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Looking for Echo in George Du Maurier's *Trilby*: An Intermedial Perspective

Présence d'Écho dans Trilby *et quelques œuvres picturales du XIX*[e] *siècle*

Maxime Leroy

1 George Du Maurier's *Trilby* tells the story of Trilby O'Ferrall, an artist's model in Paris, who falls under the spell of the mesmeric Svengali, a musician who trains her voice through hypnosis and turns her into a famous singer. She travels and performs throughout Europe as La Svengali, and Svengali as the accompanying orchestra conductor. When Svengali falls ill and dies, his control over her comes to an end, she loses her voice and dies a few weeks later. She is much admired and loved by several male characters, including Little Billee, a young painter.

2 The novel, first published in 1894 in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, stands apart in the history of Victorian literature as "the best-selling novel of the century" (Davis 577). It was adapted into a play the year after its publication, and into a film directed by Harold M. Shaw in 1914. Manufacturers marketed Trilby products such as spoons, shoes and brooches, and in 1896, the town of Macon in Florida, often confused with Macon in Georgia, was renamed after the eponymous heroine. Svengali, who transforms Trilby O'Farrell into a great singer by using hypnosis, has passed into the realm of popular culture. The novel was also a landmark in the relatively narrow group of narratives whose prominent theme is the heroines' voices. In *Daniel Deronda* (1876), George Eliot depicted the contrasted figures of Mirah Lapidoth and the Alcharisi. Anthony Trollope's unfinished novel, *The Landleaguers* (1883), was a possible source for Du Maurier. Its heroine, Rachel O'Mahony, starts her career as a famous opera singer thanks to Mr. Moss, an impresario from America and a "greasy Jew" (37) like Svengali. Later, Gaston Leroux's *The Phantom of the Opera* (1910), George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* (1913) and Isak Denisen's "The Dreamers" (1934) were in turn influenced by Du Maurier's novel.

3 *Trilby* was illustrated by its author with 121 engravings. Some of these are full-page illustrations, others are interpolated within the text, and tailpieces appear at the end of some chapters. Taken together, they coalesce with the text to produce a synthetic work to which a musical dimension must be added: the lyrics of popular songs are quoted, and key scenes in the narrative, as well as several plates, show the heroine singing Schubert, Schumann and Chopin. *Trilby*, then, is a pictorial and musical novel meant to be read, looked at and—as far as possible—heard. This, I will contend, is how the book first relates to the tale of Echo and Narcissus, which is precisely about the interactions, and sometimes the "missed connections" (Lawrence 2), between words, images and sounds. I will explore how the motif is activated in the novel, and to what end. Echo's name does not appear anywhere in it, and it would probably be far-fetched to try and match each character with his or her equivalent in Ovid's tale, although some share common traits. Svengali, for example, shows intense narcissism: "he had but one virtue [...] his love of himself as a master of his art—*the* master" (Du Maurier 41); "Svengali [...] looked at himself in what remained of a little zinc mirror, and found that his forehead left little to be desired" (Du Maurier 47). Mrs. Bagot is a Hera of sorts when she prevents Trilby from marrying her son. The references to Echo in *Trilby*, then, are "indirect in the sense that it calls for associations that go beyond mere substitution of a referent" (Irwin 521).

4 I will therefore try to explore new lines of research, first by asking the question "Where can one find Echo in *Trilby*?" I will describe Echo as a latent allusion in the novel. Then, drawing on Roland Barthes's analyses in *Image Music Text*, particularly on his essay "The Grain of the Voice", I will show the importance of representations of the body, both in the text and in some of the engravings. Finally, in connection with the theme of dismemberment, I will compare Du Maurier's text and illustrations to paintings by Edgar Degas and Thomas Eakins, a drawing by J.J. Grandville and a photograph by Julia Margaret Cameron—a choice of artists and works I will explain.

Echo as a latent allusion

5 Echo is present everywhere in *Trilby*, but visible nowhere in the sense that her name never appears as proper noun. Yet, the narrator uses several indications pointing towards the nymph. Firstly, the novel is saturated with mythological and artistic references, among which those to other Greek nymphs and goddesses are prominent. Trilby's first appearance is prepared by a description of a bust of Clytie, a water nymph, who, like the young heroine, is "the likeness of a thing to be loved and desired for ever" (4); the conversation of her three British friends (the three painters who share a studio in Paris) "was to her as the talk of the gods in Olympus" (64); a fictionalised Hector Berlioz wrote twelve articles on her in a journal called *La Lyre Éolienne* (220); "[Trilby] was the Venus Anadyomene from top to toe" (238), and she is also compared to "a siren" (261) and to "dear Circe" (262). Orestes is mentioned, as well as "a centaur and Lapith from the Elgin marbles" (3), the Venus de Milo, Calypso... and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Echo's name is missing but her presence can be detected through other, more specific, allusions.

