

Hidden duality within *Secret Window*

For my thesis, I propose to analyze the function of the music in the film *Secret Window* showing how the score 1. functions within the diegesis of the film and 2. assists in conveying the film's narrative specifically through two aspects of the score – the comparison of minimalistic vs. melodic scoring, and the treatment and possible indications of pitch class D.¹ I chose this particular film due to its recent place in film history, as well as for the method in which I interpret the music plays an active role in the telling of the story. My analysis of *Secret Window* will focus on: 1. examining my personal transcriptions of the score heard within the film; 2. comparing the techniques of this film score to others by Philip Glass and other suspense film composers (e.g., Bernard Hermann); 3. examining how the music is incorporated into the film in comparison with traditional cueing as discussed in the current literature (diegetic vs. nondiegetic scoring, “sneaking²”); 4. how I hear these film scoring techniques as portraying the duality of the main character (Mort Rainey/John Shooter) within the film; 5. looking at the two specific aspects of the film score (previously mentioned³) that present themselves several times within the film in a way that I hear as playing a vital role within the narrative – specifically in considering the two main characters, Mort Rainey and John Shooter.

¹ The main focus is on D as a pitch axis, with exploration of the note E as a temporal shift of this focus to represent the main character (Mort).

² Anahid Kassabian, *Hearing Film: Tracking Identifications in Contemporary Hollywood Film Music* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 95.

Concerning music within a film, the terms diegetic and nondiegetic refer to the manner of incorporating the music into a specific scene. If the music is diegetic, then it is perceived as being heard within the context of the narrative – a character singing on screen or a character turning on a cd player that is audible to the audience. Nondiegetic music is understood as not being heard by the characters in the film, but audible to the audience viewing the film. The term “sneaking,” as discussed by Anahid Kassabian, refers to the technique of bringing in the film score through ambient noise on screen so as to hide (or sneak in) the entrance of the score – the audience, therefore, is not distracted by the initial entrance of the score.

³ Treatment of pitch class D; comparison of minimalistic vs. melodic scoring.

The film score to *Secret Window* was composed mainly by Philip Glass with additional music written by Geoff Zanelli. The film was directed by David Koepp, and is based on the story *Secret Window, Secret Garden* by Stephen King. It was released by Columbia Pictures in 2004. *Secret Window* concerns the life of a man named Mort Rainey (played by Johnny Depp) who writes short stories. The film opens with Mort discovering his wife is having an affair – the entrance of a D is the first instance of nondiegetic music, which is noticeably contrasting to the lack of music up to this point. This D is followed by transitional music that accompanies the opening credits. During this transitional music, the camera switches from the motel room door to a view of the lake by the cabin where Mort now lives, panning across the water and moving into the cabin through the upstairs window ending downstairs on a full shot of Mort. The time is now six months later after Mort’s discovery – him and his wife Amy (played by Maria Bello) are in the process of getting a divorce. This full shot of Mort is where the transitional music ends on an E⁴ and fades out with Shooter’s knock on the door. Here the audience is visually introduced to the character John Shooter (played by John Turturro) who accuses Mort of stealing a story Shooter says he wrote.⁵ When Mort reads Shooter’s pages, he realizes that his story and Shooter’s story are one and the same⁶, and thus the plot of the film begins to unfold. Shooter demands that Mort admit he stole his story and that he “fix [his] ending.”⁷ He threatens Mort, destroying his property and killing people in Mort’s life who Shooter says “were going to get in the way of [their]

⁴ The full shot of Mort shows his typical appearance of messy hair and clothing (specifically a robe with numerous holes) seen throughout the majority of the film.

⁵ 4’ 40’’ into film.

⁶ With the exception of character names and the ending; the title of Mort’s story is “Secret Window,” the title of Shooter’s story is “Sowing Season.”

