

INTERPRETIVE STRATEGIES: INTENTIONALITY

Irene Atkins writes that “the elements of a specific source-music sequence or scene having been determined, the historian or critic can then approach an analysis of the music and the scene in terms of the filmmaker’s rationale and the ways in which he uses music to communicate with the audience.”⁷ Although our critical responses need not be predicated solely on artistic intent, Atkins is right in emphasizing the filmmaker’s rationale, especially when his or her musical choices are clearly conscious. Valuable interpretations can derive from these understandings, and there are many examples of this kind.

In Sally Potter’s remarkable *Thriller* (1979), Puccini’s *La Bohème* is played, both narratively and musically, against Bernard Herrmann’s music to Hitchcock’s *Psycho*. The film’s argument is set up, discursively, patiently, convincingly, on the disjunction between the music sources: romantic strains and jarring screeches are revealed as diverse expression of the same impulse, of doing violence to women.

In Jean-Luc Godard’s *Scenario du Film Passion* (1982), he explains his use in *Passion* (also 1982) of some “magnificent romantic music, this little-known Dvorak piano concerto. Perhaps it will help me see, and say, that there is romance in labour.” Godard confirms that, in at least some cases, musical selections are made for what they represent, and not just for accompaniment. In this case the cue is chosen because of its idiom. Dvorak aside, we don’t understand part of the film if we don’t identify that idiom.⁸

One of the powerful effects of idiomatic selection and identification is the kind of epochal confluences—the time of composition bound to the time of quotation—they effect. John Addison speaks of his score for *Tom Jones* (1963). “The film opened with a sequence in silent film style, for which I used the very simple device of a harpsichord to represent the eighteenth century and a slightly out of tune piano to denote the silent movie element.”⁹

Here traditional forms, or forms associated with tradition, such as the harpsichord and the eighteenth century, support the film-modernist rendering of an iconoclastic narrative. “Though it was the eighteenth century which ‘swung’ on the screen, there was a