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Nineteenth Century Melodrama: From *A Tale of Mystery* to *Monte Cristo*

Anne Dhu Shapiro

On Saturday night the Melo-Drame made its appearance. There is certainly no affectation in giving it this name, as it is quite unlike anything that has hitherto been brought out upon the English stage. It contains a mixture of every different species of theatrical representation. We have by turns tragedy, comedy, and farce, pantomime, dancing, and music.

To Thomas Holcroft's *A Tale of Mystery*, the first melodrama in English, was described in the *London Morning Chronicle* of Monday, November 15, 1802. While the reviewer emphasizes the mixture of elements, perhaps because of Thomas Harris's proposed derivation from the French for this new genre, *mêler-drame*, which mixed drama and *ballet d'action*,¹ the more accepted etymology is out of the Greek root *melos* for melody combined with drama. Both etymologies are useful in that they help us understand the genre itself. The mixing of elements was nothing new on the English stage, since it had occurred in genres ranging from the masque to the pasticcio; but in the case of melodrama, the particular *way* they were mixed, or, more precisely, the desired effect of their mixture was different enough to be noticed and to deserve a new name, separating this genre from its forebears in pantomime, domestic drama, and *ballet d'action*.

A short essay cannot do justice to a genre that was popular for over a century, and whose offspring in movies and television continue to thrive today; this one will be limited to the two significant works mentioned in my title, which date from the two ends of the nineteenth century. These two plays illustrate how central the role of music was in defining the genre, even long after it ceased to be thought of as primarily a musical one.

Holcroft's melodrama was a direct importation from Paris, where his model, though not yet called by the name melodrama, was *Coelina, ou l'Enfant du mystère*, by Guilbert de Pixérécourt, with music by Adrien Quaisain. This "Spectacular Prose Drama," as it was called by Pixérécourt, had been similarly hailed for its novelty at its première on the stage of the Théâtre Ambigu-Comique on September 2, 1800. Predecessors to the genre in France were the *scène-lyrique*, *Pygmalion*, of Jean Jacques Rousseau; the popular pantomime and the pantomime-dialogue of the Boulevard theaters of Paris; and the ballet spectacles of the post-Revolutionary

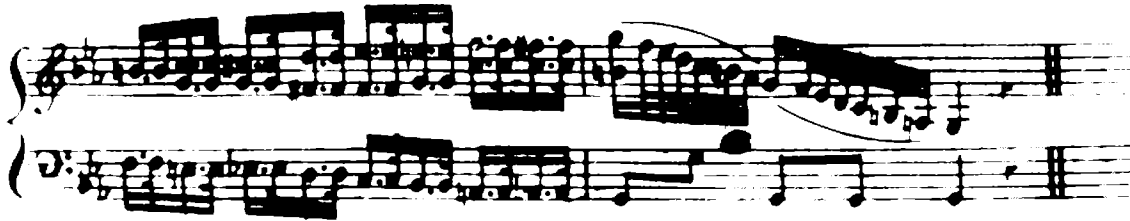
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¹ According to Frederick Reynolds, *The Life and Times of Frederick Reynolds, written by himself* (London: Henry Colburn, 1826), II, 346, this etymology was first proposed

by Thomas Harris, who from 1774 to 1809 was the sole manager of the Covent Garden Theatre, where *A Tale of Mystery* played.

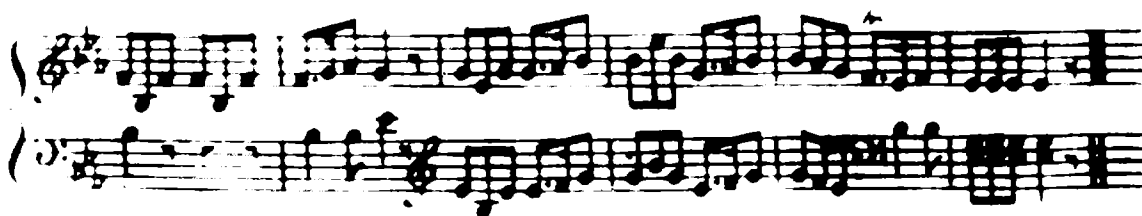
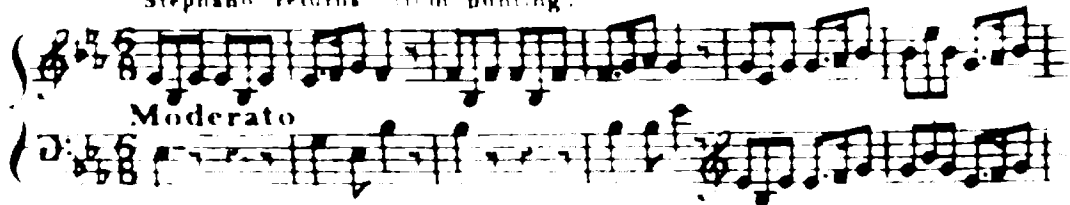
Enter Fiametta alarm'd, and in a hurry.

Allegro *p*



Stephano returns from hunting.

Moderato



Tale of Mystery

Figure 1. *Bushy, A Tale of Mystery* (London, 1802), p. 9. Reproduced by kind permission of the Cambridge University Library.

A TALE OF MYSTERY.

a benevolent eye! (*aloud*) Sit down, Sir. Leave us, my children.

