *more* monstrous because of his muteness. In his introduction to the Penguin edition of *Frankenstein*, Maurice Hindle exemplifies the typical scholarly response to the discrepancy between Shelley’s monster and his dramatic successors: “It is ironic that the Creature’s narrative, so vital to the moral underpinning of the whole work, has been ignored in the numerous theatrical and filmic re-workings of the story.... [It] has simply been left out, unwanted by an audience which prefers the more frightening (and ‘simpler’) grunts of a threatening monster.”²⁴ Hindle recognizes the significance of the Monster’s speech to the novel and declares it missing from the dramatizations, without considering whether alternative forms of language replace it. He suggests that Peake (and *Frankenstein*’s other adaptors) silence the Monster in order to dehumanize him and further terrify the audience. A sampling of the relatively few scholarly works on, or referencing, *Frankenstein*’s stage adaptations suggests just what we are up against if we wish to examine Peake’s monster and play as anything other than reductionist mimicry. Albert LaValley’s “The Stage and Film Children of *Frankenstein*” and William St. Clair’s “The Impact of Frankenstein” both suggest that the simplicities of the stage versions threaten or obliterate the complexities of the novel.²⁵ Inverso goes further, arguing: “the

Monster is devoiced, then destroyed. It is as if the disturbing, articulately phrased questions posed by Mary Shelley's eloquent Monster must be heard in this forum. By reducing her orator-monster to a grunting beast or a slobbering fool, the melodrama can provide a ready-made justification for his extermination."²⁶ In "Beyond Adaptation: Frankenstein's Postmodern Progeny," Pedro Garcia blames Peake for "beginning...the process of omission and simplification characteristic of [*Frankenstein's*] drama and film adaptations."²⁷ Forry, perhaps Peake's most prolific scholar, is also his most damning critic, deploring "the success of a tawdry melodrama entitled *Presumption; or, The Fate of Frankenstein* from the pen of Richard Brinsley Peake, a thirty-one-year old hack."²⁸ Judging by its critics, one would expect to encounter a crude and reductive play with a grunting, idiotic monster that (fortunately) dies, an expectation that makes reading *Presumption* all the more astonishing.

"Peake's characterization of the Monster as a mute...severely limited the possibilities for pathos" is Hoehn's representative conclusion in his dissertation on Richard Brinsley Peake, the only book-length study of this playwright,²⁹ leading one to wonder, are any of *Presumption's* scholars familiar with the role of the mute in melodrama? Among numerous others, melodramas with mute characters include *A Tale of Mystery*, *The Inchcape Bell*, or *The Dumb Sailor Boy*, *Homicide*, or *The Dumb Boy and the Spectre Knight*, *The Dumb Guide of the Tyrol*, *The Dumb Friend*, *The Dumb Girl of the Inn*, in English, and *Le Chien de Montargis*, *Les Ruines des Babylone*, *Christophe Colomb*, *La Citerne*, *Les Maures d'Espagne*, *La Muette de la Forêt*, *Robert le Diable*, and *Le Vieux Caporal*, in French. In his seminal work on English melodrama, Michael Booth describes this character as: "almost always a sympathetic figure with a terrible and mysterious past who is meant to evoke great pity;" "dumb characters are rarely hero or heroine," but they are "the centre of pathos and distress."³⁰ In other words, rather than "severely

limit[ing] the possibilities for pathos,” Peake actually designates his monster the play’s “centre of pathos and distress.”

Peter Brooks’ *Melodramatic Imagination* includes the most thorough study of the mute role. He argues that “the mute role is the virtuoso emblem of the possibilities of meaning engendered in the absence of the word” (62). Melodrama as a genre was born of, and practiced, language restriction. Carolyn Williams describes it rather as “an organized audio-visual field.”³¹ Melodrama’s relative de-emphasizing of dialogue derives from its origins in *pantomime dialogueés*, the English Licensing Act of 1737 that restricted spoken drama to two Patent Theaters, and the massive size of the theaters themselves, which potentially held thousands. Williams identifies three “master-convention[s] of melodrama’s visual semiotics”—the physiognomic legibility of characters, pantomimic action, and the tableau. The mute role, in a sense, exemplifies and encapsulates the genre as a whole. Melodrama, pressured to communicate with fewer words, instead used visual means to express “beyond the normal range of language” (Williams 289, 280). Similarly, through silence, the mute figure conveys more, not less, because he or she is constrained to communicate using the genre’s own language: physiognomy and pantomimic gesture. *Presumption*’s critics contend that the Monster’s muteness closes down his possibilities of meaning; he is the grunting, slobbering monster—obviously heinous and appalling. Brooks’s study, however, argues that meaning proliferates in wordlessness in the melodramatic “text of muteness.”

Before turning to the mute *monster*, we should consider a selection of melodrama’s more traditional mute *men* in order to establish the characteristics of this role: Thomas Holcroft’s *Deaf and Dumb; or, The Orphan Protected* (1801) (adapted from Bouilly’s *Abbé de l’Épée*) and his *A Tale of Mystery* (1802) (adapted from Guilbert de Pixérécourt’s *Cælina; ou, L’Enfant du*

Mystère). Bouilly based *Abbé de l'Épée* upon a factual event in the life of the Abbé de l'Épée who founded the Institution for the Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb in Paris. L'Épée “employed a systematized language of signs based on the gestural language of the uneducated deaf people he had observed on the streets of Paris,” generating a “golden age” for the signing asylum in the mid-eighteenth century.³² Holcroft’s *A Tale of Mystery*, Britain’s first self-proclaimed “Mélo-Drame,” instigated the popularity of the mute character.³³ Moreover, Holcroft was the “intimate friend” of Shelley’s father, so it is reasonable to assume that Mary Shelley was familiar with the play (Pollin 101). Both plays suggest how the mute role garners sympathy, and both plays evaluate the alternative forms of language that silence produces, including gesture.

In *Deaf and Dumb*, the evil uncle of the mute figure, Julio, abandons him as a child in Paris so that he might inherit Julio’s estates. The Abbé de l'Épée helps Julio rediscover his birth home and attempts to reunite him with his family, including his cousin, St. Alme, and St. Alme’s fiancé, Marianne. The play establishes a system of language that exalts silent communication for its clarity, innocence, and honesty. Holcroft presents two interconnected systems of gesture: the formal sign system of Julio and the “natural” and “universal” sign system of the heart by which St. Alme and Marianne communicate. When De l'Épée translates Julio for his cousin, we can see the play’s evaluation of mute communication: “you are not deceived. He calls you friend—he speaks to you in smiles and tears, the language of the heart—his only language.... O, nature, nature, how resistless is thy eloquence!”³⁴ The mute character remains outside of the romantic action—neither hero nor heroine, yet certainly not the villain. Rather, once the mute successfully communicates without speech, he calls forth the most pity and compassion from the audience and surrounding characters. His physical expression and gestures speak “the language of the heart”—pure and innate and thus universally understood.

Similarly, in *A Tale of Mystery*, Romaldi attempts to assassinate his brother, Francisco, in order to gain his wife and estates, rendering him mute, presumably by cutting out his tongue. Francisco, now impoverished, spends much of the play unable and unwilling to betray and condemn his brother. But he is perfectly able to communicate, at least to those who are themselves innocent and willing to interpret his gestures. The family that takes in the mute and impoverished Francisco discusses his attributes:

Selina. His manners are so mild!

Stephano. His eye so expressive!

Selina. His behaviour so proper!

Fiametta. I'll be bound he is of genteel parentage!

Bonamo. Who told you so?

Fiametta. Not he, himself, for certain, because, poor creature, he is dumb. But only observe his sorrowful looks. What it is I don't know, but there is something on his mind.³⁵

Fiametta, the family's servant who originally discovers the wounded Francisco, is particularly sensitive to his physiognomy, guessing accurately that "he is of genteel parentage" and has "something [the attempted murder] on his mind." Francisco's appearance—his "expressive" eyes and "sorrowful looks"—correspond with his gestures. Fiametta describes encountering Francisco "making signs that he was famished with hunger and thirst[.] I knew him at once.... If you had *seen* his clasped hands, and his thankful looks, and his dumb notes, and his signs of joy at having found me!—While I have a morsel, he shall never want" (*A Tale of Mystery* 227). To Fiametta, Francisco's gestures are transparent: hunger, thirst, and the more complex expressions of thanks and joy. Later, when Bonamo, the patriarch, demands to hear Francisco's tale in full—"There is pen, ink, and paper: when you cannot give answer by signs, write"—Fiametta "interprets" Francisco's signs, determining that Francisco knows his attackers and, moreover, so does Bonamo, thus suggesting the mute figure's ability to communicate more definite and particular meanings too (*A Tale of Mystery* 228). Like his appearance, Francisco's gestures at

their broadest indicate his inherent goodness. In this sense, Francisco, the first mute figure of self-declared British melodrama, is representative of his successors. Two visual fields—character physiognomy and pantomimic gesture—work in harmony to communicate to receptive characters and the audience.

The narrative continues to unfold through pantomime, poses, expressions, tableaux, music, writing, and gestures. Eventually, a scar on the back of Romaldi's hand, received when Francisco bit him in self-defense, betrays Romaldi's guilt. These situations evoke a sense of pity for the innocent mute character simultaneously trapped by his injury and pushed to express himself through speech alternatives, like gesture, that ultimately compliment the visual and embodied medium of the stage.

“Fast action and plenty of it is the rule, then, and melodrama takes care never to clog the movement with too many words.... [Its] scene[s] would make perfect sense to a deaf spectator,” argues James Smith in *Melodrama*.³⁶ Melodrama not only includes “deaf and dumb” characters speaking in gestural language, it also more broadly imparts its narrative through physicality and action, as if communicating to a deaf and dumb audience—perhaps necessary in nineteenth-century theaters which held thousands. The mute role is not a melodramatic anomaly; rather, it is the heart of a genre originating in material communication. “Melodrama’s recourse to meaning embodied,” Brooks maintains, “has something to do with the historical emergence of the genre from earlier forms, pantomime and *pantomime dialoguée*, created in a situation where the popular theatre had no legal right to the word, which was the exclusive privilege of the patented theatres.”³⁷

Moreover, *Presumption* unfolded physically both because of its genre (melodrama) and because of contemporary acting techniques. The same eighteenth-century language philosophies

that influenced Shelley's depiction of her monster's language development also contributed to a gestural acting style that would last through the nineteenth century. David Mayer's "Acting in Silent Film: Which Legacy of the Theatre?" traces the formation of gesture-based acting in the eighteenth-century to Enlightenment philosophers:

The Enlightenment's interest in gesture arises because physical signs were thought to be associated with the innocent behaviour of "primitive" societies. Thinkers such as... Rousseau held that before such societies were corrupted and separated by the numerous spoken languages of Europe, Asia, and Africa, all people communicated through a universal "language of action" alone. In the lexicon of this graphic pre-language, there was assumed to be a gesture—universally practiced and universally recognized—for everything. Actors of the Enlightenment were therefore encouraged to acquire a gestural vocabulary which might render speech unnecessary, and choreographers and artists across Europe vied to describe visual alphabets which transcended language and dialect.³⁸

Through Rousseau, Mayer equates gesture with the primitive, or man newly born, much like Shelley's monster emerging from Victor's laboratory. The Monster, however, seeks language to communicate; whereas, Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment stage practices identify those initial gestures as superior. Both Brooks and Mayer describe the era's acting stances and repertory of devices used to convey emotion through body, including dramatic postures and exaggerated facial expressions as well as gesture. Brooks contends, "Such a non-naturalistic, unreal style of acting allowed the actor to call upon moments of direct communication with the audience" (*Melodramatic Imagination* 47). David Mayer, who is primarily a critic and theorist of stage melodrama, shows its genealogy in the acting style of silent film: "Should the actor assume another stance, the audience, reading these signs, may make inferences about the character depicted."³⁹ Both scholars suggest that the audience observing this technique *reads* the actor's body in order to determine character, and by practicing such a technique, the actor appeals immediately to the audience with a clear (universal) message.

A selection of prominent acting guides spanning the mid-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries indicates the common perception of stage gesture. John Hill's *The Actor: Or, a Treatise on the Art of Playing* (1755) posits:

Gestures have their determinate signification as well as words; and they can no more be misunderstood: the life and spirit of a representation depend greatly upon these; and what is more than both, its truth. We may express to an audience every passion of the heart by these, without words: Often the player is not allowed words, and when he is, these give them double force and energy. There are peculiar gestures for every passion; but these are not arbitrary, or what the player pleases; they are dictated by nature; they are common to all mankind, and therefore all men understand them.⁴⁰

Gesture cannot “be misunderstood.” It professes “truth” and “passion” by drawing from “nature” and presenting a language “common to all mankind.” In 1822, the year prior to *Presumption*'s staging, Henry Siddon's *Practical Illustrations of Rhetorical Gesture and Action* calls upon the actor “to seize all occasions of observing nature,”⁴¹ and even by 1901 Charles Aubert begins his *The Art of Pantomime* stating, “The language of action, or dumbshow, is universal.”⁴² Repeatedly across the nineteenth century, gesture in general and the gestural acting style in particular are seen as natural and universal—present at man's conception and thus capable of being understood by all men.

Turning to Peake's *Presumption*, we can observe nineteenth-century gestural acting techniques in action, so to speak. When Cooke first leaps on stage, Frankenstein voices his morbid fixation: “The horrid corpse to which I have given life!” The Monster, however, “*looks at Frankenstein most intently [and] approaches him with gestures of conciliation.*” To which Victor, grabbing a sword, responds, “Fiend! dare not to approach me—avaunt, or dread the fierce vengeance of my arm” (Peake, *Hideous Progenies* 144). If stage gestures communicate universally—as nearly all contemporary acting guides and melodrama scholars conclude—then Peake's monster's “gestures of conciliation” would not be lost on the audience, yet Frankenstein

vows vengeance with nothing to revenge. Shortly thereafter, the Monster's initial encounter with the cottagers shows him pantomimically at his most childlike:

*The Monster cautiously ventures out—his mantle having been caught by the bush, he disrobes himself; leaving the mantle attached to the rock.... He watches Felix and Agatha with wonder and rapture...he hears the flute of Felix...stands amazed and pleased, looks around him, snatches at the empty air, and with clenched hands puts them to each ear—appears vexed at his disappointment in not possessing the sound; rushes forward afterwards, again listens, and, delighted with the sound, steals off, catching at it with his hands. (Peake, *Hideous Progenies* 147)*

The Monster, naked and vulnerable—to engage the audience with the athletic Cooke, as pictured on the frontispiece of Dicks' *Standard*—learns of humanity and sound through the De Lacey family, yet Peake extends his language education no further, leaving the Monster enraptured by music, another of melodrama's key non-verbal forms of expression. Clearly this monster is not the grunting, slobbering, terrifying fool described by the vast majority of *Presumption*'s critics. Rather, despite the makeup that induces Frankenstein's cry of "horrid corpse," Cooke's gestures present a timid, affable, joyful, though hideous man-child.

The Monster demonstrates his ingenuous innocence in candid gestures; in contrast, Victor Frankenstein disturbingly rambles about decaying corpses. In a monologue, Victor explains how he created his monster:

To examine the causes of life—I have had recourse to death—I have seen how the fine form of man has been wasted and degraded—have beheld the corruption of death succeed to the blooming cheek of life! I have seen how the worm inherited the wonders of the eye and brain—I paused—analyzing all the minutiae of causation as exemplified in the change of life from death—until from the midst of this darkness, the sudden light broke in upon me! (Peake, *Hideous Progenies* 139)

These lines read almost verbatim from Shelley, but in her novel, the three primary characters (Walton, Frankenstein, and the Monster), divide the words relatively equally between them. In the play, Peake removes Walton and the Monster's narratives, instead using all three stories to construct dialogue around what are essentially fragmented sections of Frankenstein's tale. By

doing so, Peake allows Frankenstein's words to dominate the scenes; he frequently speaks to himself and often overruns other character's meager sentences with his lengthy monologues. Thus, Peake alters the way we perceive both Victor and his monster's language. Victor appears aggressive and detached from the other characters—self-absorbed and socially awkward. Other characters speak predominantly filler around him: “Farewell, Frankenstein! He heeds me not —’tis vain to claim his notice,” complains Clerval (Peake, *Hideous Progenies* 139). This, in turn, alters the way we perceive the silent monster; his gestures (of conciliation, for example) refuse to permit Victor to resume his monologue. Comparing the play's language, in particular Victor's, with the Monster's gestures, we can see that gesture, even when emanating from the body of a monster, retains the clarity, honesty, naturalness, and universal comprehension expounded in the era's acting guides.

MELODRAMA, PHYSIOGNOMY & THE DIVIDED MONSTER

The Monster is a divided figure (both victim and villain), an unremarkable character trait in a novel like Shelley's *Frankenstein*, but surprising in melodrama, where this in-betweenness defies well-established melodramatic conventions. Two of melodrama's preeminent critics note the external representation of unambiguous character types on the melodramatic stage. Booth explains, “Moral position is identifiable with character type; audiences could know at once, by the initial appearance and first speeches of any person in melodrama, his or her character and forthcoming role in the play. By its very nature melodrama demands superficial ‘instant’ characters who behave in the same way, think in the same way, and act in the same way” (15). Brooks concurs: “Since melodrama's simple, unadulterated messages must be made absolutely clear, visually present, to the audience, bodies of victims and villains must unambiguously

signify their status.”⁴³ However, for *Presumption*’s monster, “initial appearance and first speeches” present conflicting “moral position[s].” The Monster’s dramatic entrance in terrifying makeup contrasts with the conciliatory gestures he first offers Frankenstein. The audience’s recollection of the Monster from Shelley’s novel, plus their familiarity with the conventional mute role from previous melodramas, add further layers of uncertainty. Shelley’s monster is a unique creation, defying and developing the various genres the novel straddles—gothic, horror, science fiction, epistolary fiction, even realism. If Peake refuses to reduce the Monster to type, as I argue, then Peake and Cooke have no example to pattern the Monster’s behavior, thoughts, and actions after. Peake has therefore innovated within the conventions of the genre, although writing close to its origins.

Melodrama specializes in making precise messages visually available. Unmistakable physical and behavioral characteristics denote the villain. One melodramatist, writing in 1806, describes his attributes:

He carries on his brow the badge of vice,
That narrow cheek, that keen, but sunken eye
That black complexion, all denote the villain.
His scowl is dreadful as a winter’s blast.⁴⁴

Still in 1860 the villain’s “face rivals in blackness that of a metropolitan statue.... His forehead is ploughed with...prodigious wrinkles, indicative of his ‘haggard mind.’ ...His countenance is steeped in gloom.”⁴⁵ Modern interpretations depict “a swarthy, cape-enveloped man with a deep voice” (Brooks, *Melodramatic Imagination* 17) who is “most wholeheartedly hissed and hated, when endowed with malevolence more than human, a motiveless malignity which sends shivers of irrational terror down the spine” (Smith 20). *Presumption*’s monster noticeably fits the facial and physical features of the villain; however, as soon as we move beyond appearance, this monster fails to fulfill the villain’s behavioral and circumstantial expectations. Smith references

the villain's "motiveless malignity," and Brooks further distinguishes villains from their victims: "Villains are remarkably often tyrants and oppressors, those that have power and use it to hurt. Whereas the victims, the innocent and virtuous, most often belong to a democratic universe: whatever their specific class origin, they believe in merit rather than privilege" (*Melodramatic Imagination* 44). In each of these depictions, Victor Frankenstein comes closest to resembling the melodramatic villain. The Monster demonstrates unequivocal motives for his murderous behavior—rejection by his maker and all of humanity. Victor, however, immediately responds to his creation with "motiveless malignity." Moreover, the Monster attempts to integrate into human society through gestural communication and performing beneficial deeds for the De Lacey family, much as in the novel. Frankenstein, although not a tyrant, does wield the most power, oftentimes oppressing his monstrous offspring while disregarding friends and family.

Despite Forry's conclusion that Peake "simplified the plot [of Shelley's *Frankenstein*] by...reducing the major characters to four types: the hero, the villain, the persecuted heroine, and the comical rustic" ("Dramatizations" 64-65), *Presumption*'s monster unmistakably exhibits characteristics of both the melodramatic villain that invite audience disapproval (such as murder), and characteristics of the melodramatic hero that invite audience approbation (such as rescuing damsels in distress). In Shelley's novel, the Monster describes how and why he murders William and frames Justine for the crime. On stage, Frankenstein discovers the Monster with William who "*holds forth the child*" then "*shoulders the child and rushes off within the path*" (Peake, *Hideous Progenies* 157). All the characters proclaim murder, and presumably the Monster does kill William offstage; however, by concealing this action, Peake allows more possibility of sympathizing with a criminal whose crime we fail to observe in gruesome detail. Moreover, *Presumption* does show us the Monster saving lives. When Agatha encounters the

Monster on a bridge she “*screams loudly, and swoons, falling into the rivulet. The Monster leaps from the bridge, and rescues her.*” Her scream terrifies De Lacey, but the Monster “*places Agatha in her fathers arms, tenderly guiding the hand of old De Lacey to support his daughter—Agatha recovers, and perceiving the Monster, with a shriek, again faints—the Monster hovering over them with fondness*” (Peake, *Hideous Progenies* 152). Unlike De Lacey, literally blind to the Monster’s overtures, or Frankenstein who immediately assumes he has created evil, or even Agatha who judges the Monster by appearance, *Presumption*’s audience observes and comprehends his heroics. The audience sees the horrific countenance of the blackest villain performing a romantic hero’s actions—a remarkable combination on the melodramatic stage.

Moreover, the play ends without resolution. As Booth argues, undivided characters end unambiguously: “after immense struggle and torment good triumphs over and punishes evil, and virtue receives tangible material rewards” (14). However, in *Presumption*, Frankenstein, pursuing his creation through the Alps, fires a pistol and instigates an avalanche that “*annihilates the Monster and Frankenstein—A heavy fall of snow succeeds*” (Peake, *Hideous Progenies* 160). Good neither triumphs over evil, nor does virtue receive “tangible material rewards;” rather, a blank slate of snow whitewashes two adulterated characters.

MAN AS MONSTER / MONSTER AS MAN

“What a pause was all about us in that well-compacted pit; how breathless and how blank was that entire floor of faces; and what a mystery came at last—that shapeless, sightless, speechless, mass of movement.” (“Sketches of Stage Favourites: Mr. T. P. Cooke,” *The Illustrated London News*, 15 October 1853)⁴⁶

Thus far, we have primarily considered roles in our analysis of *Presumption*’s monster—the role of the mute, the role of the villain, and how the Monster inhabits both in defiance of melodramatic convention. Because melodrama externalizes its characters’ morality, these roles

manifest through *mise-en-scène*—the mute’s gestures, the villain’s swarthy complexion. In performance, *Presumption* offered what Brooks terms “total theatre” (*Melodramatic Imagination* 46), or theater comprised not only of dialogue, but elaborate settings, lighting, costumes, makeup, declamatory and gestural acting, music, and tableaux, amongst other techniques. *Presumption*’s playbill of Covent Garden of July 9, 1824, confirms its status as total theater in capital letters: “Among the many striking effects of this Piece, the following will be displayed: Mysterious and terrific appearance of the Demon from the Laboratory of Frankenstein. DESTRUCTION of a COTTAGE by FIRE. And the FALL of an AVALANCHE.”⁴⁷ But Cooke’s monster, which one critic compared to “a wax representation of a victim of the plague in a Florentine museum,”⁴⁸ must have been the most spectacular of all *Presumption*’s stage craft.

Just as the Monster later appropriates Frankenstein’s name, Cooke, *Presumption*’s monster, upstages the play’s title character, and becomes identified with the role. Frankenstein, initially acted by Wallack, was taken over by Rowbotham, Bennett, Baker, Perkins, and Diddear (Nitchie 224); whereas, Cooke played the Monster’s role 365 times. In “The Acting of Thomas Potter Cooke,” Harold Nichols bemoans scholarly neglect of nineteenth-century melodramatic actors, especially Cooke who spent fifty-six years performing to critical and popular acclaim: “When the *Theatrical Chronicle and Dramatic Review* attempted to rate the popular appeal of the principal London actors in 1842, it described Charles Kean’s popularity as ‘great,’ Ben Webster’s as ‘middling,’ and Madame Vestris’ as ‘great at wit,’ while the word for Cooke’s was ‘wonderful.’”⁴⁹

Cooke’s acting skills, athleticism, and attractiveness contributed to audience perception of the Monster in *Presumption*. An issue of *The British Stage* depicts Cooke’s “fine muscular figure and handsome expressive countenance,”⁵⁰ or “the face of an Apollo, and the build of a

young Hercules.”⁵¹ Hoehn explains that Cooke acquired his “powerful physique” from his years as a sailor during the Napoleonic Wars, and he specialized in the melodramatic convention of “striking effective poses or attitudes of both body and countenance” (15-16). Each of these descriptions highlights both Cooke’s strong body and his capacity to express complex emotions, thus suggesting he could personify the physically powerful monster we fear, as well as the emotive being of Shelley’s novel.

Moreover, contemporary accounts indicate Cooke’s sex appeal—his “fine muscular” body comparable to Hercules’ and his “handsome” Apollonian face. Twentieth-century scholars who dismiss the dramatized monster as explicitly horrifying and thus less human than his novelistic counterpart forget that underneath the colorful greasepaint and matted wig resides one of the most attractive and popular melodramatic actors of the nineteenth century. In a current example, Johnny Depp may assume bizarre accents, facial-tics, strange haircuts, and heavy makeup (in *Edward Scissorhands*, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, *Pirates of the Caribbean*, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, and *Sweeney Todd*, to name only a handful of movies starring an unattractive Depp), yet we, his audience, remain well aware of the good-looking actor beneath the character’s façade, especially in the case of a renowned performer like Depp or Cooke. In fact, Cooke’s wardrobe in *Presumption* indicates that Peake was capitalizing on the popularity of the actor. His attire consisted of “a close-fitting cotton dress or tunic, and a larger robe or toga that was removed during the performance. The scanty dress of the Monster facilitated actor movement; it also served to display the physique of the actor playing the role” (Hoehn 47). One of Cooke’s few detractors, Mr. John Brown, calls the Monster “a raw-head and bloody-bones,” and vows he will not take his pregnant wife to see him. “Brown’s primary consideration seem[s] not to have been the morals or meanings of *Presumption!* as much

as the virile spectacle of the scantily-clad ex-sailor, T. P. Cooke” at a time when male exposure of the legs was taken to be risqué (Hoehn 53-54).

Rather than simply extol Cooke’s good looks, however, I would like to suggest that Peake’s dramatization actually enfolds the actor’s humanity within the character of the Monster. The very process that stages the grotesquely embodied and terrifying Monster simultaneously presents the fit and handsome Cooke; thus, if theater dehumanizes Shelley’s monster through visual presentation, it also rehumanizes him in a distinctly dramatic way in order to capture the reader’s concurrent attraction and repulsion to the Monster in Shelley’s *Frankenstein*.

Contemporary accounts and discrepancies between *Presumption*’s manuscripts indicate that Cooke substantially altered the role of the Monster. Upon *Presumption*’s opening, Horace Smith writes to Shelley in Paris that Peake “‘vivified the monster in such a manner as caused the ladies to faint away & a hubbub to ensue—however they diminished the horrors in the sequel, & it is having a run,”⁵² suggesting that hubbub and horror were not Peake’s intent, and he specifically altered the play to facilitate a more tempered response. Comparing the Larpent copy of the play, titled “*Frankenstein, A Melo-Dramatic Opera in 3 Acts*,” with the Dicks Standard edition shows that the altered presentation of *Presumption* both expanded Cooke’s performance and encouraged more sympathy for a less evil monster.

A heavily pantomimic scene like the Monster’s destruction of the De Lacey cottage demonstrates how Cooke’s performative abilities persuaded Peake to further humanize the Monster at the expense of the surrounding characters. In the manuscript, when Felix and Frankenstein observe the Monster near Agatha and her father, “*Felix discharges his gun and wounds the Demon, who writhes under the wound. In desperation [he] pulls a burning branch from the fire*” and “*rushes at them.*” “*The Demon hangs to the Rafters, setting light to the thatch*

and Rafter, with malignant joy” (Peake, *Seven Gothic Dramas* 413). In contrast, in the Dicks Standard edition, Felix pursues the retreating Monster and “*discharges his gun—wounds the Monster in the shoulder—who writhes under the agony of the wound from which the blood flows—would rush on Felix, who keeps the gun presented—he is deterred by fear of a repetition of the wound.*” When Frankenstein enters, the Monster “*casts himself at his feet, imploring protection.*” Victor turns hysterical—“Misery! the Fiend! Hence, avoid me! do not approach me—thy horrid contact would spread a pestilence throughout my veins!—hence, no, no! You shall not quit this spot—but thus—thus I destroy the wretch I have created!”—and “*endeavours to stab him with his dagger.*” Cooke’s Monster bats the dagger from Frankenstein’s ineffectual hand, then “*expresses that his kindly feelings towards the human race, have been met by abhorrence and violence; that they are all now converted into hate and vengeance.—In desperation, the Monster pulls a flaming brand from the fire, and in agony of feeling...set[s] fire to the...cottage*” (Peake, *Hideous Progenies* 414). Peake noticeably extends the scene’s pantomime. Moreover, although in both texts Felix wounds and the Monster writhes, only in the later edition does the Monster express “agony” and “fear” upon receiving a heavily bleeding injury. This enhanced monster makes one last attempt to reconcile himself with his creator and the human race, but is met with, not only rejection, but attempted assassination. Somehow Cooke’s mute monster manages to convey through gesture and expression what Shelley’s monster needs seven chapters to unload—his overtures, his rejection, his vengeance—and, in “desperation” and “agony of feeling” he initiates payback. In the altered version of *Presumption*, the Monster acts, not because of his instinctual monster nature, but out of physical and psychological pain, fear, desperation, rejection, and crushed hopes. He takes no “malignant joy” in his vengeance. Alternatively, the scene’s *people* shoot, stab, hurl insults, and seem oblivious

to the fact that their victim has just rescued Agatha from drowning and seeks nothing but their acceptance in return. Peake not only develops the Monster's role in response to Cooke's performance, he also humanizes the Monster while concurrently dehumanizing the play's people.

Contemporary audience responses to this performance illustrate Cooke's ability to generate sympathy for the Monster. Prince Hermann Pückler-Muskau writes in a letter dated 13 October 1826: "The principle part ... was acted by Mr. Cooke, who is distinguished for a very handsome person, skilfull acting, and a remarkably dignified, noble deportment"⁵³—qualities presumably not present if the Monster were a mere grunting, slobbering beast. Moreover, reviewers recognize the Monster's embryonic human sympathy: "Nothing could be more excellent than the acting of Mr. T. P. Cooke, as the nameless monster, in marking the first effects of some of the most striking objects of art and nature upon his newly-created faculties," praises *The Theatrical Observer*.⁵⁴ A reviewer in *The London Times* condemns the play for lacking a concrete moral statement, objecting to "the creatures moments of gentleness;"⁵⁵ however, even this criticism suggests that Peake succeeded in capturing Shelley's balanced approach to the Monster. A review of another performance by Cooke indicates his ability to convey the Monster's complex emotions through pantomime alone: "his attitudes are so very expressive, that though he is forbidden to speak, we are at no loss to understand his thoughts and his feelings, his hopes, his fears, and his mysterious designs; as soon, probably, as they may be supposed to enter his mind."⁵⁶

Ultimately, Cooke's mute performance captures the Monster's ingenuousness and murderousness as portrayed in the novel. *The Drama; or Theatrical Pocket Magazine* applauds Cooke for "embod[ying] the horrible, bordering on the sublime or the awful. His exhibition of great strength, of towering gait, and of reckless cruelty, contrasted with the fiend's astonishment

on hearing a ‘concord of sweet sounds,’ and on beholding female forms, or in saving a human being from drowning, was masterly and characteristic.” The Monster’s “subsequent change of feelings, with the varied scenes and treatment to which it is exposed, display admirable discrimination in the performer.”⁵⁷ *The Drama* describes a diverse performance, contrasting “the horrible,” “the awful,” recklessness, cruelty, and physical power, with innocence, tenderness, and heroics. Like the mute role embedded in the Monster’s body, Cooke’s twofold performance displays the very nuances that make Shelley’s monster so memorable. Perhaps Peake’s remarkable transformation of the conventions of melodrama derives from his effort to adapt a novel—not only *this* novel, but the novel as a genre—whose characters are always more mixed and individuated. Adaptation, so common to melodrama, and frequently grounds for its critical dismissal, turns out to be a good thing with powers of innovation particular to it.