6 After Little Billee falls in love with Trilby, he looks into her eyes, which "seemed for a moment to reflect only a little image of himself against the sky beyond the big north window" (Du Maurier 30). The young English man is her Narcissus, or at least his attitude embodies "the narcissistic desire of most men who look into the eyes of their nineteenth-century beloveds [...] who were not supposed to reflect back anyone or anything else that

has ever happened to her" (Thurschwell 50). Trilby, who is a nude model, as Little Billee discovers, and who has had adventures with men, is not able to meet such expectations. A slightly modified, and unattributed, quote from a song by Béranger introduces the motif of resonance, Echo's most distinctive attribute: "Votre cœur est un luth suspendu! / Aussitôt qu'on le touche, il résonne" (Du Maurier 52) [original: "Mon cœur est un luth suspendu : Sitôt qu'on le touche, il résonne"]. Trilby's voice—even prior to its transformation under Svengali's influence—is characterised by its reflections in the room: "From that capacious mouth and through that high-bridged bony nose there rolled a volume of breathy sound, not loud, but so immense that it seemed to come from all round, to be reverberated from every surface in the studio" (Du Maurier 18). Years later, as she triumphs in a concert hall in Paris as "La Svengali", the reverberation can be heard again, although in a transfigured way: "in a minute or two it is all over, like the lovely bo (u)quet of fireworks at the end of the show, and she lets what remains of it die out and away like the afterglow of fading Bengal fires—her voice receding into the distance—coming back to you like an echo from all round" (Du Maurier 220).

7 Beside these references and thematic allusions, Echo is present through a simple literary device which makes her presence even more perceptible—the repetition of words. It is one of many sound effects used by Du Maurier, and it creates material echoing effects which pervade the language of the narrator ("Paris! Paris!! Paris!!!", 8), of Svengali ("Svengali, Svengali, Svengali!", 52, 53 and 213, "me, me, me!", 74), Trilby ("*Svengali... Svengali... Svengali!...*", 284) and minor characters such as Mrs. Bagot ("Oh, my God! my God! my God!", 124) and Gecko ("Ich habe *geliebt und gelebet! geliebt und gelebet! geliebt und gelebet!*", 300). As can be observed, the function of these repetitions varies, expressing, in the first four examples given, the narrator's enthusiasm, Svengali's self-absorption, and Trilby's delusive obsession with Svengali (these are her dying words).

8 One would expect repetition, in a novel about music and singing, to have poetical effects, but this is clearly not the case here, because of the deep ironical tone: one reason the novel was so popular was that it seemed to work by debunking great art and taking nonsense to unthinkable heights: "all reverence for all that is high and time-honoured and beautiful seems at a discount", the narrator says (107). It can be argued, then, that these cases of palilalic repetitions play an essential role in bringing down high art irreverently. For example, the use of italics and punctuation signals exaggerated voice inflections and emotional expression.

9 In apparent contradistinction, three illustrations recycle an image of Trilby performing in the exact same fixed position. The two Trilbys on page 219 ("Un impromptu de Chopin") [fig. 1] and page 211 ("Au clair de la lune") [fig. 2] are almost mirror images, while those on pages 211 and 249 ("Oh, don't you remember sweet Alice, Ben Bolt?") [fig. 3] only differ through distance from the viewer. However, as I will show, the dialectic between repetition and variation also plays a role in this case.

Fig. 1: George Du Maurier, "Un impromptu de Chopin" (1894), wood engraving, 7.3 cm x 12.3 cm, illustration for *Trilby*, scanned by Philip V. Allingham for *The Victorian Web*

Fig. 2: George Du Maurier, "Au clair de la lune" (1894), wood engraving, 10 cm x 6.9 cm, illustration for *Trilby*, scanned by Philip V. Allingham for *The Victorian Web*

Fig. 3 : George Du Maurier, "Oh, don't you remember sweet Alice, Ben Bolt?", 6.9 cm x 10.9 cm, wood engraving, illustration for *Trilby*, scanned by Philip V. Allingham for *The Victorian Web*

10 The overall effect, then, is that of an ironic, "latent allusion" (Pasco) to Echo. Du Maurier uses referential, thematic and stylistic markers pointing towards the unnamed mythological figure. For Pasco, "such indications [...] substantiate the existence of a latent allusion that awaits the reader" (18). In order to function, the allusion "must be perceived; its metaphorical terms must be united in the mind of a reader" (Pasco 18). In other words, an active part is expected from the reader to fill in the missing gaps and conjure up the figure more substantially. Simon Cooke has argued that Du Maurier's aim, through the interplay of text and illustrations, was precisely to engage "the reader/ viewer in an interpretive game" (Cooke 96). The analysis of corporeal representations of Trilby's voice, as well as their interactions with contemporary literary and visual representations of sound and music, will reveal some aspects of the game.

