TRANSLATION THROUGH MUSIC, SPEAKING THROUGH MUSIC:
***THE SHAPE OF WATER* (2017)**

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ABSTRACT: Ever since the translational turn, translation studies has needed to expand its reach beyond the textual focus, to engage with other modes, such as music and digital forms of communication, intercultural exchange, and not least multimodal forms of translations through film, within which we find the sub field of music and translation. This article takes the specific example of a film, *The Shape of Water*, to illustrate how music speaks on behalf of mute characters, and how music contributes to the storytelling. In analysing case studies from the film, metaphor, multimodal transfer and musical meaning are explored to show how music 'speaks' on behalf of the characters and supplements the filmic narrative.
KEYWORDS: Music; Multimodal; Meaning Transfer; Film; Storytelling

1. Introduction

This article examines the role of music in the 2017 film *The Shape of Water* to illustrate how translation between modes is possible through the notion of metaphor. The multimodal context is complex and offers a way to tackle how music is the key agent in expressing emotion through metaphor. To create emotion in the spectator one needs motion – it is perhaps no surprise that the words 'motion' and 'emotion', in English, are only one letter difference – they are intertwined. As Desblache asserts, from a translation perspective: "Music in films plays an important narrative role […]. It has also always played a strong emotional role" (2019, p. 234).

Film music has a long history. First, the silent movies seemed artificial in their unnatural silence. Music was added in various forms, such as a live pianist improvising music appropriate to the scene (offering mimetic bar-style piano music for a social scene, or slow romantic music for a love scene). The parallelism and what became known as 'mickey-mousing' was only one way. Other live music was meticulously planned, composed and orchestrated to be played by a full orchestra. When we consider the fact that classical music has been telling stories through music without words for centuries, through opera and ballet overtures, tone poems based on often complex poems and long form narratives and other programmatic music, it is perhaps no surprise that we accepted music within this cinematic genre with ease. By the time film music was being composed and recorded to be released synchronised with the film screening, the composers had come from the classical music tradition. For example, George Auric writing music for Jean Cocteau's *La Belle et la Bête* (1946) had previously been part of *Les Six* writing ballets and instrumental music. His mentor, Erik Satie, had written music for the ballet *La Parade* (1917), which utilises representation of modern global trends such as skyscrapers and typewriters in a story which sells tickets to a circus performance, before going on to write cinematic music for

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En'tracte which was a prelude to the staged ballet *Relâche* (1924).[1] What this directly attests to is that film music grew from the classical orchestral tradition, with composers moving from concert hall and theatre music to film. With a tradition of telling stories through music, the capacity for music to engage audiences through metaphor to foster an emotive reaction was already attuned within the theatregoing and radio-listening culture of the developed world. As such, adding orchestral music to a visual scene, though unnatural, felt more natural than silence.[2] Sci-fi, fantasy and mystery films rely "more than most on music's ability to make the unfamiliar seem familiar and therefore facilitate the expression of emotion with which the spectator can empathise" (Minors, 2023, p. 333).

Now film music has become a whole discipline of study, due to the complex ways in which music can be used. Most commonly, the composer is brought in toward the end of the process. With the film shot, usually edited, and the drama laid out in visual and verbal form, the composer is given a 'temp track' (temporary mock-up of the film's soundtrack) by the director. A temp track includes the kind of sound world the director wants for the film. In essence, it is a guide to assist the director in describing to the composer what tone the music needs to set for the film. Sometimes the temp track even remains, as in the famous case of the opening of *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) (Minors, 2021, p. 188). Not all films work this way though. And as the genre becomes more experimental, and more digital capabilities come into force, directors and composers are collaborating in new ways. For example, for *Oppenheimer* (2023), Christopher Nolan (director) brought Ludwig Göransson into the process at the start, to collaborate with him on identifying how music could tell the story of such a first-person narrative (see Minors forthcoming). This enables the music to more sensitively set the scene by using a style appropriate to the era, culture and heritage of the story. Music also creates the atmosphere, whether by raising tension through faster, more dissonant music, or by relaxing it through slower, consonant melodious music, or, alternatively, removing all sound to stand in stark contrast to the scene (e.g. *Oppenheimer*, when the test bomb explodes, and we know and can see it would be very loud, the film scene is initially silent, amplifying the shock of the visual scene) (Minors, forthcoming). As in opera, music can utilise specific character themes, whereby the scenes are set up to align a melody with a character or align an instrument to a character (more below). The music can be both empathetic and an-empathetic. It can both complement and contrast.