(*Francisco suddenly rises, as Stephano and Selina offer to go, brings them back, and in-treats they may remain.*)

Bona. Since he desires it, stay.—There is pen, ink, and paper: when you cannot answer by signs, write; but be strict to the truth.

Fran. (*with dignity points to heaven and his heart.*)

Bona. Who are you?

(*Francisco writes; and Stephano, standing behind him, takes up the paper and reads the answers.*)

Fran. "A noble Roman!"

Bona. Your family?—

Fran. (*gives a sudden sign of Forbear! and writes*) "Must not be known."

Bona. Why?

Fran. "It is disgraced."

Bona. By you?

Fran. (*gesticulates.*)

Fiam. (*interpreting*) No, no, no!

Bona. Who made you dumb?

Fran. "The Algerines."

A TALE OF MYSTERY.

Bona. How came you in their power?

Fran. "By treachery."

Bona. Do you know the traitors?

Fran. (*gesticulates.*)

Fiam. (*eagerly*) He does! he does!

Bona. Who are they?

Fran. "The same who stabbed me among the rocks." (*A general expression of horror.*)

Bona. Name them.

Fran. (*gesticulates violently, denoting painful recollection; then writes*) "Never!"

Bona. Are they known by me?

Fiam. (*interpreting*) They are! They are!

Bona. Are they rich?

Fran. "Rich and powerful."

Bona. Astonishing! Your refusal to name them gives strange suspicions. I must know more: tell me all, or quit my house.

(*Music to express pain and disorder.*)

Enter PIERO.

Pier. Count Romaldi, Sir.

Fran. (*starts up, struck with alarm*):

Steph. So soon!

Bona. Shew him up.

Figure 2. Holcroft, *A Tale of Mystery* (London: R. Phillips, 1802), pp. 8-9. Reproduced by kind permission of the owner, John M. Ward.

era. In France, dance remained an important element of melodrama; in England it would soon disappear. The direct influence of pantomime on *A Tale of Mystery* can be seen in the important role written for a mute character, who had to mime his part to music, and in the frequent use of the tableau, a wordless portrayal of the interrelationships of the protagonists displayed in a sort of "freeze-frame," especially at the ends of scenes.

A closer look at several scenes from *A Tale of Mystery* will illuminate which elements in the music composed by Thomas Busby had continuity with the past and which were new.³ At the opening of Act I the servant Fiametta enters with the adopted niece of the house, Selina. The stage directions read: "Music, to express discontent and alarm"; Selina says, "You seem hurried, Fiametta?"; and in the score

³ Thomas Busby, *The Overture, Marches, Dances, Symphonies and Songs in the Melo-Drama A Tale of Mystery* (London: R. Phillips, 1802), is found in the British Library M1513.B97T3, as well as in the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Musiksammlung, the Library of Congress, and the

University of Illinois. The text by Thomas Holcroft, *A Tale of Mystery, A Melo-Drama as performed at the Theatre-Royal, Covent Garden* (London: T. Dawson, 1802), is found in Harvard University, Houghton Library. *EC75.H6995.

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Hon. "Why?" Francisco "It is disgrac'd. Bon. B. your Fran. gesticulates with agitation.

The first system of music consists of two staves. The upper staff is a vocal line in a key with two flats (B-flat major or D-flat minor) and common time. It begins with a vocal line that includes the lyrics "Hon. 'Why?' Francisco 'It is disgrac'd. Bon. B. your Fran. gesticulates with agitation." The lower staff is a piano accompaniment in the same key and time signature, providing harmonic support for the vocal line.

Francisco being ask'd who made him dumb, gives signs of horrible recollection.

Allegro

The second system of music is marked "Allegro" and consists of two staves of piano accompaniment. The key signature remains two flats and common time. The music is characterized by a more active and rhythmic accompaniment compared to the first system.

Fran. The fame who stab'd me among the Rocks. Bon. Nan. then I find Sever.

The third system of music consists of two staves. The upper staff is a vocal line with the lyrics "Fran. The fame who stab'd me among the Rocks. Bon. Nan. then I find Sever." The lower staff is a piano accompaniment. The key signature and time signature are consistent with the previous systems.

Hon. "Are they rich?"

Bon. Let me all, or quit my House.

Maestoso **Allegro**

The fourth system of music is marked "Maestoso" and "Allegro" and consists of two staves. The upper staff is a vocal line with the lyrics "Hon. 'Are they rich?' Bon. Let me all, or quit my House." The lower staff is a piano accompaniment. The key signature and time signature are consistent with the previous systems.

Romald's being announced, Francisco starts up, struck with alarm.

Allegro

The fifth system of music is marked "Allegro" and consists of two staves of piano accompaniment. The key signature and time signature are consistent with the previous systems. The music is marked with a dynamic of *p* (piano).

Francisco attempting to pass the Door meets Romald.

The sixth system of music consists of two staves of piano accompaniment. The key signature and time signature are consistent with the previous systems. The music continues the rhythmic and harmonic patterns established in the previous systems.

Figure 3. Busby, A Tale of Mystery (1802), p. 12.

the cue is "Enter Fiametta alarm'd, and in a hurry." Thus, in the very opening words of the play, there is homage to pantomime, one of the musical predecessors of the melodrama, and to its ubiquitous "hurry music,"³ usually, as here, four bars of quick, scalar music (figure 1).