From disembodiment to intermedial weaving

11 As Judith Greenberg has suggested, the nymph's story is one "of separation from one's very body due to grief and the persistence of belated and fragmentary resonances in the aftermath of the disembodiment" (319). The relationship and occasional dissociation between voice and body is precisely a running theme in the novel. Svengali is described as having musical genius but no physical capacity to sing—as Henry James noted in his notebooks after he discussed the project with its author, Svengali has "infinite feeling and no organ [...] of his own" (James 51). I would contend that the sexual innuendo was probably intended. The narrator describes such a condition as follows:

> He was absolutely without voice, beyond the harsh, hoarse, weak raven's croak he used to speak with, and no method availed to make one for him. But he grew to understand the human voice as perhaps no one has understood it—before or since.
> So in his head he went forever singing, singing, singing, as probably no human nightingale has ever yet been able to sing out loud for the glory and delight of his fellow-mortals; (making unheard heavenly melody of the cheapest, trivialest tunes —tunes of the café concert, tunes of the nursery, the shop-parlor, the guard-room,

> the school-room, the pothouse, the slum. There was nothing so humble, so base even, but that his magic could transform it into the rarest beauty without altering a note. This seems impossible, I know. But if it didn't, where would the magic come in? (Du Maurier 42)

Again, parody is palpable, but Svengali's voice lacks what Roland Barthes calls "The grain of the voice" in *Image Music Text*. Because he is an accomplished musician, his voice may possess "all the features which belong to the structure of the language being sung, the rules of the genre, the coded form of the melisma, the composer's idiolect, the style of the interpretation" (Barthes 182) but it fails to be "a dual production of language and of music [...] where melody explores how the language works and identifies with that work" (181-182.) Trilby is his exact opposite: she has a great voice but no musical talent. Svengali, fascinated by her vocal capacities, tries, rather grotesquely, to understand them by examining her mouth, as shown in text and in picture [voir fig. 4]:

> She opened her mouth wide, and he looked into it.
> "Himmel! the roof of your mouth is like the dome of the Panthéon; there is room in it for 'toutes les gloires de la France,' and a little to spare! The entrance to your throat is like the middle porch of St. Sulpice when the doors are open for the faithful on All-Saints' day; and not one tooth is missing—thirty-two British teeth as white as milk and as big as knuckle-bones! and your little tongue is scooped out like the leaf of a pink peony, and the bridge of your nose is like the belly of a Stradivarius (—what a sounding-board! and inside your beautiful big chest the lungs are made of leather! and your breath, it embalms—like the breath of a beautiful white heifer fed on the buttercups, and daisies of the Vaterland! and you have a quick, soft, susceptible heart, a heart of gold, matemoiselle—all that sees itself in your face!"). (Du Maurier 50-51)

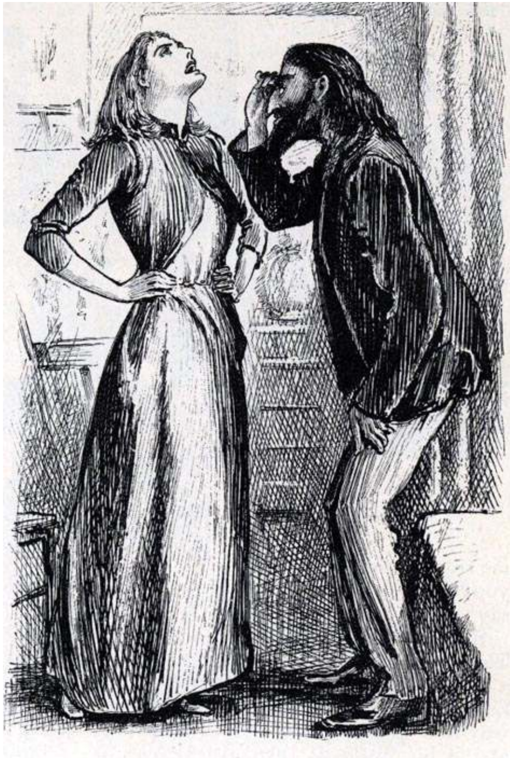

Fig. 4 : George Du Maurier, "Himmel! The roof of your mouth!" (1894), 11 cm x 7.2 cm, wood engraving, illustration for *Trilby*, scanned by Philip V. Allingham for *The Victorian Web*