Moreover, *Presumption* appears to have instigated Cooke’s career-defining role as nautical hero and British patriot, the “Jolly Jack Tar.” In *Blood and Thunder*, Maurice Disher outlines Cooke’s pre-stage career: “He was born in 1786—St. George’s Day, very properly, his birthday.... From the start his true-blue destiny was recognized, for [he was made] a midshipman at the age of ten. In 1796 he sailed in the *Raven* for the blockade of Toulon, fought at St. Vincent, and was wrecked off Cuxhaven.”⁵⁸ Contemporary accounts conflate Cooke with his roles—a sailor, a hero, and a patriot on and offstage. Two years after *Presumption*’s opening, on 3 November 1825, Cooke appeared as the nautical hero Long Tom Coffin at the Adelphi Theatre, followed by his most famous sailor role, William in Douglas Jerrold’s *Black-Eyed Susan* on 8 July 1829. He also acted the part of Harry Hallyard in J. T. Haine’s *My Poll and My Partner Joe* (1835). *Presumption*’s success and the widespread critical acclaim for Cooke in his role as the Monster, which showcased his athletic and expressive qualities, made him “the first choice for

the heroic sailor role,” argues Hoehn (83, 87).⁵⁹ In “We commence...with one of the oldest and most agreeable of our remembrances—Mr. T. P. Cooke,” Maura Cronin illustrates how the characteristics linked to this role, including British patriotism, became associated in the popular imagination with Cooke himself, making the actor “an embodiment of the national son.”⁶⁰ Thus, Cooke “was hailed as the foremost exponent, not only of heroes in domestic drama but of monsters in the demonic” (Disher 92), an unusual combination at a time when actors generally learned, excelled in, and stayed with one type of role.⁶¹ Analyzing this transition in Cooke’s career indicates a fluid audience and popular approach to men and monsters, as centered on Cooke’s portrayals. His role as the supposedly horrifying and malevolent Monster led directly into his most acclaimed and prestigious role as the heroic and patriotic British sailor, which suggests that Cooke demonstrated qualities in the earlier character that translated to the latter. Furthermore, if the popular imagination conflated Cooke with both national hero *and* monster, then perhaps, as Shelley suggests in *Frankenstein*, the space between men and monsters is nearly imperceptible.

CURTAIN CALL: *PRESUMPTION* & POPULAR CULTURE

“Thunders of applause,” “breathless interest,” “crowded and elegant audiences,” “immense overflow,” proclaim the playbills during *Presumption*’s first season.⁶² In 1823 *Presumption; or, The Fate of Frankenstein* was performed thirty-seven times to popular acclaim, and in July of 1824 it was successfully revived five times in London. *Presumption* continued to hold the stage throughout the 1820s and into the 1830s, and, despite being deemed a “now somewhat antique drama,” was still acted in New York City in 1843 (Forry, *Hideous Progenies* 3, 10-11). Analyzing theaters’ seating capacities, prices of admission, and the length of

Presumption and its offspring's runs, St. Clair's "The Impact of Frankenstein" concludes: "Every single night one of the Frankenstein plays was performed, it brought a version of the story to more men and women than the book had in ten or twenty years" (52). Furthermore, *Presumption* instigated fourteen other English and French dramatizations of *Frankenstein* within three years of its first performance. So far over ninety dramatic adaptations of *Frankenstein* exist (Forry, *Hideous Progenies* ix). Clearly, Peake's *Presumption* was hugely successful throughout the nineteenth century. Its depiction of *Frankenstein* and Frankenstein's monster most likely reached a wider and more diverse audience than Shelley's novel.

Presumption, in fact, influenced the novel itself, inspiring a second edition, the 1823 G. and W. B. Whittaker edition, as Shelley notes in her letter to Leigh Hunt regarding the play. Peake's structuring of the tale under the moralizing rubric of "presumption" perhaps even influenced Shelley's own moral revamping of *Frankenstein* in the 1831 Standard Novels edition. The author's introduction reframes the story as one of presumption as she confronts the question, "How I, then a young girl, came to think of and to dilate upon so very hideous an idea?" (Author's Introduction 5). In her description of the creation scene dream-vision that prompted *Frankenstein*, Shelley comments, "Frightful must it be; for supremely frightful would be the effect of any human endeavour to mock the stupendous mechanism of the Creator of the world" (Author's Introduction 9). Shelley underscores how Victor Frankenstein *presumes* to play God, moralistically refocusing the novel along the lines of Peake's play's title.

Finally, Peake's *Presumption* influenced, not only subsequent editions of the novel and numerous dramatic adaptations, it also almost certainly contributed to Universal Studios' *Frankenstein* film series and thus current popular perception of the Monster. It is a given that the indelible image of Boris Karloff as the Monster has stamped itself on all post-1931 versions and

visions of Frankenstein's creation, including the Monster's greenish hue and speechlessness, a tradition evidently owing to the first mute monster, Cooke's. Moreover, the film sets the creation scene in a cavernous laboratory at the top of a flight of stairs, much like *Presumption*, and includes a comical servant, Fritz, one of Peake's other original contributions to the Frankenstein legend. *The Motion Picture Herald* applauds Boris Karloff "as the one important candidate who has arisen for the mantle of the late Lon Chaney.... Because of his restraint, his intelligent simplicity of gesture, carriage, voice, and makeup, Karloff has truly created a Frankenstein Monster."⁶³ In referencing Karloff's gesture and carriage, and comparing him to Lon Chaney, the silent film star renowned for his pantomimic abilities and mercurial makeup, this reviewer suggests a fascinating correspondence between the melodrama, *Presumption*, and Universal's *Frankenstein*. Whale's film was released in 1931, only a few years after *The Jazz Singer* (1927) launched the "talkies," and Karloff's mute, childlike monster surely gestures toward the earlier era of silent films. It is well known that actors in silent cinema used the gestural semiotics of melodrama in order to express meanings that could not otherwise be conveyed.⁶⁴ By reviving *Presumption*'s mute monster, Whale and Karloff also stage an acting technique that originates in melodrama's visual and physical spectacle. In observing Karloff as *Frankenstein*'s monster, or merely existing in a world saturated with his portrayal, we acknowledge that melodrama's visual semiotics of actor, costume, and gesture—underscored and enforced by muteness—traversed the nineteenth century into the twentieth. Peake's monster conveys complex characteristics through contrasting visual fields, thereby embedding the narratives or dialogue of *Frankenstein* and his monster from Shelley's novel within a material medium or figure. In a sense, *Frankenstein*'s words are adapted into a body. When Cooke's monster attempts "to grasp at the sounds he heard," as Shelley describes in her review of *Presumption*, he demonstrates a dramatic technique

proliferating in melodrama and continuing through modern drama: the conflation of sound and visible materiality.

¹ Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*, ed. Maurice Hindle (London: Penguin Books, 1992) 57, 96.

² Jeffrey N. Cox, ed. *Seven Gothic Dramas, 1789-1825* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1985) 67.

³ George Steiner, qtd. in Charlene E. Bunnell, "Roots of Mary Shelley's Dramatic Sensibility," *"All the World's a Stage:" Dramatic Sensibilities in Mary Shelley's Novels*, ed. William E. Cain (New York: Routledge, 2002) 12.

⁴ Charlene E. Bunnell, "Roots of Mary Shelley's Dramatic Sensibility," *"All the World's a Stage:" Dramatic Sensibilities in Mary Shelley's Novels*, ed. William E. Cain (New York: Routledge, 2002) 12.

⁵ Mary Shelley, *Journals*, vol. 2: 475, qtd. in Bunnell 12-13.

⁶ Mary Shelley, *Letters*, vol. 2: 246, qtd. in Bunnell 13.

⁷ Martin Meisel, *Realizations: Narrative, Pictorial, and Theatrical Arts in Nineteenth-Century England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983) 47.

⁸ Mary Shelley, Author's Introduction to the Standard Novels Edition (1831), *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*, ed. Maurice Hindle (London: Penguin Books, 1992) 8-9.

⁹ Martin Meisel, "Scattered Chiaroscuro: Melodrama as a Matter of Seeing," *Melodrama: Stage Picture Screen*, Bratton, Jacky, Jim Cook, and Christine Gledhill, eds., (London: British Film Institute Publishing, 1994) 67.

¹⁰ Maryanne C. Ward, "A Painting of the Unspeakable: Henry Fuseli's *The Nightmare* and the Creation of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*," *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 33.1 (Winter 2000) 20-31. She details Byron's slight connection to the painting, as well as the more substantial connections of Wollstonecraft, Godwin, and Percy Shelley, the most prominent being Wollstonecraft's, who quite possibly had an affair with Fuseli. Multiple copies of the painting also existed as well as parodies, so Shelley would have had ample opportunity to view it, as well as personal reasons to include the replicated scene in her novel.

¹¹ Mary Shelley, *Journal*, qtd. in Pollin 100.

¹² Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Pygmalion* (1762-1770), ed. and trans. Christopher Kelly, Letter to D'Alembert and Writings for the Theater, *The Collected Writings of Rousseau*, vol. 10, ed. and trans. Allan Bloom, Charles Butterworth, and Christopher Kelly (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2004) 233.

¹³ Burton R. Pollin, "Philosophical and Literary Sources of *Frankenstein*," *Comparative Literature* 17.2 (1965 Spring) 98, 105. Specifically, "Mme de Genlis' works previously and afterwards had an absorbing interest for her. Mary's mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, had mentioned the presence in Altona of the aristocratic refugee from revolutionary France in her *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark*. This famous work was familiar to both Shelley and Mary. They both knew Godwin's reference to Mme de Genlis' *Leçons d'une Gouvernante*, cited to illustrate faults in the education of princes and the prejudices implicit in the phrase 'filial piety' (*Political Justice*, 1798 edition, II, 17-20 and 53). He calls her 'a woman of uncommon talents, though her self infected with a considerable number of errors' (p. 19). This judgment is supported by the accounts in Michaud and in others cited by Quérard and Bourguelot.... Even in 1815 Mary was a devotee, going through all five volumes of *Les Veillées du château*, translated in 1785 by Thomas Holcroft, Godwin's intimate friend (*Journal*, p. 34); in the summer of 1816, after beginning *Frankenstein*, she was reading *Adèle et Théodore, ou Lettres sur l'éducation* and *Les Voeux téméraires* (*Journal*, pp. 56 and 60). In November she read *Alphonsine, ou la Tendresse maternelle* (*Journal*, p. 66), and in January 1817, the *Knights of the Swan* (p. 75). Mary's partiality is evident" (100-01).

¹⁴ Denis Diderot, "Letter on the Deaf and Dumb," *Diderot's Early Philosophical Works*, ed. and trans. Margaret Jourdain (New York: Burt Franklin, 1972) 167.

¹⁵ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Essay on the Origin of Languages*, qtd. in Marshall 184. In "*Frankenstein*, or Rousseau's Monster," David Marshall outlines the "considerable evidence that Rousseau was a formative influence in Mary Shelley's intellectual development and even in her personal life in the years leading up to and including the period in which she composed *Frankenstein*." Other scholars, too, recognize the specific influence of Rousseau's *Origin of Languages* on Shelley's *Frankenstein* including Brooks and Christian Bök in "The Monstrosity of Representation: *Frankenstein* and Rousseau."

¹⁶ Mary Shelley, letter to Leigh Hunt, 9 Sept. 1823, qtd. in Elizabeth Nitchie, *Mary Shelley: Author of Frankenstein* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1953) 219.

¹⁷ Fig. 1. T. P. Cooke as the Monster in *Presumption* (Oxford, Bodleian Library); rpt. in Steven Earl Forry, *Hideous Progenies: Dramatizations of Frankenstein from Mary Shelley to the Present* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990) 19.

¹⁸ Richard Brinsley Peake, *Presumption; or, The Fate of Frankenstein, Hideous Progenies: Dramatizations of Frankenstein from Mary Shelley to the Present*, ed. Steven Earl Forry (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990) 143.

¹⁹ Gordon Hitchens, "'A Breathless Eagerness in the Audience': Historical Notes on Dr. Frankenstein and His Monster," *Film Content* 6 (1970) 51.

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- ⁵⁸ Maurice Willson Disher, *Blood and Thunder: Mid-Victorian Melodrama and Its Origins* (London: Frederick Muller Ltd, 1949) 91.
- ⁵⁹ Cronin, Disher, and Nichols also support Hoehn’s assertion that Cooke’s triumph as the Jolly Jack Tar sprang, in part, from his previous success as the Monster in *Presumption*.
- ⁶⁰ Maura L. Cronin, “We commence...with one of the oldest and most agreeable of our remembrances—Mr. T. P. Cooke,” *Nineteenth Century Theatre & Film* 29.1 (June 2002) 8.
- ⁶¹ See Cronin 22.
- ⁶² Playbills re. *Presumption*, by Richard Brinsley Peake, qtd. in Elizabeth Nitchie, *Mary Shelley: Author of Frankenstein* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1953) 221.
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CHAPTER TWO

Muted Music, from Melodrama to “the new music drama”

“*The Ghost Sonata* was only supposed to show you the form I am seeking for the new music drama...condensed, concentrated, with only a few voices,” writes August Strindberg.¹ This chapter spans from later melodrama—Leopold Lewis’s *The Bells* (1871)—to later Symbolism—Strindberg’s *Ghost Sonata* (1907)—building what I see as a clear bridge between melodrama and Symbolisms’ audio-visual semiotics. What I seek to explore is how melodrama leads to Symbolism. The connection between melodrama and Realism has been critically established, but I see this exclamatory theater as progenitor of even Maeterlinck’s sparse and ethereal drama. The key is (pauses in) music and the mute figure. Melodrama’s music translates into its declamatory speech, which later develops into Symbolism’s incantatory language, but, more interestingly, melodrama’s music correlates with muteness and the mute figure(s). Because of melodrama’s intertwined dialectics of silence/sound and stasis/movement, we can recognize musical composition materially and thus visually on the Symbolist stage. Moreover, as the actor’s body takes on qualities of the symbol, we can see how melodrama’s poses “unfold,” functioning as sort of proto-symbols: the frozen moment that the audience is asked to read and interpret. In plays like *Ghost Sonata* and Henrik Ibsen’s *When We Dead Awaken* (1899), the actors’ bodies are at a crossroads between melodrama’s poses and symbolic objects. As such they are embodied silent communicants: half mute figures and half symbols.

Leopold Lewis, *The Bells*

“Happy are those who have nothing upon their conscience!,” declares Father Walter after describing the night the Polish Jew disappears in Leopold Lewis’s 1871 psychological melodrama, *The Bells*, adapted from Erckmann-Chatrian’s novel, *Le juif polonais* (1867), and made famous by Henry Irving’s star role at the Lyceum Theatre.² Set at a Village Inn in Alsace around Christmas time, the heavy snow reminds the characters of the “Polish Jew’s Winter,” when a wealthy merchant passing through the town stopped at the Burgomaster, Mathias’s, Inn. The next morning the Jew’s horse was discovered, dead, along with the merchant’s blood-stained garments, but no sign of the body. The play progresses with the wedding of Mathias’s daughter, Annette, to the Quartermaster of Gendarmes, Christian, but the heavy snow and recitation of the story of the Polish Jew cause Mathias to hear the sound of the Jew’s sleigh bells as his conscience begins plaguing him for the Jew’s murder. Through “flashbacks” into Mathias’s mind, the audience learns that Mathias, beset by financial difficulties, murdered the merchant for his money and disposed of the body in a lime kiln.

While Lewis offers traditional melodrama in this spectacular study of villainy, he pushes towards Realism in his exploration of a repentant conscience. Deviating from earlier melodrama, the “villain,” Mathias, is punished for his crimes through his own mind, as opposed to the community, which never discovers the murderer. Also diverging from (some) earlier melodramas, *The Bells* lacks an obvious mute figure: a character like *A Tale of Mystery*’s Francisco who is at once the victim of, and witness to, crime. In *The Bells*’ transition from melodrama to Realism, the mute figure ceases to be a single actor-filled role on the stage and instead becomes the conscience—a much explored territory in Realist theater. Pushing this argument a step further, if the villain’s conscience subsumes the mute role, then the villain (Mathias) contains innocence (the mute role)—a sort of extension of *Presumption*’s monster’s

conflicting innocent gestures and villainous costume. And, at *The Bells* conclusion, the murderer becomes the victim of his own crime.

Father Walter's declaration—"Happy are those who have nothing upon their conscience!"—introduces a traditionally melodramatic theme, that of crime and guilt, yet, his story includes a notable absence: an embodied victim. Christian speculates, "There are so many ways of detecting criminals, and so few escape, that to have committed a crime like this, and yet to remain undiscovered, showed the possession of extraordinary address. [...] Now it is my idea that the murderer, to destroy all traces of his crime, threw the body of the Jew into one of these kilns" (Lewis 488). My first chapter considers two early melodramas, Holcroft's *Deaf and Dumb* (1801) and *A Tale of Mystery* (1802), both of which include mute figures, victims of crime who silently retain the violence and betrayal committed against them. However, by this later-nineteenth-century melodrama, the violated body has seemingly disappeared, and this in a play that pronounces, "The most important acts in life should always take place in the presence of all" (489).

Rather than a betraying *body*, *The Bells* presents betraying *music*, bells. A "*Distant sound of Bells [is] heard.*" And Mathias murmurs "*To himself—'Bells! Bells!' His whole aspect changes, and he leaves off eating and sits listening,*" before asking his companions, "Do you not hear the sound of Bells upon the road?" Walter and Hans respond, "Bells? No!" (481). The bells—heard only by Mathias for whom they recall the Jew's sleigh bells—make explicit what has always been true of melodrama; music stands in for things that cannot be said. In "Melodrama," Carolyn Williams describes the development of one of the genre's key semiotics:

Early in the nineteenth century in England, melodramatic music might be interruptive or interludic, as in ballad opera. But increasingly the music grew almost continuous, suppressing itself during passages of declamation and swelling between those passages of dramatic speech. Melodramatic declamation—a rhythmic, heightened oratorical style,

characterized by the addition of extra syllables—is carefully produced in relation to the music. Indeed, the articulation of speech in relation to the music makes it clear that speech itself is often a dimension of melodramatic music, and that melodrama often purposefully blurs the boundaries between speech and song. Working around and behind the declamation, the music starts and stops, rises or falls, and themes repeat and vary, providing the melodrama with one important dimension of its temporal structure. Like the tableaux, music supplies the “points” of the form (with chords or with separate songs).³

In melodrama, music functions structural, much like the genre’s tableaux and points, supplementing stops and starts in dramatic action. By doing so, it blurs the distinction between aural and visual perception. However, what strikes me as most interesting in terms of Symbolism in William’s analysis is that the music “suppress[es] itself” and “swell[s]” in fluctuation with dramatic speech, and that melodramatic declamation assumed the qualities of music. In other words, music in melodrama actually filled moments of verbal *silence*. Or, built into melodrama is the recognition that sound and silence can go hand-in-hand; when characters are mute, sound (in the form of music) fills the stage. This technique will reappear in Symbolism and Expressionism, where we perceive silence in spite of sound. Conversely, Symbolism stages music despite silence, partly (as my analysis of *Salome* will demonstrate) through “a rhythmic, heightened oratorical style,” one that “blurs the boundaries between speech and song.”

Symbolist plays lack melodrama’s “melo,” but ask that we perceive them musically, like Strindberg’s *Ghost Sonata* or Wilde’s *Salome* with its crucial dance. Here, however, we can see the bells as fulfilling a sort of mute role. In an earlier melodrama, the mute figure would have silently, non-verbally communicated the crime to the audience and other characters. Lewis fills that absence—the silent space—with bells (indicative of the crime). He works within melodrama’s framework, substituting music for moments of silence; yet, here the music fills a traditionally embodied or visible role, replacing the absent mute figure.

Similarly, *The Bells*' bells also stage sound as interiority: Mathias's otherwise *silent* thoughts experienced musically. As "*the Bells come closer...the back of the Scene rises and sinks*" displaying a melodramatic tableau used to reveal one of Realism's focuses: the protagonist's mentality (Lewis 481). "*The Jew is discovered seated in sledge...; the horse carrying Bells; the JEW'S face is turned away...the scene is seen through a gauze...vision of a MAN dressed in a brown blouse and hood over his head, carrying an axe, stands in an attitude of following the sledge; when the picture is fully disclosed the Bells cease.*" Mathias "*starts violently upon seeing the vision before him; at the same time the JEW in the sledge suddenly turns his face, which is ashy pale, and fixes his eyes sternly upon him; MATHIAS utters a prolonged cry of terror, and falls senseless*" (482). We are observing a flashback through Mathias's mind to the scene of his crime. Significantly, this scene unfolds wordlessly through pantomime accompanied by music.

"Melodramatic music subtends, expresses, and directs the play of the actors' balletic alternations between movement and stillness, speech and silence," writes Williams. Similarly, "tableaux interrupt and punctuate melodramatic action with their moments of static composure. The actors freeze suddenly into attitudes and pose like statues."⁴ Williams identifies the relationship between melodramatic music and tableaux, or, more broadly, the relationship between sound and silence, movement and stasis. The bells, an overt form of melodramatic music, ring while the vision is revealed, and then cease while Mathias and the audience observe and digest the flashback's divulgence. This genre establishes an unabashed association between sound and movement, and silence and stasis, such that I wonder whether it could even induce a sort of Pavlovian response in its audience: to *see* movement would be to expect to *hear* sound. Melodrama certainly offers later playwrights, like the Symbolists, the opportunity to forgo the

“melo” aspect of melodrama while retaining a sense of musicality through movement, and (in turn) silence through stasis. Melodrama, as we can see in *The Bells*’ use of sound (bells) and tableaux, conflates or entwines audio and visual fields to such an extent that we come to understand one as the other; thus, when the Symbolists introduce statues and slow, deliberate motions, we *see* the represented silence.

Within this musically-induced tableau, the imagined Jew who “fixes his eyes sternly upon” Mathias functions as a mute figure: silent, communicating through gesture, and, if not the center of the play’s “pathos and distress,” clearly its victim. The center of the play’s pathos and distress is most likely Mathias—whose tormented mind we are asked to observe and pity—which points to another mute figure in the vision scene, the “MAN dressed in a brown blouse and hood over his head.” He too communicates wordlessly but clearly through gesture, standing “in an attitude.” This wordlessness extends beyond Mathias’s conscience as he “utters a prolonged cry of terror, and falls senseless;” he produces an incomprehensible sound and descends into inscrutable silence, his mind containing, and making him, the mute figure in a plot that hinges on his silence regarding his own crime. Of course not all melodramas include mute figures, so we could simply categorize *The Bells* with the many melodramas missing this role. However, Lewis offers us this wordless, pantomimed scene containing the victim of a crime who is unable or unwilling to betray the perpetrator—a description equally applicable to *A Tale of Mystery*’s Francisco. Yet this description is applicable to *two* different characters in the scene, for highly divergent reasons: the murdered Polish Jew, dead and thus *unable* to betray Mathias, and Mathias himself (both the present character and his flashback body-double) who is *unwilling* to reveal his crime and thus becomes the tortured victim of his own conscience. If Peake’s *Presumption* fractured the mute figure, as I argue in chapter one, then Lewis’s *The Bells* explodes this role.

But as with any explosion the pieces don't simply disappear; rather, they scatter, causing elements of the mute figure to permeate the play: the Jew, the imagined Mathias, and both embedded within the character Mathias's staged conscience. Muteness or the mute figures now suggests interiority, but visible and material interiority, embodied in Mathias's tableau vision of himself and the Polish Jew.

In *A Tale of Mystery* (1801), Fiametta easily translates Francisco's pantomimed signs for the audience and surrounding characters, but by 1823, Peake is already disrupting the mute figure's "universally" understood gestures by placing them within an opposing body (one that suggests villainy rather than innocence). By 1871, even our interpreter in *The Bells*—the mesmerist—fails to read the fractured mute figure in Mathias's mind. Mathias ponders his vision and fainting spell: "Would anyone believe that the mere talk about the Jew could bring on such a fit? [...] But it was that Parisian fellow at the fair who was the real cause of all.... When he wanted to send me to sleep...I said to myself, 'Stop, stop, Mathias...you might relate certain incidents in your past life!'" (485). Earlier in the day Mathias saw "a performance in the town" where a mesmerist "simply looked at [his participants] and made signs, and they went fast asleep." As Hans explains, "This Parisian sends people to sleep, and when they are asleep he makes them tell him everything that weighs upon their consciences" (479). While the audience and (in earlier melodramas like Holcroft's) other characters can read the mute's legible body to determine the villain and his crime, here, the other characters can't see the Jew to read his body's signs—the corpse has disappeared; its only trace remaining in Mathias's mind. *The Bells* transitions from a romanticized sense of a universal language, on display in *Presumption* and earlier melodramas, to a "scientific" (or pseudo-scientific) approach to communication;

mesmerism can force the body to reveal truth. However, Mathias avoids his body's interpreter; thus, the mesmerist merely triggers Mathias's conscience to display itself to the play's audience.

A second vision scene further transfers the mute figure's role to *The Bells*' seeming villain. Rather than flashing back to the murder scene, the "*Curtain at back of gauze rises, disclosing an extensive set of a Court of Justice*" with "*three JUDGES on the bench*" (494). Mathias no longer mentally "observes" his past action, but rather assumes a role in a present, imaginary trial scene—the sort of judgment scene that, in an earlier melodrama, would have taken place amongst a community. The court's President commences the trial by stating, "you have already heard the deposition of the witnesses. What have you to say in answer?" To which Mathias exclaims, "Witnesses! People who saw nothing; people who live miles from the place where the crime was committed; at night, and in the winter time! You call such people witnesses" (495). We enter the trial scene in medias res, the witnesses having already spoken, but one could equally see them as silent or absent—a recognized role waiting to be filled. The President also complains of, "the deaths of witnesses who could have given evidence," literalizing their absence while underscoring the *observed* but unspoken crime. Without the mute witness knowing but not telling the crime, the President identifies the bells and the mesmerist as Mathias's potential betrayers. "This noise of Bells arises in the prisoner's mind from the remembrance of what is past. The prisoner hears this noise because there rankles in his heart the memory of that he would conceal from us." "If you are innocent, why should you fear the Mesmerist, because he can read the inmost secrets of your heart?," demands the President (496-97). Thus, even the bells (a silent sound) and the mesmerist (the body's interpreter) absorb some of the "exploded" mute figure's characteristics.

Under the imagined mesmerist's influence, Mathias describes the night of the murder:

Nothing is heard, except from time to time the Jew's horse under the shed, when he shakes his bells. [...] [The Jew] looks at me. He has grey eyes. [...] All is silent. [...] He fixes his eyes steadily upon me! [MATHIAS, *with body bent, takes several steps forward as if following and watching his victim, he extends his hands.*] [...] Kill a man! —kill a man! You will not do that, Mathias—you will not do that! [...] What dreadful silence! [...] [*He bends down in a watching attitude.*] [...] [*The noise of the Bells increase...*MATHIAS *springs forward, and with a species of savage roar, strikes a terrible blow with his right hand.* [...] [*He bends low down and appears to lift the body upon his back; then he walks across stage, his body bent, his step slow as a man who carries a heavy load.... He appears to push the body with the pole (into the lime kiln), using his whole force, suddenly he utters a cry of horror and staggers away, his face covered with his hands.*] Those eyes, oh, those eyes! (498-500)

With the exception of the ringing bells, a “savage roar,” and “a cry of horror”—all non-verbal communicants—Mathias emphasizes the night's silence: “nothing is heard;” “all is silent;” “what dreadful silence.” The scene's uncanny muteness is only matched by Mathias's sense of being observed: “he looks at me;” “he has grey eyes;” “he fixes his eyes steadily upon me;” “those eyes, oh, those eyes!” Even after the Jew's death, Mathias perceives him witnessing his crime. Yet, unlike the first vision scene, here the Jew is absent; Mathias himself recounts the story and takes on the role of mute figure. The Jew's eyes permeate the scene, but Mathias “takes several steps forward as if following and watching his victim,” and “bends down in a watching attitude.” Mathias is another observer in this scene and one who communicates through pantomime. The audience and Mathias's conscience (in the form of the imaginary judges) read this pantomime—Mathias's perfectly comprehensible mute gestures. Mathias usurps the mute figure's role from his victim, embedding the innocent victim within the guilty murderer.

After Mathias's conscience accuses him of his crime, it “condemns the said Mathias to be hanged by the neck until he is dead” (501). Mathias awakens from his dream vision exclaiming, “[*in a voice of strangulation*]. The rope! the rope! Take the rope from my neck! and “*his hands clutch at his throat as if to remove something that strangles him,*” until his wife pronounces him “Dead! [*The Bells cease.*]” (502). Departing from earlier melodrama, in *The Bells*, the mute

figure remains incomprehensible, if not to himself and the audience, then to the surrounding community of characters. The method of his execution literally silences him through strangulation. The mute figure, in all its various manifestations, dies: the murdered Jew and, of course, Mathias himself. Whereas earlier melodrama would have contained a public revelation and condemnation of the criminal, with Mathias's death, his secret dies too. In a sense, Mathias's secret and the silence surrounding it, kill him, making him at once murderer and murdered, criminal and victim, guilty and innocent, accused and accuser, in other words, the mute role embedded within the villain's conscience—an expansion of *Presumption's* fractured mute figure, and one that relates muteness to visibly manifested interiority.

August Strindberg, *Miss Julie*

From late melodrama—*The Bells* (1871)—I turn to early Naturalism with Strindberg's *Miss Julie* (1888). Primarily I seek to use *Miss Julie* as a sort of springboard to Strindberg's later Symbolist play, *Ghost Sonata* (1907), arguing that *Ghost Sonata* reworks its Naturalist predecessor, and thus establishing a clearer line from melodrama to Naturalism (or Realism) and Symbolism. In *Miss Julie*, written only seventeen years after Lewis's *The Bells*, Miss Julie, a Count's daughter, sleeps with the valet, Jean, on Midsummer Eve. Strindberg subtitles his play "A Naturalistic Tragedy," yet he clearly manipulates melodramatic tropes, scenarios, and themes—illegitimacy, sexual double standards, and problems of inheritance—to achieve Naturalistic ends. Moreover, he includes melodrama's mistrust of verbal language and tendency to embodied communication.

Strindberg's "Preface" to *Miss Julie* attempts to divorce the play from its melodramatic predecessors. He describes the "prolonged theatrical crisis now prevailing throughout Europe,"

and declares the playwright, “a lay preacher spreading the thoughts of his time in a form so popular that the middle classes, from which theatrical audiences are mainly drawn, can know what is being talked about without troubling their brains too much.”⁵ This audience exercises “the tyranny of an applauding or hissing majority” (“Author’s Preface” ix). Strindberg’s criticism of the theater echoes common complaints against melodrama: its popularity, appeal to the middle and working classes, and banality. More specifically, melodramas’ audiences routinely applauded the hero and hissed at the villain. In *Miss Julie*, Strindberg “trie[s] to modernise the form” by writing “A Naturalistic Tragedy” rather than a melodrama (ix). He dismisses melodrama’s declamatory gestures in favor of a more subdued acting style, “where the subtlest movements of the soul are to be reflected on the face rather than by gestures and noise;” yet nevertheless, he continues to turn to gestural communicants found in melodrama: “the pantomime, and the dance” (xix, xvii).

In Jean and Julie’s liaison, Strindberg manipulates melodramatic scenarios to achieve Naturalistic ends. In his seduction of Julie, Jean, “in a tone of deep distress and with rather exaggerated emphasis” recalls, “I thought: if it be possible for a robber to get into heaven and dwell with the angels, then it is strange that a cottier’s child, here on God’s own earth, cannot get into the park and play with the count’s daughter.”⁶ Jean expresses melodramatic sentiments—undermining the class system in favor of merit-based selection; moreover, he does so with the “exaggerated emphasis” characteristic of melodrama’s acting style. Julie, however, recognizes the goal-driven performativity of Jean’s story and compliments him: “You narrate splendidly,” encouraging Jean to identify his influences: “I have read a lot of novels and gone to the theatre” (*Miss Julie* 13). As a servant in the 1880s, “the theater” for Jean might well have included melodrama. His tale of class-oppressed love fits melodramatic convention, yet Julie

and Jean's dialogue indicates Jean's conscious manipulation of melodrama in order to arrange their common scenario: not class-defying, star-crossed love, but rather sexual desire. Jean paints his fellow servants as a threatening mob, driving the two lovers into their compromising situation: "The mob is always cowardly. And in such a fight as this there is nothing to do but to run away. JULIE. Run away? Where to? We cannot get out. And we cannot go into Christine's room. JEAN. Oh, we cannot? Well, into my room, then! Necessity knows no law" (14). Our pursued hero and heroine invoke a law outside of the justice system, but in doing so they traverse genres from melodrama to modern drama, from an organized universe to one ruled by passion. After their tryst, when Julie bemoans, "Can there be another human being on earth so unhappy as I am at this moment?" (18), she uses the language of melodrama's "helpless and unfriended" heroine, yet her own actions have constructed this isolation.