Unusual in this example are the dotted rhythms and the bit of imitative counterpoint at the beginning. Unusual, too, is the reference in the cue not only to the action—hurrying—but also to the emotional state of being alarmed. It is this element that points most clearly toward the future role of music in a melodrama.

The following scene is played without music, then, as Fiametta exits, the next musical excerpt is heard; its open fourths and fifths signify—in "patterned sound"⁴—the approach of a hunting party, in this case a party of one, the young Stephano, son of Bonamo and admirer of Selina (figure 1).

In Act I, the scene of highest drama occurs when the mute Francisco, who has come to the home of the kindly Bonamo and his adopted niece Selina, is invited to tell his tale. Since he is mute, he must answer the questions by writing responses which are then read aloud by Stephano, and the silences between the questions are filled in with appropriate music. Figure 2 reproduces a page of the 1802 playbook for this scene. You will see no mention of music until the end of the scene: "Music to express pain and disorder"; but from the score, where cues are written above each bit of music (figure 3), and from a promptbook, in which nine cues for music are added in ink,⁵ it is apparent that music was played almost continuously throughout the scene in order to underpin the emotional meaning of each sentence of dialogue and to interpret its mute response. The music was probably played by strings, with a possible woodwind or two. Figure 4 shows Mr. Farley as Francisco, pen in hand, as he writes a response. Notice his exaggerated stance and gesture.

The first piece in figure 3 is rather long; its thirty-two bars could have accompanied a short dance, but it is instead played, as the cue in the score reads, after Bonamo hands a chair to Francisco. Considerable stage-business, acting skill, and perhaps almost dance-like gestures would be needed to fill the time this piece takes. Its function is primarily to set the mood, and perhaps to slow down the pacing before the brisk scene which is to follow. The predecessors of the next bits in figure 3, marked *Maestoso*, are clear. Besides their resemblance to accompanied recitatives in opera, these dramatic snippets of music are quite similar to the pieces in Rousseau's *scène-lyrique*, *Pygmalion*, where, to quote Rousseau, "the spoken word is in some way announced and prepared by the musical phrase."⁶ The mood changes with each succeeding bit of dialogue (or mimed emotion), but harmonically and in overall tempo the music is coherent enough to hold the scene together. The important functions here are the mirroring of quick nuances of mood—the difference between Francisco's sense of honor in promising to tell the truth and his sorrow in having to withhold information about his family—and, once again, pacing, perhaps especially important in a scene where only half the conversation is directly heard.

Figure 4 (opposite page). Charles Farley (1771-1859) as Francisco in *A Tale of Mystery* (1802), painted by Samuel de Wilde (1748-1832). Reproduced by kind permission of the Garrick Club, London.

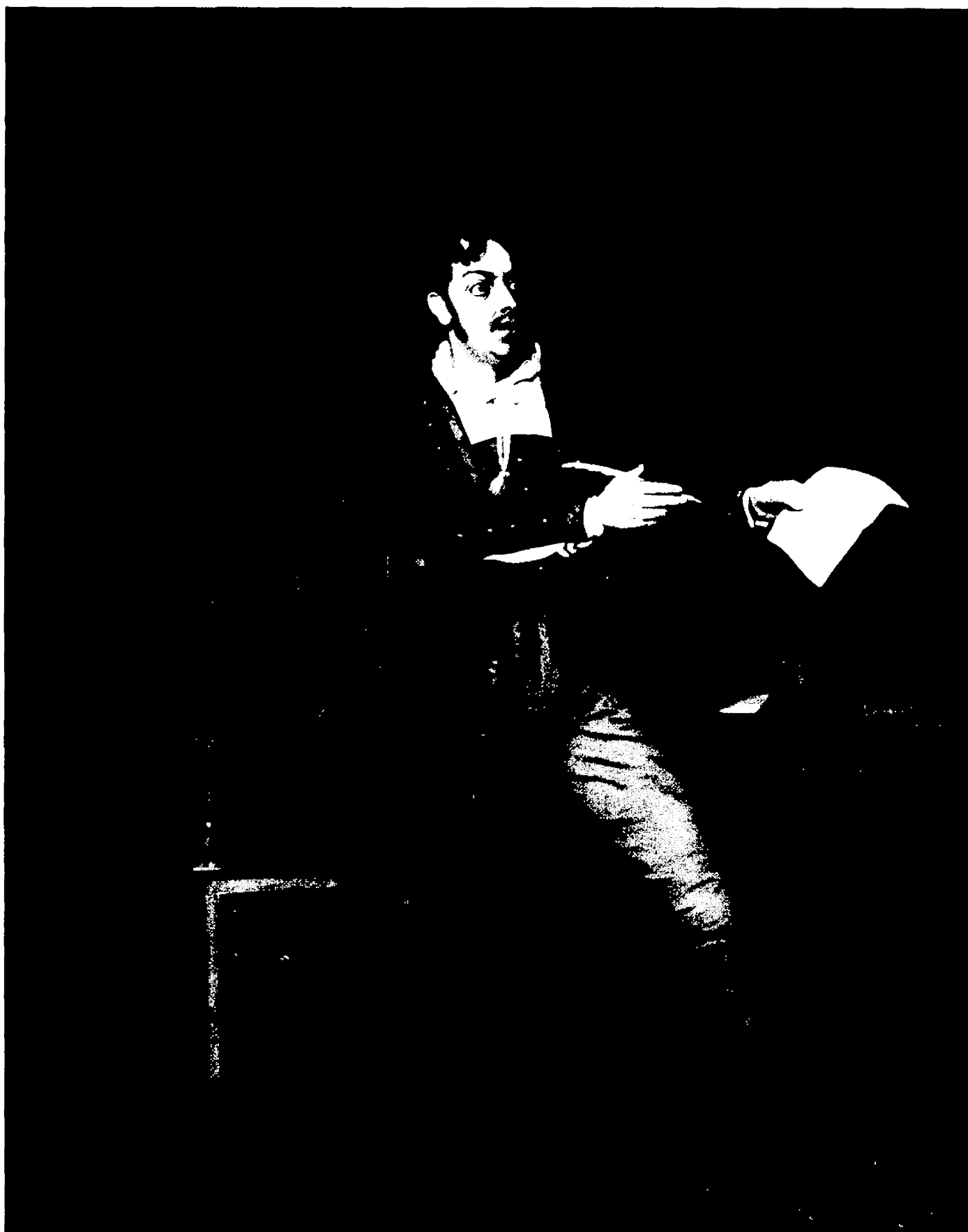
³ I have used the term "action music" for similar passages in "Action Music in American Pantomime and Melodrama, 1730-1913," *American Music*, 2, no. 4 (Winter 1984), 49-72.