The film example chosen for this article is particular: *The Shape of Water* is a complex film in terms of genre. In one sense it is a romantic film, with the two lead characters falling in love and heading off to their happy ever after. It is also a historical drama set during the Cold War. And, significantly, it has the tone and green colour-palette of a fantasy film,

[1] The music in *En'tracte* supports a Dadaist film, shot via stop-motion capture, to show men jumping around a cannon on a Parisian roof top. Interestingly Satie himself is part of the visual scene.

[2] For readers new to film studies, I would recommend reading: Kathryn Kalinak (2010), *Film Music: A Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press; and Mervyn Cooke (2008), *A History of Film Music*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

whose two lead characters are both mute. Removing speech from the lead roles and replacing it with physical gestures alongside diegetic music,[3] the spectator is drawn to listen to the musical score in even more detail to interpret their gestural dialogue.

When we discuss music expressing meaning or the process of modal exchange, we often rely on metaphor. Not only does this remind us that we interpret one thing in terms of another (e.g. the lyrics of a song, in place of the lead mute character's speech, in this example), but it brings into stark reality that a process of translation is at the core of our verbal and textual language, in that simile, metaphor and oxymoron all require us to consider comparison of similar things. It recognises and understands difference. Difference in these cases is not a problem, but a way to bring two things together to supplement meaning. Metaphor is vital to how we are able to interpret multimodality, as it enables us to interpret through and across different modes.

"The idea of 'experiential meaning potential' is close to the view of 'metaphor' elaborated in Lakoff and Johnson (1980)" (Kress, 2010, p. 11). The point here is that we mutate or transform the action of sending a message, in and through whatever mode, into knowledge and understanding, whether that be embodied (somatic, felt, implicit), sensory, logical or emotional knowledge (Minors, 2023, pp. 332-348). We utilise what is well known in artistic research – that spectators and artists alike understand and build knowledge, in many ways (see Grierson, 2009, p. 17; Blain and Minors, 2020; Minors, Östersjö, et al 2024) through feelings, metaphors, and a wide range of sensory inputs. The spectators' feelings are important in how they experience the film. The choice of pre-composed music, brought into the sonic layer of *The Shape of Water* alongside newly composed music, is a device used to set the historical context and metaphorically give voice to the lead characters in a way that newly composed music could not. The association enables well-known songs to lend their meaning to the new setting of this film.

In what follows, I give an example of how music speaks on behalf of characters in a narrative film and how music contributes to the storytelling. By using the verb 'to speak', I deliberately play on words, in that translation studies and meaning analysis still focus heavily on verbal, textual language proper. By referring to speaking, I also wish to emphasise the need to include diverse voices and perspectives across the modes. But in writing on music and translation from a semiotic perspective, I challenge the field to consider meaning delivery more widely through all non-verbal modes and across non-verbal modes.

The multi-layered nature of film, formed from so many meaning-bearing modes (moving image, script, acting, gesture, sound design, music, dance, dialogue, silence, special effects, and so on) makes it particularly interesting to explore what music brings to its overall 'message', and how it helps to communicate that story. As there is "no shared

[3] Diegetic music forms part of the filmic story with which the characters engage (e.g. the music played in a concert they are attending or on a disk they are listening to) in comparison to non-diegetic music, which is used as a background accompaniment for the spectator but of which the characters in the filmic scene are unaware.

meaning resource for moving between speech and image" (Kress, 2010, p. 26) or music, the context of the work, the film, and the story, told scene by scene, becomes the context within which we can decode how the "potential for meaning" (Kress, 2010, p. 32) is realised.