Strindberg stages the failure of verbal language. In "Speech Situations in *Miss Julie*," Egil Törnqvist identifies two forms in particular: indeterminate listeners and seeming duologues that really function as soliloquies: "'JEAN. The count is home! Imagine if Kristen— JULIE. Now he has been at his desk?' [...] Jean and Julie do not address one another; each of them thinks aloud; the moment they voice their speeches they experience themselves as alone."⁷ Speech fails to communicate both because no one listens and because the words themselves are meaningless: "JEAN. That was nothing but talk. JULIE. Lies in other words!" (*Miss Julie* 18-19). Jean verbally constructs a beautiful scene of their future together, "at Lake Como, where the sun is always shining, and the laurels stand green at Christmas, and the oranges are glowing," and once Julie has accepted and repeated his words, Jean strips them of meaning: "Lake Como is a rainy hole, and I could see no oranges except in the groceries" (23).

Instead, Strindberg turns to a non-verbal language available in melodrama that, despite its silence, reveals secrets. During the play's first "intermission," Jean "offers his arm to MISS JULIE and leads her out," at which point a "pantomime" ensues (5). A "ballet" marks the second intermission, and a "dumb play" the third (15, 26). Each of these moments of embodied communication also indicates transgressions by Jean and Julie: their initial and inappropriate dancing flirtation, their sex act, and Julie's theft from her father.

At *Miss Julie*'s conclusion, Strindberg even employs a device from Lewis's *The Bells*: bells. In my analysis of *The Bells*, I see the bells as making explicit the implicit design of melodramatic music. "*Music with frequent Chords*" during a dramatic moment indicates the character's state of mind and encourages the audience's equivalent emotional response; ideally the audience should both understand and to some degree *experience* the character's rapid heart beat. Of course no other *characters* should respond to the emotion-inducing music; rather, it goes unacknowledged on stage. The bells draw attention to melodramatic music's representation of an interior state: Mathias confesses to the bells' origin in his mind, and no other characters can hear them, yet the audience does. The bells signal interiority, but interiority explicitly embedded within an exterior—Mathias's body—made plainly manifest and visible through the flashback and visionary tableaux.

Strindberg, working within a Naturalist setting, includes diegetic bells, yet these bells still indicate interiority, point to the bodies whose silent thoughts we experience, and even suggest the fractured mute figure's role as aware of (and thus capable of exposing) crime.

Christine wonders, "It can't be the count, do you think, who's come home without anybody hearing him?" (28). The Count is notably missing from the stage, both as a body and a voice. Törnqvist views him as not "an individual, [but rather] a representative of a

system” (*Strindbergian Drama* 60). He, of course, represents the class system, but I would argue that the Count is also an evolution of the mute figure, much like the Polish Jew. In *The Bells*, the audience hears the sound of the Polish Jew’s sleigh bells, and briefly sees him when we enter Mathias’s head; otherwise, the Polish Jew never speaks and is not listed among the cast of characters. In *Miss Julie*, the Count never appears onstage and communicates solely through his bell, to which the characters respond as if accused of their crime:

Two sharp strokes are rung on the bell. MISS JULIE leaps to her feet. JEAN changes his coat. [...] [Goes to the speaking-tube, knocks on it, and listens. JEAN. It is Jean, your lordship! [Listening again, the spectators being unable to hear what the count says] Yes, your lordship! [Listening] Yes, your lordship! At once! [Listening] In a minute, your lordship! [Listening] Yes, yes! In half an hour! JULIE. [With intense concern] What did he say? Lord Jesus, what did he say? (Miss Julie 34)

Strindberg emphasizes the Count’s verbal silence—the spectators are unable to hear the count, including Julie—“What did he say?”—yet Jean reacts to the sound of the bell by quickly “chang[ing] his coat,” a gesture that indicates his guilty awareness of assuming above his station in bedding the Count’s daughter.

“Now, since I’ve heard the count’s voice—now—I can’t quite explain it—but—Oh, that damned menial is back in my spine again,” laments Jean (35). Strindberg, in a sense, modernizes *The Bell*’s depiction of consciousness with the speaking tube. Jean has heard a voice “in his head” that none of the other characters hears, and that voice recalls him to his transgressions. Underscoring the idea that this real bell is also a part of Jean’s conscience, an internal accusation of guilt, Jean bemoans, “To be that scared of a bell! Yes, but it isn’t only the bell— [...] but if you cover up your ears—just cover up your ears! Then it rings worse than ever! Rings and rings, until you answer it” (*Miss Julie* 36). In *The Bells*, the mute figure is subsumed in Mathias’s conscience and only makes a brief appearance on stage divided between the Polish Jew and Mathias himself in a “flashback” scene. Strindberg further internalizes the mute figure

within his characters' bodies. The Count, silent yet still a separate being from the other characters, bodily recalls Jean and Julie to their crime. Julie is, in part, a product of her genealogy, as Strindberg emphasizes in his preface, and Jean literally bows under the weight of the Count's presence: "that damned menial is back in my spine." In *Miss Julie*, the mute figure is at once a character—the Count—and a silently accusing component of the guilty parties' bodies—their conscience and internalization of class norms.

Strindberg has "naturalized" Lewis's pointed melodramatic music from an agitated memory of sleigh bells to a present servant's bell; however, he retains the bell's function as language substitute (Lewis's pantomimed flashback scene and the Count's absent communication), and its indication of embodied interiority (Mathias's and Jean's). Interiority, of course, always comes with a body, but Lewis (in particular) and Strindberg materialize interiority itself through (respectively) tableaux, and the "speaking-tube" and Jean's bodily response to the sounding bell. Broadly speaking, from melodrama to Naturalism, musical sounds continue their seemingly contradictory association with materialized silence; the Polish Jew and the Count are mute figures—unheard because absent—and we musically and visually experience the otherwise silent thoughts of Mathias and Jean.

Strindberg, *Ghost Sonata*

"As far as *The Ghost Sonata* is concerned, don't ask me what it is about. *Discrétion, s'il vous plaît!* One enters a world of intimations where one expresses oneself in halftones and with the soft pedal." —Strindberg, "Letter to Schering" (7 April 1907)

Ghost Sonata's stylized, Symbolist language clearly evokes secrets—"don't ask me what it is about," "*discrétion*"— and "halftones," but Strindberg also alludes to "the soft pedal," a musical metaphor that underscores the play's title, *Ghost Sonata*. Clearly, Strindberg saw his

piece as a sort of musical composition, but the play has no score and includes no music. *Ghost Sonata* tells the story of a student, Arkenholz, who can see the dead. He meets an old man, Jacob Hummel, who introduces him to a house of ghostly inhabitants, including a mummy and the Young Lady, who we later learn is the daughter of the Old Man (Hummel) and the Mummy. In transitioning from *Miss Julie* (1888) to *Ghost Sonata* (1907), we can trace the development of the trope of silence and the mute witness from a play more firmly rooted in melodrama—both in terms of date and design—to one clearly belonging to modernism, and specifically Symbolism, within one author’s *oeuvre*. I see *Ghost Sonata* as an extension or development of *Miss Julie*, exploring similar themes of cross-class sexual liaisons and their ensuing secrets. In *Ghost Sonata*, we observe the continued fracturing of melodrama’s mute figure. Strindberg’s play includes many (temporarily) mute characters. What it does not include is music, the component that should make it a “sonata.” Rather, I argue, *Ghost Sonata* is an arrangement of musical *pauses*. Strindberg (and, more broadly, Symbolism) does away with the “melo” portion of melodrama, but expects the audience to recognize the music-like composition of his piece by embodying pauses on the stage (and page) in the form of mute figures. In *Ghost Sonata*, we understand silence as a visual field.

Through themes, character histories, and plot developments, *Ghost Sonata* bears an uncanny resemblance to *Miss Julie*, its nineteen-year predecessor. Near the play’s opening, the Student admires the Colonel’s house, the setting of *Ghost Sonata*’s action: “I walked by here yesterday, when the sun was shining on the window panes from inside—I said to my friend, ‘Think of living there, four flights up, a beautiful wife, two pretty kids, and twenty thousand crowns in income.’”⁸ Like the Count’s residence in *Miss Julie*, the Colonel’s house represents the upper class, and specifically the lower class’s desire for wealth and status. And it is equally

corrupted as Miss Julie's home. Bengtsson, Jacob Hummel's servant explains: "I serve in his house as he has once served in mine. He was a lover to the cook in my kitchen for two whole years" (*Ghost Sonata* 26). The audience learns that Hummel was once a servant and the cook's lover in Bengtsson's home, replicating Jean and Christine's relationship, suggesting Jacob is Jean's future after breaking free of his class restraints. Similarly, Hummel had an affair with an upperclass woman, the Mummy, who expresses sentiments reminiscent of Miss Julie: "That was my mother, she made me...don't blame me!" (27, 20), recalling Miss Julie's tale of her parent's contentious relationship and mother's controversial childrearing practices (*Miss Julie* 21-22). At least one critic views the Young Lady, the offspring of Hummel and the Mummy, as an extension of Miss Julie: "'A victim of the discord which a mother's 'crime' has produced in a family, a victim of the complaisance of the day, of circumstances, of her own defective constitution'—thus Strindberg characterizes Miss Julie. The description admirably fits Miss Adèle" (*Strindbergian Drama* 194). And, finally, the Mummy punishes Hummel in a manner similar to Jean's "punishment" of Miss Julie, commanding him to "Get up, go into the clothes closet where I sat for twenty years and mourned our crime. — In there hangs a rope..." (*Ghost Sonata* 27). Like Jean's concluding, whispered instructions to Miss Julie (*Miss Julie* 35-36), the Mummy encourages Hummel to exit the scene and commit suicide. Viewing *Ghost Sonata* as an extension of *Miss Julie* offers us the opportunity to examine how Strindberg develops similar themes in a Symbolist format, in particular silence and the mute figure. We can trace their transition from melodrama through Naturalism to Symbolism.

Strindberg himself roots *Ghost Sonata* in Symbolism, "If you want to understand my upcoming work, I ask you to read Maeterlinck's *Le Trésor des Humbles*, the greatest book I've ever read," by the premier French Symbolist playwright.⁹ Moreover, he expresses intentions

similar to Maeterlinck's: "*The Ghost Sonata* was only supposed to show you the form I am seeking for the new music drama; starting with chamber music, condensed, concentrated, with only a few voices. But *The Ghost Sonata* has another side! To extract atmosphere (poetry!) out of contemporary everyday reality" ("Letter to Tor Aulin" 125). Like chamber music, Symbolist writing employs limited voices or language in rhythmic, musical patterns, as my following chapter on Wilde's *Salome* and Symbolism will examine in greater detail. Strindberg's technique is similar, as is his intended outcome: to reveal the "poetry" or deeper meaning behind the everyday through "few voices." For Strindberg (and Wilde), "music drama"—and note how "the new *music* drama" suggests an updated version of *melodrama*—seems to mean the limiting of language: "condensed, concentrated, with only a few voices." Strindberg views language as suspect: "Nor can it be denied that language, originating naturally in the need to convey thoughts, was also developed with a concern for concealing thoughts, hence the multifarious and varied meanings of words."¹⁰ *Ghost Sonata* stages this latter intention of language. When the Student demands of the Young Lady: "Tell me! Why do your parents sit in there so silently, without saying a single word?" The Young Lady explains, "Because they have nothing to say to each other, because neither believes what the other says. My father has put it thus: What will it serve to speak, we can neither fool the other?" (*Ghost Sonata* 29). Rather than language, Strindberg turns to silence.

Thaddeus Torp, translator of this edition of *Ghost Sonata*, notes Strindberg's structural silences and their relationship both to Maeterlinck and *Miss Julie*:

In [translating *Ghost Sonata*] I became particularly aware of the typography of the Swedish edition in contrast to that of most English-language versions, the most obvious being that the play is written as one continuous action, as is *Miss Julie*, and not broken into separate scenes or acts, as most translators have insisted. The Swedish edition is broken at irregular intervals by open lines with the insertion (*Paus.*) after which the dialogue continues. Or at times the more usual practice of a single asterisk *.¹¹

Torp compares these punctuated pauses with “Maeterlinck-like silences” (viii). Rather than mark plot shifts with conclusive scene or act changes, Strindberg records his play’s transitions with silence. Torp registers these silent pauses as quintessentially Symbolist; however, as my analysis of melodramatic music in *The Bells* indicates, silent pauses as a structural element of the play text developed earlier, in melodrama. Williams unites melodrama’s musical pauses with its acting and staging style: “Melodramatic music supports and underscores [a] pointed visual style, stopping and starting to delineate passages of action or mood.” The music corresponds with actors’ “sweeping gestures com[ing] to a point in the body’s brief pose or ‘attitude,’” and “static poses arrest the action, then dissolve into action again, then freeze into the next pose.” Just as the music and actors pause, the dramatic action itself does too; it “climaxes in the frozen moments of the tableaux” (“Melodrama” 263). Williams analysis of *A Tale of Mystery* explicitly demonstrates the relationship between musical and visual (actor/action) pauses:

when Selina overhears the plotting of the villains, the music softens (“*expressing pain and alarm*”), pauses when she reveals the danger to Francisco, then swells and “*continues tremendous*” until the villain enters, when it “*suddenly stops*.” This play text is explicit in signaling not only the entrances, but also the stops: “*After which, sudden pause of music,*” “*Music ceases,*” “*Sweet and cheerful music, gradually dying away.*” (“Melodrama” 302)

Returning to *Ghost Sonata*, Strindberg writes a music-less script, which he titles a musical score—a sonata (of ghosts)—that stylistically diverges from traditional plays, forgoing act and scene breaks for pronounced pauses (in dialogue). The play resembles a musical score, but how are we, the audience, supposed to understand it as music without song and instruments? The key is melodrama, specifically melodrama’s audio-visual semiotics.

Törnqvist maps out *Ghost Sonata*’s extensive mute sequences and characters:

No less than ten of the forty-nine sequences depend on pantomime. In Act I seven of the characters (plus the Beggars) are mute, while two only have a few lines to speak. In fact, there are only three proper speaking parts: the Old Man, the student, Johansson. In Act II

five of the characters are mute, or nearly so, while five have speaking parts. In Act III there are three speaking parts against three mute ones. A glance at the distribution of silent/spoken sequences with regard to the different characters reveals that several of the speaking parts have long moments of silence. (*Strindbergian Drama* 184)

Apart from the obvious insistence on silence, these pantomimed sequences and mute characters suggest melodrama's mute figure, but one that has (as in later melodramas like *The Bells*) exploded. No single character—a sympathetic Francisco or controversial monster—is mute, rather a whole series of characters are mute, nearly mute, or periodically mute. Why intersperse silent presences on stage amongst speaking parts? Strindberg titles his play *Ghost Sonata*: a sonata of ghosts. In other words, characters in the play—its ghosts—comprise the musical score, making it a sonata. The mute characters on the stage function as pauses in the score: moments of silence that we recognize visually rather than aurally. Strindberg has eliminated the music, but, using a technique perfected in melodrama, he has maintained the sense that the audible can be recognized visually. We are *seeing* music comprised of active characters and ghostly pauses. Bengtsson explains the “ghost supper”: “Well, they look like ghosts...this has been going on for twenty years—always the same people, saying the same things, or else keeping silent” (*Ghost Sonata* 16). The play's ghostly characters introduce pauses in dialogue and, more importantly, pauses in “life,” or the play's action. They are visual representations of silence and stasis.

One of the play's primary (frequently) mute figures is the Mummy, who exists in two forms, which signal stasis and movement, and silence and speech. She is at once “*a white marble statue of a young woman*” and the Mummy who “now sits in there like a mummy, and worships her own statue” (*Ghost Sonata* 2, 8). Underscoring the connection between the statue and immobile woman, the Student marvels, “She looks like a marble statue” (10). The statue of the Mummy and the Mummy who resembles her statue remain still and silent (or at least unintelligible) for much of the play.

Strindberg depicts her “jabbering,” repeating, “Ta, ta, ta, ta! [...] (*Like a parrot*) Pretty Polly! When Jacob Hummel hears the Mummy parrot, “Pretty Polly! [...] Is Jacob there?,” he exclaims, “A spook! [...] ...It is such secrets they’ve been keeping in this house!,” at which point the Mummy, “speaking with a human voice,” asks, “Aren’t you Jacob?” (19). The Mummy switches from nonsense sounds to meaningful words. Strindberg divides a modernized mute figure in two: the Mummy and her statue. The statue, of course, remains utterly still and silent: an emphatic mute figure who unites melodrama’s audio-visual fields—stasis equates to silence. The relatively immobile Mummy, who sits all day observing her statue, is also *relatively* mute, “jabbering” in repetitive nonsense words. Jacob Hummel declares her a “spook,” or ghost: one of the silent and static pauses in (broadly) Strindberg’s score, and (specifically) the play’s dialogue and action. Moreover, as she becomes an active character in the script, one who literally moves across the stage and, at the play’s conclusion, denounces and exposes Hummel, she also breaks her long-held silence. “Aren’t you Jacob?” signifies the Mummy’s moment of recognition and transition, where the still and silent past (her memories of Jacob) enter the active present—Jacob is once again a part of her life. Referring back to *The Bells*, we can see how this technique pulls from melodrama, where Mathias’s “flashback” to the night he murders the Polish Jew takes place in a silent and still tableau, that is until the Jew turns his head and directs his gaze on both the past (vision of) Mathias and the present character. The switch in each instance is one from past (memory) to present, as well as stasis to motion.

Here we can see both an embodied form of symbolism at work, and how that symbolism derives from melodrama. Evert Sprinchorn, in his introduction to Strindberg’s chamber plays, sees the Mummy as a living metaphor (or, perhaps, symbol): “Strindberg had to invent a new dramatic language...a language in which *metaphors assume life*.... To say that the sweet young

thing you once knew now looks like an old mummy is one thing; to have this woman imagine herself a mummy and comport herself like one, as Strindberg has her do, is another.”¹² And in his “Representation of Death in Strindberg’s Chamber Plays,” Freddie Rokem relates the Mummy as symbolic object with the Mummy as dead woman: “the truth is revealed in the meeting with death, when the human being becomes monumentalized and is *transformed into an object*; something which he himself can view from the outside, as a conscious observer, or can be viewed by others as in...*Spöksonaten*.”¹³ By living in her memory of the past, a young woman has become mummified, or literally a mummy in Strindberg’s play. She is now metaphorically a ghost, or dead—a stilled body more closely resembling an object, which Strindberg reiterates through the Mummy’s replication in her statue. By reproducing the Mummy in her statue, Strindberg points to the transition from active (character or person) to static (object), and by specifically making her duplicate a *statue*, or not just an object but an *art* object, he directs us to *pause* and consider the paused woman as a symbol.

Melodrama’s physical pauses—action solidifying into tableaux, or actors momentarily freezing into attitudes or points—solicit the audience to read that moment as pregnant with the past and future, and, moreover, even the actual present: the social, cultural, and political references suggested by the suspended narrative, itself perhaps even a replication of a well-known work of art. Examining *Ghost Sonata*’s mummy statue, we can see Symbolism’s development of this melodramatic technique. Strindberg directs his audience to consider this static, duplicated, art object, which represents the Mummy’s past—“*a white marble statue of a young woman*”—and (through the Mummy—the statue’s matching copy) carries through to the play’s future action, simultaneously as the Mummy gains speech and movement. As I discuss in chapter one, Rousseau’s *Pygmalion*, arguably the first melodrama, takes as its subject matter a

statue coming to life, demonstrated on stage through motion and corresponding music. In *Ghost Sonata*, we are witnessing Symbolism's re-creation of this audio-visual dramatic action. We are also, in a sense, observing Symbolism's birth from melodrama. The Mummy and her statue reside somewhere between the melodramatic actor frozen in an expressive pose, and the symbolic object pointing to its unspoken subject.

In melodrama, the presence of the mute figure indicated a hidden secret, ripe for exposure once the mute's silence could be translated into words by the surrounding characters. In *Ghost Sonata*, the guests at the ghost supper are all, in a sense, mute figures, aware of their own and each other's secrets, and remaining silent for fear of exposing them. Again this suggests the concept, made manifest in *The Bells*, that personal conscience has assumed the role of mute figure. As the guests of the ghost supper assemble "in a silent circle," Hummel verbalizes this connection between muteness and conscience:

Talk of the weather, which we know; ask how we are, that we know. I prefer silence, to hear men thinking and see their pasts; silence can hide nothing...But words can; I read recently that different languages arose so that primitive man might keep his tribal secrets from the others. Spoken words are ciphers and if one can find the key then one can understand all tongues of the world; but one can also uncover secrets without a key, and especially in the matter of one's parentage; when it is necessary for legal proof that is another matter: two false witnesses are all the legal proof needed, if they agree. But for the venture I have in mind I have no need of witnesses. Nature herself has endowed human beings with a sense of shame that seeks to bury what should be buried. Nevertheless we find ourselves in situations against our will when by chance our deepest secrets must be uncovered, when the mask is torn from the impostor, when the criminal is exposed... (*Pause; all regard each other silently.*) How hushed you are! (*Long silence*) This has been my mission in this house: to root out weeds, to expose crimes, to balance the ledger. (*Ghost Sonata* 24)

Hummel concludes his speech with melodramatic language—"the mask is torn from the impostor," "the criminal is exposed," "to expose crimes," "to balance the ledger"—in reference to a situation at once familiar from melodrama and *Miss Julie*, a secret liaison and illegitimate offspring. Hummel's conjecture regarding silence and speech clearly recalls the Enlightenment

language theories that influenced melodramatic acting styles, but even more significantly, through silence, Hummel can “*see [men’s] pasts.*” As in melodrama, silence alerts the audience to switch from aural to visual comprehension. In melodramatic and symbolic silence, we can literally *see* the past: in Mathias’s flashback tableau, or the Mummy’s youthful statue, or another mute figure in *Ghost Sonata*—one who lingers between vision (Lewis) and ghost (Strindberg)—the Milkmaid.

The Milkmaid, who silently communicates through gesture, and is the victim of a crime but unable to accuse her murderer, suggests melodrama’s traditional mute figure. In the cast of characters, Strindberg lists the Milkmaid as “a vision,” but in this “ghost sonata,” she is also the embodied dead and, as such, the visible past. In her analysis of *The Bells*’s flashback scene, Williams compares “the return of the repressed” (Mathias’s memory of the murder) to “the return of the dead” (the dead Polish Jew’s reappearance in Mathias’s flashback vision) (“Melodrama” 299). The Milkmaid stands at this juncture: at once the surfacing repressed memory of Hummel’s crime, and the ghost of the murdered girl.

I cannot prove that Strindberg read or saw *The Bells*, yet his play does uncannily resemble Lewis’s. “*With the rising of the curtain, the bells of several churches can be heard ringing in the distance.... A steamship’s bell rings, and now and then the silence is pierced.... After a few minutes’ silence, when the MILKMAID has finished her toilet, the STUDENT comes in from the left.... STUDENT. May I use the dipper? MILKMAID. (Hugs the dipper to herself.)*” (*Ghost Sonata* 2, 3). Bells introduce the vision of the Milkmaid who, like the Polish Jew, is also a murder victim from the protagonist’s past, and one who accuses her murderer through gesture and a pointed gaze. “MILKMAID. (*Enters, seen only by the STUDENT and the OLD MAN [Hummel]; she stretches her arms up like a drowning person and stares fixedly at the*

OLD MAN” (15). After Hummel and the Mummy’s disclosures at the ghost supper, we learn the meaning of the Milkmaid’s gestures: “charges were brought against [Hummel] for luring a girl out on the ice in order to drown her, because he feared she’d witnessed a crime he did not want to be exposed” (26). Hummel responds to the visionary return of his repressed crime like Mathias: he “*shudders*” and “*collapses with horror.*” And finally, at the play’s conclusion, Hummel will strangle himself to death with a rope in response to his awakening conscience. “Get up, go into the clothes closet...In there hangs a rope,” commands the Mummy. I am not trying to argue that Strindberg was specifically influenced by Lewis, so much that Symbolism was influenced by melodrama. In later melodramas, like *The Bells*, we can already see (not dialogue but) sound and pantomime indicating interiority, and interiority frequently referencing a repressed past.¹⁴ I see a through-line from melodrama to Symbolism to Expressionism (as my fourth chapter will argue), where this form of interiority is made physically and visibly manifest on the stage through silent actors (mute figures) and setting, and, more specifically, that these moments contain seemingly conflicting, yet accepted, syntheses of sound and silence. *Sound* signals what should be silent—the contents of a character’s head.

The primary difference between *The Bells* and *Ghost Sonata*’s mute figure is the Milkmaid’s mobility. Rather than remaining contained within the protagonist’s head—demarcated on the melodramatic stage in tableaux vision sequences—the Milkmaid wanders the stage and is even observed by the Student—a “Sunday child” who can thus see the dead. Rather than writing a melodrama, where music and action correspond, and pauses within the music signal stilling of the actors’ movement, it is as if *Ghost Sonata*’s characters are musical notes themselves, which Strindberg has arranged on the stage. When the mute Milkmaid enters a scene, we understand a sort of pause in the dramatic narrative. Dialogue and action may

continue around her, but she directs our attention to a gap in the told story. For example, Hummel tells the Student of his past, but the Milkmaid's appearance to the Student and audience suggest that there is more to Hummel's past than what he says aloud. She, like the Mummy (another mute figure), contains the past and will alter the future. The mute figures in *Ghost Sonata* are visible pauses that, in their derivation from melodrama, we are meant to understand aurally, forming a sort of sonata of speaking and silent characters, a sonata of people and ghosts.

Henrik Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* & *When We Dead Awaken*

I turn from Strindberg's *Miss Julie* and *Ghost Sonata* to Henrik Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* (1890) and *When We Dead Awaken* (1899) in order to demonstrate that this development of the mute figure, and trope of muteness, from melodrama through Naturalism (or, in Ibsen's case, Realism) to Symbolism is not an isolated, Strindbergian incident. I seek to show that the mute's pantomimic, musically accompanied, communication becomes the symbolizing body as this formerly discrete role pervades character interiority. Like *Miss Julie*, I use *Hedda Gabler* as a text more chronologically and thematically close to melodrama that I see Ibsen reworking in his later, Symbolist piece. As Strindberg's preface to *Miss Julie* suggests, Naturalism and Realism react to melodrama, insistently divorcing themselves from their predecessor theater, and only including melodramatic techniques almost unintentionally or critically. As Williams notes, "Ibsen's plays in particular were strongly inflected by melodrama, a debt that can be perceived in his ironic uses of the tableau, and his ostentatiously spare use of music" ("Melodrama" 304-05). It isn't until we reach their later, Symbolist works, when Strindberg and Ibsen have moved into an *avant-garde* theatrical form that *seems* more clearly at odds with popular melodrama that

these (and other Symbolist) playwrights begin fully employing the audio-visual semiotics already available on the melodramatic stage.

Hedda Gabler includes five primary characters: Hedda; her dull but reliable, academic husband, George Tesman; their lascivious friend, Judge Brack; Eilert Løvborg, a recovering alcoholic and former “lover” of Hedda; and his current lover and writing partner, Mrs. Elvsted, who has left her husband for Løvborg. After Løvborg relapses and loses his and Mrs. Elvsted’s manuscript, Hedda encourages him to commit suicide with one of her pistols. Brack describes Løvborg’s botched attempt to Hedda, insinuating that he realizes her role, and Hedda concludes the play by shooting herself. Ibsen’s 1890 play borrows from melodrama and suggests Symbolism, and like these genres, it illustrates the insufficiency of language, the clarity of silence, and how gesture and symbols communicate non-verbally.

Like *Ghost Sonata*, *Hedda Gabler* demonstrates the futility of language through “small talk,” in particular, repeated “catch phrases.” Tesman—who specializes in “setting other people’s paper in order,” repeats others’ words, and interjects verbal tics—exemplifies language’s degeneration into drawing-room talk.¹⁵ Mrs. Elvsted praises Løvborg: “In these last two years, there wasn’t a word to be said against him,” and Tesman’s response is both a familiar part of most conversations and revealing: “Not a word? Just think of that, Hedda!” (*Hedda Gabler* 235). He mimics Mrs. Elvsted’s statement, followed by a clichéd exclamation. The play’s conclusion underscores the distinction between inane social-speak and pointed action. “A shot is heard within. [...] Hedda lies, lifeless, stretched on the sofa.... TESMAN (*shrieking to BRACK*). Shot herself! Shot herself in the temple! Can you imagine! BRACK (*in the armchair, prostrated*). But good God! People don’t *do* such things!” (303-04). Ibsen contrasts Hedda’s wordless, physical gesture with Tesman and Brack’s inappropriate repetition of their catch

phrases: there is no need to “imagine” Hedda’s action; it’s already happened, and people obviously “do such things.”

Like *Miss Julie*, *Hedda Gabler*’s silence includes the unspoken, or topics that are understood, yet remain outside the play’s dialogue. In an 1891 review of *Hedda Gabler*, Edmund Gosse states:

I will dare to say that I think in this instance Ibsen has gone perilously far in his desire for rapid and concise expression. The stichomythia of the Greek and French tragedians was lengthy in comparison with this unceasing display of hissing conversational fireworks, fragments of sentences without verbs, clauses that come to nothing, adverbial exclamations and cryptic interrogatories.¹⁶

Gosse is, in part, noticing the silent spaces in *Hedda Gabler*: the pauses, the missing words, the unasked and unanswered questions. Examples include Thea’s affair with Løvborg, Hedda and Løvborg’s intimacy, and Løvborg’s transgressions. Hedda silences Thea: “Shh! Tesman’s coming. (*Gets up and whispers.*) Thea—keep all this just between us” (*Hedda Gabler* 242). And Hedda and Løvborg perform a dialogue full of pauses and confidences: “HEDDA. ...our secret closeness—our companionship that no one, not a soul, suspected. [...] LØVBORG. Yes, Hedda—and the confessions I used to make—telling you things about myself that no one else knew of then. [...] And all those—those devious questions you asked me— HEDDA. That you understood so remarkably well—” (265). Perhaps most importantly, Hedda’s pregnancy remains unstated. Tesman marvels, “But have you noticed how plump and buxom [Hedda’s] grow? How much she’s filled out on the trip? HEDDA (*crossing the room*). Oh, do be quiet—!” (230). Hedda silences her husband, and without verbalization, he remains unaware of the obvious, although, through Hedda’s physically communicating body, the audience and many of the characters would be aware that she took more than her own life. Critics note Hedda’s relative taciturnity, calling her “the most reticent heroine in world literature.”¹⁷ Instead, Hedda

communicates with her body. She reluctantly participates in social niceties—the very words whose triviality Ibsen highlights—and then demonstrates her real feelings to the audience in silent gesture: she “*moves about the room, raising her arms and clenching her fists as if in a frenzy*” (231).¹⁸

Like *Miss Julie*, *Hedda Gabler* features pronounced symbols, and Ibsen will later expand upon the play’s themes in a full-scale Symbolist drama. Hedda’s pistols, her depiction of Løvborg “with vine leaves in his hair,” and, perhaps most importantly, Thea and Løvborg’s “child,” repeatedly appear throughout the play and signify beyond the basic word or object (*Hedda Gabler* 247, 271). When Løvborg claims to have destroyed his manuscript, Mrs. Elvsted laments, “Do you know, Eilert, this thing you’ve done with the book—for the rest of my life it will seem to me as if you’d killed a little child. LØVBORG. You’re right. It was like murdering a child. MRS. ELVSTED. But how could you do it—! It was my child too” (286). But Løvborg tells Hedda the truth: “I lost the child. Just lost it. God only knows what hands it’s come into. Or who’s got hold of it,” and when Hedda comments, “Well—but when all’s said and done—it was only a book—,” Løvborg explains, “Thea’s pure soul was in that book” (287). The work of art as figurative offspring, infused with the muse’s soul, will feature prominently in Ibsen’s Symbolist drama, *When We Dead Awaken*, but critics even recognize the Symbolist tendencies of *Hedda Gabler*. In “Stasis and Silence,” Constance Kent considers Ibsen’s engagement of Maeterlinck’s “parallel dialogue,” which Maeterlinck describes as: “a poem draws the nearer to beauty and loftier truth in the measure that it eliminates words that merely explain the action, and substitutes for them others that reveal, not the so-called ‘soul-state,’ but I know not what intangible and unceasing striving of the soul towards its own beauty and truth.”¹⁹ And, in “Wilde and Ibsen,” Kerry Powell parallels *Hedda Gabler* and Wilde’s quintessential Symbolist play,

Salome, noting, with the exception of Hedda, “there was practically no precedent on the contemporary English stage for Wilde’s portrayal of the central woman character as a morbid, sexually frustrated person of borderline sanity whose only satisfaction comes from causing the death of the man she vainly craves.”²⁰ Even William Archer, Ibsen’s primary nineteenth-century English translator and advocate describes *Salome* as “an oriental Hedda Gabler.”²¹ Like Strindberg’s *Miss Julie*, Ibsen’s *Hedda Gabler* offers us another play at the crossroads of melodrama and Symbolism.