⁴ See John Ward, "Points of Departure," p. 10 above, for a description of "patterned sound."

⁵ See pp. 9-10 of a prompt copy of the edition published in New York for N. Judah by G. & R. Waite in 1803.

The theater historian Charles Durang purchased this copy in 1819, which is now in the Harvard Theatre Collection, TS 2653.100.

⁶ *Fragments d'observations sur l'Alceste italien de M. le Chevalier Gluck (1774) in Oeuvres complètes*, new edition, (Paris: Dalibon, 1826), XIV, 141: "la phrase parlée est en quelque sort annoncée et préparée par la phrase musicale."



18 A TALE OF MYSTERY.

Mal. Executioners!

Rom. Infamy!

Mal. Racks!

Rom. Maledictions!

Mal. From all which a blow may yet deliver us.

SELINA, entering and hiding behind the door, opposite to the chamber of Romaldi, overhears them.

Rom. 'Tis a damning crime!

Mal. Were it the first.

Rom. Where is he to sleep?

Mal. There. (pointing to the chamber opposite to Romaldi's)

Sel. (behind the door) They mean Francisco!

Rom. Obstinate fool! Since he will stay—

Mal. He must die.

Sel. The monsters!

Rom. I heard a noise.

Mal. (looking toward the folding-doors) He's coming.

Rom. Let us retire and concert—

Mal. Then, at midnight—

A TALE OF MYSTERY.

19

Rom. When he sleeps—

Mal. He'll wake no more!

[*Exeunt to the chamber of the Count.*

(*The stage dark: soft music, but expressing first pain and alarm; then the successive feelings of the scene. FIAMETTA enters, with FRANCISCO, and a lamp; which she places on the table. She regards him with compassion, points to his bed-room, then curtsies with kindness and respect, and retires; he returning her kindness. He seats himself as if to write, rises, takes the lamp, looks round with apprehension, goes to the chamber-door of Romaldi, starts away with horror, recovers himself, again places the lamp on the table, and sits down to write. The door of Romaldi opens: MALVOGLIO half appears, watching Francisco; but, as he turns, again retires.*)

Enter SELINA, who gently pulls the sleeve of Francisco: he starts; but, seeing her, his countenance expands with pleasure.

(*Music pauses on a half close.*)

Sel. (in a low voice) Dare not to sleep! I

D 2

Figure 5 (above). Holcroft, *A Tale of Mystery*, pp. 18-19.

Figure 6 (opposite page). Busby, *A Tale of Mystery*, pp. 15-16.

The importance of music within this early melodrama is made explicit in many places in the playbook, a feature soon dropped in printed books. For example, toward the end of Act I, as Francisco readies himself for bed, the stage directions include "soft music, but expressing first pain and alarm; then the successive feelings of the scene" (see figure 5). Figure 6 illustrates his emotions: apprehension, horror, gentleness, pleasure—which, like the earlier ones, are connected, yet differentiated. Most remarkable for a printed playbook is the description "Music pauses on a half close" (see figure 5), which is as specific and technical a demand as any made on the actors. The score by Thomas Busby indeed does end this section on a half-close—ready to leap into the "Con furia" section in which the old tormentor of Francisco, Romaldi, comes to threaten him (see figure 6).

Left over from its French origin—and relating also to English eighteenth-century dance and pantomime—is the extended ballet sequence that begins Act II. It is built into the plot as a pre-nuptial festivity, and its four separate dances could be accompanied by onstage musicians. In this scene, music thus assumes a function it has in the "real world."

Francisco rises, takes the Lamp, looks round with apprehension.

Larghetto

A musical score for piano, consisting of two staves. The tempo is marked 'Larghetto' and the dynamics are 'p'. The music is in a minor key and features a slow, somber melody with a steady accompaniment.

Coming to Romaldia Door, he starts away with horror.