Kress's ideas (2010) around multimodality link closely to those present in film studies and media production studies, as well as musical multimodal theories and musicological literature. It should be noted, however, that there are other theoretical frameworks one could take, such as adaptation studies. Whereas adaptation emphasises change and alteration in the process of "representing the source" (Baker and Saldanha, 1998, p. 3), Kress's motion of multimodality is much more about supplementing meaning across various modes. This view of media bringing together different ways of meaning into a cohesive work aligns closely with that of film theorists, including Gorbman's seminal view of the interdependent necessity of the artistic modes in co-delivering meaning through metaphor (1980).

Choosing a film in which the lead two characters are mute – and in which one of the lead characters is presented to the spectator as non-human – means that the soundtrack of the film is made up of voices from the supporting actors, alongside music, breathing, sound design, and silence, and of course the sound of water, wind and nature more broadly. The film is not always language-centric or logocentric. The film, *The Shape of Water* (2017) explores through its story the need to learn how to translate between different peoples in different contexts. It also includes American sign language (specifically of the time), which the character might have learned from a book,[4] and more universal hand gestures, which increases the accessibility of the film.[5] In fact, it is extra-lingual forms of communication that often hit us the hardest in performative modes of expression, tugging at the metaphorical heart strings in a way that the literal impact of words cannot.

2. *The Shape of Water* (2017): speaking through gesture and music

The Shape of Water was premiered at the 74th Venice International Film Festival in 2017. Directed by Guillermo Del Toro and composed by Alexandre Desplat, the film is a blend of fantasy, romance, pseudo-historical drama and crime. However, in interviews, the composer's description is clear: "it is a musical", Desplat says firmly (HeyUGuys, 2018, 00:00:58). Desplat is interested in "how you use music in the film" (Ibid., 00:04:49), not only for accompanying scenes, but also as an active proponent of the storytelling. He makes clear that he writes a melody when asked to by the director but that this process does not guide his choice of instrumentation, timbre, tone and so on. He responds to the needs of the film's message, whether atmospheric or dramatic (Ibid.)

Elisa is the lead character. She is mute and has scars on her neck that look a little like gills. She works as a cleaner in a facility that we learn is government-run, with high security.

[4] See interview with Sally Hawkins and Octavia Spencer, FOX 5, 2018, 00:04:06-00:05:50.

[5] A further discussion outside the scope of this article could consider this film from the viewpoint of audio-visual translation.

The story revolves around how her life changes when, cleaning a mess in one of the laboratories, she encounters a non-human creature held within a water-tank. It becomes clear that the creature (an amphibian man) is the subject a many invasive tests led by the facility director and biologist, Richard Strickland. Strickland is shown at home as a father and husband in a traditional 1960s setting, but at work he tortures the creature and displays misogynistic behaviour towards Elisa and racial prejudice to her co-worker, Zelda. Elisa forges a bond with this creature, known in the screenplay as the 'amphibian man'. She proceeds to work with her elderly artist neighbour and her co-worker Zelda (who translates her American Sign Language throughout the work scenes) to rescue the amphibian man from the laboratory. She takes him to her own flat, located above a cinema. Due to the hostility shown by the government workers, she and her neighbour then help him escape to the open sea and Elisa joins him.

The two lead characters (Elisa and the amphibian man) are agents of difference and pose threats to the norm, in that they communicate without words, and become a romantic partnership regardless of their difference. But it is more than this. Their difference, in communication, in appearance, in perspective, is used as a provocation for the spectator to think about who is right and wrong. The villains of the story are the leaders, namely the men with power, particularly Richard Strickland (played by Michael Shannon). The idea of the voiceless beauty (the Cinderella of this world) underpins Elisa Esposito's character (acted by Sally Hawkins), who is presented as the underdog. The amphibian man (acted by Doug Jones), who is nameless, represents difference and a potential threat. As Del Toro says, this amphibian man is presented as "an elemental god. He's not an animal […] that he represents the most ancient holy past from another culture" (FOX 5, 2018, 00:02:50). In interview, it is made clear that the amphibian man comes from South America, which, considering the 1960s Cold War context of the film, seems threatening.