* * *

“What is it that...[Ibsen] has added to life, thereby making it appear so strange, so profound and so disquieting beneath its trivial surface? The discovery is not easy, and the old master hides from us more than one secret.”

—Maeterlinck, *The Treasure of the Humble*

In *When We Dead Awaken*, a sculptor, Professor Arnold Rubek, and his wife, Maia, journey to a coastal bath where Rubek encounters a “traveling lady” (Irene) and her Deaconess—a former artist’s model who inspired Rubek’s greatest work of art, “The Resurrection,” and Irene’s dark companion. As Maia seeks to break away from Rubek and live her life to the fullest with a hunter, Mr. Ulfheim, Rubek and Irene recall their work together and wasted lives. Ibsen’s 1899 play unites *Hedda Gabler*’s George Tesman and Løvborg in Rubek, the married academic and successful artist. Maia frees Hedda from her imprudent marriage, and Ibsen explores the relationship between Løvborg and Thea—the artist and his inspiration/partner—with Rubek and Irene. Like Strindberg’s *Miss Julie* and *Ghost Sonata*, Ibsen develops major concepts from an earlier, Realist play into a Symbolist one, which includes Symbolisms’ suggestive silence as well as a modernized mute figure reminiscent of melodrama’s.

The most prominent repetition of a thematic concern from *Hedda Gabler* in *When We Dead Awaken* is the relationship between the artist, his muse, and their work of art. Thea

describes her association with Løvborg as one of partnership, implicitly romantic and explicitly professional: “then came the wonderful, happy time when I could share in his work! When I could help him! [...] Whenever he wrote anything, we’d always work on it together” (*Hedda Gabler* 241). But she also functions as his “inspiration” (267)—as Løvborg notes, “Thea’s pure soul was in that book”—establishing an artist and assistant/muse dynamic, where the woman contributes “life” to the art object through her innocence. Thea and Løvborg also enact the female muse’s need to live vicariously through the male artist, and the artist’s ability to thus deny her “life.” Thea declares, “And that’s why I have the right, as well, to be with you when it comes out. I want to see you covered with honor and respect again. And the joy—I want to share the joy of it with you too,” but Løvborg has already lost their manuscript and now attempts to lose her: “I have no more use for you, Thea. MRS. ELVSTED. ...No more use for me! Then I’m not going to help you know, as I have? We’re not going to go on working together? LØVBORG. I have no plans for any more work. MRS. ELVSTED (*in desperation*). Then what will I do with my life?” (284-85). In *When We Dead Awaken*, Ibsen rewrites Løvborg and Thea as Rubek and Irene: the artist, his partner/muse, and their artwork-as-child. Irene exclaims, “*that was our creation, our child. Mine and yours,*” and demands of Rubek, “have you done something evil to our child?”²² Similar to *Hedda Gabler*, the male artist can and has damaged the child/artwork, but Ibsen alters this scenario slightly in his later work:

IRENE. And the child? The child also prospers. Our child lives after me. In glory and honor.

RUBEK. (*Smiling as if at a far off memory*) Our child? Yes, we called it that—then.

IRENE. When I lived, yes.

RUBEK. (*Trying to strike a lighter vein*) Yes, Irene—I can promise you ‘our child’ has become famous over the whole wide world. You have no doubt read about that?

IRENE (*Nodding*) And has made its father famous also. — That was your dream.

RUBEK. (*Softly, with emotion*) I owe it all to you, Irene. Thank you for that.

IRENE. (*Sitting fixedly a moment*) If I had done what was my right, Arnold—

RUBEK. What do you mean?

IRENE. I would have put that child to death.

RUBEK. Put it to death, you say!

IRENE. (*Whispering*) Put it to death—before I left you. Crushed it. Crushed it to dust.
(*When We Dead Awaken* 52)

Unlike Løvborg's lost manuscript, the "child" lives, but Rubek has altered the sculpture without Irene, and by denying their romantic involvement in order to preserve Irene's role as pure muse, he has also "killed" her. By endowing the sculpture with life, a soul (Irene), and releasing it into the world (Rubek), the two characters have denied themselves life; they have exhausted their own lives like Strindberg's ghostly cast. Rubek and Irene are the "dead" of Ibsen's title, and the playwright depicts Irene haunted by the silent woman in black. "I gave you my young, living soul. And that left me empty within—soulless. [...] It was *that* I died of," explains Irene, which the Deaconess illustrates by "open[ing] the door wide and mak[ing] room for" Irene (59).

Like Strindberg's *Ghost Sonata*, Ibsen's *When We Dead Awaken* includes embodied silence, or silence that we can recognize visually despite concurrent sound on stage. "Listen to the silence here," Maia remarks to her husband, and when Rubek notes, "It is possible for one to perceive the condition of silence," Maia agrees, "Yes, God knows you can. [...] In the city there was noise and uproar enough. But nevertheless—I sensed that this same noise and uproar had something dead shrouding it" (*When We Dead Awaken* 39). In *Ghost Sonata*, Strindberg's ghosts indicate the metaphoric and literal dead, are mute figures on stage, and function as sonic and spatial pauses. Here Maia suggests something similar—that one can distinguish silence despite "noise and uproar," or, broadly speaking, sound—and she perceives silence as "something dead" that "shroud[s]" sound. Silence takes on a physical component, and one Maia associates with the dead. Again, as in *Ghost Sonata*, the living are metaphorically dead: "When we dead awaken. [...] We can see that we have never lived" (80). As Irene explains to Rubek, "it was then terrifyingly clear to me that you were dead already—had long been. [...] Dead. Dead, as I

am” (88). The stagnation that destroys Hedda—her inability to live the life she desires which drives her to suicide—becomes symbolic in *When We Dead Awaken*. All of these characters commit the crime of self-destruction: either Miss Julie and Hedda’s suicides, or the ghosts and dead of Strindberg and Ibsen’s later Symbolist plays.

Irene traverses the stage like a ghost or statue accompanied by a mute figure:

dressed in fine, cream-colored white cashmere and followed by a DEACONESS in black with a silver cross on a chain at her breast.... Her face is pale and drawn and stiffened; eyelids droop and the eyes seem to be without sight. Her dress is floor-length and form-fitting, falling in folds about her body. Over her head, neck, breasts, shoulders, and arms she has a large white crepe shawl. She holds her arms crossed over her breasts. Stands without motion. Then moves stiffly and with measured steps. The DEACONESS’s movements are likewise measured. (46)

The Deaconess remains silent with the exception of a single word at the play’s conclusion. She:

stands there and looks silently and searchingly around.) [...] (Suddenly a thunderous roar is heard far up on the glacier. It slides and whirls downward with raging momentum. PROFESSOR RUBEK and IRENE are glimpsed briefly in the midst of the avalanche which buries them.) DEACONESS. (Let’s out a shriek, stretches her arms towards where they fell, and cries) Irene! (Stands silent a moment.) (80)

The Deaconess, like the mute figures in *Ghost Sonata*, silently points to Irene’s past, her failure to live; yet, this scene also clearly mimics a melodramatic tableau with its oscillation between silence and sound, stillness and movement. The Deaconess stands, motionless and silent, then this moment is violently broken by “*a thunderous roar*” and the sliding, whirling, “*raging momentum*” of the avalanche. The previously mute figure, like a melodramatic actor breaking from a pose, “*stretches her arms*” and shrieks, “Irene!” The scene transitions from stillness and silence to motion and sound and concludes with the Deaconess “*Stand[ing] silent a moment*”: pause—dramatic action—pause. Like the Deaconess, we (the audience) are given a moment to process the meaning of the avalanche, which has at once killed Rubek and Irene and signals their

decision to live. Ibsen, like Strindberg, has aligned sound, motion, and life against silence, stasis, and death.

Like *Ghost Sonata's* Mummy, divided into the living dead and an art object, Irene in her “white cashmere” resembles both a ghost and a statue. “*Her face is pale and drawn and stiffened*” with sightless eyes, and a dress that reveals her figure but also falls “in folds about her body.” She “*stands without motion.*” And, like the Mummy and her statue, Rubek’s sculpture exemplifies an interesting correlation between melodrama’s mute and Symbolism’s symbol. The statue is both mute figure and object. Rubek calls his sculpture, “‘Resurrection Day.’ Personified in the likeness of a young woman awakening from the sleep of death” (56). Rubek sculpts resurrection or awakening, and, in a Pygmalion-like scenario, the statue assumes life by consuming the soul of its living model, Irene. Irene, in turn, has become a statue in her “death.” Maia describes her, “Advancing—like a marble statue,” and Rubek muses, “Doesn’t she look like the living image of resurrection?” (68). Irene’s body has become an art object, and, as such, it demands that we too pause and consider its contained meaning and what it may symbolize even outside the text. After all, the title of the play is *When We Dead Awaken*; we are implicated in Ibsen’s living dead.

Ibsen even suggests Irene and her replica’s origin in melodrama. After she flees Rubek and the sculpture, Irene “posed on a turntable in music halls. Posed as a naked statue in living pictures” (53). “Living pictures,” also known as *tableaux vivant*, were of course a key feature of melodrama. Irene’s “*poses plastiques*” also resemble “attitudes,” the pointed moments of stillness in the melodramatic acting style. In *Henrik Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism*, Toril Moi explores Ibsen’s interest in *tableaux vivant* and attitudes, arguing, “Attitudes...inspired Ibsen’s vision of the female figure in Rubek’s sculpture ‘The Day of Resurrection’ in *When We*

Dead Awaken. This enigmatic figure hovering between life and death, at times appears as a living woman, Irene, at times as dead marble.²³ Moi describes the performance of attitudes outside of melodrama:

Attitudes...were performed by one woman, who in a dancelike performance would freeze into a series of imitations of classical sculptures. [...They] were part of the early nineteenth century's extensive experimentation with the arts of "mute expression": gesture, mimicry, dance, and music.... Thus...attitudes were experienced at once as dance, sculpture, and painting. Most importantly, the attitude was always allegorical.... The woman's body performed the allegory; the members of the audience had to join the two together by using their own imagination, sensitivity, and education. (122)

Irene's role as ghost, statue, and dancing woman performing attitudes situates her at a crossroads of melodrama and Symbolism that I will explore in further detail in the following chapter on Symbolism, Oscar Wilde's *Salome*, and Loie Fuller's Salome dances. As a ghost, she signifies death and the past, but posing "on a turntable in music halls," she also recalls the function of Strindberg's ghosts—embodied musical markers. As a dancer, she represents the other side of melodrama's sound/silence dialectic: movement and stillness. Yet she is a dancer who pauses, whose body becomes a statue, an art object for us to read and interpret. The Symbolist dancer's body is a legible sign born of melodrama's attitudes.

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- ¹ August Strindberg, "Letter to Tor Aulin" (6 July 1908), *Strindberg on Drama and Theatre*, 125.
- ² Leopold David Lewis, *The Bells, Nineteenth Century Plays*, Ed. George Rowell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972) 476.
- ³ Carolyn Williams, "Melodrama," *New Cambridge History of English Literature: Victorian Period* (forthcoming, Cambridge University Press, 2012) 301.
- ⁴ Carolyn Williams, "Moving Pictures: George Eliot and Melodrama," *Compassion: The Culture and Politics of an Emotion*, Ed. Lauren Berlant (New York: Routledge, 2004) 109.
- ⁵ August Strindberg, "Author's Preface," *Miss Julie* (New York: Dover Publications, 1992) ix.
- ⁶ August Strindberg, *Miss Julie* (New York: Dover Publications, 1992) 9.
- ⁷ Egil Törnqvist, *Strindbergian Drama: Themes and Structure* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell International, 1982) 52, 60.
- ⁸ August Strindberg, *Ghost Sonata*, *Ghost Sonata Strindberg / When We Dead Awaken Ibsen*, Ed. and Trans. Thaddeus L. Torp (Wheeling, Illinois: Harlan Davidson, 1977) 7.
- ⁹ August Strindberg, "Letter to Emil Schering" (30 April 1901), *Strindberg on Drama and Theatre: A Source Book*, Eds. and Trans. Egil Törnqvist and Birgitta Steene (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007) 107. Symbolism, both as a genre and Symbolist drama, is more thoroughly addressed in chapter three, "Silence | Symbolism | Salome."
- ¹⁰ August Strindberg, "Soul Murder (Apropos Rosmersholm)," *Selected Essays by August Strindberg*, Ed. and Trans. Michael Robinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 69.
- ¹¹ Thaddeus L. Torp, "Introduction," *Ghost Sonata Strindberg / When We Dead Awaken Ibsen*, ix.
- ¹² Evert Sprinchorn, Seabury Quinn and Kenneth Peterson, "Introduction," *The Chamber Plays by August Strindberg* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1962) xxii. My italics.
- ¹³ Freddie Rokem, "The Representation of Death in Strindberg's Chamber Plays," *Strindberg and Genre*, Ed. Michael Robinson (Norwich, England: Norwich Press, 1991) 133. My italics.
- ¹⁴ For a consideration of the relationship between contemporary psychoanalytic practice and melodrama, please see Elin Diamond, "Realism's hysteria: disruption in the theater of knowledge," *Unmaking Mimesis: Essays on feminism and theater* (New York: Routledge, 1997) 3-38.
- ¹⁵ Henrik Ibsen, *Hedda Gabler*, *Henrik Ibsen: Four Major Plays, Volume 1.*, Trans. Rolf Fjelde (New York: Signet Classic, 1992) 300.
- ¹⁶ Edmund Gosse, "Ibsen's New Drama," Rev. of *Hedda Gabler*, *Fortnightly Review* 49 (1 Jan.–1 June 1891) 5.
- ¹⁷ Else Høst, "Utdrag fra *Hedda Gabler* (1958)," *Et skjær av uvilka °rlig skjønnhet. Om Henrik Ibsen's Hedda Gabler*, Ed. Anne Marie Rekdal (Gjøvik: LNU, Cappelen Akademisk, 2001) 197.
- ¹⁸ In "Realism's hysteria," Elin Diamond asserts the relationship between *Hedda Gabler* and melodrama's fallen woman, arguing that "Ibsenite realism guarantees its legitimacy by endowing the fallen woman of popular melodrama with the symptoms and etiology of the hysteric." The hysterical woman's "most salient feature is her muteness; embodying the truth, she cannot speak it;" instead, "the philosopher or psychoanalyst...verbally interprets the truth that she bears" (Diamond 6).
- ¹⁹ Maurice Maeterlinck, *The Treasure of the Humble*, pp. 111-12, qtd. in Constance Kemler Kent, "Stasis and Silence: A Study of Certain Symbolist Tendencies in the Modern Theatre," Diss. (Columbia University, 1973) 73.

²⁰ Kerry Powell, "Wilde and Ibsen," *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*, 28.3 (1985) 229.

²¹ William Archer, *Black and White*, qtd. in Powell, 229.

²² Henrik Ibsen, *When We Dead Awaken*, Ghost Sonata Strindberg / When We Dead Awaken Ibsen, Ed. and Trans. Thaddeus L. Thorp (Wheeling, Illinois: Harlan Davidson, 1977) 72, 73.

²³ See Toril Moi, *Henrik Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism: Art, Theater, Philosophy* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006), esp. pp. 122-23 and 153-54.

CHAPTER THREE

Silence | Symbolism | *Salome*: “a transition of sounds to fabric”

“We renounce that erroneous esthetic...which would have the poet fill the delicate pages of his book with the actual and palpable wood of trees, rather than with the forest’s shuddering or the silent scattering of thunder through the foliage,” writes the premier French Symbolist poet, Stéphane Mallarmé.¹ My third chapter establishes a definition of Symbolism through Mallarmé and the most influential English Symbolist, Arthur Symonds, before turning to the Symbolist playwrights, Maurice Maeterlinck and Oscar Wilde, and Symbolist dancer Loie Fuller. What I seek to understand is how Symbolism, a poetry-based movement that claimed to “renounce...the actual and palpable wood of trees”—in other words, reject the material world—appeared and even thrived on stage.

Rather than the “palpable wood of trees,” Mallarmé prefers “the *silent* scattering of thunder through the foliage.” Symbolism conveys silence *through materiality*: we are only aware of the silent, scattered thunder because of the rustling leaves. They are the physical, visible objects that alert us to something more—an otherwise silent subtext. We can observe this technique in Maeterlinck’s plays like *L’Intérieur*, where he registers the presence of death by its effect on a silent, gesturing family in a tableau setting. As in melodrama, Symbolism presents its most important moments, moments when what must be conveyed extends beyond the bounds of verbal language—its dramatic action—in materialized silence.

Whereas Maeterlinck resists the actor’s body on stage, Wilde grounds his Symbolist drama in the corporeal, making the body itself a symbol in a play text centered on an iconic

dancer, *Salome*. I move from theater to dance, examining the Symbolist Salome dances of Loie Fuller, a founder of modern dance, a *Folies Bergère* performer, and beloved of the French Symbolists. Through Wilde and, especially, Fuller, Symbolism's initially ethereal, exclusive performances reached a popular audience: Maeterlinck's incantatory, obscure, marionette pieces translated into Fuller's "skirt dances," viewable at the Paris World's Fair in 1900. I am not suggesting that Fuller performed Maeterlinck, but rather that we broaden our understanding of Symbolism. The woman turning her body into a symbol representing a silent subtext relates to the gesturing, silent characters in Maeterlinck's plays through their use of non-verbal, embodied communication.

What is "white"? In Wilde's catalogue it is lilies, snow, roses, "the feet of the dawn when they light on the leaves," "the breast of the moon when she lies on the breast of the sea." But eventually it is "thy body," Jokanaan's body—a body that is present on the stage in the form of an actor.² "White" is also the title and theme of one of Fuller's Salome dances. Melodrama stages the gesturing mute figure and asks that we read his (or her) body's silent language. In Symbolism, the symbol pushes towards materiality: the word itself becomes an object. In Symbolist performance, we are, in a sense, able to *see* words.

Symbolism, Symbolist theater, and silence

Symbolism, the late nineteenth-century art movement originating in France, primarily flourished in poetry, which still receives the most scholarly attention.³ In poetry, the (surface) text references something underlying and unwritten. Beyond the deliberate ambiguity of much poetic language, Symbolist poetry emphasizes the gap between the text and its unspoken meaning. Rather than a one-to-one correspondence between the present symbol and the absent

“symbolized,” the poem’s symbolic language suggests multiple and indeterminate meanings, creating an interplay between text and subtext. Arthur Symons, perhaps the most influential English Symbolist, defines Symbolism in his *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*—“It came to denote every conventional representation of idea by form, of the unseen by the visible”—and quotes Thomas Carlyle on symbols: “there is concealment and yet revelation: hence therefore, by Silence and by Speech acting together, comes a double significance.... In the Symbol proper...there is ever...some embodiment and revelation of the Infinite; the Infinite is made to blend itself with the Finite, to stand visible, and as it were, attainable there.”⁴ Symons, through Carlyle, conflates two modes of perception: audio and visual. He aligns “Speech” with “form” and “embodiment” (and thus “the visible”), and “Silence” (or the “idea”) with “the unseen.” The quote comes from Carlyle’s *Sartor Resartus*, conceived in 1831 and first published in London in serial format in 1833-34 during the height of English melodrama. Carlyle’s explanation of symbols, which becomes Symons’ definition of Symbolism, contains the semiotic system observable on the contemporary popular stage.

Melodrama, broadly, and melodrama’s mute figure, specifically, impart unspoken ideas through the visible and material—for example, *Presumption*’s monster uses the physical and embodied medium of gesture to tell the audience of his rejection by humanity. Already, in *Presumption*, the interplay between the actor (Cooke’s) handsome physique, the Monster’s repulsive costume, and the mute role’s innocent gestures disrupt the one-to-one correspondence between gesture and meaning explicated in eighteenth and early-nineteenth century acting guides. Symbolism, in Carlyle and Symons’ definition, goes a step further by arguing for the interchange of silence and speech, the invisible and visible, the material and immaterial: “by Silence and by Speech acting together,” “the Infinite is made to blend itself with the Finite.” For

example—and to suggest how Symbolism expands the semiotic system already present in melodrama—Fiametta translates the mute Francisco’s gestures: “If you had seen his clasped hands, and his thankful looks” (*A Tale of Mystery* 227). Francisco’s physical and visible gesture of clasped hands indicates his thanks on the melodramatic stage. Symbolism asks that we also reverse this correlation; when we comprehend thankfulness, the image of clasped hands should arise. In this way, Symbolism asks us to locate language within (visible, material) objects.

While Symons and Carlyle provide a broad definition of Symbolism, the French Symbolist Stéphane Mallarmé—whose *salons du mardi* at the *Rue de Rome* influenced a generation of Symbolist writers—explains how Symbolism functions in poetry: “The poet must establish a careful relationship between two images, from which a third element, clear and fusible, will be distilled and caught by our imagination. We renounce that erroneous esthetic...which would have the poet fill the delicate pages of his book with the actual and palpable wood of trees, rather than with the forest’s shuddering or the silent scattering of thunder through the foliage” (“Poetry as Incantation” 108-12). The symbol and its meaning is never a one-to-one correspondence, but Mallarmé’s description of Symbolist poetry suggests further in-betweenness; the juxtaposition of two images or symbols points to the Idea. Again, this description is interesting to consider in light of melodrama, and specifically *Presumption*’s monster, which asks us to contrast visual fields in order to comprehend unspoken meaning. Mallarmé associates that intangible “third element” with silence—“the silent scattering of thunder through the foliage,” and he asks us, in a sense, to read backwards; through the “shuddering” and “silent scattering,” we perceive the forest and foliage. Poetry, of course, must be comprised of language, but Mallarmé sees the “ideal” Symbolist poem as, “a reasonable number of words stretched beneath our mastering glance, arranged in enduring figures, and

followed by silence” (“Poetry as Incantation” 109). The poem’s words are limited, precise, and punctuated by quietude.

For Mallarmé, it is the spaces between and, in a sense, their betweenness that matter. “For every sound, there is an echo. Motifs of like pattern will move in balance from point to point,” he writes. “Everything will be hesitation, disposition of parts, their alternations and relationships—all this contributing to the rhythmic totality, which will be the very silence of the poem, in its blank spaces, as that silence is translated by each structural element in its own way” (“Poetry as Incantation” 111). Between the “sound” and its “echo,” there is silence, just as “between two images,” there is space. Mallarmé conceives of sound spatially. Sounds and echoes are “structural” components or “parts” of the poem, between which lie “blank spaces.” In his description of the production of Symbolist poetry, Mallarmé conflates sound and materiality, so that sound is objectified (“disposition of parts”), but also objects take on aural qualities like rhythm.

Returning to Symons and his explication of the French Symbolists for an English audience, he interprets Mallarmé’s composition process: “Words, [Mallarmé] has realised...must be employed with an extreme care, in their choice and adjustment, in setting them to reflect and chime upon one another” (*The Symbolist Movement* 70). Symons identifies Mallarmé’s minimalist language and his use of patterned echoes. He too oscillates between audio and visual imagery: “chime” (a sound) and “reflect,” which recalls mirroring.

[A] sensation begins to form in [Mallarmé’s] brain, at first probably no more than a rhythm, absolutely without words.... Delicately, stealthily, with infinitely timid precaution, words present themselves, at first in silence. Every word seems like a desecration, seems, the clearer it is, to throw back the original sensation farther and farther into the darkness. But, guided always by the rhythm...words come slowly, one by one, shaping the message. (*The Symbolist Movement* 71-72)

For Symons, Mallarmé's poems begin with non-linguistic rhythm; words emerge from silence and are governed by rhythm. Mallarmé's and, more broadly, the Symbolists' use of silence is twofold: silence is both a lack of words—as limited as possible while still conveying meaning—but the message or Idea is also silent. The echoes, patterns, and chiming of words produce rhythm that indicates this otherwise silent Idea; thus, Symbolist language inherently approaches music, or perhaps even, melodrama's attitudes, which “move in balance from point to point.”

Symons, in fact, describes Symbolist poetry as “visible music” (*The Symbolist Movement* 69), denoting not only the chiming and rhythm but also suggesting that this music takes on material form, or becomes “visible,” which reemphasizes the other half of the Symbolist equation: the material and visible symbol that captures the immaterial and invisible concept and, as Carlyle suggests, cannot be divorced from it. Mallarmé argues, “If the poem is to be pure, the poet's voice must be stilled and the initiative taken by the words themselves, which will be set in motion as they meet unequally in collision” (“Poetry as Incantation” 111). The stilling of the poet's voice implies another form of silence in Symbolist poetics, but Mallarmé also points to the physicality of symbolic language; words violently collide with one another producing movement.

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Friedrich Nietzsche traces the symbolic from poetry through music to materiality and motion. He describes, “The lyric poet, a Dionysiac artist,” who “has become entirely at one with the primordial unity, with its pain and contradiction, and...produces a copy of this primordial unity as music...now, however, under the influence of Apolline dream, this music in turn becomes visible to him as in a *symbolic dream-image*.”⁵ The lyric poet replicates “the primordial unity” (which can be equated to Symons' “idea” or Carlyle's Infinite) in music that is then made *visible* through symbols. However, Nietzsche presses symbolism further: “In the Dionysiac dithyramb man is stimulated to the highest intensification of his

symbolic powers.... The essence of nature is bent on expressing itself; a new world of symbols is required, firstly the symbolism of the entire body, not just of the mouth, the face, the word, but the full gesture of dance with its rhythmical movement of every limb” (21). His “new world of symbols” moves beyond “the word” as symbol (and “the face” and “mouth” that produce language) to “the entire body,” which communicates through gestural dance and, in doing so, reproduces the rhythm and movement present in symbolic poetry. Nietzsche’s descriptions of symbolism offer a means of connecting Symbolist poetry to performance such as dance or theater; music replicated in (rhythmic) symbolic language engenders dance and the gesturing (moving) body. Similar to visible or present words, the body functions as a *material* symbol of the invisible, silent Idea.

Recognizing the body as a communicating symbol equivalent to the word or words in Symbolist poetry addresses a common question or misperception regarding the Symbolist stage. As Catherine Taylor Johnson muses in “Symbolist Transformation: The Shift from Stage to Screen in France,” “The major challenge to making symbolism work on stage is the contradiction of representing an invisible, intangible world or spirit in a medium that uses concrete objects and live actors. The contradiction centers on the solid, tangible and visible actor whose live presence on stage is the antithesis of symbolism.”⁶ In fact, that “solid, tangible and visible actor” *is* the symbol, and, as Carlyle points out, the symbol and symbolized can never be separated. Just as Symbolist poetry *must* utilize words to convey the silent Idea, Symbolist theater must include, not only dialogue, but also the material stage such as actors and set. Symbolist dramatists may have expressed an anti-theatrical stance. For example, Maeterlinck claimed, “performance of a great work using contingent and human elements is an antinomy. All great works are symbols, and the symbol can never bear the weight of the active presence of the

human being.”⁷ However, Maeterlinck and other Symbolist authors wrote and *staged* plays. The question is, how?

Symbolist theater developed alternative and radical scenic practices that would become known as “synthetic decor.” Symbolist *mise-en-scène* seeks a unity of setting and script, producing simplified decorative sets with minimal stage properties, stylized costumes, and two-dimensional, non-perspectival painted backdrops, all designed to direct the audience’s attention to the poetic language and represent the unconscious on stage. Gauze curtains combined with the evolution of stage lighting further lent an air of mystery. Actors in symbolist dramas, when not replaced by puppets or marionettes, often performed in masks, spoke in monotone, or moved in pantomimic or oriental styles like *Noh* and *Kabuki*. The purpose of Symbolist stage craft, acting technique, and dialogue was to locate the dramatic action within the mind of the audience. Unlike placing action offstage or closet dramas, the audience’s realization of Symbolism’s invisible truth was the play’s objective or dramatic action.⁸ The interplay of the actors’ speech or communication and the stage’s *mise-en-scène* reveals the Infinite or Idea. Because of this aspiration, the material Symbolist stage and its dialogue (despite their minimalism) become laden with import and meaning.

Maeterlinck’s *L’Intruse* and *Intérieur*

They would make us dream of the infinite even while we say: “Nicole, bring me my slippers.” (Review of Maeterlinck’s *Pelléas et Mélisande*)⁹

Maeterlinck’s critic mocks the Symbolists for elevating the Infinite even in mundanity. However, this review points to two significant elements of Symbolism: simplified language and meaningful objects—“Nicole, bring me my *slippers*.” In their analysis of Symbolism’s

conception of the Infinite, contemporary scholars often overlook the slippers, and even Nicole—the materially present objects and bodies, which signify the Infinite on the Symbolist stage and comprise the focus of my study.

In his chapter, “Maeterlinck as a Mystic,” Symons recognizes that the foremost Symbolist playwright conveys the Infinite through both silence *and* the material stage. Symons quotes Maeterlinck on silence—“Souls...are weighed in silence, as gold and silver are weighed in pure water, and the words which we pronounce have no meaning except through the silence in which they are bathed” (*The Symbolist Movement* 92). Maeterlinck interprets silence as a background to language—ever present, if unacknowledged. Symons, analyzing Maeterlinck’s statement, concludes, “The secret of things which is just beyond the most subtle words, the secret of the expressive silences, has always been clearer to Maeterlinck than to most people; and, in his plays, he has elaborated an art of sensitive, taciturn, and at the same time highly ornamental simplicity, which has come nearer than any other art to being the voice of silence” (*The Symbolist Movement* 84). Symons sees Maeterlinck as reversing the typical experience of language where silence is “subtle” and words are “expressive.” Maeterlinck instead gives “voice” to silence through simplification. He enacts silence in his plays through “small words and repetitions...attitudes and omissions.” In “endeavouring to clothe mystical conceptions in concrete forms,” Maeterlinck “has invented a drama so precise, so curt, so arbitrary in its limits, that it can safely be confided to the masks and feigned voices of marionettes” (*The Symbolist Movement* 85). Symons focuses on Maeterlinck’s use of limited language—“small words,” “repetitions,” “omissions,” precision and curtness. However, the play’s limited vocabulary must be embedded in some concrete object like actors’ “attitudes,” masks, or marionettes. “The aim of Maeterlinck,” Symons argues, “is not only to render the soul and the soul’s atmosphere, but to

reveal this strangeness, pity, and beauty through beautiful pictures.... He has realised...that the art of the stage is the art of pictorial beauty, of the correspondence in rhythm between the speakers, their words, *and their surroundings*” (*The Symbolist Movement* 87-88, my italics). In Symons’ analysis, Maeterlinck’s plays stage “the voice of silence” in order to display the soul, but they do so within a visual and material medium, the stage. He emphasizes “pictorial beauty” and “surroundings,” indicating his awareness that silence and the soul manifest in concrete environments.

Maeterlinck’s philosophy of silence translates into his dramatic practice in what he terms “second-degree dialogue” and “static theater.” In his essay, “Silence,” Maeterlinck describes silence and its purpose: “Speech is of Time, Silence is of Eternity.”¹⁰ This foremost and influential Symbolist playwright clearly aligns silence with the Infinite or Idea represented by the symbol. Maeterlinck views silence as the enveloping subtext or background of existence: “It surrounds us on every side; it is the source of the undercurrents of our life” (“Silence” 11-12). He associates it with language, declaring, “It is idle to think that, by means of words, any real communication can ever pass from one man to another;” rather, “the words that we let fall have no meaning apart from the silence that wraps around them” (“Silence” 4, 19). Silence is both subtext and a form of communication more palpable than words. Much like melodrama’s universal, gestural language, for Maeterlinck, silence corresponds with truth: “Bethink you of those moments when...the slumbering truths sprung to life, and tell me whether silence, then, was not good and necessary” (“Silence” 10). This silence that surrounds us and our language, and relates to truth, Maeterlinck terms “*active silence*,” as opposed to “*passive* silence, which is the shadow of sleep, of death or nonexistence” (“Silence” 7) and the central theme of his plays.