12 Trilby is depicted as large, with powerful lungs, in contrast with Little Billee's rather weakly constitution. Such "overwhelming femininity", Thurschwell argues, which comes

as a challenge to Little Billee's own "small, infantilized and effeminate" appearance "is dealt with in the novel by literally pulling Trilby apart" (Thurschwell 51) as her feet and her voice are anatomized by her artist friends and by Svengali. Svengali felt that Trilby's voice was "brought to your ears in one and the same movement from deep down in the cavities, the muscles, the membranes, the cartilages" (Barthes 181). It is Barthes's definition of the grain: "the materiality of the body speaking its mother tongue; perhaps the letter, almost certainly *signifiance*", defined as "meaning in its potential voluptuousness" (Barthes 182). Trilby's voice, the narrator says, "expressed [emotions] with no dramatic or histrionic exaggeration of any sort" (Du Maurier 212). As Barthes puts it, "it forms a signifying play having nothing to do with communication, representation (of feelings), expression" (Barthes 182). Yet, it can conjure "a revelation of some impossible golden age" (Du Maurier 212) and some "old cosmic vision of the beauty and sadness of things "(Du Maurier 214). In other words, Trilby does not naturally sing in tune, but when she does under Svengali's spell, her voice "bears along *directly* the symbolic, over the intelligible, the expressive" (Barthes 182). I would add: the sexual. The three British friends are foot fetishists, as we shall see, while Svengali's interest in the girl's anatomy verges on necrophilia:

> "[...] And ach! What a beautiful skeleton you will make! [...] You shall have a nice little mahogany glass case all to yourself in the museum of the École de Médecine, and Svengali shall come in his new fur-lined coat [...] and look through the holes of your eyes into your stupid empty skull, and up the nostrils of your high, bony sounding board of a nose without either a tip or a lip to it, and into the roof of your big mouth, with your thirty-two English teeth, and between your big ribs into your big chest." (Du Maurier 92)

13 The parallel with Barthes's analysis can be expanded further as Trilby's voice is described not by "the poorest of linguistic categories: the adjective" (Barthes 180) but mostly through its effect on the audience and through nouns used as vehicles for metaphors. For example, when Trilby repeats the only stanza of "Au clair de la lune" ("She sang it three times over—the same verse. There is but one", Du Maurier 210), the effect is different each time as she manages "to displace the fringe of contact between music and language" (Barthes 181):[1]

> She sang the verse a second time [...]. One felt all the genial gaiety and grace and impishness of Pierrot and Columbine idealized into frolicsome beauty and holy innocence [...]. Then she came back to earth, and saddened and veiled and darkened her voice as she sang the verse for the third time; and it was a great and sombre tragedy. (Du Maurier 212)

14 The sexual connotations in Svengali's examination of Trilby's mouth and throat, and his subsequent control of her voice through hypnotism, recall Caren Greenberg's analysis of Longus' version of the myth, in which Pan dismembers and scatters the nymph's body (something Svengali does only verbally or phantasmagorically): "Like a printed text, Echo's body provides a new location for [Narcissus'] words, and Echo's voice provides a new reading of his text. At this point Echo's body stands instead of Narcissus' body as a point of origin for his speech, but her body is at the same time a locus of her own sexual desires" (C. Greenberg 305). Similarly, Trilby's body provides a new medium for Svengali but she retains her individuality. "While this seems to prove that Svengali simply sings through Trilby's instrument, La Svengali's type of performance also fits Trilby's personality. Because she prefers common songs in the artists' garret to art music, Trilby could have chosen most of her mesmerized repertoire" (Weliver 265).

15 Thurschwell explains that hypnosis was much discussed during the 1880s and 1890s "through a debate about the mysterious sources of the hypnotic trance, and what it might indicate about the human will" (41). France, she adds, "was a particular locus for anxieties about hypnosis and agency in relation to criminal acts" (42) and Du Maurier, whose novels are informed with contemporary scientific and medical theories, may have chosen Paris (where Dr Charcot was carrying out his research at the Salpêtrière Hospital) for this reason too. As well as being a victim and a ventriloquist's dummy,[2] Trilby is the focus of erotic fantasy from virtually all male characters, while her own sexual desires are acknowledged but leave them frustrated. After looking into Trilby's eyes in search of his own reflection, Little Billee finds "at the bottom of all—a thin slimy layer of sorrow and shame" (Du Maurier 31).

16 In the final part, as Gecko, the Gypsy violonist who accompanied Svengali, reveals the mystery of the girl's transformation, he rewrites Ovid's narrative to stress the vacuity of the maestro's attempt:

> He had but to say "Dors!" and she suddenly became an unconscious Trilby of marble, who could produce wonderful sounds—just the sounds he wanted, and nothing else—and think his thoughts and wish his wishes—and love him at his bidding with a strange unreal factitious love [...] just his own love for himself turned inside out—*à l'envers*—and reflected back on him, as from a mirror [...] *un écho, un simulacre, quoi! pas autre chose!...* It was not worth having! I was not even jealous! (Du Maurier 299)

17 The expression "Trilby of marble" evokes the three duplicated images of her singing and looking like a statue, and also Ovid's narrative in which Echo's bones are turned to stone. As Gecko also says, she has become a "singing-machine" (Du Maurier 299). The commodification of her body, in a marketable sense, is part of the dehumanization process. For contemporary readers, the words *écho* and *simulacre* had resonance in connection with this. Rae Beth Gordon has pointed out that they were commonly found in the psychiatric literature of the time to describe "the anxieties surrounding the mechanization of work" and the expression of "the outing of the corporeal unconscious" (Gordon 59). Du Maurier, then, proposes a reinterpretation of Echo's story in the light of these new approaches. *Trilby* also explores different forms of echophenomena, from parrot-like language ("the only English [Zouzou] knew was the phrase "I will not! I will not!" which he [...] repeated over and over again when he came within ear-shot of a pretty English girl", Du Maurier 102) to obsession ("all this new "Trilbyness" kept echoing in [the Laird's] brain all night (for he was of a nature deeply musical), and sleep had been impossible to him", Du Maurier 229) and to semantic satiation:

> "As when we dwell upon a word we know,
> Repeating, till the word we know so well
> Becomes a wonder, and we know not why,"
> so dwelt the Laird upon the poor old tune "Ben Bolt," which kept singing itself over and over again in his tired consciousness, (and maddened him with novel, strange, unhackneyed, unsuspected beauties such as he had never dreamed of in any earthly music). (Du Maurier 229-230)

18 Twice, the narrator even broadens the perspective, albeit paradoxically: "history is always repeating itself" (Du Maurier 165); "History goes on repeating itself, and so do novels, and this is a platitude, and there's nothing new under the sun" (Du Maurier 100). Echo may not be mentioned by name, but she is a driving force in history, and specifically in the history of the novel. The paradox is that the tone of the passages is comical, while the idea that history repeats itself is pessimistic. Once again, we must bear in mind that

the novel plays with concepts from the philosophy of history as it plays with high art, debunking them and bringing them down irreverently.

Intermedial perspectives

19 The first picture I would like to compare to the representations of Trilby is Edgar Degas's *Singer with a Glove* (*Chanteuse au gant*, 1878) [fig. 5].

Fig. 5: Edgar Degas, *Singer with a Glove* (1878), 53.2 cm x 41 cm, pastel on canvas, Fogg Museum (Harvard Art Museums), Cambridge, MA, reproduced on wikiart.org

20 It is one in a series of paintings showing singers and dancers made the same year and displaying "particularly dislocated and dismembered [figures]" (Armstrong 46). The singer's body is cut by the frame, while her glove and her mouth are two competing forms near the centre of the picture, preventing the viewer's eye from focusing on one focal point. In 1877, the art critic Roger Ballu spoke of the "disjointed gestures" (quoted in Armstrong 45) of Degas's singers, and in 1879 an unsigned review in *La Vie parisienne* concurred with this negative opinion, this time disparaging his dancers: "To the right, half a dancer: an ear, a shoulder, left arm and leg. To the left, the other half of another dancer: ear, shoulder, right arm and leg" (quoted in Armstrong 46).

21 Such corporeal fragmentation is also found in *Trilby*, not only through Svengali's relish in visualising her inner system, but also in Little Billee's drawing of her left foot on the wall. The three friends venerate both the foot and its image, which they see again as they return to their old Paris dwelling years later. The sketch had been framed and covered by glass, an echo of Svengali's fantasy to exhibit the girl's skeleton in a glass case. According to Kirby-Jane Hallum, "Du Maurier is playing here; by reducing Trilby to an unconventional body part he undercuts the marble arm literary cliché" (142), an intention one can detect in Degas's painting as well, considering the unnatural whiteness

of the singer's forearm. The other prominent body part is the inside of the singer's mouth, her palate, her tongue and her teeth—"the awesomely cavernous roof of her mouth" (quoted in Hallum 141) as Nina Auerbach said of Trilby. Degas showed how "it is in the throat, place where the phonic metal hardens and is segmented, in the mask, that *signifiance* explodes" (Barthes 183).

22 Apparently, this perfectly matches "the foremost aural aesthetic moment in the novel" (Hallum 144), that is to say Trilby's performance in Paris, during which her voice is once again compared to a powerful but disembodied echo: "her voice was so immense in its softness, richness, freshness, that it seemed to be pouring itself out from all round". However, in Du Maurier's engravings, Trilby's mouth is shut, or her lips are barely parted, quite in line with most representations of operatic singers up to the 1850s, during which the novel is set. In that respect, they are closer to a photograph by Julia Margaret Cameron called *The Echo* (1868) [fig. 6].

Fig. 6: Julia Margaret Cameron, "The Echo" (1868), 27.1 cm x 22.7 cm, albumen silver print, Creative Commons