The film won multiple awards and nominations, including the 2018 Academy Awards for Best achievement in Directing (for Del Toro) and Best Achievement in Music Written for Motion Pictures (Original Score) for Desplat. BAFTA and the Golden Globes also recognised the music, film, sound, and directing, among other things (IMDB, 2018). It is significant that both the visual and aural elements of the film were recognised, as they coexist, in an interdependent manner.

During the film, water is used in numerous ways, not only as a symbol for life and home, but also as a mirror, and as a quasi-musical sound effect even when we cannot see water. Water's ability to move, reshape, adapt, change to different environments and be supplemented with nutrients and so on make this basic element of life into a powerful metaphoric device, used across all aspects of the film. Not only named in the title, water is also a visual and often aural element of most scenes. Water gives the universal experience of all life, connecting both the human and non-human, as shown in this film. The musical joining of the two characters ensures we can read the connections and empathise with them. Supplemented by the metaphorical reading of water, we are able to deepen our understanding and share in their experience through our mutual understanding of the

elements. Water references have occurred in music for centuries, from flowing adapting melodies composed by Handel, through to the kaleidoscopic piano melodies of Liszt, to the octatonic scales of Debussy (e.g. *Voiles*, *Reflets dans l'eau*) and Ravel (*Jeux d'eau*), and many others in 20th century European works. Indeed, one can hear the octatonic scale within the chosen movie, drawing on this long-standing tradition of symbolising water within the harmonic sound world (00:08:00). The adaptation of these musical themes throughout the film supplements the narrative, in some cases, metaphorically speaking on the characters' behalf to express their perspectives (specifically Elisa's) and share their emotional experiences.

Visually, a consistent tone is set. Green as a colour palette is used in most contexts. Green here represents the future, at a time in the 1960s when "where American is obsessed with the future" (FOX 5, 2018, 00:02:47) in its literature, its films and its aspirations (including the moon landing). Green is shown in the colour of the walls, the furniture, the soap used, the sweets that Strickland eats, the skin tone of the amphibian man, the cake, and even the car. When a black-and-white scene is used, then, it emphasises a different active 'voice' for Elisa and the amphibian man. How are Elisa's mute voice, yet active intentions, projected then through music?

3. Different 'voices'

Responding to a journalist, Desplat described how he worked with Del Toro, coming to the movie once it had been shot and edited. In describing the collaboration, he referred to Del Toro as a 'knight' leading the group, specifically leading the tone of the filmic storytelling. "Everything was open" for his compositional ideas, meaning that De Toro enabled Desplat to add his own creativity to the film, to find his own way of bringing the film to life through music, without restrictions. Desplat was firm, though, that there would have to be "lots of flutes and whistling" (Variety, 2018, 00:01:14).

To create a tone for this film, Desplat makes some particular choices regarding the instrumentation for his score. It is notable that the woodwind section is entirely made up of flutes, of all sizes, and there are no clarinets, oboes or bassoons. Working with a full string and brass section, and limited percussion (bass, timpani, tom-toms), Desplat's choice of flute for a leading melodic role gives a specifically airy timbre, which he described as bringing an organic flavour to the score, perhaps reasserting the humanity of the unknown amphibian man. Indeed, in interviews, Desplat has been quite detailed about his choice. In order to find the 'magic' of the story, "it was clear that the music should be the voice of love" (Variety, 2018, 00:20:00). Desplat refers to the 'soul' of the film, that soul being formed from the love shared by Elisa and the amphibian man. Love sets the context for the entire score. Considering that the film is set in Cold War America (conflicts are referred to by the authority leaders, and there is a role for a Russian spy), it is interesting that Desplat chooses to foreground the romance throughout the film. Through flutter-tonguing in the flutes, tremolos in the bass, and constant motion, a sense of threat is created when the Cold War elements are at the forefront of the story. Even the opening of the film, moving

from Bb minor to D major, sets the tone, effectively announcing that there will be two different core elements to the narrative: the Cold War 1960s industrial place of work with threats and unknowns; and the personal, emotional, intimate setting of the home, with the ideal of 1940s musicals, dancing and dream-like imagination.