A musical score for piano, consisting of two staves. The dynamics are 'f'. The music is more rhythmic and agitated, reflecting the character's horror.

He recovers himself, and returns to the Table.

Larghetto

A musical score for piano, consisting of two staves. The tempo is marked 'Larghetto' and the dynamics are 'p'. The music returns to a slower, more controlled pace.

Selina enters and gently pulling him by the Sleeves, he starts.

A musical score for piano, consisting of two staves. The dynamics are 'sf'. The music is characterized by sharp, rhythmic chords and a sense of sudden movement.

Francisco seeing Selina, his countenance expands with pleasure.

A musical score for piano, consisting of two staves. The dynamics are 'sp'. The music is more melodic and expressive, indicating a change in Francisco's mood.

16

Sel. "Your life is in danger!"

Con furia

A musical score for piano, consisting of two staves. The tempo is marked 'Con furia'. The music is very fast and dramatic, with a strong rhythmic drive and a sense of urgency.

110 SONG. Omitted in the representation.

Vio. 1^o

Vio. 2^o *Unite*

Viola

Voce

Bassi

Allegretto e spiritoso

p

The

Lightning may blase, and the Thunder may roll, And the Hail clatter down on the

roof. Yet be the heart kind, and un-spotted the Soul, It can

Figure 7. *Bushy, A Tale of Mystery*,
p. 30.

Selina testifies joy at the sight of the Miller's House.

Vivace

Another type of extended music, however, did not appear, despite the fact that it is printed in the score, and in fact is the only part scored for instruments. Figure 7 shows the first page of a three-strophe song that was to have been sung when Selina, now banished from Bonamo's house along with Francisco, who has been discovered to be her long-lost father, sees the Miller's cottage, where they can finally find refuge from the storm through which they have been walking. Despite the pastoral charm of the song and its undoubted saleability as a separate item, it was, according to the score, "omitted in the representation." Very likely it was too long and static to survive the new aesthetic of ever-changing emotion that is so clearly seen in the passage in figure 3. The drama is moving at a very fast pace now, with the typical "melodramatic" ending in sight—the villain hiding in the Miller's house, which Selina and her father are approaching, and the soldiers searching the nearby mountains. Instead of stopping the action in a three-strophe song, Selina demonstrates her joyful mood in a twenty-four-bar Vivace (figure 8).

Figure 8. Bushy, *A Tale of Mystery*, p. 35.

By the 1880s, a twenty-four-bar piece was long for a melodrama, even though music was perhaps no less important to the production. The expression "bits and pieces" is truly applicable to the music of late nineteenth-century melodramas in the popular theater. An effective illustration of this is *Monte Cristo*, a theatrical adaptation of the Dumas novel of 1844-45; it was made popular in America by the English actor Charles Fechter in the 1860s and 1870s, then taken over and



Figure 9 (above left). Mr. James O'Neill Presenting . . . Monte Cristo (Buffalo, NY: The Corner Lithograph Co., [late 1880s]), title page. Harvard Theatre Collection.

Figure 10 (above right). Mr. James O'Neill, p. [10]: as the Count in Act V.



refurbished in 1883 by James O'Neill (see figures 9 and 10), who literally played it until he dropped, in formats ranging from a three and one-half-hour, five-act melodrama to a twenty-minute, one-act vaudeville skit; he last played it for the silent film camera in 1912. I have utilized sources from the mid-point of this odyssey—a promptbook, a cue-sheet, and manuscript orchestral parts for the music to *Monte Cristo*. All are now in the Harvard Theatre Collection,⁷ formerly the property of J.B. Studley, a Boston actor who in 1884 mounted the play and portrayed the lead role, until he was enjoined by the owner of the script, John Stetson—who had managed James O'Neill in his first appearance in the role in 1883. O'Neill ultimately bought the script from Stetson—an act memorialized by his son Eugene in *Long Day's Journey into Night*, where the father says: "That God-damned play I bought for a song and made such a great success in, it ruined me with its promise of an easy fortune."⁸

A full understanding of the use of music in *Monte Cristo* entails knowing the plot in detail, but for our purposes a few salient features will suffice, aided by pictures of James O'Neill in his role.

⁷ See TS 2436.500 for the printed prompt book and TS 3436.700 for the manuscript music, cue sheet, and script. I wish to acknowledge the help of the Harvard Theatre Collection staff for making these and other materials

readily available.

⁸ *Long Day's Journey into Night* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950), p. 149.