23 The novel and the photograph share their intermedial dimension. On the back of one of the prints Cameron handwrote the lines "And music born of murmuring sound / Shall pass into her face", taken from William Wordsworth's "Three Years She Grew", except that the poem says "beauty" where Cameron wrote "music". If the substitution was intentional—I can only assume that it was—this is a remarkable paratextual (or paravisual) device emphasising the relations between music, image and poetry. Obviously, the title itself plays a crucial role, and had it been different, it is likely that no critic would have claimed that "Campbell's youthful innocence and soft gaze aptly mirror the classic myth of the maiden nymph Echo" (Wolf 220). But the title is part of the work and necessarily determines the way we look at it. In Cameron's portrayal, Wolf writes, "Echo holds her hand to her chest as if to give expression" (220) to the loss of her voice

after Hera's punishment. Unlike Degas, Cameron opted for a harmonious composition in which the curves of the sitter's arm and hair respond to each other. Aesthetically, the photograph is clearly Pre-Raphaelite; it evokes, for example, both Dante Gabriel Rossetti's *Aurelia* (1863-1873) and George Frederic Watts's *Edith* (1862). Similarly, Du Maurier depicted his heroine as a recognisable Pre-Raphaelite model whose description remarkably matches Hattie Campbell as she appears in *The Echo*: a "tall female figure [...] clad in what seemed like a classical dress of cloth of gold [...] her thick light brown hair tied behind and flowing all down her back to nearly her knees" (209). The narrator in *Trilby* acknowledges her type of beauty:

> Trilby's type would be infinitely more admired now than in the fifties. Her photograph would be in the shop-windows. Sir Edward Burne-Jones—if I may make so bold as to say so—would perhaps have marked her for his own, in spite of her almost too exuberant joyousness and irrepressible vitality. Rossetti might have evolved another new formula from her; Sir John Millais another old one of the kind that is always new and never sates nor palls—like Clytie, let us say—ever old and ever new as love itself! (90)

24 The comparison between the photograph and the illustrations also reveals the importance of backgrounds. In *The Echo*, the figure emerges as a white form against the dark background, creating an unreal atmosphere, and, combined with the title, leading the viewer to see the figure as a possible symbol of virginal femininity. Cameron's preference for long exposure times resulted in "this created blurred parts of the images—backgrounds fade into darkness, foreground details of jewelry or clothing shimmer in their abstraction [...] her women take on the utterly mythic, a poised and sensitive beauty" (Polchin). It contrasts with the plate called "Un impromptu de Chopin", which shows Trilby as an empty white form detached on a white background, creating a strange absence of perspective and possibly suggesting that her singing belongs to celestial music, far above the mass of dark, mundane musicians sitting at her feet. Her domineering position evokes La Zambinella in Honoré de Balzac's *Sarrasine*, whose penetrating voice (a phallic symbol) turns out to be a castrato's, not a woman's (Trilby's voice is described, as she can be heard in the staircase before she enters the studio, as ungendered: "a portentous voice of great volume, and that might almost have belonged to any sex", 78). Only Svengali, thrusting his body forward and upward in front of her, seems to compete with her overwhelming power.

25 The plate also evokes the composition of J.J. Grandville's "Venus at the Opera", from his illustrated fantasy *Un autre Monde* (1844) [fig. 7], which also shows a mythical figure above a group of men (whose heads are single eyes) looking up to her lustfully.

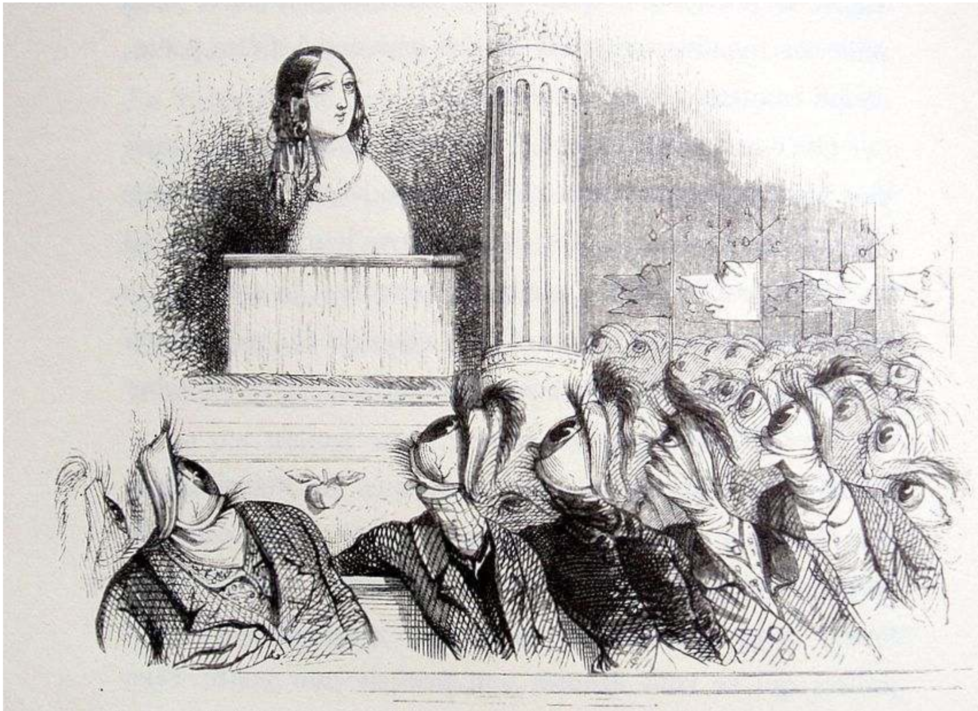

Fig. 7: J.J. Grandville, "Venus at the Opera" (1844), print, illustration for *Un autre monde*