Maeterlinck conveys active and passive silence on the stage through “static theater,” which includes “*dialogue du second degré*.” He defines “second-degree dialogue” as, “It is only the words which seem at first hearing useless that really count in a play. It is in them that the soul of the play is hidden. Alongside the indispensable dialogue, there is almost always another dialogue which seems superfluous. Look closely, and you will see that it is the only one that the soul really listens to, because it is only here that it is being spoken to.”¹¹ Maeterlinck expands the concept of silence to include, not only the more literal “omissions” identified by Symons, but words that appear to neither instigate nor convey action. Situations rather than events comprise action in “static theater,” for example, waiting. Yet Maeterlinck promotes this inactivity as ideal dramatic action:

I have often thought that an old man sitting in his armchair, waiting simply beneath his lamp, listening beneath his consciousness to all the eternal laws that reign around his house, interpreting without understanding the silence of his doors and windows and the small voice of the light, submitting to the presence of his soul and his destiny, head slightly bent, unaware that all the powers of this world are active and watchful in his room like attentive servants, not knowing that the sun itself holds the little table he leans on over the abyss, and that there is not a single star in the sky, nor a single force of the soul which is indifferent to the movement of an eyelid closing or a thought rising,—I have come to believe that this immobile old man lives, in reality, a more human, more profound, and more common life than the lover who strangles his mistress, the commander who is victorious in battle, or “the husband who avenges his honor”. (*Le Trésor des humbles* 168-69)

Despite utilizing one of melodrama’s principal tropes, muteness, Maeterlinck rejects its clichéd heroes and heroines, in favor of an old man sitting, waiting, listening, interpreting, and submitting in seeming inaction. However, this stasis in silence reveals “eternal laws,” soul, destiny, and “all the powers of the world” that remain active but unnoticed by the melodramatic lover, commander, and husband. Again, however, we see how conveying silence and the soul does not take place in empty space; rather, the audience experiences both through the medium of the old man—a body, if immobile, on the stage. We comprehend and interpret silence through his silent,

static presence. It is primarily within the static pieces such as *L'Intruse* and *Intérieur* that Maeterlinck alternates speech and silence in order to communicate Symbolism's broader concepts of soul and the invisible Infinite.

Maeterlinck completed *L'Intruse* (*The Intruder*) in December of 1890, and it was first produced by Paul Fort of the Théâtre d'Art on 20 May 1891. *The Intruder* takes place in the living room of a home, where the blind Grandfather, Father, Uncle, and Three Daughters await the arrival of the Uncle's sister, a nun. An ailing mother and her newborn child are in adjoining rooms. Eventually the Grandfather hears someone enter the room, the clock strikes midnight, the baby cries, and the Sister of Mercy appears and announces the death of the mother.

The Intruder makes use of omissions or pauses in second-degree dialogue that literalize silence on the stage, as well as absent, silent characters (like Strindberg's *Ghost Sonata*): the infant, the dying mother, and death itself. The speaking characters make the audience aware of these unseen roles and their pointed reticence. The Uncle, for example, comments upon the baby's noiselessness: "He has not cried once all the time! He is like a wax doll." To which the Grandfather responds, "I think he will be deaf—dumb too, perhaps."¹² Dumb or mute characters recall melodrama's emblematic role, but Maeterlinck's characters are also unseen, which correlates with the Grandfather's blindness and another of *The Intruder*'s central themes: invisibility. As the Grandfather asks one Daughter, "do you not see any one?" (*The Intruder* 235). In *The Intruder* those instigating and undergoing the play's action (death and the mother, respectively) remain *unseen* as well as unheard.

Instead, the alternation of sound and silence indicates dramatic action and characters' recognition of these events. For example, the Daughter unknowingly registers the presence of death (the intruder of the play's title) when she concludes, "There must be some one in the

garden; the nightingales have suddenly ceased singing” (*The Intruder* 236). Maeterlinck cannot show death itself, only death’s effect; thus, the layering of the Daughter’s simple commentary and the sound and cessation of birdsong mark the invisible intruder. Significantly, the relevant or truth-speaking sounds are all noises, as opposed to verbal language: the nightingales’ song, the creaking of a door when death enters the house, and the child’s cry that signifies the mother’s passing (*The Intruder* 243, 255). *The Intruder* demonstrates a particular means of recognizing silence and its associated action: through the patterned start and cessation of noise. In *The Intruder*, the audience “hears” absence.

Maeterlinck’s earlier play demonstrates Symbolist theater’s focus on silence, whereas *Interior* (1894), suggests how later Symbolist plays embed that silence in material communication, or, as Nietzsche proposes, symbolism through not just the mouth and word but the *body*’s gestures. In *Interior*, which premiered at the Théâtre de l’Oeuvre on 15 March 1895, an Old Man and a Stranger discuss how to inform a family of the death of one of their daughters. The family is silent but visible through the windows of a house, while the two main characters speak outside in the garden. The play concludes when a crowd approaches with the daughter’s body, and the Old Man enters the home where he can be seen informing the family of their loss.

Maeterlinck lists the Father, Mother, Two Daughters, and Child as “silent personages,” who are kept in silence by the Old Man and Stranger for most of the play. As the Old Man states, “It is well that they have not heard us.”¹³ More so than *The Intruder*, *Interior* outlines Maeterlinck’s philosophy of silence as depicted in his essay, “Silence.” Avoiding reporting the daughter’s death, the Old Man explains, “A misfortune announced by a single voice seems more definite and crushing.... If I go in alone, I shall have to speak at the very first moment; they will know all in a few words; I shall have nothing more to say; and I dread the silence which follows

the last words that tell of a misfortune. It is then that the heart is torn” (*The Intruder* 209).

Similar to Maeterlinck’s description of second-degree dialogue, his character suggests that a single voice has more impact than a cacophony, and a few words mean more than many. More importantly, action transpires (“the heart is torn”), and is acknowledged, in silence. The stage directions set the play during “the interval that elapses between the occurrence of a disaster and the breaking of the news to the bereaved” (*The Intruder* 205). In other words, the silent characters (“the bereaved”), who have yet to hear word of the daughter’s death, are the ones to whom the play’s primary *action* (the “disaster”) has happened; yet, significantly, Maeterlinck situates the play during the “interval” or moment of stasis between the action and its impact.

As in melodrama and Maeterlinck’s *Intruder*, silence is the locus of dramatic action for this Symbolist play. Also recalling melodrama, but diverging from the earlier *Intruder*, *Interior* demonstrates silence through visual means like gesture and a form of tableau. The stage directions depict:

[An old garden planted with willows.] [At the back, a house, with three of the ground-floor windows lighted up. Through them a family is pretty distinctly visible, gathered for the evening round the lamp. The Father is seated at the chimney corner. The Mother, resting one elbow on the table, is gazing into vacancy. Two young girls, dressed in white, sit at their embroidery, dreaming and smiling in the tranquility of the room. A child is asleep, his head resting on his mother’s left arm. When one of them rises, walks, or makes a gesture, the movements appear grave, slow, apart, and as though spiritualised by the distance, the light, and the transparent film of the window-panes.] (Interior 207)

Maeterlinck establishes a tableau-like setting, so that while the dialogue between the Old Man and Stranger—the seeming action—takes place in the stage’s foreground, the characters who actually experience the dramatic action (the death of a loved one) remain silently in the background, functioning almost like a tableau or setting on the stage, even framed by window-panes. Like the old man in *Le Trésor des humbles*, Maeterlinck embeds the play’s “true” action

in the nearly static, silent characters. The unusualness of their “grave, slow” movements at once signals their “spiritualized” state and draws attention to the actors’ bodies.

Significantly, gestures transfer across the stage’s foreground setting to its tableau-like background. The Stranger describes the drowned daughter: “I saw her hair, which had floated up almost into a circle round her head, and was swaying hither and thither with the current... [*In the room, the two young girls turn their heads towards the window.*],” causing the Old Man to remark, “Did you see her two sisters’ hair trembling on their shoulders?” (*Interior* 211). This replication of gestures draws the unseen event—the death of one sister—to the silent characters (her sisters), further underscoring the association between silence and dramatic action.

Tableau and gesture are visible, and therefore material, means of registering silence on the Symbolist stage. Rather than *hearing* absence—or recognizing silence through alternations between noise and quiet—as in *The Intruder*, in *Interior*, the audience experiences silence by *viewing* silent personages visibly but wordlessly communicating. Furthermore, rather than including a blind character and discussions of sightlessness, in *Interior*, Maeterlinck emphasizes sight. Observing the family, the Stranger and Old Man converse: “*The Stranger*. They do not know that others are looking at them... *The Old Man*. We, too, are watched...” (*Interior* 214). Again, Maeterlinck layers gestures in silence; in the elliptical pauses between the Old Man and Stranger’s dialogue, we (the audience) acknowledge that we observe these characters and, in turn, are observed (by others, or conceivably by higher powers or the Infinite). Through sight we come to understand the importance of silence. “I wish we had not been able to watch them in this way,” the Old Man complains. “I thought there was nothing to do but to knock at the door, to enter quite simply, and to tell all in a few phrases...But I have watched them too long” (*Interior* 214). Maeterlinck’s character suggests that by pausing in speech and merely

observing we can understand a situation's gravity, which in turn obliterates speech. In terms of the stage, Maeterlinck implies that spectacle carries more weight than dialogue, a theory he underscores by making silence visible, palpable: "You can see that we have told them nothing," declares the Old Man (*The Intruder* 215).

When the Old Man finally does convey the daughter's death to her family, the Stranger and now-gathered crowd cannot hear and instead must interpret the news and family's response through their observation of the background tableau. The Stranger regards and elucidates the Old Man and family's actions: "He must have knocked—they have all raised their heads at the same time—they are looking at each other" (*Interior* 222). The family responds with a silent gesture—raising their heads—to the unheard sound of the Old Man's knock. Rather than alternating silence and the noise of the knock, Maeterlinck draws attention to silence by demonstrating how a noiseless gesture (head raising) can indicate sound (the knock). Even words, or at least an accurate sense of communication, can be determined through silent gesture: "He keeps his hand on the door—he takes a step back—he seems to be saying, 'Ah, it is you!' He raises his arms. He carefully closes the door again," narrates the Stranger (*Interior* 223). Maeterlinck concludes the play when the Old Man conveys the news of the death; however, he does so through stage directions—the non-dialogic element of a script: "*The Old Man begins to speak again, and little by little the others grow tense with apprehension. All of a sudden the Mother starts and rises. [...] He says a few more words; then, suddenly, all the others rise, too, and seem to question him. Then he slowly makes an affirmative movement of his head.*" The Stranger exclaims, "He has told them—he has told them all at once!," but adds, "I can hear nothing....," which is ultimately the audience's situation as well (*Interior* 224). The origin of the play's dramatic action—the daughter's death—is finally communicated but in absolute silence

for the audience of watchers and the play's actual audience. However, "I can hear nothing" does not indicate a lack of comprehension, but rather an intentional lack of sound. We know the Old Man communicates the daughter's death, we observe the change in the characters' bodies as they process this information, and through the silence and their movements we understand a subject Maeterlinck places outside the realm of speech: death. Much like melodrama, for the lead French Symbolist playwright, materialized silence conveys concepts too complex for language.

* * *

"It's exactly like...like Maeterlinck.... Didn't you mean it to be?," wondered Graham Robertson when Oscar Wilde read him his new play, *Salome*.¹⁴ Wilde admired Maeterlinck, whose works were among the books he had sent to him in prison, and listed him as an influence on *Salome*.¹⁵ In turn, Maeterlinck declared *Salome*, "mysterious, strange and admirable. [I have] emerged for the third time from this dream whose power I have not yet explained to myself."¹⁶ Yet, although Maeterlinck transitioned from representing silence through the cessation of sound to embedding silence in the visual communicants of tableau and gesture, even Wilde's contemporaries recognized the greater materiality of Wilde's Symbolist theatrics. In a review of *Salome*, William Archer writes, "There is far more depth and body in Mr Wilde's work than in Maeterlinck's. His characters are man and woman, not filmy shapes of mists and moonshine. His properties are far more varied, less conventional. His...palette is infinitely richer. Maeterlinck paints in washes of water colour. Mr Wilde attains the depth and brilliance of oils."¹⁷ Depth, body, men, women, stage properties, paint: Archer identifies the physicality of *Salome* and specifically in relation to the material stage. Maeterlinck pondered, "One should perhaps eliminate the living being from the stage.... Will the day come when sculpture...will be used onstage? Will the human being be replaced by a shadow? a reflection? a projection of

symbolic forms, or a being who would appear to live without being alive?”¹⁸ Maeterlinck retains his interest in the immaterial—shadows, reflections, projections—and, despite visually demonstrating silence, rejects the living being or human body. *Interior* was, after all, written for marionettes. Thus Wilde’s first and only Symbolist play, *Salome*, emulates Maeterlinck’s dialogue and the significance placed on silence and visual communication; however, he breaks from the Symbolist master with his interest in materiality and the body demonstrated, in particular, through his inclusion of dance.

Wilde’s *Salome*

All art is at once surface and symbol. Those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril. Those who read the symbol do so at their peril. (Oscar Wilde)¹⁹

Wilde wrote his first and only Symbolist play, *Salome*, in French during November and December of 1891 in Paris. He recounts telling the leader of the Grand Cafe orchestra, “I am writing a play about a woman dancing with her bare feet in the blood of a man she has craved for and slain. I want you to play something in harmony with my thoughts.” And “Rigo played such wild and terrible music that those who were there stopped talking and looked at each other with blanched faces. Then I went back [to his lodgings at the Rue des Cappucines] and finished *Salome*.”²⁰ Despite Symbolism’s mystical qualities, Wilde emphasizes, not just dancing, but the very physicality of the act—bare feet in blood—and suggests that music capable of producing palpable emotions inspired the play’s composition.

Salome was first published in French simultaneously in Paris and London in February of 1893.²¹ Conceivably, Wilde wrote *Salome* in French in order to avert Britain’s Examiner of Plays, who permitted works in French to get away with more than those in English.

Nevertheless, Edward Pigott, the Lord Chamberlain, banned *Salome* in June of 1892, ostensibly because it was a religious drama, and it remained banned until 1931. At the time, Wilde, Sarah Bernhardt (who was playing Salome), and Charles Ricketts and Graham Robertson (the set and costume designers), were two weeks into rehearsal for a production at the Royal English Opera House. The banning commenced a series of controversies surrounding the play. Three of Aubrey Beardsley's illustrations were censored from the English 1894 publication, and Wilde and Lord Alfred Douglas fought over Douglas's poor translation of the play.²² Eventually *Salome* was first staged by the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre in Paris on 11 February 1896, but, due to the censor's ban, it was not performed in London until 10 May 1905 by a small, private club at the Bijou Theatre.²³

Although in 1889, Symons published his first piece on the Symbolists—an obituary of the death of Villiers de Lisle Adam for *The Woman's World*, then edited by Wilde—the Symbolist movement had yet to gain momentum in England.²⁴ However, the Salome legend was a major topos of *fin de siècle* European literature, in particular the French Symbolists, including the Symbolist poet, Stéphane Mallarmé's unfinished *Hérodiade* (composed between 1864 and 1867), and two paintings by Symbolist painter Gustave Moreau, *Salomé (dansant devant Hérode)* and *L'Apparition* (exhibited in the Paris Salon of 1876), which strongly influenced J.-K. Huysmans' fifth chapter of *À Rebours* (1884).²⁵ Mallarmé recognized Wilde's contribution to the Symbolist Salome tradition. Upon finishing reading Wilde's play, he wrote, "My Dear Poet, I marvel that while everything in your Salome is expressed in such constant, dazzling strokes, there also arises on each page the Unutterable and the Dream."²⁶ Mallarmé captures Wilde's particular achievement: the union of "the Unutterable and the Dream"—the silent, mystical qualities of Symbolism—with the apparent material creation process, the "dazzling strokes" of his pen.

Wilde's biographer, Richard Ellmann, amongst other critics, identifies Huysmans' account of Moreau's Salome paintings as Wilde's predominant influence (340). In *À Rebours* (*Against Nature*) Huysmans' protagonist, Des Esseintes, establishes the symbolic nature of Moreau's *Salomé*: "the painter seemed to have wished to assert his intention of remaining outside the bounds of time, of giving no precise indication of race or country or period, setting as he did his Salome inside this extraordinary palace with its grandiose, heterogeneous architecture, clothing her in sumptuous, fanciful robes, crowning her with a nondescript diadem."²⁷ Huysmans elaborates on the visually stimulating, lavish setting and costume, yet places them, "outside the bounds of time," suggesting Symbolism's sense of the Infinite.

With a withdrawn, solemn, almost august expression on her face, [Salome] begins the lascivious dance which is to rouse the aged Herod's dormant senses; her breasts rise and fall, the nipples hardening at the touch of her whirling necklaces; the strings of diamonds glitter against her moist flesh; her bracelets, her belts, her rings all spit out fiery sparks; and across her triumphal robe, sewn with pearls, patterned with silver, spangled with gold, the jewelled cuirass, of which every chain is a precious stone, seems to be ablaze with little snakes of fire, swarming over the mat flesh, over the tea-rose skin, like gorgeous insects with dazzling shards, mottled with carmine, spotted with pale yellow, speckled with steel blue, striped with peacock green. (Huysmans 64)

Despite "remaining outside the bounds of time," Huysmans' Salome is clearly of the physical world: comprised of flesh (breasts, nipples, moist and mat flesh, tea-rose skin) and covered in intimately described objects like fabric, metals, and jewels.

Des Esseintes further details Salome's gestures in *Salome* and *The Apparition*: "Salome slowly glides forward on the points of her toes, her left arm stretched out in a commanding gesture, her right bent back and holding a great lotus-blossom beside her face, while a woman squatting on the floor strums the strings of a guitar;" "With a gesture of horror, Salome tries to thrust away the terrifying vision which holds her nailed to the spot, balanced on the tips of her toes, her eyes dilated, her right hand clawing convulsively at her throat" (Huysmans 64, 67).

Moreau suspends his gesturing dancer: “frozen like some Hindu god in a hieratic pose;” “a hideous nightmare now held in its choking grip an entertainer, intoxicated by the whirling movement of the dance, a courtesan, petrified and hypnotized by terror” (64, 68). Similar to the family’s deliberate movements in Maeterlinck’s *Interior*, Salome’s gestures recall melodrama in their specificity and ability to convey particular emotions. She even performs them to the accompaniment of music, “a guitar,” and briefly pauses in statuesque poses before continuing with her dance. However, Maeterlinck slows the family’s gestures in order to convey their spiritualized state, whereas Wilde’s inspiration—Moreau via Huysmans—slips between regality and fleshiness. She glides and balances, ballerina-like, but her gestures vary from contained (“commanding,” “hieratic”) to passionate (“horror,” “clawing”). She is at once the deliberate and statuesque dancer and the “courtesan” gyrating “while a woman squatting on the floor” plays guitar. Even more than Maeterlinck, Moreau, Huysmans, and Wilde—Moreau working within the visual medium of painting, Huysmans attempting to capture painting in writing, and Wilde translating both into the physical realm of the stage—seek to present stylized and symbolic gestures in an emphatically physical body.

Although Moreau “had been thinking of the dancer, the mortal woman,” still Salome “was no longer just the dancing-girl who extorts a cry of lust and lechery from an old man by the lascivious movements of her loins; who saps the morale and breaks the will of a king with the heaving of her breasts, the twitching of her belly, the quivering of her thighs;” rather, “she had become, as it were, the symbolic incarnation of undying Lust, the Goddess of immortal Hysteria, the accursed Beauty exalted above all other beauties by the catalepsy that hardens her flesh and steels her muscles” (Huysmans 65-66). Huysmans’ Salome is at once “symbolic” and outside the realm of time (“undying” and “immortal”), and incarnate. Despite symbolizing larger

concepts like Lust, Hysteria, and Beauty, Huysmans' emphasis falls on Salome's body: her moving loins, heaving breasts, twitching belly, quivering thighs, flesh and muscle. She may "no longer just" be this body, but the body comes across as prominently as what it symbolizes. Wilde himself wished, "to go to Spain just to visit the Prado Museum and see that Salome of Titian's before which Tintoretto exclaimed, 'Here is the man who paints with living flesh!'," ²⁸ suggesting that Wilde, like Huysmans, sought to convey the living flesh of the symbolic dancer. "Art is symbol, because man is a symbol," Wilde declared.²⁹ Unlike Symbolist works that seek to eliminate the human actor in an effort to capture the otherworldly, Wilde sees the human as symbol, capable of embedding the Infinite and Idea within his or her being.

Wilde's one-act play recounts the Biblical story of Salome, stepdaughter of Herod and daughter of Herodias, who requests the head of Jokanaan as a reward for dancing the dance of the seven veils. Like Maeterlinck, Wilde peppers his play with ellipses and simple yet meaningful speeches. Salome repeatedly demands (and eventually receives) "the head of Jokanaan," "give me the head of Jokanaan!" (*Salome* 57-60), but her effectual requests are interspersed throughout Herod's lengthy and ultimately ineffectual monologues attempting to persuade her to desist and select some other, better item—emeralds, peacocks, and a descriptive list of jewels that extends for three pages (*Salome* 57-62). Language here seems pointless: ignored, and unconvincing. When Herod concedes to Salome's demand, he ceases his monologues and Herodias "*draws from the hand of the Tetrarch the ring of death, and gives it to the Soldier, who straightway bears it to the Executioner*" (*Salome* 62). The actual death sentence occurs, not through language at all, but through stage directions (actions) and properties (the ring). In *Salome*, the most successful language is truncated or materialized in gesture and objects. And, as Salome narrates, the death itself results in, "no sound. I hear nothing. Why

does he not cry out, this man? [...] There is a silence, a terrible silence” (*Salome* 63). Instead, “A huge black arm, the arm of the Executioner, comes forth from the cistern, bearing on a silver shield the head of Jokanaan. Salome seizes it. Herod hides his face with his cloak. Herodias smiles and fans herself. The Nazarenes fall on their knees and begin to pray” (*Salome* 64).

These are the most lengthy and detailed stage directions of the entire play, and they set up a silent yet clear gestural language: Jokanaan is dead, Salome is gleeful, Herod ashamed, Herodias content, and the Nazarenes mourn the loss of their prophet. In Salome’s final speech, she merely repeats, “I have kissed thy mouth, Jokanaan, I have kissed thy mouth” (*Salome* 67), reinforcing the sense that the mouth is less a tool for speech and more communicative through its very corporeality.

The opening lines of the play demonstrate *Salome*’s participation in the Symbolist tradition, as well as Wilde’s particular take on symbols: their fluidity in relation to materiality.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN

How beautiful is the Princess Salome to-night!

THE PAGE OF HERODIAS

Look at the moon. How strange the moon seems! She is like a woman rising from a tomb. She is like a dead woman. One might fancy she was looking for dead things.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN

She has a strange look. She is like a little princess who wears a yellow veil, and whose feet are of silver. She is like a princess who has little white doves for feet. One might fancy she was dancing.

THE PAGE OF HERODIAS

She is like a woman who is dead. She moves very slowly. (*Salome* 1-2)

At its most basic symbolic level, the moon represents death or “a dead woman.” However, Wilde follows Mallarmé’s directive: “The poet must establish a careful relationship between two images, from which a third element, clear and fusible, will be distilled and caught by our

imagination.” The Princess Salome, the moon, a dead woman, a little princess, a woman who is dead: by juxtaposing the princess with the moon, Wilde reveals death overshadowing Salome. Yet the dialogue between the Syrian and Page also suggests the slipperiness of Wilde’s symbols: the Princess is like the moon, the moon is like a dead woman, the moon is like the princess, the princess is like a dead woman. Furthermore, Wilde signals a central trope of his play by immediately introducing feet and dancing. Whether the moon indicates a princess or a dead woman, it moves, either “very slowly” or “dancing” with “little white doves for feet.” The constant shifting between images obscures what is symbol and what is Idea, which Wilde underscores through his focus on movement and, specifically, dancing. Transitioning between symbol and Idea clouds Symbolism’s typical distinction between the material, worldly object and the immaterial Infinite it represents.

Wilde’s symbols become more bodily-oriented as the play progresses, until it is difficult to distinguish symbol from concrete object. Salome praises Jokanaan’s body:

Thy body is white, like the lilies of a field that the mower hath never mowed. Thy body is white like the snows that lie on the mountains of Judaea, and come down into the valleys. The roses in the garden of the Queen of Arabia are not so white as thy body. Neither the roses of the garden of the Queen of Arabia, the garden of spices of the Queen of Arabia, nor the feet of the dawn when they light on the leaves, nor the breast of the moon when she lies on the breast of the sea.... There is nothing in the world so white as thy body. (*Salome* 21-22)

She presents five similes—Jokanaan’s body is white like lilies, snow, roses, the dawn, and the moon—yet the final three are nonfunctional (“not so white as thy body”), and Salome eventually concludes that Jokanaan’s body is incomparable: “There is nothing in the world so white as thy body.” Simile (and metaphor) attempts to describe something inherently indescribable since it must be approached through something it is not. Wilde engages in excessive simile in *Salome*, stressing this frustration at the heart of Symbolism. However, whereas more traditional

Symbolism attempts to capture intangible concepts like eternity, the soul, or death, Salome cannot quite describe the whiteness of Jokanaan's body. The resemblances themselves become more bodily-oriented: the *feet* of the dawn (reminiscent of the opening description of the moon), and the *breast* of the moon and sea. Salome likens Jokanaan's body to anthropomorphized nature—in other words, the body of man is equated with nature that is like the body of man. When Salome seeks to symbolize Jokanaan's body, the symbols instead fold in on themselves (body compared to body) and are eventually dismissed. The body stands alone, becoming a symbol itself.

Jokanaan prophecies: “the sun shall become black like sackcloth of hair, and the moon shall become like blood” (*Salome* 44). Here the sun and the moon, rather than functioning as symbols as the moon does at the play's start, become *symbolized* by body parts, hair and blood. Herod identifies this phenomenon when he exclaims, “How red those petals are! They are like stains of blood on the cloth. That does not matter. It is not wise to find symbols in everything that one sees. It makes life too full of terrors. It were better to say that stains of blood are as lovely as rose-petals” (*Salome* 51). Comparing rose petals to blood produces terror, but equating blood to rose petals beautifies blood. In reversing the typical simile to fixate on the blood stain, or bodily product, Wilde also indicates the very fluidity of symbolism: the images can be read in both directions to produce varying meanings. Wilde, in a sense, draws attention to the movement of symbols—the *transitioning between*.

As Mallarmé and Symons suggest, Symbolism uses patterned, rhythmic language to point beyond the text. In *Salome*, Wilde produces patterns through word repetitions that highlight his interest in the moving and materialized symbol; patterned language draws connections *between* characters and *across* the play. Various characters associate the word “terrible” with both

Salome and Jokanaan. For example, when the Young Syrian observes Salome, the Page reacts: “It is dangerous to look at people in such fashion. Something terrible may happen,” but the Solider also states of Jokanaan: “He was very terrible to look upon” (*Salome* 3, 7). The Syrian sees Salome in the moon, just as Salome seems to perceive her interpretation of herself: “How good it is to see the moon! She is like...a little silver flower. She is cold and chaste. I am sure she is a virgin,” but when she meets Jokanaan, Salome compares him to the moon as well: “He is like an image of silver. I am sure he is chaste, as the moon is. He is like a moonbeam, like a shaft of silver. His flesh must be very cold” (*Salome* 11, 19). The words moon, silver, cold, and chaste repeat across the text and pull these two seemingly opposite characters together. Whereas Jokanaan begins the play as a disembodied voice emerging from a cistern, Salome—the woman dancer and thus, inevitably, sensual object—first enters the stage commenting upon her very bodiliness: “Why does the Tetrarch look at me all the while with his mole’s eyes under his shaking eyelids? It is strange that the husband of my mother looks at me like that. I know not what it means. Of a truth I know it too well” (*Salome* 10). However, at the play’s conclusion, and after repeated word and image associations linking the two characters, Salome and Jokanaan reverse roles. The beheaded Jokanaan is only body (or, in realization, a prop or object)—a silent and dismembered corpse—whereas “the Voice of Salome” resounds across the darkened stage (*Salome* 66). Wilde unites the spiritual and corporeal—the prophet’s voice and the dancer’s body.

In “Dancing for an Oath: *Salome*’s Revaluation of Word and Gesture,” Heidi Hartwig notes that *Salome*’s plot includes only “three essential actions—Salome’s dance, Jokanaan’s beheading, and Salome’s death,” and otherwise “consists almost entirely of speech acts. It turns on disputation, oaths, and prophecies.”³⁰ Hartwig argues, “In this play, Wilde dramatizes the

dynamic relationship between language and action, or in strictly dramaturgical terms, between words and gestures;" "all actions in the play are shown to be direct products of linguistic acts" (23, 27). Hartwig points to Salome's pronouncement, "I will kiss thy mouth, Jokanaan; I will kiss thy mouth," which results in the play's conclusion: "I have kissed thy mouth, Jokanaan, I have kissed thy mouth" (*Salome* 26, 66). Significantly, these are repeated phrases, suggesting that, not only does *Salome* conclude with "the actualization of those tropes of prediction and intention in the form of performed material acts" (Hartwig 30), but that repetition—a key component of patterned and rhythmic *Symbolist* language—draws the immaterial and material together.

Turning to Wilde's staging, his one act play consists of a single set which includes foreground and background similar to Maeterlinck's *Interior*. The scene opens on "A great terrace in the Palace of Herod, set above the banquet-hall. Some soldiers are leaning over the balcony" (*Salome* 1). While the Young Syrian observes Salome, the soldiers comment upon the banquet's action: "FIRST SOLDIER: What an uproar! Who are those wild beasts howling? SECOND SOLDIER: The Jews. They are always like that. They are disputing their religion" (*Salome* 2). As well as referencing sound, the soldiers narrate action: "Herodias has filled the cup of the Tetrarch" (*Salome* 4). Presumably this play unfolds much like Maeterlinck's *Interior*, with the speaking characters apart from, and commenting upon, the dumbshow actions of the background scene—a melodramatic convention on display in *The Bells* where Mathias's vision scenes occur in the background, a place of psychic projection. The banquet-hall setup should include silent yet explicitly gesturing characters performing a pantomime, or sort of living-picture, below and behind the narrating foreground characters—the soldiers, Syrian, and Page. Also like the family in Maeterlinck's *Interior*, the *silent* scene includes the *active*

characters—Salome and Herod, who instigate the play’s dramatic action (the dance, and deaths of Jokanaan and Salome).

This onstage layering—e.g. the foreground soldiers narrating the observable actions of the background banquet—assumes the characteristics of symbolism itself. The Young Syrian compares Salome to “the shadow of a white rose in a mirror of silver” (*Salome* 3). Symbolism includes a built-in layering: image/Idea, or the reflection of a shadow of an object. Unlike Maeterlinck whose foreground and background scenes remain primarily separate (the Old Man only briefly enters the family’s home at *Interior*’s conclusion), Wilde focuses on the *transition* between observers and actors, or the *shift* between scenes that seems more broadly representative of the fluctuation between silence (the actors) and speech (the observers) and Idea and symbol. The Young Syrian exclaims, “The Princess is getting up! She is leaving the table! [...] Ah, she is coming this way. Yes, she is coming towards us” (*Salome* 9). He focuses on her exiting one scene and entering another, just as Salome herself joins the foreground repeating, “I will not stay. I cannot stay” (*Salome* 10). In a sense, the dancing girl cannot stay still. She is the first “active” character to break the barrier between silent and speaking sets, as Herod and Herodias will later. Just as the moon dances with dove-like feet when symbolizing Salome, for Herod the moon “reels through the clouds like a drunken woman” prior to him “slipp[ing] in blood” (*Salome* 28). Like Salome, Herod introduces motion—dancing, reeling, and slipping—and both cross from the stage’s background to foreground causing shifts in the narrative action. Maeterlinck separates his speaking and non-speaking characters, or more broadly mundane existence and real experience. Wilde’s Symbolist drama, however, focuses on the *transition* between these worlds—how material mundanity and deeper experience interact.