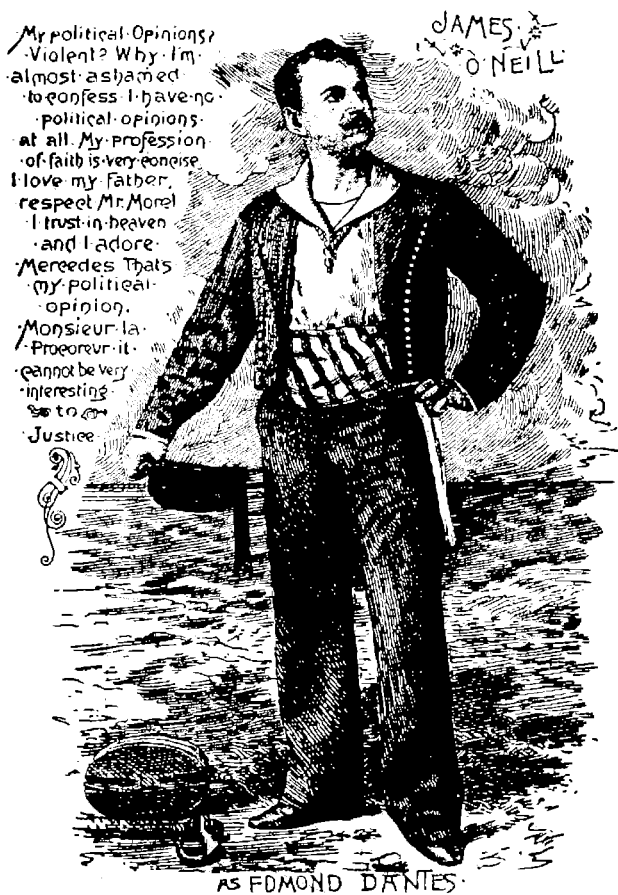


Figure 11 (above left). Mr. James O'Neill, p. [3]: as Dantes in act I.

Figure 12 (above right). Anonymous photograph (ca. 1885) of O'Neill as Dantes, imprisoned in the Château d'If in act II. Harvard Theatre Collection.

Edmund Dantes, the young sailor hero of Act I (figure 11), has excited the envy of his evil shipmate Danglars. The jealous man is joined by two of his comrades, and as a result of their machinations Dantes is arrested in the midst of his wedding to the beautiful Mercedes. He is sent to a dreaded island prison, the Château d'If (figure 12), where he spends eighteen years, gaining the friendship of the Abbé Busoni, who on his deathbed gives Dantes the secret to the location of the treasure of Monte Cristo. Upon his escape from prison, Dantes declares "the world is mine," a line made famous in O'Neill's performance (figure 13), then plots his revenge upon the people who had incarcerated him. He first disguises himself as the Abbé Busoni and oversees the death of the first of his antagonists (figure 14). He next appears as the mysterious Count of Monte Cristo and makes himself known to his former betrothed, Mercedes, now married to one of his enemies, Fernand, in the grand ballroom scene of Act IV (see frontispiece, page 4). Then he avenges himself on the two remaining villains, Fernand and Danglars, in the climactic duel scene (figure 15).

The Harvard manuscript consists of a score for the conductor and nine instrumental parts, with melody lines or cross-references for twenty-eight melodic segments, each of which I will term a melos. The parts are for first and second violins, viola, bass, trombone, flute, clarinet, cornet, and drum. The composition is unattributed. "Property of J. Studley" is written on the conductor's part, and musicians' names appear on some parts, which were signed by players from such places as the Grand Opera House in Brooklyn and the Lyceum Theater in Philadelphia.



Figure 13 (above left). Mr. James O'Neill, p. [5]: as Dantes in act II.

Figure 14 (above right). Mr. James O'Neill, p. [7]: disguised as the Abbé Busoni in act III.



In comparison to *A Tale of Mystery* the amount of music provided seems remarkably sparse. Most examples are eight bars long; several consist of just one chord. The longest is seventeen bars. Thirteen of the twenty-eight melos are repetitions of previously heard material. From the conductor's score we learn how long the spoken portions between music cues lasted: six minutes were consumed by dialogue between melos 8 and melos 9; fifteen minutes between 15 and 16, and twenty-two minutes between 20 and 21.

This was, however, not the only music played by the orchestra. It played an overture and entr'acte music, usually drawn from the regular European and American theater fare of the day. A Boston playbill for *Monte Cristo* lists the music played before and between the acts as *The Magic Flute*, a Strauss waltz, and the Finale of the first act of *Lohengrin*.⁹ The manuscript score calls for "a long overture" before the opening cue for Act IV in all parts; the piece played may well have varied from performance to performance.

The actual amount of dramatic music is small. Nevertheless, many of the same functions that music served in early melodrama are still present in *Monte Cristo*, but it now unobtrusively underscores techniques of lighting, staging, mechanical effects, and acting—all of which had undergone change since the early days of melodrama.

⁹ Playbill for the Globe Theatre, Boston, Wednesday, October 26, 1870, in the Harvard Theatre Collection.



Figure 15. Mr. James O'Neill, p. 111; fighting the duel in act I.

Closed-form set pieces and dances are fewer and shorter and serve definite purposes. In *Monte Cristo*, the only song is the one sung by the drunken jailer Caderousse in Act I. (In the O'Neill script a cue for this is provided; it was to be "The dogs and the cats and the chickens and the rats," an unidentified tune that must be an example of pre-existent rather than newly composed music.) The closed-form pieces occur mostly at changes of scene or entries and exits, such as the opening scene of festivity at a tavern (figure 16, melos 1); the entrance of the ship in Act I (figure 17, melos 4), a piece probably designed in part to cover the noise of moving the ship onstage; and a twenty-four-bar march in Act II, which accompanies the entrance of a group of soldiers. These pieces do not differ in style or function from the incidental music used in most plays—they use either well-established theatrical conventions or are "realistic," portraying music that would have been heard by the characters on stage.