The flute becomes a sonic voice for the emotion of the characters, but Desplat goes further in ensuring some form of sonic voice for Elisa. Perhaps in response to Del Toro's personal sonic contributions to the verbal sound effects for the amphibian man, Desplat writes into the score many melodies to be whistled. Whistling in the film was requested by Del Toro (HeyUGuys, 2018, 00:01:15). As confirmed in interviews by Del Toro and Desplat, it is the composer's own whistling which has been included in the film score. This is fascinating as it not only speaks for Elisa, but in some scenes, notably on her bus commute to work, it is Elisa who is whistling her own theme, through Desplat's whistle. In addition to the flute-dominant score, combined with whistling, Desplat uses an accordion. Creating a feel of the 'other', i.e. beyond America to another culture, the accordion is able to give a sonic cue that both Elisa and the amphibian man are not from the same area as everyone else. They are highlighted by their difference in how they communicate and also in the score that accompanies them and supplements their communication.

There is a lightness to much of the score, not only done through melodic writing for the flute and accordion, but also through quiet but constantly moving musical lines. The piano often doubles the celeste or harp in constantly flowing passages – a metaphor for water – which instantly gives a sense of motion, even when the scene is static. The constant movement in the score is matched by the constant movement of the camera, which itself reflects the tone of films shot in the 1960s. Del Toro and Desplat watched and listened to historical films in order to recreate the time period for this film. As Desplat noted in the post-Oscar Awards interview, with water always present in the film in some way, he aimed "to figure out the instrumentation, the way the melody moves in waves [...] the softness of the instrumentation […] with flutes, the whistle and the accordion, … it is all instruments with air, with something organic" (Variety, 00:04:24-00:04:38).

The embodied nature of the musical performance, with breath, is important to situating Elisa in the film. Giving voice to a character without speech can be done through breath and gesture: considering the range of modes able to communicate and deliver meaning, the embodied sounds of the actors are very important to the detail of the story. Linking Elisa's theme to her, not only by synchronizing the sound of it to her visuals, but by including her whistling her theme in the diegesis of the film, is assertive. It has the effect of presenting a first-person perspective on the story, whereby the viewer is invited to view everything through her experience. This is only made possible due to music, and the linking of various sound worlds to her. As I note elsewhere, the first-person perspective is still fairly unique for large-scale film works (Minors, forthcoming), but it is made possible through character themes linked to their experiences in screen, alongside bodily intimate sounds and the use of silence.

Metaphor is not a mode, but a device which all modes can use. As such, it becomes a unifying feature to link modes when they project meaning through different and often contrasting means. Voice as a concept therefore needs not be limited to language and to speaking. It becomes the expression of meaning, tone, and emotion, the delivery of someone's message and the performance of identity through a range of modes. Here, voice is also a metaphor for the mute characters' ways of communicating through music, movement, gesture and shared experiences within the water. In place of language proper, it exists across all modes.

The sound of the amphibian man is important for expressing the nature of the character, and to ensure this would be possible, Del Toro worked with the effects team for over three years to make the eyes and movement possible in the amphibian suit, shot in camera lens, with mechanisms embedded on the back of the costume. The sound of this character was recorded by Del Toro himself (FOX 5, 2018) using, particularly, analogue processes important to the embodiment of the character, such as the recording of whistling by the composer (referred to above).

Desplat notes that in the film the characters watch musicals from the 1940s and 50s, so "the score has to be near to that" (DP/30, 2018, 00:03:40). As in many films, music has the complex role of representing both the 1960s, as the present, and 1940s, as the past. Thus, the 1960s style of music is usually shown as emanating from the world outside Elisa's flat and workplace, via the radio or TV, while the music associated with her is the 1940s music she consumes through the musical theatre and cinematic choices she makes. Her nostalgia sets her apart from the present, suggesting she is a dreamer. As Elisa is watching the musicals, alongside her neighbour and the amphibian man, music enables the context to be realised.

