

The sounds in *The Thin Man*: A Case of Symbiotic Relationship Between Literature, Cinema, and Radio

An interesting outcome of the contemporary reflection on media consists of treating them as a reality in permanent transformation, not as fixed natural objects but «relational concepts» (Natale), resulting from the interplay of different elements. A pattern of tensions that also draws less monolithic assumptions about each medium' specificity, soliciting a constant connection with other media as well as diachronic approach to the study of intermediality. Asserting the importance of the study of the past, the aim of this proposal is to examine the case of *The Thin Man* as an historical example of constant border crossing from literature to cinema and from cinema to radio, a process surveyed, here, isolating the sounds (dialogue, music, sound effects).

Three are the components to investigate the symbiosis. First, the *speech*: the flat, muscular, and laconic language identifying Hammett' style dissolves into verbal dexterity and sophisticated repartees derived from the screenwriting teams of Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett. Those witticisms found in the radio adaptation a perfect amplifier, largely based on the radio's innate tendency to play with words, revealing, incidentally, the imprint of the American logocracy.

Second, the *characters*: in spite of his marriage with Nora, Nick Charles can be defined through the archetype of the tough detective hero, a man driven by an eccentric morality in a loathsome world. A character overtly appearing in first-person narrative: the I-talk. Otherwise, in the movie, the suave and classy persona of William Powell, with his mid-Atlantic cultivated accent, deviates from the proletarian underground of 1930s detective fiction. Mostly, it is the gained centrality of Nora (Myrna Loy) to change the masculine focal point giving room to another portrayal of female unruliness, akin to the comic roles played by Lombard or Hepburn in the main screwball comedies of the era. Showing that marriage should have been synonym of fun, Loy represents both the disruptive force of her language (jabs, punchlines), and a woman «set squarely in the position of equal in wit, energy and resourcefulness to her male partner» (Young).

Third, the *genre*: the blend of detective drama and screwball comedy obtained in the movie is reproduced by the radio and lodged in the sound effects. The radio adaptation is of some interest for many reasons but, mostly, because it uses the sounds – hooks and short musical intermissions – to shape our perceptions of the transient genre at every plot's turnout.

From a novel that has a great ability to make us feel the resonance of a spoken language to a film that mould this aural bedrock in a way attuned to mundane practices and changing social roles, we come to the radio version, that configures sounds and music according to the genres. As Jenkins pointed out: «each medium does what it does best», not only adding new insights into the related narrative system but also – in this case – offering different but intertwined hearing experiences.

Keywords: transmedia storytelling, classical Hollywood, literature, radio, American history.

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