Analyzing the actual set and costumes of *Salome* indicates Wilde's investment in the symbolic function of material items, in other words, the significance of material items (as symbols) in conveying the Idea or Infinite. Charles Ricketts designed the set for the first large-scale production of *Salome* in London (at King's Hall, Covent Garden in June of 1906) according to a plan conceived with Wilde in the early 1890s. Sketches by Wilde and Ricketts show a stage bare except for cistern and staircase, marking the design Symbolist in its non-reality and ahistoricism.³¹ Furthermore, color schemes divide and signify characters, as well as highlight significant images from the script, such as Salome's feet and the moon. Ricketts describes:

I proposed a black floor—upon which Salome's white feet would show.... The sky was to be a rich turquoise blue, cut across by the perpendicular fall of strips of gilt matting, which should not touch the ground, and so form a sort of aerial tent above the terrace.... [Wilde's idea] was...that the Jews should be in yellow, the Romans were to be in purple, the soldiery in bronze green, and John in white. Over the dress of Salome the discussions were endless: should she be black "like the night"? or—here the suggestion is Wilde's—"green like a curious and poisonous lizard"? I desired that the moonlight should fall upon the ground, the source not being seen; Wilde himself hugged the idea of some "strange dim pattern in the sky".³²

Costumes for the actual production included: "Salome, dressed in a mist rising by moonlight, with a train of blue and black moths. Herodias, in a peacock train of Dahlias and a horned tiara. Herod, is robed in silver and blue lined with flame decorated with griffons, sphinxes and angels. The scene is all blue on blue." The Page's costume was "black with silver scales (the back of silver tissue) with orphreys of Angels and apples!"³³ Upon viewing this production, Michael Field comments, "Never has the stage been so wonderfully used...with all the masses, lights, sparkle, glow, atmosphere of a masterpiece to set the human passion it symbolises."³⁴

At the same time that the set and costumes symbolize "human passion" and other intangible qualities, they also capture Wilde's original conception of Salome:

Don't you think that she would be better completely naked? [...] Yes, utterly naked. But with jewels, many jewels, interlacing strands of jewels, all the gems flashing, tinkling and

jingling at her ankles, her wrists, her arms, about her neck, around her waist; their reflections making the utter shamelessness of that warm flesh even more shocking. For I cannot conceive of a Salome who is but a silent and passive instrument.... Never...! Her lips in Leonardo's painting reveal the limitless cruelty of her soul. Her lust must be an abyss, her corruptness, an ocean. The very pearls must die of love upon her bosom. The fragrance of her maidenhood must make the emeralds dim, and inflame the rubies' fire. On that burning flesh even the sapphire must lose the unstained purity of its azure blue.³⁵

Clearly the Salome of Rickett's 1906 production is not utterly naked; however, the intense focus on the symbolism of objects—Salome's train apparently included “forty-two blue foil and velvet butterflies” (Tydeman 51)—reflects Wilde's interest in capturing intangible emotions or concepts like cruelty, lust, and corruption in jewels or the material costume. Theater has always done (or tried to do) this, but Wilde's choice of jewels and their significance and abundance is notable. The jewels, as in *À Rebours*, seem to highlight the “warm flesh” they barely cover, first through contrast—the sapphire's “unstained purity”—and then through replication—the lustful pearls and inflamed rubies. As the cold gems warm against their wearer, they take on her qualities. Wilde focuses on the jewels' “tinkling and jingling” and “their reflections,” recalling Symons' interpretation of Mallarmé's poetics: words must “reflect and chime upon one another.” The jewels literally perform words' function in Symbolist poetry: repeating each other and what they cover (their “subtext”), plus the suggestion of musicality. Only, once again, in Wilde the words/jewels veil and reveal a fleshy body rather than a metaphysical Idea. If nothing else, Wilde's elaborate description of Salome's abundant jewels and Ricketts' extravagant costuming emphasize the physicality of the symbolic object.

Even the symbolic language of Wilde's play pushes towards the physical. His patterned expressions not only demonstrate the incantatory rhythm typical of Symbolist texts, they approach music and suggest choreography for the dance at the heart of the Salome legend. Elaborately artificial and pseudo-archaic grammar, emphatic inversions of conventional word

order, and highly-mannered rhythmic repetitions create a sort of dance in the language itself. David Wayne Thomas, in “The ‘Strange Music’ of *Salome*: Oscar Wilde’s Rhetoric of Verbal Musicality,” argues that “the drama’s studied dialogue is congruent with Western forms of musical exposition, wherein elementary patterns are proposed and developed through progressive elaborations on initial ur-patterns or motifs,” and “its one-act structure allows it a distinctly monological and formally integrated narrative texture, much like a lyric poem or a musical composition.”³⁶ Moreover, Wilde may have written *Salome* with Sarah Bernhardt in mind for the lead role, and, as Symons describes it, by the 1890s Bernhardt’s voice had taken on musical intonations: she speaks “chantingly,” with a “throbbing, monotonous music, which breaks deliciously, which pauses suspended, and then resolves itself in a perfect chord.”³⁷ Wilde himself noted the “recurring phrases of *Salome*, that bind it together like a piece of music with recurring *motifs*,”³⁸ and multiple contemporary readers experienced it as such. Lord Alfred Douglas declares, “Again and again it seems to one that in reading one is *listening*; listening, not to the author, not to the direct unfolding of a plot, but to the tones of different instruments.... One thing strikes one very forcibly in the treatment, the musical form of it.”³⁹ Richard Strauss, who used an abridged German translation of Wilde’s text as the libretto for his 1905 opera, saw Wilde’s play as “simply calling for music.”⁴⁰ And Michael Field’s review of the 1906 performance illustrates how Ricketts translated the music of Wilde’s text into performance: “All the actors stand and keep their positions long, giving their speeches as chords in the *Moonlight Sonata*. The whole play is full of harmony and ‘leit motifs’, of evocations, and all this character is brought out by gesture and timbre of voice” (250).

In the script, the incantatory quality of the language navigates between song and dance. Salome declares Jokanaan’s voice “music to mine ear,” yet in describing the mouth that produces

that voice, she evokes feet: “Thy mouth is redder than the feet of those who tread the wine in the wine-press. It is redder than the feet of the doves who inhabit the temples and are fed by the priests. It is redder than the feet of him who cometh from a forest where he hath slain a lion, and seen gilded tigers” (*Salome* 20, 23). Salome draws further parallels between the incorporeal (voice of) Jokanaan and the body of the dancing woman, whose “little white-hands are fluttering like doves that fly to their dove-cots” (*Salome* 7); Jokanaan’s mouth is as red as the feet of doves, and Salome, the dancer’s, feet and hands move like doves. Furthermore, a patterned dance of language, peppered with the word “dance,” precedes Salome’s actual, physical dance. It begins with Herod’s request:

Dance for me, Salome.

HERODIAS

I will not have her dance.

SALOME

I have no desire to dance, Tetrarch.

HEROD

Salome, daughter of Herodias, dance for me.

HERODIAS

Peace. Let her alone.

HEROD

I command thee to dance, Salome.

SALOME

I will not dance, Tetrarch. (*Salome* 46)

This repetition of variations on the word “dance,” as the three characters negotiate the terms of the real dance, continues for ten pages of text. Salome only agrees to dance when Herod promises:

Salome, Salome, dance for me. I pray thee dance for me.... When I came hither I slipped in blood, which is an ill omen; also I heard in the air a beating of wings, a beating of giant

wings.... Therefore dance for me. Dance for me, Salome, I beseech thee. If thou dancest for me thou mayest ask of me what thou wilt, and I will give it thee. Yes, dance for me, Salome, and whatsoever thou shalt ask of me I will give it thee, even unto the half of my kingdom. (*Salome* 49)

Within this single speech Herod repeats “dance” six times. Moreover, his words evoke Salome’s own association of mouth and feet (voice and dance); Herod slips in blood and hears the beating of wings, recalling the images of doves that bind Salome and Jokanaan, as well as the blood on “the feet of him who cometh from a forest where he hath slain a lion,” linking feet to Jokanaan’s red mouth. In a sense, this bartering establishes choreography for the dance to come, as well as reinforces the notion that language can produce dance by comparing mouths to feet in relation to the woman whose feet will gain her the mouth of the dead prophet.

Wilde conveys this momentous dance with the brief stage directions, “*Salome dances the dance of the seven veils*” (*Salome* 54), a description so concise it has left multiple critics bemoaning “surely one of the most laconic directions in all of modern drama” (Donohue 131). Silvia Bigliuzzi declares the nondescript dance, “disappointing,” and wonders, “is it intentionally symbolic, or is it simply due to the fact that [Wilde] was neither a choreographer nor a musician?” (82).⁴¹ Yet, despite the fact that Wilde only added the stage directions, “*Slaves bring perfumes and the seven veils, and take off the sandals of Salome*” (*Salome* 52) to the proofs, and dedicated Aubrey Beardsley’s copy, “for the only artist, who, besides myself, knows what the dance of the seven veils is, and can see that invisible dance,” Wilde was clearly invested in the dance while writing his play.⁴² André Salmon recounts Wilde attending a performance at the Moulin Rouge where a Romanian entertainer danced on her hands as Flaubert’s Salome does in *Trois Contes*. Later Wilde tried to contact the dancer to cast her in his play-in-progress, where she would dance on her hands “as in Flaubert’s story.”⁴³ And Retté describes: “He brought me the manuscript of *Salome*. I remember that during this visit he stated that he would like to see

the role of Salome played by an actress who was also a first-class dancer. For more than an hour he imagined all the possibilities of this idea and held me spell-bound.”⁴⁴ Wilde, in his various conceptions of Salome—licentious, chaste—always imagined her dancing: “I am writing a play about a woman dancing with her bare feet in the blood of a man she has craved for and slain;” “Her body, tall and pale, undulates like a lily.... There is nothing sensual in her beauty. The richest lace covers her svelte flesh” (Ellmann 344, 342). Clearly, as an examination of Wilde’s manuscripts and letter to Beardsley indicates, Wilde saw no need to outline the dance with any more than a curt stage direction, yet he was also inspired by dancers, envisioned the dance ranging from wild and shocking to slow and undulating, and intended the part of Salome for a dancer.

In a sense, the “invisible dance,” the dance *imagined* in detail yet never transferred to the page, epitomizes Wilde’s conception of Symbolism. It is both the invisible Infinite, outside the bounds of the text, only signified by the play’s rhythmic, chiming language, but also a *dance*—very much of the body, possibly inspired by an acrobat at the Moulin Rouge and evoked by the images of bare feet and blood. As Herod exclaims, “Ah, thou art to dance with naked feet! ’Tis well! ’Tis well! Thy little feet will be like white doves.... No, no, she is going to dance on blood! There is blood spilt on the ground. She must not dance on blood” (*Salome* 53). Bloody footprints on the stage visibly repeat Salome’s dance steps, leaving behind a concrete sign of the absent dance.

Fuller’s Salome dance

Wilde’s *Salome* points to an embodied symbolism available in Symbolist dance, where communication—specifically, communicating the Idea through the symbol—occurs by way of

the *body* and *silent* “language.” This language, as Wilde explores in *Salome*, inherently involves motion or transition; the symbol and symbolized are constantly in flux and entangled (the spiritual and corporeal, silence and speech). To examine Symbolist dance, I turn to a pioneer of modern dance, Loie Fuller, who performed Salome pantomimes based on Wilde’s play.

Wilde may have attended a performance by Fuller during the composition of his own *Salome*, and Wilde’s play most likely served as an animating intertextual reference for Fuller’s *Salome*, “a lyric pantomime in one act and five tableaux,” which opened at the Comédie-Parisienne on 4 March 1895, and initiated a series of Salome dance routines.⁴⁵ Fuller’s pantomime ran until 27 April 1895, although she continued performing the dances separately from the pantomime. The 1895 Salome included music by the composer Gabriel Pierné, who wrote incidental music for several Bernhardt plays, and sets by the painter Georges-Antoine Rochegrosse, who illustrated Flaubert’s 1877 novella, *Hérodias*. The pantomime contained five dances: Black, Sun (later known as Fire), White, Rose, and Lily.⁴⁶ Each of these images also appears in Wilde’s *Salome*: the blackness of tombs, and Jokanaan’s eyes and hair; the fire which burns Herod’s head before he tears off his crown of rose petals; the whiteness of both Jokanaan and Salome’s skin; and Salome’s lily-like undulations. A *New York Times* review describes the pantomime’s specifics:

It consists of four tableaux, descriptive of the Biblical scene between Herod and John the Baptist. The first represents the prophet visiting Herod, commanding him to put away Herodias, his unlawful wife. Herod refuses at first, but finally accedes partially, and is angry with Herodias. She studies how she may win him back, and decided [*sic*] that the best way will be to have her daughter Salome dance for him. This is done, and upon seeing the dance Herod accedes to the demands of Herodias.... The pantomime is concluded with Herod’s dispatching a servant to behead John the Baptist, Salome entering to protest just after the command has been executed.⁴⁷

In November 1907, Fuller produced a second pantomimed version of Salome, *La tragédie de Salomé*. It was staged at the Théâtre des Arts, with a libretto by Robert d’Humièr

and music by Florent Schmitt. The program notes depict its seven tableaux: John the Baptist enters Hérode's palace to condemn Hérode and Hérodiade's marriage; the second tableau includes "La danse des perles," with Salomé draped in yards of pearls; thirdly, Salomé performs "La danse du paon" in an extravagant costume made of 4,500 peacock feathers; in the fourth tableau, Salomé battles two serpents; in the "Dance of steel," Salomé appears in a blinding, metallic light. In the sixth tableau, "La danse d'argent," Salomé is clothed in a silver and gold sequined robe, but Hérode grabs her veils, stripping her naked. John the Baptist quickly covers her, resulting in his beheading. Suddenly, blood flows across the stage and Salomé reappears for the final scene, "La danse de la peur" (fear), where the head of John the Baptist appears in the midst of a storm, driving Salomé into a "délire infernal."⁴⁸ This seventh tableau, like Huysmans' novel and Wilde's play, may have referenced Moreau's *L'apparition*. Moreover, just as Wilde's *Salome* emphasized the symbolism of material items, each of Fuller's dances centers on a specific object, including jewels from Herod's coffers and a peacock costume possibly reminiscent of Beardsley's famous illustration for Wilde's text, "the Peacock Skirt."

Contemporary response to Fuller's performance further links her dances to Wilde's play. "It was a Salome...whose hands—mobile, expressive, tender or threatening hands, white hands, hands like the tips of bird's wings—emerged from the clothes, imparted to them all the poetry of dance, of the seductive dance or the dance of fright, the infernal dance or the dance of delight."⁴⁹ Clarétie's description recalls Salome's fluttering, white, dove-like hands in Wilde's play, which may have inspired Fuller's choreography. Jean Lorraine expands upon this image while recounting two of Fuller's 1895 dances, Lily and Fire.

In a sea of shadows a grey, indistinct form floats like a phantom and then, suddenly, under a beam of light, a spectral whiteness, a terrifying apparition. Is this a dead woman who has been crucified, hovering above a charnel-house, her arms still held out under the folds of her shroud, some huge, pale bird of the polar seas, an albatross or a gull, or

perhaps a spirit of the dead on its way to the sabbath...? But how poignant, how superb, how overwhelming and frightening, like a nightmare induced by morphine or ether.⁵⁰

Fuller herself becomes the symbolic white bird of Wilde's *Salome*, as well as the dead woman searching for dead things in the Page's vision of the moon; Fuller, shining "under a beam of light" in the darkness, embodies the moon as well. In "Fire Dance," Fuller "is flame itself. Standing in a fire of coals, she smiles and her smile is like a grinning mask under the red veil in which she wraps herself, the veil which she waves and causes to ripple like a fire over her lava-like nudity."⁵¹ This veiled and unveiling Salome is at once "flame itself" (or a white bird, or the moon), a symbolic image, but also "nude." Fuller never performed without clothes, yet Lorraine depicts her "smiling nakedness," suggesting, like Wilde's dancer, Fuller captures the otherworldly—"a nightmare induced by morphine or ether"—within the worldly. First published in 1893 and performed in France in 1896, Wilde's *Salome* may have inspired Fuller's pantomimic dances, initially through his text and, prior to her 1907 production, through the staged play. Moreover, as descriptions of her symbolic but still discernible body suggest, Fuller modeled the kind of dance Wilde envisioned.

In "Crayonné au théâtre," Mallarmé declares "dance alone capable, in its summary writing, of translating the fleeting and the sudden all the way to the Idea."⁵² Dance is the ideal Symbolist communicant, capable of capturing the Idea within and through motion. Symons elaborates:

And something of the particular elegance of the dance...the evasive, winding turn of things; and above all, the intellectual as well as sensuous appeal of a living symbol, which can but reach the brain through the eyes, in the visual, concrete, imaginative way; has seemed to make the ballet concentrate in itself a good deal of the modern ideal in matters of artistic expression. Nothing is stated, there is no intrusion of words used for the irrelevant purpose of describing; a world rises high before one, the picture lasts only long enough to have been there: and the dancer, with her gesture, all pure symbol, evokes, from her mere beautiful motion, idea, sensation, all that one need ever know of

event. There, before you, she exists, in harmonious life; and her rhythm reveals to you the soul of her imagined being.⁵³

Symons compliments dance's wordlessness—"nothing is stated"—and constant transition, its "winding turn of things." But its silence and elusiveness appeal to the audience "through the eyes, in the visual, [and] concrete." The dancer is at once a *pure* symbol, and living, visible, gesturing and concrete. Because of her wordlessness and continuous motion (her "evasive, winding turn" and "rhythm"), she is capable of stimulating the imagination to evoke "idea" and sensation. Fuller herself asserts, "What is the dance? It is motion. What is motion? The expression of a sensation. What is a sensation? The reaction in the human body produced by an impression or an idea perceived by the mind," and claimed, "To impress an idea I endeavour, by my motions, to cause its birth in the spectator's mind, to awaken his imagination, that it may be prepared to receive the image" (Fuller 70, 71). Fuller roots her dance technique firmly in Symbolism. Dance springs from an "idea" (which produces a sensation that in turn results in motion), but dance also plants "an idea" "in the spectator's mind." Fuller contends her dance derives from, and results in, the symbolized Idea.

Fuller's actual dance technique used contemporary technology in the service of Symbolist mysticism. Edison invented the incandescent lamp in 1879, and theaters began converting from gas to electric light in the early 1880s. Fuller performed her solo dances in total darkness on a stage draped in black silk. She then projected lights through slides decorated with colored gels onto the stage and her body, replacing conventional setting and costume with complex lighting effects that demanded a team of electricians (Reynolds 158). Through lighting, images of natural phenomena, like flowers, appeared on the large swaths of moving fabric manipulated by the dancer, and seemed to emerge from and recede into the darkened stage (Albright 70). Fuller patented a "Theatrical Stage Mechanism"—four mirrors placed in a semicircle to reflect the

lights, dancer, and stage—as well as a system of flooring where spotlights shone upwards through glass openings onto the dancer, who performed on a raised, reflective glass platform. She also patented a prismatic “room,” comprised of a glass wall erected between the audience and dancer, combined with diagonally placed mirrors that met at the back of the stage. In a darkened auditorium with a brightly lit stage, the invisible glass wall served as a mirror for the dancer, while projecting the dancer’s reflection onto the mirrors behind, causing the audience to perceive the dancer as a disembodied, kaleidoscopic series of images (Reynolds 159). The very mechanical and material aspects of Fuller’s dance performances generated the intangible and otherworldly qualities sought by the Symbolists—symbolic, natural images, constantly transforming, and punctuated by dark (silent) spaces. Through mirrors and glass, Fuller seemed to do away with the body while simultaneously replicating it into a visible pattern or rhythm.

Contemporary responses indicate that observers perceived Fuller’s dances in the Symbolist tradition. Roger Marx captures her manipulation of costume:

Here, center stage is the dancer, arms stretched out with her wands, swinging her ample sleeves into circles and vast, parallel figure Ss. Here she is now, lifting the fabric above her shoulders in erect pillars, coiling curls, twisted spirals, turning it into wild waters, rising swelling, and then sinking waves swirling furiously under the gusts of an unseen cyclone. While the rhythm accelerates, the cadence rushes and the charming creature disappears among the frames and halos of the surrounding spirals, faster the tones alternate and cross, tones of vermeil, and foliage, of azure and blood red; faster they disintegrate, mingle and marry; topaz to lapis, emerald to amethyst, ruby to sapphire, moonstone to aquamarine; the fabric dizzily bubbling, borrows all the iridescences and, as a rainbow, takes all the nuances of the decomposing prism. The vision is never as vivid and passionate as in its vanishing moment when it sinks into naught and turns into darkness.⁵⁴

Fuller not only projected symbols onto her costume, she transformed her dancing body into a symbol itself by manipulating wands with attached fabric, “turning it into wild waters” and Wilde’s jewels, evoking fluidity and its opposite. Marx represents Fuller’s “rhythm” and

movement. Colors and shapes form, unite, and “disintegrate,” so that the dancer is in a constant state of transition, shifting between symbol and symbolized.

Mallarmé proclaims Fuller, “*not a woman*, but a metaphor summarizing one of the elementary aspects of our form, sword, cup, flower, etc., and...*she does not dance*, suggesting, by the prodigy of shortcuts or energies, with a corporeal writing that would necessitate paragraphs of prose in dialogue as well as description to express, in editing: poem disengaged from all writing apparatus” (*Oeuvres complètes* 304). He illustrates Fuller’s bodily transformation into symbolizing object, and relates her performance to poetry itself, but poetry detached from language. In a sense, the Symbolist dancer is the ideal Symbolist poet—capable of producing a poem without words. Although here Mallarmé seems to dismiss the dancer herself (“*she is not a woman*”), later, like Lorraine, he perceives:

this multiple clearing around a nudity, great with the contradictory flights where the nudity orders it, stormy, gliding, magnifies it to the point of dissolving it: central, for everything obeys a fleeting impulse in whirlwinds, she resumes, by willing it at the extremities of each headlong wing and shoots her statuette, strict, upright—dead from the effort of condensing in a liberation almost from her of belated decorative bursts of skies, of sea, of evenings, of perfume and of foam. (*Oeuvres complètes* 309)

Mallarmé recognizes both the dancer’s body at the center of the storm of fabric and its agency:

“ordering” and “willing” the fabric and all it represents to “obey.” Even the physicality of Fuller’s performance comes through. Fuller, in Mallarmé’s description is certainly “not a woman;” nevertheless, the “strict, upright” “statuette,” “burst[ing]” forth “foam” “in “a liberation” that leaves her “dead from the effort” recalls a highly carnal, if masculine, act. Loie herself declared, “I make that lily by sheer force of will..... Le Lys du Nil is the hardest thing that I do.”⁵⁵

Though clearly Fuller manifests her symbols and their more ephemeral meanings through physical exertion, she preferred to give the impression that, conceptually, they originated

effortlessly. “I’ve studied and practiced incessantly, and yet my most popular work has come about by accident,” Fuller declares (62-64), and critics promoted this narrative: “It is with [Fuller] more a matter of inspiration than step.”⁵⁶ Fuller advances a sense of both inherent tendency and truth in her dance: “Music...ought to indicate a form of harmony or an idea with instinctive passion, and this instinct ought to incite the dancer to follow the harmony without special preparation. This is the true dance” (69). “True dance” emerges from the Symbolist “idea” as experienced in music, yet Fuller also conceives of dance as instinctual. Thus Mallarmé’s wordless, corporeal poetry approaches melodramatic gestural language; the ideal communicant is mute yet universally comprehensible because of its origin in instinct or nature and its appeal to truth. Fuller ponders, “Throughout we place no value on the movement that expresses the thought.... Who of us has not been pained by a movement of impatience, a lifting of the eyebrows, a shaking of the head, the sudden withdrawal of a hand? We are far from knowing that there is as much harmony in motion as in music and colour. We do not grasp the facts of motion” (67). Fuller suggests that people overlook the effectiveness of these common, recognizable gestures she associates with motion and therefore dance. In Book 7 of *The Laws*, Plato too traces inherently arising and universally understood gesture to dance:

The more composed the man’s temperament, and the tougher he has been trained to be, the more deliberate are his movements; on the other hand, if he’s a coward and has not been trained to show restraint, his actions are wilder and his postures change more violently. And in general, when a man uses his voice to talk or sing, he finds it very difficult to keep his body still. This is the origin of the whole art of dancing: the gestures that express what one is saying.⁵⁷

Movement reveals character, or gesture expresses self, which occasions dance. I am not arguing that dance is necessarily a language, or gesture universal, but rather that Symbolist poets and dancers saw Symbolist dance as an extension of a comprehensive, bodily communication, more expressive than words—a concept, originating in Enlightenment theories of language and

proliferating in melodrama. Moreover, whereas the Symbolist *poets* appealed to an exclusive audience, Fuller takes Symbolist *dance* to the popular stage, performing regularly at the *Folies Bergère*.

In a sense, Fuller subsumes the spectacular melodramatic stage with her body. In a theater laden with scenery, she discards all but “space. Dreaming is space, I need no décor, no set, no props, just space!”⁵⁸ She acts within the Symbolist’s subtextual realm of the Infinite —“dreaming is space” —but, despite foregoing decor, set, and props, does not leave this space blank. The French termed Fuller “la Créatrice,” for developing, not only colossal flowers, but also large-scale, nearly abstract naturescapes—storms and seas. Her body, and its enveloping fabric, filled this dream space. Fuller’s Lily costume alone utilized 500 yards of silk and could radiate ten feet from her body and be thrown up to the height of twenty feet (Banes 73). Fuller produced scenic spectacle on par with the melodramatic stage, yet she did so with her single body; her body *became* the set. Mallarmé depicts, “a transition of sounds to fabric...exaggeration, the withdrawing of skirt of wing, instituting a place. The enchantress creates the atmosphere, drawing it from and back into herself, in a silence throbbing with crepe” (*Oeuvres complètes* 309). Ethereal sound becomes material costume, in a transitioning reminiscent of the movement between symbol and Idea. The poet highlights “exaggeration,” a melodramatic trope, as he describes the progression from costume to natural symbol (“wing”). The dancer creates not only the more insubstantial “atmosphere,” but also earthly “place,” all within “a *silence*.”

* * *

In 1917 Filippo Tommaso Marinetti wrote in the “Manifesto of the Futurist Dance,” “We Futurists prefer Loie Fuller” because of her “utilization of electric light and mechanisms.”

Marinetti claimed that Fuller represented the “ideal multiplied body” of the futurist dance. He argued that dance must be emancipated from music, which he considered “basically nostalgic,” but not performed in silence, rather accompanied by noise, which Marinetti called the “language of the new human-mechanical life.”⁵⁹ Although the Futurists glorified Fuller’s use of technology, they also commended her body, “multiplied” through incessant motion—a concept Fuller adopted from Symbolism, and, in particular, Wilde’s Symbolist play, *Salome*. Whereas Maeterlinck and Wilde disrupted their performances with silence that reflected the quietly enveloping Infinite, while minimizing verbal language and incorporating gesture and dance as bodily communicants, the Futurists propose a wordless material “language,” exemplified by Fuller, but complemented by noise rather than silence. Perhaps Marinetti indicates the “future” of silence; in the evolution of body-based language, silence merges with noise in modern theater and performance.

¹ Stéphane Mallarmé, "Poetry as Incantation," *The Modern Tradition: Backgrounds of Modern Literature*, Eds. Richard Ellmann and Charles Feidelson, Jr. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965) 108-12: 110.

² Oscar Wilde, *Salome: A Tragedy in One Act* (New York: Dover Publications, 1967) 21-22.

³ For an in-depth examination of Symbolism see Frank Kermode, *The Romantic Image* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957) and Paul de Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality," *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983).

⁴ Arthur Symons, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1919) 2.

⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, Eds. Raymond Geuss and Ronald Speirs, Trans. Ronald Speirs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 30.

⁶ Catherine Taylor Johnson, "Symbolist Transformation: The Shift from Stage to Screen in France," (Diss. University of Georgia, 2000) 104.

⁷ Maurice Maeterlinck, "Menus propos: Le théâtre," *La jeune Belgique* (Sept. 1890) 334.

⁸ See Johnson pp. 2-4, 102-03, 105.

⁹ Review of Maeterlinck's *Pelléas et Mélisande* in the *Universal Monitor*, qtd. in Anna Balakian, *The Symbolist Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 1977) 137.

¹⁰ Maurice Maeterlinck, "Silence," *The Treasure of the Humble*, Trans. Alfred Sutro (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1900) 3-21: 4.

¹¹ Maurice Maeterlinck, *Le Trésor des humbles* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1896) 173.

¹² Maurice Maeterlinck, *The Intruder*, in *A Miracle of Saint Antony and Five Other Plays*, Trans. William Archer (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1917) 231-55: 233.

¹³ Maurice Maeterlinck, *Interior*, in *A Miracle of Saint Antony and Five Other Plays*, 203-25: 205, 207.

¹⁴ Graham W. Robertson, *Time Was: The Reminiscences of W. Graham Robertson* (London: Hamilton, 1931) 136.

¹⁵ See Katharine Worth "Evolution of European 'Drama of the Interior': Maeterlinck, Wilde and Yeats," *Maske und Kothurn* 25 (1979) 161-70: 165; and Anne Varty, *A Preface to Oscar Wilde* (London and New York: Longman, 1998) 137.

¹⁶ Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988) 354.

¹⁷ William Archer, Review of *Salome* in *Black and White* (11 March 1893) xiv.

¹⁸ Maurice Maeterlinck, "Small Talk—the Theatre (1890)," qtd. in Mary Fleischer, *Embodied Texts: Symbolist Playwright-Dancer Collaborations* (New York: Rodopi, 2007) 7.

¹⁹ Oscar Wilde, "Preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*," *Collins Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* (Centenary Edition. Glasgow: Harper Collins, 1999) 17.

²⁰ Oscar Wilde, qtd. in Noreen Doody, "An Influential Involvement: Wilde, Yeats and the French Symbolists," *Critical Ireland*, Eds. Alan Gillis and Aaron Kelly (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001) 48-55: 50.

²¹ Proofs of the first French edition are at the Clark Memorial Library; the second manuscript is at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas, Austin; and the Rosenbach Collection, Philadelphia hold the third. See Joseph Donohue, "Distance, death and desire in *Salome*," *The Cambridge Companion to Oscar Wilde*, Ed. Peter Raby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 118-42: 121-22.

²² See Varty 131.

- ²³ William Tydeman and Steven Price, *Wilde / Salome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 25-26, 40-41.
- ²⁴ See Doody 50.
- ²⁵ Silvia Bigliuzzi, "Collaborating Media and Symbolic Fractures in Wilde's *Salomé*," *Collaboration in the Arts from the Middle Ages to the Present*, Eds. Silvia Bigliuzzi and Sharon Wood (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006) 79-90: 79.
- ²⁶ Stéphane Mallarmé qtd. in Ellmann 375.
- ²⁷ J.-K. Huysmans, *Against Nature*, Trans. Robert Baldick (London: Penguin, 1959) 66.
- ²⁸ Oscar Wilde qtd. by Gomez Carrillo, "How Oscar Wilde Dreamed of Salome," in E. H. Mikhail, *Oscar Wilde: Interviews and Recollections*, Vol. 1 (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1979) 192.
- ²⁹ Oscar Wilde qtd. in Donohue 136.
- ³⁰ Heidi Hartwig, "Dancing for an Oath: *Salome*'s Revaluation of Word and Gesture," *Modern Drama* 45.1 (Spring 2002) 23-34: 26
- ³¹ See Tydeman 45-51.
- ³² Charles Ricketts, "On the Art of Stage Decoration," *Pages on Art* (London, 1913) 243-44.
- ³³ Margery Ross, *Robert Ross: Friend of Friends* (London, 1952) 127.
- ³⁴ Michael Field, *Works and Days: Extracts from the Journal of Michael Field*, Eds. T. and D. C. Sturge Moore (London, 1933) 250.
- ³⁵ Oscar Wilde, qtd. by Gomez Carrillo, "How Oscar Wilde Dreamed of Salome", in E. H. Mikhail, *Oscar Wilde: Interviews and Recollections*, Vol. 1 (The Macmillan Press Ltd, London, 1979) 193.
- ³⁶ David Wayne Thomas, "The 'Strange Music' of *Salome*: Oscar Wilde's Rhetoric of Verbal Musicality," *Mosaic* 33.1 (March 2000) 20, 21.
- ³⁷ Arthur Symons, *Plays, Acting, and Music* (New York: Dutton, n.d.) 28, 32.
- ³⁸ Oscar Wilde, Letter to Lord Alfred Douglas [? 2 June 1897], *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, Eds Merlin Holland and Rupert Hart-Davis (New York: Henry Holt, 2000) 874.
- ³⁹ Lord Alfred Douglas, Review of *Salome*, *The Spirit Lamp* 4 (1893) 21-27.
- ⁴⁰ George R. Marek, *Richard Strauss: The Life of a Non-Hero* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967) 156.
- ⁴¹ For further complaints see Austin E. Quigley, "Realism and Symbolism in Oscar Wilde's *Salome*," *Modern Drama*. 37.1 (Spring 1994) 104-19: 113-14; and Varty 143.
- ⁴² See Rodney Shewan, "The Artist and the Dancer in Three Symbolist Salomes," *The Bucknell Review* 30.1 (1986) 102-30: 124. *The Complete Letters* 578.
- ⁴³ Oscar Wilde, qtd. in Tydeman 19-20.
- ⁴⁴ Retté, qtd. in Mikhail 190-91.
- ⁴⁵ Rhonda K. Garelick, *Electric Salome: Loie Fuller's Performance of Modernism* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007) 127. Tydeman 136-37.
- ⁴⁶ See Richard Nelson and Marcia Ewing Current, *Loie Fuller: Goddess of Light* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1997) 80; and Garelick 93.
- ⁴⁷ "Miss Fuller's New Dance," *New York Times* (24 Jan. 1896).
- ⁴⁸ Ann Cooper Albright, *Traces of Light: Absence and Presence in the Work of Loie Fuller* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2007) 135-38.
- ⁴⁹ Clarétie, qtd. in Loie Fuller, *Fifteen Years of a Dancer's Life* (Boston: Small, Maynard & Co., 1913) 287-88.