26 In Grandville's tale, however, the puppet is not the singer but the forward narrator:

> One eye, who should have been an Academician, cried out: It's Venus herself! Though a little overstated, I could readily agree. My old nature was awakened, and I cast a stinging wink at the stranger; she seemed to smile back at me. Let me tell you, I heeded only my own audacity, and scheming like an ex-Zephyr I met her at the exit, wishing to slip a little letter into her palm; the inconnue only turned around and, looking me up and down with disdain, said to me, "Why, you're nothing but a puppet!" (Grandville)

27 Like Degas's "Singer with a Glove", Thomas Eakins's *The Concert Singer* (1890-92) [fig. 8] shows a performing artist, and also departs from the idealized, static depictions of female opera singers which still prevailed in mid-century.[3] Here, however, the dismembered body is not the singer's, but the conductor's, whose hand can be seen in the left-hand corner of the painting.

Fig. 8: Thomas Eakins, *The Concert Singer* (1890-92), oil on canvas, 191 cm x 138 cm, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Creative Commons

28 It resembles Svengali's hand in "Au clair de la lune", and both evoke the hand of a painter at work: they hold their batons like brushes and seem to be giving a final touch to their figures. Svengali strikingly reverses the Pygmalion metamorphosis from statue to woman, as on her master's command the girl "became an unconscious Trilby of marble, who could produce wonderful sounds" (299). A similar effect is obtained in the painting, with the same whiteness of the performer's arm. One difference is that Degas's singer performed in a café, whereas Weda Cook, the opera singer who is depicted here, embodies high culture. Trilby's dual identity explores the relationships between the two cultural environments. Contrary to Cameron's sitter, Cook is unidealized, but the same attention has been paid to the background, in both cases remarkably empty, and thereby potentially mythical.

29 Repetition is visually inscribed in the painting through the bunch of flowers on the stage, suggesting that the singer is performing an encore. Paravisual elements also play a significant part: on the chestnut frame of the painting (more visibly therefore than Cameron's handwritten lines on the back) Eakins carved the opening bars of Mendelssohn's "Rest in the Lord". He later described the carving as "ornamental [and] unobtrusive" but added that "to musicians I think it emphasized the expression of the face and pose of the figure" (quoted in Sewell 97).

30 In striking resonance with different passages in *Trilby*, each time Weda Cook sat for him, Eakins asked her to sing the same phrase repeatedly, for hours, so that he could observe the action of her mouth and throat. Some critics have claimed that she is shown "forming the *e* sound in the word *rest*" (Sewell 261). Cameron's Echo is deprived of sound, but Degas's singer is also clearly uttering a vowel sound, recalling Panzera's opinion, analysed by Roland Barthes, that the secret of good singing lies in "the admirable vowels". Also

reflecting on vowels, Barthes writes: "There lay the 'truth' of language—not its functionality (clarity, expressivity, communication)—and the range of vowels received all the *signifiance* [...]: the opposition of *é* and *è* (so necessary in conjugation), the purity—almost electronic, so much was its sound tightened, raised, exposed, held [...]" (184). I would contend that Du Maurier may have chosen, quite originally, to represent his diva forming consonant or rolling sounds: Barthes's description of "the paradoxical state of a letter-sound at once totally abstract (by its metallic brevity of vibration) and totally material (by its manifest deep-rootedness in the action of the throat)" (184) is illustrated by the "great metallic brazen clangors" in Trilby's voice, "with a clang so utterly new, so strangely heart-piercing and seductive" (229). Barthes wonders whether we are not then "hearing voices within the voice" and whether it is not "the truth of the voice to be hallucinated" (184), recalling the multiple layers of transe, hypnotism and bodily control in the novel: Svengali is a "big hungry spider" that controls Trilby's body; Trilby's singing has physiological effects on the listeners ("almost an ache" 229). Angela Leighton suggests that Vernon Lee's "The Wicked Voice" (1890) also "opens up the space between beauty and morality, between the disembodied voice and the wickedness of the singer, which is Victorian aestheticism's special playroom" (114).

31 I have attempted in this article to read *Trilby* in the light of Roland Barthes's analyses to focus on the notion of dismemberment, which seems to be pervading the novel. In this respect, it can be read/seen in connection to other works as well. These range from the 1840s to the 1890s and cover several very different pictorial media such as lithography, pastel on canvas, photography, and oil on canvas, suggesting that a literary and pictorial tradition does exist, asking for further investigation. This may well be the ultimate form of echo, along with the principle behind the wood-engraving reprographic technique—printing an image again and again, so that it could be printed alongside the letterpress at a reduced cost.