Related to such incidental music, but with a subtly different function, is entrance and exit music for lead characters. In *Monte Cristo*, it is Edmund Dantes, the future Count of Monte Cristo, who has the most entrance and exit music. It adds weight to his appearances, and in this play, where the transformations of his character are an important part of the plot, the changes in his entrance music are crucial. Melos 5 (figure 18) designates the young Edmund as a bold sailor; his character is further developed by re-use of part of the "soldier music" heard in Act II (figure 19, melos 13), which follows and musically gives a response to his betrothed Mercedes: "I

Monte Cristo *Conductor*

N^o 1 Opening *All^o* 2/4

Curtain

W. "Learn all from him"

N^o 4 Isn't she pretty

All^o 3/4

Fill on.

he is here from (Lily)

N^o 5. All^o 6/8

Fill on

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Figure 16 (top). Monte Cristo, conductor's part (before 1884), fol. 1: melos 1.

Figure 17 (center). Monte Cristo, conductor's part, fol. 1: melos 4.

Figure 18 (bottom). Monte Cristo, conductor's part, fol. 1v: melos 5.

N^o 13. Riches of Peru

Marcia

Fill on

N^o 18 here they are

Allegro

till the Stranger
entire

All Command on

Allegro Oct II

All. And

tremolo

till the Stranger
entire

Figure 19 (top). Monte Cristo, conductor's part, fol. 2: melos 13.

Figure 20 (center). Monte Cristo, conductor's part, fol. 2v: melos 18.

Figure 21 (bottom). Monte Cristo, conductor's part, fol. 2v: melos 15.

No. 3. sure of it and then
 All^o || *tremolo*
 till Ladrouse on stairs

No. 7. in these words
 All^o || *tremolo*
 till letter's written. Stop when throws letter in the floor

Figure 22 (above). Monte Cristo, conductor's part, fol. 1, melos 3.

Figure 23 (below). Monte Cristo, conductor's part, fol. 1v, melos 7.

would not give this hour of my life for all the riches of Peru." Melos 18 (figure 20) is also for Edmund, whose disguise as the Abbé Busoni is portrayed by a dotted-rhythm Largo in minor to match his adopted role. More curious is the re-use of the same music as Melos 26, just before Edmund's dramatic entrance as the Count of Monte Cristo in Act IV; here it may be a cue to the audience, to let it know that the Abbé and the Count are one and the same.

Besides introducing characters, music functions in an important way to set mood and to smooth transitions. Melos 15 (figure 21) is played when the scene changes from the gaiety of the marriage festivities to the gloom of the cell in the Château d'If, where Edmund has been confined for eighteen years. It is heard again as melos 16 at the end of that scene, where it is twice stated, once pianissimo as guards are heard coming, and then double forte as Edmund escapes and cries out: "the world is mine!" Sixteen bars long and ending on the tonic, it is nonetheless inconclusive enough to be repeatable *ad infinitum*, or, as one manuscript part reads, "till Mr. Studley speaks."

The most stereotypical pieces in melodrama are the "hurries" and the "agitatos," often very short passages that give an emotional punch to particular portions of the play. Now fully emancipated from their origin as action music, the function of the hurries in the 1880s has changed to one of underlining emotional agitation rather than physical action. Melos 3 (figure 22), for example, is designated in the cue sheet (figure 24) as "4 Bars Hurry", but here the situation is clearly one of emotional agitation in the mind of the evil Danglars as he begins to plot Edmund's downfall. His lines read: "Something not quite straight here! That man came looking for the letter that Edmund received at Elba from the hands of the exiled emperor. Let me

Monte Cristo. Act 1st

at Rise — Lively 7
 shall know from him — 4 Bars Hurry 10/16
 shure of it, and then — 4 Bars Hurry ~~10/16~~ 5
 isn't she pretty — Lively till on.
 he is here — Lively till on.
 what lies behind him — Lively till off.
 in those words — All: ~~agitato~~ tremolo pp till letter is written.
 here they come — Lively till on.
 it be in time — Lively till change.

Scene 2^d

it is I — Chord ff
 and now to work — Lively till change.

Scene 3^d

here is Monsieur Edmond — Short Hurry 3
 all the riches of Peru — March till Soldiers on
 I am lost — All: agitato tremolo ff till Curtain

Act 2^d Scene 1st taret

~~Scene 2^d~~

is a charming woman — Slow tremolo till change & then 16/16

Scene 3^d 16/16

when sentinels appear above prison — Slow tremolo pp ff till curtain

Act 3^d 16/16

at Rise — ~~Agitato~~ pp Lively
 here they are — Slow mysterious pp till on (Andlysonic)
 Salute you — March till Soldiers off
 nothing to fear — 4 Bars Hurry finish with Chord 5/16
 I call him — Hurry pp ff according to action till Curtain
 turnover.

Figure 24. Monte Cristo, cue sheet (before 1884), p. 1. Harvard Theatre Collection.

only be sure of it and then . . . (music).” Here the music literally takes off from the uncompleted thought, letting the audience fill in the conclusion with non-specific, but agitated emotion—accurately mimicking the character’s own emotional situation, since he himself does not yet know what he will do to bring Edmund down. Whether or not the actor mimes something appropriate to the music (no action is specified in the script), the emphasis is nevertheless on emotion rather than action.