When Desplat first heard the story summary from Del Toro, he said that "it leaves you a bit perplexed". For Desplat to understand the story, it was important for him to see Del Toro's drawings and then watching the fully edited film. "I knew that I should not do something that was too overwhelming" (GoldDerby, 2018, 00:00:48-00:00:54) in the soundtrack, he said. Instead, he "needed to find a beautiful love theme" (00:00:58-00:01:06) for Elisa and the amphibian man. In sum, the genre of the film was described as "a fairy tale for troubled times", a description one interviewer accredits to Del Toro himself (GoldDerby, 2018, 00:01:08).

4. Speaking through character themes and pre-composed and pre-recorded music (scenes 4, 5 and 6)

Though the film's pace is steady and relatively slow, its component elements are moving all the time. The camera, in particular, is rarely still. Desplat confirms that he came to the film once the entire thing was shot (DP/30, 2018, 00:01:40). It seems sensible then that he mirrors this motion with constant movement in the music, often using celeste, harp, piano combinations to accompany scenes. Though he sets specific character themes to Elisa and the amphibian man, I am not going to refer to them as leitmotifs, as the film's style and

genre do not align with the ways in which Wagner used leitmotifs in his 19th century operatic works.

We first meet the amphibian man in scene 4 (from 00:17:46). Desplat introduces him with a French horn motif (00:20:02). The spectator, at this point, does not know whether the amphibian man is friend or foe. The horn might represent him being the hunter, though as we find out later, he is in fact the hunted. It almost sounds like whale song at first, following the plucked strings, as Elisa finds Strickland's two severed fingers on the floor. The musical content in this scene emphasises the differences between Strickland and the amphibian man. The use of the horn call from 18th and 19th century opera to set the scene and associate character in specific roles subtly lays out a question: can we trust this new character that looks and sounds so different to everyone else? In the context of the '60s Cold War, there is a suggestion that the creature could be a spy or a tool for the enemy. With his amphibian hands on the glass, there is a repeated piano sequence, which situates him with specific melodic shapes in the bass. We hear D#, E, C# (semi-tone to tone). When Elisa is introduced, this motif is expanded as follows: D#, E, G, E, D#, C#, D#, E, C#.[6] The expansion reveals interest and begins to build their association both visually and aurally.

The uncertainty regarding this new amphibian character is continued into scene 5 (from 00:22:47) with an oscillating semitone in the French horn (00:23:18) as we see the amphibian man chained in the pool of water for the first time. The same character theme then returns, consolidating it to the amphibian man. Elisa uses American sign language, combined with the loaded symbol of a boiled egg, as the starting point for their 'conversation'. She taps the eggs with a spoon, rhythmically calling the man (00:23:42). Only then does the solo piano start to sound, playing a well-known song, 'You'll Never Know'.[7] With both sexual connotations and metaphors of seeding and birth, the egg symbolises the potential growth of these two leading characters, while suggesting further depth to their mutual development. They both ingest the eggs, accompanied by the flute; he takes the egg and dives into the water (00:24:56). The act of eating in this film (as at the start of scene 6, 00:28:33) becomes something that humanises the unknown creature to the spectator. The egg, in Saussurean terms, is a signifier able to carry meaning beyond itself.

Scene 6 fully associates Elisa's theme with her as she sleeps on the bus. Then, back in the green laboratory, she places an egg on the side of the pool and removes an LP player from a drawer (00:31:05). A 'conversation' between Elisa and the amphibian man is facilitated through both musical appreciation of the LP, and through signing: he signs music (00:32:15). Elisa chooses to play music to the amphibian man, and he engages, while eating to *Why do Robins Sing in December*, written by Magomayev for the musical, *My Fair Lady*

[6] See Minors (2023, p. 344), where I discuss the limited three-note motive significance in *Arrival* and compare it briefly to this scene.

[7] This song, with music by Harry Warren and lyrics by Mark Gordan, is used in different versions in the film. One version is sung by Randa Fleney with the London Symphony orchestra, arranged by Alexandre Desplat. The other is sung by Alice Faye, and is borrowed from the motion picture *Hello, Frisco, Hello* (1943).

