

Maeve Connolly

A Crime Dramatically Reconstructed, Again

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In “A Crime Dramatically Reconstructed, Again” an act of acoustic voyeurism is compulsively staged and re-staged for the camera. The drama is punctuated by ambiguous shadows, gradually revealed as a hand over the lens. Each momentary loss of vision recalls the self-inflicted blindness of Oedipus. As an archetypal three act narrative, the tragedy of Oedipus is celebrated by Aristotle because its form can be surveyed as a whole. It offers no barrier to perception or threat to subjectivity. In Freudian psychoanalysis, however, the story of Oedipus reveals the workings of the unconscious mind and the instability of the subject.

Investigation of narrative subjectivity is a staple of critical film practice but “A Crime...” exceeds the limits of many structuralist critiques through the incorporation of acousmatic sound. In this Oedipal tragedy, the object of desire is represented by the first recording of Caruso (performing Puccini’s *La Tosca*). The interplay between the unseen voice, the projector and the moving image adds a historical dimension to the exploration of psychoanalytic and aesthetic codes. It acts as a reminder that Freud’s theory of the unconscious was modelled upon on contemporary mechanisms of storage and transmission, such as the phonograph.

The recording of Caruso’s voice did little to halt the displacement of stage drama by cinema as a popular form of expression. Only fragments of melodrama, a combination of gesture and music to circumvent restrictions against public speech, survived in silent cinema. The moment of plenitude experienced and lost in “A Crime...”, can be read then as an idealised unity of sound and image, an imaginary moment before the birth of cinema.

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