- ⁵⁰ Jean Lorraine, qtd. in Sally Banes, *Dancing Women: Female bodies on stage* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998) 72.
- ⁵¹ Jean Lorraine, qtd. in Dee Reynolds, "The dancer as woman: Loie Fuller and Stéphane Mallarmé," *Impressions of French Modernity: Art and literature in France 1850-1900*, Ed. Richard Hobbs (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1998) 155-72: 161.
- ⁵² Stéphane Mallarmé, "Crayonné au théâtre," *Oeuvres complètes*, Ed. Henri Mondor and G. Jean-Aubry (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1945) 541.
- ⁵³ Arthur Symons, *Studies in Seven Arts* (London: Martin Secker, 1906) 246.
- ⁵⁴ Roger Marx, "Loie Fuller," *Les arts et la vie* (Jan.-June 1905) 270.
- ⁵⁵ Review of "Lys du Nil," *New York Blade* (11 Apr. 1896).
- ⁵⁶ The London *Figaro* (17 Mar. 1895).
- ⁵⁷ Plato, Book 7, *The Laws*, Trans. Trevor J. Saunders (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976) 308.
- ⁵⁸ Loie Fuller: "Fait de beaux rêves"; clipping, Ro 12118, Rondel Collection, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal.
- ⁵⁹ F. T. Marinetti, *Marinetti: Selected Writings*, Ed. R. W. Flint, Trans. R. W. Flint and Arthur Coppotelli (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1971) 138.

CHAPTER FOUR

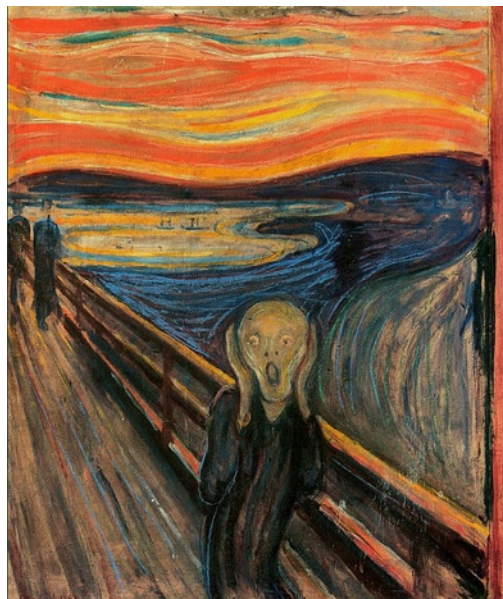
Expressionism's "background for silence"

"There is always the monotone of surf on the bar—a background for silence," remarks Eugene O'Neill.¹ In the early summer of 1919, O'Neill moved into a converted Coast Guard station overlooking Peaked Hill Bar off Provincetown, Cape Cod, and began work on his play, *The Emperor Jones* (1920). He identifies this space as inspirational for his play, specifically its silence, a concept he had already considered in his note for the unwritten one act play, "Silence," in which a man "buys house in country to get quiet—far away from everything—wears felt slippers, etc."² When considering *The Emperor Jones*, what is more interesting than the Coast Guard station's silence, or the playwright's not uncommon preference for silence, is what O'Neill calls the "*background* for silence," "the *monotone* of surf on the bar."³ O'Neill's play, written during his stay on Cape Cod, overtly stages monotonous sound as background for silence: the "steady thump of a tom-tom" which continues "uninterruptedly to the very end of the play"⁴ being the most obvious, but also the Emperor's unabating monologues. And in a stage direction that seems equally descriptive of the "surf on the bar," O'Neill writes: "A somber *monotone* of wind lost in the leaves moans in the air. Yet this sound serves but to intensify the impression of the forest's relentless immobility, to form a *background* throwing into relief its brooding, implacable *silence*."⁵ O'Neill seeks to capture his Cape Cod experience of monotonous sound accentuating silence in his Expressionist play.

In analyzing the possibility of staging simultaneous sound and silence on the Expressionist stage, particularly through the lens of O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones*, this chapter

considers Expressionist theater, through Symbolism, as an extension of melodrama's muteness. Expressionism's silence is twofold and embodied. In its most basic definition, Expressionism is the external expression of the internal. On the stage this includes *mise-en-scène* expressive of the characters' internal thoughts and emotions.⁶ Despite constant sound—the tom-tom, monologues, and wind in *The Emperor Jones*, and similar noises in O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape* (1921), Elmer Rice's *The Adding Machine* (1923), and German Expressionist, Georg Kaiser's *Von morgens bis mitternachts* (*From Morn to Midnight*) (1912)—the Expressionist stage conveys silence to its audience through setting and what Egil Törnqvist terms “audible thinking.”⁷ O'Neill, Rice, and Kaiser's character monologues are internal thought processes, or the *silent* voices in “our” heads. And these (usually) unexpressed words join with (typically) inexpressible emotions embodied and conveyed in the stage's physical setting: “the forest's relentless immobility...its brooding, implacable silence.” Silent thoughts are audible, and silent *mise-en-scène* coupled with monotonous sound comprises “a background for silence.”

From melodrama to Symbolism to Expressionism



Perhaps the most iconic image of Expressionism is Edvard Munch's *Skrik*, or *The Scream* (1893-1910), which Strindberg describes as, "A scream of dread at Nature, which, flushed with rage, is about to speak through storm and thunder to those foolish, puny beings who imagine themselves to be gods without resembling gods."⁸ Strindberg's poetic account of Munch's paradigmatic Expressionist painting references simultaneous sound and silence, suggesting that Expressionism contains this seemingly conflicting duality within its definition: while the humanoid figure "screams," Nature is "*about* to speak"—silent, yet visibly manifesting its emotions and words. If Expressionism is the internal made external, then what is silent (the internal) is expressed through silent means: the physical and visible—here, Nature. Munch's painting exemplifies this definition itself; the figure makes no sound, yet we understand it as screaming through its frozen expression and gesture.

In a less dramatic definition, but with specific reference to Expressionist drama, Rice writes, "The author attempts not so much to depict events faithfully as to convey to the spectator what seems to him to be their inner significance. To achieve this end the dramatist often finds it expedient to depart entirely from objective reality and to employ symbols, condensations and a dozen devices."⁹ Rice notes Expressionism's intent to convey the internal, or "inner significance," through the external, specifically referencing "symbols" and "condensations," for example, the condensing of language. And a more modern description of Expressionist theater, by Mardi Valgema, expands upon Rice's aforementioned "devices:" "The expressionist playwrights' search for the essential or inner reality was made accessible through distortion, by which objects were no longer viewed photographically, but symbolically; through sound effects and music; and through lyric dialogue that was frequently stripped of all but the essential words."¹⁰ Valgema considers the influence of German Expressionists like Kaiser on O'Neill,

but his definition recalls two dramatic forms previously addressed in this dissertation:

Symbolism's symbols and "lyric dialogue," melodrama's "sound effects and music," and both genres' restriction of language to "the essential words" in favor of *mise-en-scène*.

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Expressionism, in a sense, plays with a Symbolist equation, making sound the background (noise) to (embodied) silence. Silence, Maeterlinck maintained, is the crucial subtext in Symbolism: "souls...are weighed in silence." In his play, *The Intruder*, the audience understands a physically absent presence audibly; the patterned start and cessation of sound indicates death. Or recall Mallarmé's request that the Symbolist poet "fill the delicate pages of his book with...the forest's shuddering or the silent scattering of thunder through the foliage." Already, in Symbolism, the audience should experience sound—"thunder"—as "silent," and do so specifically through material or scenic means, significantly, the *forest's* foliage. O'Neill, the Expressionist playwright, uses almost precisely the same imagery as the Symbolist poet to physically demonstrate silence, rustling leaves: "A somber monotone of wind lost in the leaves moans in the air. Yet this sound serves but to intensify the impression of the forest's relentless immobility, to form a *background* throwing into relief its brooding, implacable *silence*." Symbolism embeds silence within objects in such a way that sound and silence can be omnipresent—on the stage, in Maeterlinck's *Interior*, the noiseless gesture of head raising indicates (an unheard) sound, a knock—and Expressionist theater pushes the boundaries of this possibility.

The only two critical texts to link melodrama and Expressionism are Richard Murphy's "The Poetics of Hysteria: Expressionist Drama and the Melodramatic Imagination" and Julia Walker's *Expressionism and Modernism in the American Theatre*. Murphy also references the

“scream” or “schreien,” which he designates Expressionism’s “poetics of hysteria,” arguing that Expressionism and melodrama create “a language of excess with which [they] can begin to speak of the unspeakable.”¹¹ In his analysis of melodrama, Murphy reiterates Brooks’ argument in *The Melodramatic Imagination* that melodrama uses a “seemingly unrestrained mode of communication” to represent “the unarticulated or marginalized side of experience...an unspeakable realm...a moral universe which exists—like desire or the Unconscious within the individual” after the loss of the sacred in modernity (156-57). Expressionism too uses a language of excess—“its bombast, its unashamed opening of the soul, its ‘sentimental’ claims to privileged insight into a transcendent beyond”—not to communicate “a moral universe” located within the individual, like melodrama, but rather desire or the unconscious, which also reside “in the realm of the unspeakable” (Murphy 156). Murphy associates melodrama and Expressionism through their use of excessive communication in order to convey internal and thus silent or “unspeakable” spaces. His claim draws attention to the seeming contradiction of sound and silence on the melodramatic and Expressionist stages.

Walker locates the origins of American theatrical modernism in Expressionism, arguing that Expressionism stages the separation of body, voice, and words caused by new communication technologies that displaced “the human artist from the act of meaning making.”¹² She asserts that the melodramatic actor had “interpretive authority” through “the ‘point,’ an acting technique whereby actors used their bodies to realize their interpretations of a playwright’s text” (Walker 8). Melodramatic “points” rendered “silence...a form of signification in and of itself—not only as a meaningful pause between words and phrases but as a moment for highlighting the physicalized meanings of the actor’s body” (Walker 22). Walker references contemporary examples like *The Autobiography of Joseph Jefferson* (1889) and Henry Irving’s

“The Art of Acting” (1893) to show how, with the rise of scenic realism and innovations in stage machinery and lighting technology, “actors began to create their characterizations out of new relationships to props” (35). “Where, early in the century, the actor was the primary interpreter of the dramatic text, by the end, he or she was simply one of many signs within the text of the *mise-en-scène*” (Walker 53). Walker identifies the significance of silence and actors’ bodies to the melodramatic stage, and traces the connection between those bodies and stage properties, arguing that the later equivalency of bodies and *mise-en-scène* demonstrates a loss of actor authority that denotes theatrical modernism. However, melodrama’s points had some level of established meaning that made them “universally” comprehensible, as my analysis of eighteenth and nineteenth-century acting guides in chapter one suggests; thus, what seems more noteworthy than a transition of textual interpretation from actor to playwright or producer-director is the retainment of silence and the relationship between actors’ bodies and scenery on the Expressionist stage.

Uniting Murphy and Walker’s explorations of the relationship between melodrama and Expressionism, this dissertation argues that melodrama, Symbolism, and Expressionism all employ alternate forms of communication, or what Murphy terms “languages of excess,” in order to present the unspoken or “unspeakable.” Melodrama’s emphatic speech, Symbolism’s rhythmic, incantatory words, and Expressionism’s sounds or noise all seek to convey silence, and they do so coupled with material communicants: melodrama’s gesturing bodies, Symbolism’s object-approaching language and dance, and Expressionism’s stage settings.

O’Neill’s influences & Kaiser’s *From Morn to Midnight*

“I take it that the essence of melodrama is to accept emotions uncritically; which, in the writing, amounts to assuming or suggesting emotions that are never realized either in language or action. Melodrama in this sense is a constant in Mr. O’Neill’s work.”¹³ Contemporary critics of O’Neill accused him of melodrama.¹⁴ Even Fergusson’s reductive description of melodrama unintentionally captures the similarities between the nineteenth-century genre and O’Neill’s Expressionist pieces; both present “emotions that are never realized...in language.” O’Neill’s father himself was an actor on the melodramatic stage, and O’Neill’s reminiscence of him, though as derisive of melodrama as other critics from the 1930s, indicates he witnessed and absorbed this form of theater: “I can still see him in that play [*The Count of Monte Cristo*] with outstretched arms, rising from a canvas sea shouting, ‘The world is mine.’ It was a time when artificiality was as prevalent on the stage as it was in everyday life. The simplest lines had to be declaimed.”¹⁵ O’Neill specifically recalls the melodramatic actor’s gestures and exaggerated language. Clearly melodramatic technique influenced O’Neill and is present in Expressionism. This chapter on Expressionism focuses on O’Neill, in particular *The Emperor Jones*, but also *The Hairy Ape*, and, tracing his influences, both within melodrama and within Expressionism, demonstrates how embodied silence carries through from melodrama to Symbolism to Expressionism.

O’Neill himself lists the Symbolists, Ibsen, and Strindberg as influential to his dramatic writing: “I was undoubtedly greatly influenced indirectly through Strindberg.... I was also in my formative years an enthusiastic admirer of the French symbolists.”¹⁶ When O’Neill proclaims his “feeling for the impelling, inscrutable forces behind life which it is my ambition to at least faintly shadow at their work in my plays,”¹⁷ he recalls the Symbolists’ ambition to use symbols and silence to point beyond the immediate world. And when critics note O’Neill’s replication of

“Strindberg’s use of rhythm and of musical effects...especially...his practice of arranging the dialogue for emotional effect by picking up phrases and repeating them as in a musical composition,”¹⁸ they could equally be referencing the Symbolists’ use of rhythm, repetition, and musical composition in their dramatic works. When O’Neill describes his vision of modern theater, he points to Ibsen, Strindberg, and in particular, Strindberg’s symbolist plays. He declares Strindberg “the precursor of all modernity in our present theatre, just as Ibsen...was the father of the modernity of twenty or so years ago,”¹⁹ and recalls “the impact...when I saw an Ibsen play for the first time [in 1907], a production of *Hedda Gabler* at the old Bijou Theatre in New York—and then went again and again for ten successive nights. That experience discovered an entire new world of the drama for me. It gave me my first conception of a modern theatre where truth might live.”²⁰ Ibsen and Strindberg shaped O’Neill’s conception of dramatic modernism, but Strindberg’s symbolist plays specifically influenced O’Neill’s Expressionist pieces. He directed Strindberg’s *Ghost Sonata* in 1924, shortly after writing *The Emperor Jones* and *The Hairy Ape*, and declares in the playbill for his production: “All that is enduring in what we loosely call ‘Expressionism’—all that is artistically valid and sound theater—can be clearly traced back...to Strindberg’s ‘The Dream Play’ [and] ‘The Spook Sonata’.”²¹

* * *

While O’Neill claimed the Symbolists, Ibsen, and Strindberg as his primary inspirations, and denied the influence of German Expressionism and, in particular, Georg Kaiser’s *From Morn to Midnight*, critics note the similarities between German Expressionism and the later American Expressionism, and specifically compare Kaiser’s play to O’Neill’s *The Emperor Jones*. O’Neill declares: “The first Expressionistic play that I ever saw...was Kaiser’s *From Morn to Midnight*...after I’d written both *The Emperor Jones* and *The Hairy Ape*. I had read *From Morn*

to Midnight before *The Hairy Ape* was written, but not before the idea for it was planned.... As a matter of fact, I did not think much of *Morn to Midnight*.... It would not have influenced me.”²² Elmer Rice supports O’Neill’s refutation: “I do think there is no foundation for the belief that the Americans—Lawson, O’Neill, Treadwell...—were imitating German forms. If O’Neill had any influence at all it was Strindberg.”²³ Nevertheless, the possibility exists that O’Neill was aware of, and indirectly absorbed, *From Morn to Midnight* into his work. Ashley Dukes translated Kaiser’s play for the Incorporated Stage Society of London, where it was first performed in March, 1920. Reviews of the performance, as well as a Berlin production by Max Reinhardt (1919) appeared in the *London Times*, and Dukes’ translation was published in the autumn issue of the Boston magazine *Poet Lore*. Thus when O’Neill began writing *The Emperor Jones* in the fall of 1920, while he may not have seen or read *From Morn to Midnight*, he would presumably have been aware of its prominence on the German stage and its rising influence across England and America.²⁴ Despite O’Neill’s resolute denial, critics continue to trace the likeness between *From Morn to Midnight* and *The Emperor Jones*, including dialogue, stage directions, the incorporation of distorted visions and masked figures, and a serial scene structure, held together by the wanderings, and experienced through the mind, of the protagonist.²⁵ The one definite area of overlap between German and American Expressionism is in scenic design. For example, Robert Edmond Jones worked under Max Reinhardt in Germany before designing the sets for O’Neill’s Expressionist plays.²⁶

I would argue for the (at least indirect) influence of German Expressionism on its American counterpart—and, more specifically, the influence of Kaiser’s *From Morn to Midnight* on O’Neill’s *The Emperor Jones*—through the relationship between sets and dialogue in Expressionism. *From Morn to Midnight* presents silence, embodied forms of communication,

and what I would call “scenic” language. As Ernst Schürer notes, “in contrast to the factual language of most of the figures,” the play’s protagonist, the Cashier, “uses metaphors and imagery in his monologues. His speech is highly symbolic.”²⁷ The silence in Kaiser’s play is supplemented with symbolic, visually-based images reproduced in the play’s scenery, which tacitly express meaning in the absence of language. Whatever O’Neill may have known or thought of German Expressionism and *From Morn to Midnight*, by using set designers trained in German Expressionist theater, O’Neill introduced and developed Kaiser’s form of embodied, silent communication that often occurs in the presence of sound.

“Something akin to divine assurance was restored to our theater when *From Morn To Midnight* was produced by the Theatre Guild.... One cannot question the profound conviction that the play is a way of revelation for the cluttered and floundering theater of our time.... Nothing is done, nothing is spoken, except the essential.”²⁸ *From Morn to Midnight* was first staged in the United States by the Theater Guild in the summer of 1922. The reviewer from *The Dial* remarks upon its sparsity, including the play’s limited use of speech. In Kaiser’s play, the protagonist, a Cashier at a bank, steals a large sum of money from his employers in a misguided effort to run away with an Italian Lady customer. When she rejects his offer, he continues on a journey of self-revelation: visiting his family, attempting to spend the money on prostitutes and horse races, and giving it away to the Salvation Army where he commits suicide when faced with arrest for his theft. *From Morn to Midnight* stages the failure of everyday language, and its protagonist communicates primarily through limited words and gestures, underscoring the significance of silence in the play. However, despite Kaiser’s emphasis on silence, restrained speech, and the inadequacies of words, sound permeates the play, as it does in O’Neill’s *The Emperor Jones*, which makes similar use of noise and rambling monologues. The relationship

between the Cashier's monologues and *From Morn to Midnight*'s scenery suggests how, in a sound-filled play, it can still appear that "nothing is spoken."

In scenes like scene four, where the Cashier returns to his family and concludes that they cannot satisfy his self-seeking, Kaiser explores the collapse of conventional language. The Cashier's Wife comments, "It's not twelve o'clock yet." To which the First Daughter responds, "Not nearly twelve, Mamma," and her mother revises and reiterates, "No, not nearly twelve."²⁹ The words are banal and parroted between characters. The original statement is unnecessary, and in its successive repetition and needless revision, Kaiser critiques the clamor of commonplace "small talk." When the Cashier enters the scene and describes his previous whereabouts, "In deep dungeons....! In bottomless pits beneath monstrous towers; deafened by clanking chains, blinded by darkness," his Wife replies, "The bank must be closed today. The manager's been drinking with you. Has there been a happy event in his family?" (Kaiser 66). The Cashier's language is highly symbolic, and indicative of his inner turmoil more than his literal location, yet interestingly, he links his emotions with particular settings, thus representing an otherwise silent state through scenery. "Deafened by clanking chains" captures the simultaneity of sound and silence in *From Morn to Midnight* (and later on in O'Neill's Expressionist works) where noise ("clanking") signals silence (deafness). The Wife's response constrains and conflicts with the Cashier's symbolic and scenic expression of feeling, suggesting the incompatibility of standard speech with self-expression.

The Cashier, when not using scenic language—language that is practically embodied through its representation of material settings—communicates primarily through single words and gestures, foregrounding silence and physicality. He spends nearly the entire first scene of the play utterly silent, in terms of speech, yet still communicating. The scene opens with "*The*

Cashier rap[ping] on the counter. The Messenger Boy turns, hands in a check. The Cashier examines it, writes, takes a handful of silver from a drawer, counts it, pushes a small pile across the counter. The Messenger Boy sweeps the money into a linen bag.” When the Lady approaches the Cashier’s counter she “*(Opens her handbag, takes out a letter and hands it to Cashier. A letter of credit.)* Three thousand, please. *(The Cashier takes the envelope, turns it over, hands it back.)* LADY: I beg your pardon. *(She pulls out the folded letter and offers it again. The Cashier turns it over, hands it back.)* LADY: *(Unfolds the letter, handing it to him.)*” (Kaiser 51). The Cashier communicates with sound solely by rapping on the counter, otherwise he uses a series of gestures that are dance-like in their fluidity and repetition.

Ultimately these sounds and gestures are more demonstrative of the scene’s repressed feelings and actions than extensive dialogue, as are the Cashier’s only words at the scene’s conclusion, “Fetch me—glass—water,” which initiate his theft of the money (Kaiser 56). Kaiser omits all but the essential three nouns and a verb from the Cashier’s first vocalization, but this limited speech is enough to spark the chain of events that comprise the play’s dramatic action.

Despite Kaiser’s dramatization of the insufficiency of everyday language to communicate internal states, and the Cashier’s initial silence and brevity of speech, *From Morn to Midnight* is full of sound, including the Cashier’s sprawling monologues. Apart from the Cashier’s persistent rapping, the Salvation Army scene contains trumpets and drums, and both the Salvation Army and racetrack scenes include crowds of inarticulate and anonymous voices. Nevertheless, Kaiser conveys the sense of silence recognized by *The Dial*’s reviewer, despite his nearly continuous sound effects, by establishing a dialogue between the Cashier’s scenic language (his symbolic, visually-based images reproduced in the play’s scenery: “bottomless pits between monstrous towers”) and the scenery’s mute response. When the Cashier confronts the life-altering

magnitude of his theft, he exclaims, “The earth is in labor—spring storms are threatening. It comes to pass, it comes to pass! I knew my cry would not be in vain. The call was pressing.

Chaos is affronted, and shudders at this morning’s monstrous deed.” Nature responds:

“Snowflakes, shaken from the branches, stick in the tree-top and form a skeleton with grinning

jaws,” causing the Cashier to ponder, “Are you the staggering answer to my emphatic question?

[...] It’s impossible that you should be the first. The last you may be; but even then, only the last resort.... Ring me up again toward midnight” (Kaiser 64). The Cashier describes a scene similar to Strindberg’s interpretation of Munch’s *The Scream*, where nature “is about to speak through storm and thunder.” Here “spring storms are threatening,” but have yet to “speak.” The scenery is both literally silent and suspended in this pre-language state. Rather, the landscape responds to the Cashier’s actions and mental state by symbolically reflecting his theft and offering a possible solution to his questions in a snowflake-formed skeleton that foretells the play’s conclusion. The scenery wordlessly suggests the unvoiced mental state of the Cashier.

In the final scene, the skeleton reappears in a tangle of wires illuminated by a single light, and the Cashier questions this set piece: “From morning to midnight I run raging in a circle—and now your beckoning arm shows me the way—whither?” The Cashier reacts to the image’s mute response with sound and silence. He “*blows a fanfare toward the lamp*” on a trumpet, which “*dies on his lips*” when he shoots himself, and the play concludes with “*his husky gasp...like an Ecce, his heavy sigh...like a Homo,*” and “*one second later all the lamps explode with a loud report*” (Kaiser 86). The trumpeting and explosion contrast with the silence of the symbolic, skeletal set-piece’s answer to the Cashier’s final question and the Cashier’s wordless yet communicative gasp and sigh. Georg Kaiser’s *From Morn to Midnight* demonstrates the

Expressionist technique of staging silence within noise through the use of scenery, which O'Neill later develops in his Expressionist plays.

Sound & silence in *The Emperor Jones*

Like Kaiser in *From Morn to Midnight*, Eugene O'Neill expressed dissatisfaction with standard language, preferring instead silence and sound, demonstrated, in a sense, in a technique Egil Törnqvist terms "audible thinking," which verbalizes unspoken mental states and is present in *The Emperor Jones*. In letters to his contemporaries, O'Neill bemoaned the state of modern language, particularly on the stage. "I don't think, from the evidence of all that is being written today, that great language is possible for anyone living in the discordant, broken, faithless rhythm of our time," complains O'Neill to Arthur Hobson Quinn. "The best one can do is to be pathetically eloquent by one's moving, dramatic inarticulations!"³⁰ And in a letter to Joseph Wood Krutch, O'Neill expounds, "Oh for a language to write drama in! For a speech that is dramatic and not just conversation. I'm so strait-jacketed by writing in terms of talk.... But where to find that language?"³¹ O'Neill distinguishes between dramatic speech and conversation or talk, but if we follow his previously addressed critique of the melodramatic stage, he does not mean simply exclamatory deliverance. I would argue that O'Neill found his dramatic language in the pairing of silence, sound, and materiality on the Expressionist stage.

O'Neill considered sound perhaps the most significant contribution of modern drama to the development of theater. In a letter to Theresa Helburn, he explains, "The trouble is we always let sounds go until the last minute and then throw them on.... And thereby we throw overboard what could be one of the most original and significant dramatic values modernity has

to contribute to the theatre. Believe me, I know, because I've always called for significant sounds in my plays...."³² He acknowledged himself:

a bug on the subject of sound in the theatre—but I have reason. [Robert Edmond Jones] once said that the difference between my plays and other contemporary work was that I always wrote primarily by ear for the ear, that most of my plays, even down to the rhythm of the dialogue, had the definite structural quality of musical composition. This hits the nail on the head.... But the point here is that I have always used sound in plays as a structural part of them. Tried to use, I mean—for I've never got what the script called for (even in *Jones*), not because what I specified couldn't be done but because I was never able to overcome the slipshod, old-fashioned disregard of our modern theatre for what ought to be one of its superior opportunities (contrasted with the medium of the novel, for example), in expressing the essential rhythm of our lives today.³³

O'Neill's musical and rhythmic construction of his scripts further demonstrates the Symbolists' influence on his work, but more importantly O'Neill recognizes the *structural* function of sound in his plays. Sound, in this sense, is a continuous subtext to the performance, even during moments of acknowledged silence on stage.

O'Neill's use of what Törnqvist terms "audible thinking"—where the audience *hears* the characters' (traditionally silent) thoughts—functions similarly to his structural use of sound. While audible thinking is most prominent in O'Neill's *Strange Interlude* (1926), Törnqvist traces it back to *The Emperor Jones* where Brutus Jones' extreme mental and physical circumstances push him to think aloud. In his "Work Diary," O'Neill describes this technique: "the thinking aloud being more important than the actual talking—speech breaking through thought as a random process of concealment, speech inconsequential or imperfectly expressing the thought behind—all done with the most drastic logic and economy and simplicity of words." He even considers, "Carrying the method to an extreme—one sees [the characters'] lips move as they talk to one another but there is no sound—only their thinking is aloud."³⁴ O'Neill differentiates between typically silent thoughts and speech. He initially stages this distinction by limiting language, but his proposed experiment indicates his belief in the possibility of dual

soundlessness and vocalization on stage. The characters' bodies—their moving lips—suggest silence even while their thought process streams aloud. In his one-act, *Hughie*, the Night Clerk's thoughts are printed as part of the stage directions, underscoring thinking's tenuous position between heard speech and contained silence. O'Neill, in *The Emperor Jones*, incorporates both sound as structural component—the tom-tom—and spoken/unspoken audible thinking—Jones' monologues—while simultaneously staging the forest's oppressive silence.

* * *

Unable to “put flowers in his language,” O'Neill “had to put some real ones on the stage,” complains one reviewer.³⁵ While this critic and others suggest that O'Neill's theatrical talent merely compensates for his deficiencies in language, his words perfectly capture my argument that O'Neill deliberately limited dialogue and substituted material items like props and scenery as expressive language-equivalents that maintained silence on the stage. By focusing on the material, visually (in contrast to aurally) perceived aspects of theater, O'Neill could introduce continuous sound while still suggesting soundlessness in his Expressionist pieces. *The Emperor Jones* exemplifies this technique. In it, Brutus Jones, an African-American man, establishes himself as emperor on an island in the West Indies. When the subjugated natives attempt to overthrow him, he escapes into the jungle and experiences a series of flashbacks recounting his past, both personal—for he is a murderer and an escaped convict—and historical—for he expresses a race-based collective consciousness of slavery.

O'Neill establishes the significance of silence on his stage by beginning his play, much like Kaiser's *From Morn to Midnight*, with pantomime. “A Native negro woman” enters and “begins to glide noiselessly...toward the doorway in the rear.” Smithers, a Cockney trader and Jones' second in command, “steps quickly on tiptoe into the room” and “grabs her firmly by the

shoulder. She struggles to get away, fiercely but silently" (*Emperor Jones* 5-6). Initially O'Neill demonstrates a more traditional form of mute theater, with pantomimic gestures for an established reason—the native woman is attempting to sneak away from the Emperor's palace—and no omnipresent sound. As Smithers remarks, "The tom-tom'll be thumping out there bloomin' soon," but at the present moment, silence is simply silent (*Emperor Jones* 7). O'Neill also includes a variety of mute figures—the Little Formless Fears, Jeff, the Negro Convicts, the Prison Guard, the Planters, the Auctioneer, the Slaves, the Congo Witch-Doctor, and the Crocodile God—whose measured movements recall their melodramatic counterparts. The Little Formless Fears "*move noiselessly, but with deliberate, painful effort.... They squirm toward [Jones] in twisted attitudes,*" and Jeff moves "*with the regular, rigid, mechanical movements of an automaton*" (*Emperor Jones* 23, 25). While the mute figures' motions suggest the modern mechanized era, they also point backwards to the "attitudes" performed by their theatrical predecessors. One critic specifically experiences O'Neill's use of pantomime and silence in melodramatic terms, arguing: "The collapse of language creates rather than destroys meaning." The mute figures all appear in Jones' "flashback" visions of personal and cultural past, and Bigsby associates this "dispensing with language" with "a move towards truth," "a theatrical assertion of the primacy of non-verbal communication. At the level of language lies are possible; at the level of instinctual behaviour, of gesture, and of unconscious impulse there is an available truth."³⁶ In Bigsby's account, O'Neill's Expressionism reiterates the mistrust of language present in both melodrama and Symbolism, and silence coupled with gesture communicates truth at once theatrically and "naturally" by deriving from instinct and the unconscious, and thus recalling melodrama's theory of a universal language.