(1964). The use of the LP player therefore helps to situate the era of the film, but it does more than this. It reinforces the point that in an age of technological reproduction, communication beyond speech in possible and uses that reproduction in the diegesis of the film.

Desplat outlines his creative journey with this description of the key story elements: "I try to figure out what is the sound of water, the sound of love in water, with a creature that comes from South America, in the 60s, with people watching musicals on TV - how does that sound?" (DP/30, 2018, 00:09:00-00:09:58). In working out the themes, the amphibian man has the lower bass line, while Elisa has the higher register flute and whistle line. In relation to musical themes, Desplat observes: "there is the main love theme that opens the film and closes the film; there is Elisa's theme which is connected to the love theme, so it can switch from one to the other; there's the theme for the creature, and a theme for the Russian spy" (DP/30, 2018, 00:21:00-00:21:24). As for Strickland, his violence in torturing the amphibian man speaks for itself; there is no theme for him, he is there to represent the violent potential of humans.

The initial piano solo in scene 5 gives a sense of isolation to the man – we know from this that he feels alone. The parallelism of the rising strings, as he stands, gives gravitas to his figure and commanding presence in the room. The flute is heard as he takes the egg: that is the moment he becomes associated with Elisa, musically as well as visually. Only once the egg is taken (00:31:38) can the music grow to its full orchestration. On first watching *The Shape of Water* in final cut, Desplat was "amazed by the beauty of it" (DP/30, 2018, 00:23:25). Perhaps this is why, so early in the film, Desplat uses music prophetically. The music uses the metaphor of growth from the egg, predicting the full-blown romance of these two characters to come later, by ending the scene with a full orchestral texture.

In an interview with *Variety*, Desplat was asked about any disagreements during the creative process. Desplat notes that, 'we never had to battle […] all the film is flowing […] the way the composer works for film, he works for a collective art form, not for himself [...] I have learned to live within constraints' in this filmic setting (*Variety*, 00:05:02-00:05:51). Using music to respond to and supplement the story, and Desplat's own interpretation of it, is central to how he created the soundtrack. Scene 6 ends on the cadence of the sound, as Eliza is nose to nose, through the glass tube, with the amphibian man (00:33:52). It leaves us wondering what is next.

5. Speaking through the immersive sounds of water (scenes 16 and 18)

The romantic arc of the story comes to a pinnacle when Elisa rushes out to find the amphibian man, who has escaped from her bathroom (where he had been living in the bath since she had saved him from Strickland). She finds him downstairs, in the cinema that is situated below her flat. In scene 16, they stand together in the middle of the theatre and embrace (01:16:24-01:16:57). It is notable that the film on the screen is a historical epic, set alongside a 3/4 dance-like whistled melody. Her finding him, at the instruction of her

neighbour, is a climactic moment in the film. The whistling is associated with her emotional joy and relief.

Scene 18 (from 01:22:34) builds the romantic relationship to its fulfilment. The underwater lovemaking is both romantic and magical. It confirms the love between Elisa and the amphibian man through the visual and musical elements. It gives hope to the Cold War context that humankind can create love, ironically shown by two beings that are respectively mute and non-human. As a spectator we are questioning her species too, as her human form is presented with scars that look like gills; we are left to question whether this is the source of her muteness, and also of her comfort at being in water for long periods of time. Most important to the success of this scene, in which music translates the message of the screenplay and conveys it to the spectator, is how Desplat combines the two characters' themes already heard in the film. The first is Elisa's melody, often set by the flute and through whistling; the second, is the bass line that accompanied the first appearance of the amphibian man. Now, they are played together, combined in the orchestral texture, through the full orchestration, in a warm timbre with luscious strings, flute line melodies, and brass-chorale supporting harmonies. Music provides a metaphor of joining and coming together. It likewise confirms Elisa as other, different from the other humans, and situates her within the amphibian man's world.