32 The purpose of an allusion, Irwin writes, is "to instruct an audience, to generate an aesthetic experience in an audience, and to link or connect the author with a tradition by activating themes, motifs, and symbols" (Irwin 521). Leaving aside the question of the author's intentionality of reference in my analyses of intertextual/interpictorial relationships, I suggest that by activating the Echo motif in an oblique, or latent, way, Du Maurier uses Ovid's narrative to explore new psychological theories and to create a fictional world "carried by articulated language, spoken or written, fixed or moving images, gestures, and the ordered mixture of all these substances" (Barthes 79). To the "dual production—of language and of music" (Barthes 181), or of text and of images, Du Maurier prefers the weaving of sound, sight and speech—an issue, as Amy Lawrence and other critics have shown, that lies at the core of Ovid's original myth. In *The School of Giorgione* (1877), Walter Pater expressed the idea that:

> *All art constantly aspires toward the condition of music*. For while in all other kinds of art it is possible to distinguish the matter from the form, and the understanding can always make this distinction, yet it is the constant effort of art to obliterate it. The mere matter of a picture [...] should be nothing without the form, [and] the spirit of the handling [...] should become an end in itself, should penetrate every part of the matter. This is what all art constantly strives after, and achieves in different degrees. (135)

33 Despite his complex, and generally hostile, relationship to Aestheticism, Du Maurier may have shared this view. It is Hallum's opinion that in *Trilby* he defended "the aesthetic supremacy of music over art" (145). She quotes the novel to suggest that "the mass of

images Trilby's voice conveys/evokes, from streams, to flowers, to happy children, make clear that 'no words, no pictures, could ever do the like!'" (145). This, of course, is questionable. In *Trilby*, the representation of the female voice is orchestrated by a male genius, and much of what Trilby sings echoes back children's ditties and rhymes. Again, parody is at stake here. But the novel is also part of a range of literary and pictorial attempts at reproducing and emulating the human voice, as the pictures mentioned in this article reflect to varying degrees.

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NOTES

1. Ironically, today's readers may think of Édouard-Léon Scott de Martinville's phonautograph, with which he recorded "Au clair de la lune" in 1860, the first known recording of a human voice, although Du Maurier could not have known this as it was found again and converted into digital sound in 2008 only. However, Du Maurier showed great interest in the new inventions, as shown in his cartoons "The Phonograph" (1888) and "Edison's Telephonoscope (Transmits Light As Well As Sound)" (1879), a visionary representation of video conferencing.

2. See Helen Davies, *Gender and Ventriloquism in Victorian and Neo-Victorian Fiction,* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

3. See Roberta Montemorra Marvin, "Idealizing the Prima Donna in Mid-Victorian London", *The Arts of the Prima Donna in the Long Nineteenth Century* (2012), edited by Rachel Cowgill and Hilary Poriss, Oxford: OUP.

ABSTRACTS

This article deals with the figure of Echo in George Du Maurier's *Trilby* (1894). The narrative is centred on the heroine's voice, and contains numerous mythological references, and yet there is no mention of the nymph. I posit that Du Maurier is using a "latent allusion", which attracts the reader's attention through motifs like repetition, and the doubling/dismembering of the singer's body. My analysis focuses both on the novel itself and its authorial illustrations. I will take my theoretical framework from a collection of essays by Roland Barthes, published in English as *Image Music Text* (1977), and especially from "The Grain of the Voice". I will also compare the texts and images from the novel with a selection of pictorial works (paintings by Edgar Degas and Thomas Eakins, a photograph by Julia Margaret Cameron, and a drawing by J.J. Grandville), in order to capture the mythical, social and cultural significance of the artist's voice and body, as well as the notion of music as a superior art form, in which Echo emerges as a symbolic figure, representative of the ambivalent position of women in Victorian literature and society.

L'article porte sur la figure d'Écho dans *Trilby* de George Du Maurier (1894). Le récit, bien que centré sur la voix de l'héroïne, et saturé de références mythologiques, ne fait pas apparaître le nom de la nymphe. Nous expliquerons ainsi ce paradoxe : l'hypothèse est qu'il s'agit d'une « allusion latente » qui met le lecteur en alerte face aux motifs de la répétition et du dédoublement du corps de la chanteuse. Les analyses portent aussi bien sur le texte du roman que sur certaines des illustrations de l'auteur. Un recueil d'essais de Roland Barthes publié en anglais sous le titre *Image Music Text* (1977), en particulier "The Grain of the Voice", fournit le cadre de référence théorique de l'article. La mise en perspective du texte et des images du roman avec diverses œuvres picturales (peintures d'Edgar Degas et de Thomas Eakins, photographie de Julia Margaret Cameron, dessin de J.J. Grandville) permet de saisir la portée mythique, sociale et culturelle du corps et de la voix de l'artiste, ainsi que de la musique comme art supérieur, faisant d'Écho une figure symbolique de la place ambivalente de la femme dans la littérature et la société victorienne.

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