Lyrics, music, and voice
A comparative semiotics of emotion in Cole Porter’s “Miss Otis Regrets”

Carolina Lindenberg Lemos

Université de Liège
Universidade de São Paulo
CAPES

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2 Textual organization
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3 A Picture of Miss Otis
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4 Levels
   • Miss Otis’ Viewpoint
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The emotional path of Miss Otis

- The account of a servant
- Sequence of events
- Impression of her emotional fluctuations
The emotional path of Miss Otis

- The account of a servant
- Sequence of events
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## The emotional path of Miss Otis

- The account of a servant
- Sequence of events
- Impression of her emotional fluctuations
The narration

- The relation narrator vs. narrative
  - Alluded emotional variations
  - Values: presentation and negation
- Enunciator’s choice: manipulation of tensions
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## Organization

- Relation of lyrics and musical elements
- Emotional path: narrative sequence and figures
- Relations between narration and narrated
Organization

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A Picture of Miss Otis

Levels

Textual organization

Lyrics and Melody

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>Miss Otis regrets she’s unable to lunch today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2</td>
<td><em>Madam</em>, Miss Otis regrets she’s unable to lunch today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A3</td>
<td>She is sorry to be delayed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A4</td>
<td>But last evening down in lover’s lane she strayed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A5</td>
<td><em>Madam</em>, Miss Otis regrets she’s unable to lunch today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B1</td>
<td>When she woke up and found that her dream of love was gone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B2</td>
<td><em>Madam</em>, she ran to the man who had led her so far astray</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B3</td>
<td>And from under her velvet gown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B4</td>
<td>She drew a gun and shot her lover down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B5</td>
<td><em>Madam</em>, Miss Otis regrets she’s unable to lunch today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C1</td>
<td>When the mob came and got her and dragged her from the jail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2</td>
<td><em>Madam</em>, they strung her upon the old willow across the way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C3</td>
<td>And the moment before she died</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C4</td>
<td>She lifted up her lovely head and cried</td>
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The Formula

- Repeated sentence
  - Closing of parts
  - Formula: little semantic content
  - Repetition leads to accentuation
- Background: place of rest
- Too regular and frequent
- Contrast of poor semantic content and emotional density of the song
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Repetition

- Repetition
  - Stagnation
  - Tension
  - Change in direction

- Opposition
  - Sentence that is repeated
  - Narrative that progresses

- Ressemantization
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**The Story**

### The Servant

- **Formula**: title and last name; “Madam”
- **A woman?**
  - positioning in favor of Miss Otis
  - description of the dress
  - description of her emotional state ("in Lover's Lane she strayed")
  - use of the adjective “lovely”
Formula: title and last name; “Madam”

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Part A

- First contrast of the formula with the affective impact
- A broken heart is not in great conflict with the image of an aristocrat
First contrast of the formula with the affective impact

A broken heart is not in great conflict with the image of an aristocrat
Part B

- **Shooting:** crime
- Passage from the domestic to the public realm
- B5: new interpretation
- Emotional increase: actions reveal her emotional state
Part B

- Shooting: crime
- Passage from the domestic to the public realm
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Part C

- Death
  - C5: new interpretation
  - Finality is contradictory with the transitory expression “today”
Death

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Part C

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- Finality is contradictory with the transitory expression “today”
Strong emotional disposition

- Negative external judgement (prison)
- Extreme negative external judgement (death)
- Progressive distanciation augmentation in contrast between the story and the formula
Scale

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### Interpretation

See score!
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### Miss Otis' Viewpoint

#### The Characters’ Perspective

- Emotional state through her actions
- Reaction supposes a strong deception
- Her values contrasts with those of the group
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The Narrator’s Perspective

- Description of Miss Otis: figures of proximity and kindness
- Description of the mob: violence
- Narrator’s values: opposition to the group
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Pragmatic and Cognitive Dimensions

- Narrator’s values overpower those of the group: control over the whole narrative
- Pragmatic dimension: to tell a story
- Cognitive dimension: to pass judgement on the actions and events
- Hierarchy: pragmatic dimension is an internal referent
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Vocative

- Narrator’s pragmatic sphere: “Madam”
- Only instance of first person
- Linguistic: a loose element, no syntactic link
- Musical:
  - Element of transition
  - Harmony: not a tonic (first degree – conclusions), not a dominant (fifth degree – beginnings)
  - It “breaks” the question-answer structure
  - Rhythm: the interpreter changes the rhythmic cells and leaves “Madam” unchanged
- Emphasis on the word highlights the dialog dimension
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Durations

- Original score: extra compass
- Interpretation
- Strongest emotional charge in each part
Durations

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- Third person: a break in her “duties”, added semantic content
- The introduction of the story resignifies the otherwise common message
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The Conexion

Sincretism of Levels

- **Verbal**
  - Two stories
  - Contrast: progressively bigger
  - Strangeness adds meaning

- **Musical**
  - Melody (range) and durations: accentuation of critical parts of the melody and of changes in the interpretation of the formula
  - Harmony and rhythm: emphasis and contrasts that highlight the dialog
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The role of the voice
carolinalemos@usp.br