The longest music of this sort is for melos 7 (figure 23), played throughout the scene as Danglars pens and reads aloud the letter which will implicate Edmund as a Bonapartist. Without the music it would not necessarily be apparent that what Danglars is doing is evil in intent. According to notations pencilled into the score, this melos is played until Danglars crumples up the letter and throws it at Fernando’s feet (who in turn will bear it to the appropriate officials). It is designated *allegro agitato tremolo*, a popular title for a melos, often shortened to *agit*. The use of tremolo to indicate strong emotion is one that dates back at least to Monteverdi, whose *stile concitato* is found in *Il Combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda* of 1624.

The *allegro agitato* music of melos 7 consists of sixteen bars in d minor, but it may be extended by repeating either of the first two sections or the ending section, which is designed to allow for repetition. Such extension was undoubtedly required when the music recurred at the end of the act, where the trap Danglars has laid with the letter is sprung and Edmund Dantes is caught in it. Edmund, about to be married, is interrupted by the police. When he hears that he is to be imprisoned in the dreaded Château d’If, he cries out: “I am lost!”; “music until curtain” reads the manuscript score; over this music, Danglars mutters in an aside: “You are indeed!” The agents seize Edmund; the gendarmes surround him; the sailors are held back; and Edmund’s bride-to-be, Mercedes, falls in a faint. From these stage directions (given in the Studley manuscript), it is apparent that the characters froze in a tableau of the sort called for in many scripts of the period.

The horror of that moment, underlined by music that has previously been employed to make the audience aware of Danglars’ dastardly plot, is pure melodrama: the tableau is a picture of happiness ruined, and the contrast between Edmund’s confident music of moments before and this dark passage is an intensification of that picture in emotional terms. The fact that every aspect of the play at this point strives for the same stark contrast is what makes it melodramatic in the broadest sense of the term. Nothing is ambiguous. The music is the final powerful underlining that clarifies at the same time that it carries the audience, if it is not already there, to the point of feeling deeply about the situation. Anyone’s worst fear—to be drastically interrupted at the very point of achieving highest happiness—is here made emotionally real by the music, at a moment when there are no more words, and even the action has ceased. The actors must hold their poses and let the music do its work, which may well be to carry the emotions of the audience to a realm transcending specific plot and situation, a world which some have suggested is akin to that of myth—in touch with the larger truths of human existence.¹⁰

The music itself may seem too trite to serve such a lofty end, but if it is to reach the emotions of its musically unsophisticated audiences, unblocked by conscious

¹⁰ See Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), pp. 36–55, where he suggests that melodrama deals in unambiguous signs,

reinforced at every level—rhetoric, gesture, scenery, lighting, and music.

thought, and is to remain unobtrusive, but still effective, it *must* be conventional. And, in the right dramatic situation, conventional music can work theatrical magic. The musical conventions are rather consistent in melodramas of the period; they form a language of emotion codified in patterns as well-known and understood as were the earlier conventions of status, such as the royal trumpets. Some, like the hurries, were inherited from older theatrical forms, while some were newly refurbished to fit the Romantic era, with appropriately chromatic harmonies, rising and falling sequences, syncopated rhythms, and the ubiquitous tremolo.

Within the limitations of convention, the composers of a succession of melos segments knew how to manipulate these short forms in order to achieve not only a range of emotions, but also a range of dramatic functions—from provision of local color and realistic music to mood-setting and quite specific emotional underlining. Music for nineteenth-century melodrama certainly qualifies as “bits and pieces,” but each bit and piece was tellingly crafted to accomplish its dramatic work.

As a postscript, it should be noted that the melodrama had continuity not only with its eighteenth-century roots, but also with its twentieth-century descendants, film and television. Before James O’Neill’s death in 1920, Adolph Zukor, an early film pioneer, captured O’Neill’s performance in *Monte Cristo* on a five-reel silent film of 1912 (as stated above).¹¹ This was the first film made (though not the first released) in Zukor’s “Famous Players and Famous Plays” series, which led the way to full-length feature films. Much can be learned about the style of acting cultivated for melodrama from this early series, which includes many films taken over directly from staged melodramas, with some re-writing to shorten them and to protect copyright. The exaggeration of gesture, the timing, and the stage actor’s focus are captured on film—and these very characteristics were quickly modified because of their unsuitability for the new medium. New actors, trained to film, began to be used; the same year as O’Neill’s *Monte Cristo* was filmed, the Selig Studios in Chicago released a three-reel version of the play starring John Gilbert. O’Neill sued over the copyright and won, but his version was shelved.¹²

There is continuity of tradition in the music as well, although with some obvious differences, since silent film music had to be continuous rather than sporadic. If we remember, though, that the same musicians who accompanied melodrama became the suppliers of music for the silent film, it is not surprising to find some of the same conventions with some of the same names—“hurry” and “agitato,” for example—in the cue sheets and piano books for films.¹³

¹¹ The paper-prints of this film are on deposit at the Library of Congress Film Archives. A 16 millimeter print has been restored from them.

¹² According to Louis Sheaffer, *O’Neill: Son and Playwright* (Boston: Little, Brown, & Co., 1968), p. 224, records show that O’Neill won the suit and was awarded a share in royalties from the Chicago film. The *Monte Cristo*

script at the Museum of the City of New York was introduced as evidence at the hearing.

¹³ See, for example, J. S. Zamecnik, *Sam Fox Moving Picture Music* (Cleveland: Sam Fox Publications, 1913). A passage of hurry music from Zamecnik’s publication is cited in Anne Dhu Shapiro, “Action Music,” p. 68.