As the sink overflows in her flat following her rescuing of the amphibian man from the laboratory (01:25:50), we see a hat box of hers containing the nutrients the amphibian man needs for survival, which was given to her in the laboratory by a sympathetic scientist who understood what she was trying to do. All the visual signs are bringing them together, synchronised with their musical combination. The bathroom fills with water above the cinema (while it has been raining outside). Their union is confirmed in music and in the visuals, and is recognised as the neighbour opens the door witnessing the scene (01:28:12). As the room had filled with water the neighbour was concerned for her safety, but she does not drown and seems perfectly happy in the water. Interestingly, Del Toro shoots this 'in lens', not using CGI. The scene moves from the isolation of one piano sound to a fuller orchestration. As the cinema starts to leak with water (01:30:17), the music builds, and becomes 'their' music: character themes combined.

6. Speaking through dancing: a musical within the film (scene 20)

Both Del Toro and Desplat refer to the film as a musical, as mentioned above. It is interesting then, that they integrate a musical scene directly into the diegesis of the film. Scene 20 (from 01:33:10) sees the couple seated at the dining-room table while it is pouring with rain outside. A song is on the radio (01:34:26). The amphibian man is signing to her. She becomes emotional, and as in many musicals, when emotion is too great for words alone, there is a shift from speech (or signing in this instance) to song. She tries to make sounds to sing the recurring song, 'You'll Never Know' (01:35:13). The scene transforms itself as soon as she says that she loves him. The dining-room scene fades away, through a darker setting, and into a black and white studio set with full orchestra. She is dressed in a

flowing white virginal ballgown (01:35:41), dancing with professionalism, and singing with full voice, in a typical 40/50s musical film setting (see Figure 1).

The amphibian man remains without clothes, making clear that he does not need to change to receive her love. When she sits on his knee, the lighting fades and focuses on her face. The light goes up again and the scene returns to the dining table (01:36:29-01:36:38). At this point he is looking down at the egg, the room is quiet, and he is not seeing her sign. The impact of this emotional experience, as interior to Elisa, is impactful to heightening the understanding of the spectator, while further situating the home context within the golden age of musical cinema. It is significant then when Del Toro says that: "we tried to shoot the film like a musical, but we also tried to shoot it like a classical movie. We wanted the look to be luscious, lavish, colourful" (FOX 5, 2018, 00:03:40-00:03:52). At every level there is metaphor – through colour, combining music themes, and signifiers, such as the egg. If "all translation is a dance between commensurability and incommensurability" (Fulcher, 2011, p. 553), Del Toro's film and Desplat's music represents this in a multimodal temporal form.

Figure 1. Scene 20, Black and White Musical Scene, Elisa and the amphibian man, *The Shape of Water* (2017), 01:36:04. © 2017 Fox Searchlight.

Conclusion

The chosen scenes focus above all on the two lead characters, with the music metaphorically speaking on their behalf, since they are mute. In other words, translation is important to the process of how we as spectators can read across and through the multimodal content of the film to formulate a coherent understanding of something which is rather complex. Moreover, music situates the historical period of the present (1960s) and the nostalgic approach to the 1940s musical theatre Elisa chooses to listen to. Music therefore is used to set the era, the location, and to associate characters. The diegetic use, on screen, raises the profile of music to be an active agent in the story telling, while the

non-diegetic music, heard but not directly in the visual scene, deepens the characters' relationships by sounding their associated themes, even when they are not in the visual shot.

In this case study, music in many ways becomes the main mode through which the story is told, especially where the two lead characters are concerned. As "love is the crucial element of mankind" and of this story, as Desplat put it during an interview (DP/30, 2018, 00:30:20), the composer has effectively produced a response to Del Toro's 'humanist language' (HeyUGuys, 2018, 00:00:46). The potential of film music is vast in its ability to evoke emotion and provoke visceral reactions from a spectator. I hope this particular case study shows how music has been used as an active agent, through metaphor, association, and contextual placing in the diegesis of the film, to enable the spectators to interpret the complexities of the story. Music is part of the collective experience and has a direct impact on how we are able to interpret (Minors, 2013) the long-form story of film.

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