The “incessant beating...continues even during the brief intermissions.”³⁷ “Bang! Bang! Bang! goes the drum...for a steady hour and a half, through eight scenes and seven intermissions, until the brain throbs to its monotonous beat and the world of reality is forgotten.”³⁸ “The savage tom-tom...thuds thruout the scenes and in the intermissions.”³⁹ Despite O’Neill’s emphasis on silence and economy of language, his script calls for incessant, steady, monotonous sound throughout the play and, in the original productions, even breaking the fourth wall into intermissions. Yet the stage directions continue to insist on the scenes’ silence even in the presence of this persistent noise. When Jones fires his gun at the Formless Fears, “*There is a flash, a loud report, then silence broken only by the far-off, quickened throb of the tom-tom,*” and when he encounters Jeff, “*Except for the beating of the tom-tom, which is a trifle louder and quicker than at the close of the previous scene, there is silence, broken every few seconds by a queer, clicking sound*” (*Emperor Jones* 24, 25). Somehow the audience is expected to recognize silence despite the beating, bangs, and thuds of the tom-tom joined by other incidental sounds like the click of Jeff’s dice. And critical response suggests this seemingly contradictory acceptance. Törnqvist describes *The Emperor Jones*’ “‘brooding, implacable silence’, the fateful ‘sound’ of the Great Forest, broken only by (apart from the pervasive drum) the moaning of the wind and the ‘mocking laughter like a rustling of leaves’ of the Little Formless Fears” (*A Drama of Souls* 157). Törnqvist fails to find remarkable both the repeated exceptions to the play’s silence and, more importantly, the fact that the Great Forest’s “brooding, implacable silence” includes a “pervasive drum” beat! Rather, for Törnqvist, and presumably the play’s audience, the drum has come to be a component of silence, or we can recognize silence despite the drum. I saw the Irish Repertory Theatre’s production of *The Emperor Jones* (2010), and questioned a friend who saw a different performance, and neither of us can recall whether the tom-tom beat

continuously throughout the play, indicating that, if the company accurately followed O'Neill's stage directions, then they also succeeded in turning the drum beat into the sort of "background for silence" O'Neill experienced on Cape Cod.

The drum suggests a heartbeat shared by Jones and the audience members. It "*starts at a rate exactly corresponding to normal pulse beat,*" accelerating after each shot from Jones' revolver when presumably the audience would be startled too, and ceases when Jones dies and the play's dramatic action concludes (*Emperor Jones* 17). If we are meant to experience the tom-tom as Jones' heartbeat, then the Great Forest—another aspect of the play's *mise-en-scène*—similarly represents his mind. Jones' monologues, his "audible thinking," begin when he enters the forest, which illuminates his past and a racial collective conscious. I would argue that understanding the theatrical space as Jones' body—the tom-tom as heart and the forest as mind—is, in part, how we, the audience, can recognize silence in the presence of sound. Jones' monologues and visions take place within the Great Forest, his mind; thus, we "overhear" his unspoken thoughts.

O'Neill seeks to convey the forest's silence in a way that initially seems impossible for the audience to comprehend: "*A somber monotone of wind lost in the leaves moans in the air. Yet this sound serves but to intensify the impression of the forest's relentless immobility, to form a background throwing into relief its brooding, implacable silence*" (*Emperor Jones* 21). The forest must convey "implacable silence" despite O'Neill's earlier stage directions: "*From the distant hills comes the faint, steady thump of a tom-tom, low and vibrating. It...continues at a gradually accelerating rate from this point uninterruptedly to the very end of the play*" (*Emperor Jones* 17-18). Moreover, it is from this point on that Jones begins his almost unceasing monologue. Melodrama asks that we associate silence with physicality through the body of the

mute character, and Expressionism makes a similar demand on its audience. The stage of *The Emperor Jones* is not silent, rather it is filled with drum beats and Jones' incessant speech, yet we still experience it as silent through the scenery, the Great Forest, representative of Jones' mind. In Expressionism, the character's state of mind is *expressed* externally; thus, the stage environment offers us a silent form of expression, a non-verbal language. Moreover, by entering into this space, we enter into a character's mind where all sounds are at once silent because they are internal.

The stage directions of almost every act and scene of *The Emperor Jones*, as well as O'Neill's other Expressionist plays, contain poetic, narrative descriptions of the setting which differ distinctly from the laconic, technical stage directions in most modern drama, and the setting clearly assumes the characteristics of the protagonist. O'Neill depicts the forest as "*a wall of darkness dividing the world. Only when the eye becomes accustomed to the gloom can the outlines of separate trunks of the nearest trees be made out, enormous pillars of deeper blackness,*" which contrasts sharply with the Emperor's palace "*a spacious, high-ceilinged room with bare, white-washed walls*" and a white-tiled floor (*Emperor Jones* 21, 5). The play's "real," present-day action occurs in a sort of blank slate setting of white walls and floors, air, and emptiness. Only upon entering into the forest does the setting mimic Jones' mind, full of race-related personal and historical experiences. As the forest setting reflects Jones, it becomes a character in the play. Jones demands of the scenery, "White stone, white stone, where is you?" "Box of grub, come to me" (*Emperor Jones* 22). The scenery becomes animate, and contemporary reviews of the play suggest that the audience experienced the Emperor as equally inanimate. Heywood Broun in the *New York Tribune* writes, "Generally [Jones] seems fairly painted into the scenic design."⁴⁰ As *The Emperor Jones*' vision sequences progress, the

protagonist takes on further characteristics of the *mise-en-scène*, primarily in terms of sound. I am arguing that, just as the scenery silently expresses Jones' emotions and thoughts, as we enter deeper into Jones' mind, Jones himself begins to resemble his surroundings; thus, he too reflects the duality of sound and soundlessness on O'Neill's stage—emitting noise as we understand him as “brooding, implacabl[y]” silent.

The visions are, in a sense, silence sandwiched between sound. They are pantomimic and, with the exception of Jones, comprised of mute figures. The early scenes, like the Formless Fears and Jones' encounter with Jeff, the man he murdered, all end with a shot, which increases the beat and volume of the tom-tom that leads into the next scene producing a pattern of tom-tom amplification / “silent” vision / loud shot. In the convict scene, where Jones reenacts and experiences his murder of a guard after his imprisonment for killing Jeff:

The prison guard cracks his whip—noiselessly—and at that signal all the convicts start to work on the road. They swing their picks, they shovel, but not a sound comes from their labor. Their movements, like those of Jeff in the preceding scene, are those of automatons,—rigid, slow, and mechanical. The prison guard points sternly at Jones with his whip, motions him to take his place among the other shovelers. Jones gets to his feet in a hypnotized stupor. (Emperor Jones 29-30)

O'Neill emphasizes the silence of the scene: the prison guard's “noiseless” whip and the convict's “sound[less]” labor. The guard communicates through gesture, and the vision's characters move with the deliberateness of melodramatic attitudes, which Jones, in his hypnotized state, adapts. O'Neill integrates the “real,” speaking protagonist into his pantomimed vision. Similarly, Mathias in *The Bells* enters his own vision, perhaps suggesting that these Expressionist interiorized scenes developed from melodrama's “flashbacks.” Unlike in, for example, the modern movie flashback, the audience recognizes that we are entering a character's mind through the scene's silence. Silence signifies mental space.

From the chain gang scene, Jones retreats further into an historical and racial past and becomes more thoroughly integrated into a silent scene. “*While [Jones’s] attention is...occupied, a crowd of figures silently enter the clearing from all sides. All are dressed in Southern costumes of the period of the fifties of the last century*” (*Emperor Jones* 32). *The Emperor Jones*’ “memory” scenes suggest deliberate theatricality and recall melodrama. The scene forms around the “real” figure until he is initially watching and then participating in a play of his past. The characters—planters, dandies, bells, and auctioneer—are stereotypical, as are their gestures, and they recollect melodramas from that time period like Dion Boucicault’s *The Octoroon* (1859). The intentional theatricality, including observable scene formation and character types, draws attention to the setting and its role in communicating Jones’ internal states. The vision’s characters “*exchange courtly greetings in dumb show and chat silently together.... The white planters look [the slaves] over appraisingly as if they were cattle, and exchange judgments on each. The dandies point with their fingers and make witty remarks. The bells twitter betwittingly. All this in silence save for the ominous throb of the tom-tom*” (*Emperor Jones* 32). O’Neill’s stage directions reintroduce the contrast between “*silence*” and “*the ominous throb of the tom-tom,*” and the subsequent question it raises: how does the play convey noise and silence simultaneously, both in terms of the silent forest and pervasive tom-tom, and in terms of the vision’s pantomimed but seemingly vocal expressions? For example, “*The auctioneer begins his silent spiel.... Here is a good field hand, sound in wind and limb as they can see. Very strong still in spite of his being middle-aged. Look at that back. Look at those shoulders. Look at the muscles in his arms and his sturdy legs. Capable of any amount of hard labor. Moreover, of a good disposition, intelligent and tractable*” (*Emperor Jones* 33). The auctioneer can gesture to Jones’ various body parts, but how does he convey Jones’ “good disposition”? Here the reader

can perceive how Expressionism's silent externalization of the internal is "audible thinking."

Jones "hears" the auctioneers words and complete sentences within his head, yet, as in O'Neill's *Hughie*, this dialogue is part of the stage directions and unvocalized to the audience. We have entered into Jones' head and are thus able to experience silent speech.

In the following slave ship scene, meta-theatricality draws further attention to the visions' setting and the relationship between scenery and characters, silence and sound, and internal and external. "*A cleared space in the forest*" suggests a sort of outdoor theater. The slaves' "*backs touch...the forest walls as if they were shackled to them.... At first they are silent and motionless. Then they begin to sway slowly*" (*Emperor Jones* 34-35). Whereas in the auction scene, the vision's characters enter the forest but remain segregated from it and distinct individuals, as Jones regresses into a collective consciousness, they blend into the scenery, so that the forest walls suggest a slave ship and their bodies indicate the rolling ocean. If the forest represents Jones' mental space, then his *mind* itself has entrapped and enslaved him. "*At the same time, a low, melancholy murmur rises among them, increasing gradually by rhythmic degrees which seem to be directed and controlled by the throb of the tom-tom in the distance, to a long, tremulous wail of despair that reaches a certain pitch, unbearably acute, then falls by slow gradations of tone into silence and is taken up again*" (*Emperor Jones* 35). Like the integration of mind (forest) and memory (enacted vision), the existent tom-tom blends with the imagined wail of the slaves. Whereas in previous scenes, the visions' human characters communicated in silent pantomime, now they produce "a background to silence"—language reduced to bodily sound that blends into the tom-tom/heartbeat and bleeds into silence. Then Jones' "*voice, as if under some uncanny compulsion, starts with the others.... His voice reaches the highest pitch of sorrow, of desolation. The light fades out, the other voices cease....*" (*Emperor Jones* 35). The

contrast between silence and sound that had previously distinguished between the “real” setting (Jones in the forest) and Jones’ memories or collective memories has disappeared. Rather than Jones speaking to pantomiming figures, the slaves moan and Jones joins in their vocal despair; words contrasted to silence transition to uniform noise. Nor does this scene end abruptly with the shot of the shotgun breaking the silence and disbursing the scene; rather, when Jones fully succumbs to the sounds of the scene, the distinction between present and imagined fades.

O’Neill uses sound contrasted with silence to demarcate memory, the past, and internalization, and in this final collective memory scene, he erases the distinctions between internal and external by uniting Jones’ body with his mind through shared sound.

In the final scene with the Witch Doctor that instigates Jones’ death, he “*squirms on his belly nearer and nearer*” to the Crocodile God, “*moaning continually*” (*Emperor Jones* 38).

Jones has taken on the role of the Little Formless Fears from the first vision scene. He has lost speech and begun to communicate in the moans of the imagined figures, and concludes by imitating their actions as well. O’Neill reduces language to sound and movement, and blends man and scenery; the protagonist now resembles one of the creatures seemingly comprised of the forest’s shadows. Scene seven, the final scene before we exit the forest and learn of the former Emperor’s death back at his palace, concludes with “*the throb of the tom-tom fill[ing] the silence about [Jones] with a sober pulsation*” (*Emperor Jones* 38). But, of course, there is never total silence. The tom-tom beats continuously throughout the play, and yet at *Jones’* conclusion we are supposed to understand it as filling the silence. Somehow this silence is palpable to us, the audience, despite not being a literal lack of sound. And perhaps this is what the mute figure from melodrama brings to the modern stage: the embodiment of silence, or the comprehension of silence as something other than simply the absence of sound. The mute provides a body or locus

for soundlessness, a body which expresses itself through symbolism—at first in the frozen attitudes or poses of melodrama, and later in the suggestive “white” bodies of Jokanaan and Salome, or Loie Fuller’s lily-shaped fabric. O’Neill’s Expressionist plays adapt the mute figure the Symbolist playwrights and dancers already “objectified” (Mallarmé’s “sword, cup, flower”) into silent scenery which represents internalized space.

American Expressionism & embodied silence: *The Hairy Ape* & Rice’s *Adding Machine*

Yank: “Say, is dat what she called me—a hairy ape? PADDY—She looked it at you if she didn’t say the word itself.”⁴¹ In Eugene O’Neill’s second Expressionist play, *The Hairy Ape*, written a year after *The Emperor Jones*, what Mildred actually calls the protagonist, Yank, is a “filthy beast” (*Hairy Ape* 164). The play’s title derives from an unspoken phrase, words which one character reads in another’s eyes. In *The Hairy Ape*, Yank, a stoker on a ship, experiences a crisis of self-acceptance and understanding when he sees himself through the horrified eyes of a passenger, Mildred. He seeks to prove his significance to her kind of people, the wealthy of New York, and when that fails, searches for camaraderie amongst prisoners, the Wobblies, and eventually apes in the zoo. Through *The Hairy Ape*, we can see O’Neill’s coupling of sound and silence as exemplary of his Expressionist plays, not just an anomaly in *The Emperor Jones*. Moreover, O’Neill develops the relationship between characters and setting, and sound and silence, to offer a more overt social critique of why sound fades into background noise and is experienced as silence.

As in *The Emperor Jones*, O’Neill practices an economy of language in *The Hairy Ape*. Jean Chothia, in “Theatre Language: Word and Image in *The Hairy Ape*,” measures this paucity: “At the extreme, in the confrontation scene between Mildred and Yank there are 104 lines of

stage directions to 49 of dialogue.... More typically, perhaps, the zoo scene still has 61 lines of directions to 86 of speech and, even the first scene, in which the stokers accompany their off-duty drinking with talking and singing, has only twice as many lines of dialogue as of stage directions (125 to 246).”⁴² Action, gesture, and descriptions of setting substitute for spoken words, and the language O’Neill’s characters do speak is, in the words of a *New York Times* theater critic, “choked and thwarted and inarticulate.”⁴³ The characters use limited or stereotypical phrases; frequently repeated monosyllabic (oftentimes slang) words like “skoit,” “tart,” “tripe,” and “think;” staccato-like and irregular rhythm; concentration of nouns and verbs; short sentences; and devolution into vulgarity, brawling and shouting. The stokers’ repetition of Yank’s words “think,” “love,” “law,” and “god,” have “*a brazen, metallic quality as if their throats were phonograph horns,*” and are “*followed by a chorus of hard, barking laughter,*” a stage direction that O’Neill precisely replicates four times (*Hairy Ape* 166-68). Dialogue resembles monotonous noise, and more frequently, like Jones, Yank speaks in continuous monologues. Nevertheless, there is a sense that he is silent as well. “Say, lemme talk!...Say, listen to me—wait a moment—I gotter talk, see...Say, listen” (*Hairy Ape* 150). There is no indication in the play text that the men are interrupting Yank, yet somehow Yank feels that he is not speaking.

While *The Hairy Ape* does not include the continuous and monotonous beat of the tom-tom like *The Emperor Jones*, noise does pervade the play from start—*The curtain rises on a tumult of sound*—to finish (*Hairy Ape* 141). And an interview with O’Neill suggests that he intended sound in *The Hairy Ape* to function similarly to its counterpart in *The Emperor Jones*: “The whole play is expressionistic.... Stokers do not really shovel coal that way. But it is done in the play in order to contribute to the rhythm. For rhythm is a powerful factor in making

anything expressive. People do not know how sensitive they are to rhythm. You can actually produce and control emotions by that means alone.”⁴⁴ And if contemporary reviewers did not experience specifically *The Hairy Ape*’s rhythm, they certainly experienced its noise. Gilbert Seldes in *The Dial* writes: “the terrific outbursts of The Hairy Ape are all mass; they are palpable and take shape; they are really capable of being hurled. The melody, the linear quality, is faulty; so the play reads badly. The sound is tremendous.”⁴⁵ Interestingly, multiple audience members experienced the play’s sound materially. Seldes uses terminology typically associated with physical objects—“mass,” “palpable,” and “shape”—to describe *The Hairy Ape*’s noisy communication, and Quinn describes, “a carnival of force” that “crashe[s] upon the auditor.”⁴⁶ Walter Prichard Eaton detects O’Neill’s intended rhythm, which he compares to “the fearful tattoo of a drum,” recalling, of course, *The Emperor Jones*’ tom-tom.⁴⁷

Like *The Emperor Jones*, *The Hairy Ape* stages perpetual (rhythmic, meaningful) sound, and again like its predecessor Expressionist play, the audience is supposed to understand this noise and silence can occur simultaneously. O’Neill depicts the ship’s stokehole as:

a tumult of noise—the brazen clang of the furnace doors as they are flung open or slammed shut, the grating, teeth-gritting grind of steel against steel, of crunching coal. This clash of sounds stuns one’s ears with its rending dissonance. But there is order in it, rhythm, a mechanical regulated recurrence, a tempo. And rising above all, making the air hum with the quiver of liberated energy, the roar of leaping flames in the furnaces, the monotonous throbbing beat of the engines. (Hairy Ape 160)

However, “As the curtain rises, the furnace doors are shut. The men are taking a breathing spell” (*Hairy Ape* 161). O’Neill includes paragraph-long stage directions detailing the stokehole’s “tumult of noise,” but then informs the reader that the curtain rises on silence. How does the audience understand that the noisy, active stokehole preceded the curtain rising on the resting, silent men?

Again, as in *The Emperor Jones*, I would argue that the characters' bodies are united with the set. We experience silence as embodied in melodrama's mute figure, and in Expressionism that role has transferred to the set pieces and their character counterparts, so that we understand silence as present through *mise-en-scène* despite ongoing sound. Yank repeatedly assumes the "attitude of Rodin's *The Thinker*," recalling melodrama's poses and freezing his body into a sculpture more similar to a stage prop than a character (*Hairy Ape* 165, 166). He describes himself as "de ting in noise dat makes yuh hear it," suggesting that in Expressionism silence and sound become visible or embodied (*Hairy Ape* 151). "Noise" would appear nonexistent, but Yank is the physical expression of noise—how it becomes recognizable. He emphasizes sight in his monologues: "Look at me, why don't youse dare?" "See dat building goin' up dere? See de steel work? Steel, dat's me! Youse guys live on it and tink yuh're somp'n. But I'm *in* it, see!" But despite Yank's diatribe, the wealthy ladies and gentlemen on Fifth Avenue "*stalk...by without a look*" (*Hairy Ape* 178-79). If in Expressionism we can recognize sound (or lack thereof) through objects—e.g. in *The Emperor Jones*, the forest is silent despite the persistent tom-toms—then *seeing* is a part of hearing. Without observation or recognition, people are literally silent. Yank, as he repeatedly insists, *is* the ship, he *is steel*, but these buildings and modes of transportation are unacknowledged by the people who use them, just as Yank is unseen and unheard. In *The Hairy Ape*, the "background for silence" is the mechanical noises that the modern world ignores, like the stokehole of a ship and the men who feed its furnace. These characters and settings are at once noisy and silent because their sounds are unacknowledged by the society they support.

* * *

Like Eugene O'Neill, Elmer Rice repeatedly denied the influence of German Expressionism on his Expressionist piece, *The Adding Machine*, written a year after *The Hairy Ape*. In *The Adding Machine*, Mr. Zero, a corporate drone, has worked as an accountant for twenty-five years, adding numbers, despising his hen-pecking wife, and failing to act on his desire for his coworker, Daisy. When Zero murders his boss for firing him, he is executed and enters the Elysian Fields where he can remain if he submits to experiencing pleasure and truly "living" this afterlife, or he can return to his eternal "slave" role on earth. Rice declares, "I had no experience with German expressionism" at the time of writing *The Adding Machine*. "In fact, I think the only expressionistic play that had been done in this country was *From Morn to Midnight*, Kaiser's play, which the Theatre Guild, I believe, had done a year or two before. I did not see it.... I didn't read it until after *The Adding Machine* was produced."⁴⁸ Nevertheless, Rice employs silence, sound, and setting similarly to both Kaiser and O'Neill. Rice believed, "The essence of drama is not words but action," arguing, "words are not even necessary for the creation and communication of drama" (*Living Theatre* 15, 16). He points to examples such as children's imaginary games, "pantomime, puppet shows, mummerly and pageantry," "ballets and bullfights," the mass, and silent movies, all of which convey their narratives through action more than words. Rice, like his Expressionist predecessors, limits language in *The Adding Machine*, instead relying on his set pieces to silently communicate his characters' states of mind. Rice's extensive coupling of sound and silence in the presence of dramatic sets indicates that this technique, which emerged in German Expressionism and blossomed in O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones*, carried through into other American Expressionist works, becoming a key component of the genre.

Like O'Neil, Rice's *The Adding Machine* pairs pervasive sound with notable silence. Throughout the play the audience hears, "*a sharp clicking sound as is made by the operation of the keys and levers of an adding machine,*" and Rice establishes both the insignificance of spoken language and the monotony of sound through characters' empty monologues.⁴⁹ As Daisy and Zero sit across from each other at work and muse aloud, "*each intones figures during the other's speeches*" (*Adding Machine* 7). At the same time as they fail to listen to, and communicate with, one another, Rice intended "the terrible monotony [to] beat...at one's brain like the tom tom in *Emperor Jones*." ⁵⁰

At other times Rice couples persistent sound with, not simply aimless and restricted speech, but total silence. When Mr. and Mrs. One through Six visit the Zeros, the characters repeat pleasantries as monotonous as their names, only Mr. Zero "*is silent throughout*" (*Adding Machine* 16). The stage directions in Rice's original manuscript indicate that the talk between the characters "grows louder and more staccato until it acquires a sort of rhythmic beat. Strophe and anti-strophe." ⁵¹ As in the play's opening scene, which is a monologue by Mrs. Zero concluding in, "*She goes on talking as the curtain falls,*" what is noticeable is Mr. Zero's silence. Like the Clerk in *From Morn to Midnight*, the main character initially does not speak. The palpability of the mute protagonist amongst the noise and hollow verbosity of the other character establishes a silent space despite, or in the midst of, the constant sound on the stage.

In these scenes, silence contrasts with sound, but in the Elysian Fields scene, Rice establishes their simultaneity in a means similar to *The Emperor Jones*, asking the audience to interpret a space as silent despite continuous music. Another murderer in the afterlife, Shrdlu, asks Zero: "do you hear anything? [*They are both silent, straining their ears.*] ZERO [*at last*]. Nope. SHRDLU. You don't hear any music? Do you? ZERO. Music? No, I don't hear nothin'.

SHRDLU. The people here say that the music never stops. ZERO. They're kiddin' you.

SHRDLU. Do you think so? ZERO. Sure thing. There ain't a sound." As the scene progresses, Daisy, who has killed herself, hears the music and directs Zero's attention to it: "Yeh! I hear it! He said there was music, but I didn't hear it till just now." But eventually Zero concludes, "I thought I heard it before but I don't hear nothin' now" (*Adding Machine* 44, 51, 54). Daisy hears the music, Shrdlu does not, and Zero sometimes does. Three characters experience diegetic music differently, evoking the question, what does the audience hear? If the music "never stops," as Shrdlu explains, then the audience would need to acknowledge the silence Shrdlu and Zero describe despite the ongoing sound.

Rice relies heavily on his play's expressionistic setting to convey silence in the face of sound. In perhaps *The Adding Machine*'s noisiest scene where Zero murders his Boss, the Boss can:

barely mak[e] himself heard above the increasing volume of sound.... His voice is drowned by the music. The platform is revolving rapidly now. ZERO and the BOSS face each other. They are entirely motionless save for the BOSS's jaws, which open and close incessantly. But the words are inaudible. The music swells and swells. To it is added every offstage effect of the theater: the wind, the waves, the galloping horses, the locomotive whistle, the sleigh bells, the automobile siren, the glass-crash. New Year's Eve, Election Night, Armistice Day, and Mardi Gras. The noise is deafening, maddening, unendurable. Suddenly it culminates in a terrific peal of thunder. (14)

The theatrical noises are indicative of particular stage settings, and Rice also establishes this sense of silence within noise through sight. The audience observes the Boss's mouth moving yet his words remain inaudible. Despite tumultuous noise, the words that provoke Zero's rage are unheard, and we must recognize the noise is, in a sense, nonexistent—representative of Zero's mental state but absent outside of his head.

Lee Simonson designed the sets that convey the characters' interiority without speech. In an interview, Rice describes Simonson's scenery and its significance to his work: "Everything

was out of alignment and out of focus. The judge was way, way high up—you could hardly see him, and he wore a mask. This was Lee’s idea, not mine.” Another “inspiration that [Simonson] had, the one thing that I thought was marvelous,” Rice explains, “was the final scene where he filled the whole stage with an adding machine. The keys were as big as bar stools, and Digges was hopping around on them like a monkey. Now that was very effective. I hadn’t thought of that and that was good.”⁵² Clearly the set designer contributed heavily to Rice’s production, introducing particular perspectives, masks, and movement. Moreover, the giant adding machine, the physical embodiment of the play’s title and *The Adding Machine*’s quintessential set piece, exemplifies Rice’s theory of language in modernity. “In the modern world,” writes Rice in his *The Living Theatre*, “the machinery of communication has almost acquired an identity of its own” (3). Rice embeds communication within a material object that has assumed animate characteristics. Thing and person, prop and character, become interchangeable in their ability to convey; thus, both are effective communicants on stage and can be employed simultaneously to introduce sound in the presence of silence and silence in the presence of sound.

* * *

Melodrama offers its audience a locus for silence in the mute figure who, in the midst of the genre’s exclamatory remarks and incidental music, silently expresses through gesture. Symbolism limits language on stage, introducing pauses and rhythm that push its audience to interpret characters’ movement and dialogue symbolically. Expressionism, this chapter argues, carries this nineteenth-century technique of elevating silence in the face of sound through to the modern era. Authors like Georg Kaiser, Eugene O’Neill, and Elmer Rice restrict spoken language on the stage and instead ask that we enter into the silent, because internal, spaces of their characters’ minds, which are represented symbolically through mute set pieces. The

Expressionist playwrights, and in particular Eugene O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones*, further impel their audiences to experience silent spaces in the presence of perpetual sound, so that sound itself becomes white noise—the forgotten clamor of modernization that is our background for silence.

¹ Qtd. in Olin Downes, "Playwright Finds His Inspiration on Lonely Sand Dunes," *Boston Sunday Post* (29 Aug. 1920). In Ulrich Halfmann, ed. *Eugene O'Neill: Comments on the Drama and the Theater: A Source Book* (Gunder Narr Verlag Tübingen, 1987) 6.

² Eugene O'Neill, "Silence" (1919). In *Eugene O'Neill at Work: Newly Released Ideas for Plays*, Virginia Floyd, ed. (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1981) 10-11.

³ My italics.

⁴ Eugene O'Neill, *The Emperor Jones* (New York: Vintage Books, 1921 [1920]) 17-18.

⁵ *Emperor Jones* 21. My italics.

⁶ For a thorough definition and history of Expressionism from painting to literature to theater to film, see Neil H. Donahue, ed., "Introduction," *A Companion to the Literature of German Expressionism* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2005) 1-35. He argues that "the medium of painting itself took on a new vibrancy and immediacy that all other artistic mediums, whether in image or word, sought to emulate," suggesting how the plasticity or thingness from Expressionist painting translated onto the stage. He identifies three overlapping types of Expressionist drama: spiritual (represented by Maeterlinck's plays), ecstatic, and allegorical (including *From Morn to Midnight*). All three types, however, evoke thingness: "the formal unification of elements on the stage" in the spiritual, and the actors' bodies, either singular (ecstatic) or as an ensemble (allegorical). Expressionist dramas "allow for vivid visual stylization that reinforces the play's central idea, emblematically, as a sort of visual oratory. The use of stunning backdrops and stark lighting collapses the three-dimensional space of the stage into a broken sequence...of virtually two-dimensional allegorical pictures or emblems" (Donahue 13, 19-21). In Donahue's definition, we can see Expressionism's relationship to Symbolism, and both genre's relationship to objects or materiality: the emphasis on the set and actors' bodies, and the symbolism of these stage pieces.

⁷ A sort of stream of consciousness technique of "'unspoken thoughts' or 'thought asides,' sometimes referred to as 'the *Interlude* technique' after [O'Neill's 1923 play,] *Strange Interlude*." Egil Törnqvist, "To Speak the Unspoken: Audible Thinking in O'Neill's Plays," *The Eugene O'Neill Review* 16.1 (spring 1992) 55-70: 56.

⁸ August Strindberg, *Revue Blanche* (1896). In Eugenia Popescu-Judet, "The Language-Silence in German Expressionist Drama," Dissertation (University of Pittsburgh: 1988) 74.

⁹ Elmer Rice, *Minority Report: An Autobiography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963) 198.

¹⁰ Mardi Valgema, "O'Neill and German Expressionism," *Modern Drama* 10 (1967) 111-23: 121.

¹¹ Richard Murphy, "The Poetics of Hysteria: Expressionist Drama and the Melodramatic Imagination," *Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift* 40.2 (1990) 156-70: 167.

¹² Julia A. Walker, *Expressionism and Modernism in the American Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 1-2.

¹³ Francis Fergusson, "Melodramatist," *Hound and Horn* (Jan. 1930). In *O'Neill and His Plays: Four Decades of Criticism*, Oscar Cargill, ed. (New York: New York University Press, 1961) 271-80: 272-73.

¹⁴ Other critics writing during O'Neill's lifetime who accuse him of melodrama include Homer E. Woodbridge, "Beyond Melodrama," *South Atlantic Quarterly* (Jan. 1938) in Cargill 307-20, and H. G. Kemelman, "Eugene O'Neill and the Highbrow Melodrama," *The Bookman; a Review of Books and Life* (1895-1933) 75.5 (Sep. 1932) 482-91.

- ¹⁵ S. J. Woolf, "Eugene O'Neill Returns After Twelve Years" *The New York Times* (15 Sept. 1946) 11, 61-62. In Halfmann 140.
- ¹⁶ Sister M. Vincentia Burns, "The Function of Wagner's Theory of the Union of the Arts in the Dramaturgy of Eugene O'Neill," Dissertation (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1943) 10. In Halfmann 137.
- ¹⁷ Qtd. in James A. Robinson, "O'Neill's Symbolic Sounds," *Modern Language Studies* 9.2 (spring 1979) 36-45: 44.
- ¹⁸ Clara Blackburn, "Continental Influences on Eugene O'Neill's Expressionistic Dramas," *American Literature: A Journal of Literary History, Criticism, and Bibliography* 13.2 (May 1941) 109-33: 113.
- ¹⁹ Eugene O'Neill, playbill for *The Spook Sonata* (3 Jan. 1924). In Cargill 108.
- ²⁰ Eugene O'Neill, "A Tribute to Ibsen's Memory," *Nordisk Tidende* (2 June 1938) 1. In Halfmann 135.
- ²¹ O'Neill, playbill. In Egil Törnqvist, *A Drama of Souls: Studies in O'Neill's Super-naturalistic Technique* (Sweden: Uppsala, 1968) 33.
- ²² Barrett H. Clark, "Eugene O'Neill. A Chapter in Biography," *Theatre Arts Magazine* 10 (May 1926) 325-36. In Halfmann 57.
- ²³ Qtd. in William R. Elwood, "An Interview with Elmer Rice on Expressionism," *Educational Theatre Journal* 20.1 (Mar. 1968) 1-7: 6.
- ²⁴ See Horst Frenz, "Eugene O'Neill and Georg Kaiser," *Eugene O'Neill: A World View*, Virginia Floyd, ed. (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1979) 172-85: 178-79.
- ²⁵ See Blackburn 115, Frenz 176, and Valgema 113.
- ²⁶ See Walker 7.
- ²⁷ Ernst Schürer, *Georg Kaiser* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1971) 87.
- ²⁸ *The Dial* 43 (1922) 116. In Robert Alston Jones, "German Drama on the American Stage: The Case of Georg Kaiser," *The German Quarterly* 37.1 (Jan. 1964) 17-25: 20.
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