⁷ 39’ 18’’ into film.

business.”⁸ The movie comes to its climax once the main character realizes that he (Mort) is in fact Shooter – he is the one who has committed all of the crimes which have occurred throughout the film. The personality of Shooter wins out, taking over Mort’s personality entirely, and he finally “fixes his ending” by killing Amy, Mort’s soon to be ex-wife, as well as the man she left Mort for (Ted, played by Timothy Hutton). The movie ends with Mort’s character having a different look (no longer torn clothes with unkempt hair), representative of the fact that there is no longer any part of the original Mort Rainey character left. The town is convinced of Mort’s/Shooter’s guilt, but is unable to prove anything – Shooter achieves his “perfect ending.”

In the context of this film, I say that nondiegetic music does denote something (or someone) specific in the represented space for the audience. Therefore, this thesis will deal mostly with how the music and the film’s narrative work together to tell this story.

According to Claudia Gorbman in her *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music*:

“...nondiegetic music does not denote anything in the represented space. Rather, it figures in the expression of mood, pace, feeling *in relation to* the represented space...In emphasizing moods or feelings, in specifying or delineating objects for the spectator’s attention, music enforces an interpretation of the diegesis.”⁹

Concerning *Secret Window*, I agree with Gorbman’s idea that music does enforce an interpretation of the diegesis. However, I say that the function of the nondiegetic score is not solely subordinate to the story unfolding on the screen – rather this film score incorporates the techniques that Gorbman mentions (invisibility, narrative cueing, continuity¹⁰) to signify specific figures in the narrative to the audience. Similar to the

⁸ 64’ 19” into film.

⁹ Gorbman, 32.

¹⁰ **Invisibility** – similar to Kassabian’s sneaking; **narrative cueing** – technique of using the film score to indicate specific characters or events: for this film (*Secret Window*) the use of the pitch D to represent the character Shooter; **continuity** – the use of a film score to serve as transition between scenes/shots.

shark theme in *Jaws* (1975) as discussed by Kassabian¹¹, this score uses narrative cueing to signify a character to the audience. The difference between this typical leitmotif¹² and the narrative cueing used in *Secret Window* is that the initial D (see example 1p. 12) is not immediately followed by a visual for the audience to associate it with.

In order to provide an analysis of the film score for this movie, I have been transcribing the score as I hear it in the context of the film.¹³ Peter Winkler discusses the subjective nature of transcribing music in his article “Writing Ghost Notes: The Poetics and Politics of Transcription,” and the possible implications of this. As he explains from his personal experience and attempts at transcriptions of one specific work (Aretha Franklin’s recording of “I Never Loved a Man”), transcription is often a personal expression of how an individual perceives the music he hears. Even within this seemingly objective task¹⁴, Winkler himself admits to hearing the same passage two different ways in different hearings.¹⁵ George List’s article “The Reliability of Transcription,” compares multiple transcriptions of melodies (Rumanian Carols, Yiddish and Thai Lullabies) focusing only on pitch and duration of notes.¹⁶ He concludes that, despite some discrepancies within the examples he provides, transcription notated solely

¹¹ Kassabian, 45.

¹² Kassabian, 50.

¹³ I have contacted Dunvagen, Philip Glass’ publishing and management company who directed me to Sacks and Co., as well as Schirmer Music. The agent at Sacks and Co. (Mr. Glass’ publicity agent company) informed me that he would not be able to access this score. I have contacted Schirmer Music several times requesting a perusal score of *Secret Window*, both by email and by phone, and have not received any direct contact about the availability of this score as of yet. I have also attempted to contact Geoff Zanelli (the other composer for this film) and Alan Elliot (an uncredited composer for the film) – Alan Elliot did reply but was not able to provide me with any new information.

¹⁴ Nazir Jairazbhoy discusses this notion of ‘objective’ transcription with some sort of “automatic device” (p. 264) compared with the subjective transcription by the human ear in his article “The ‘Objective’ and Subjective View in Music Transcription” (1977) in *Ethnomusicology*.

¹⁵ Peter Winkler, “Writing Ghost Notes: The Poetics and Politics of Transcription,” in *Keeping Score: Music, Disciplinarity, Culture*, ed. David Schwarz, Anahid Kassabian and Lawrence Siegel (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997), 193.

¹⁶ George List, “The Reliability of Transcription,” *Ethnomusicology* 18, no. 3 (September 1974): 353.

on what the human ear hears is “sufficiently accurate...[and] reliable to provide a basis for analysis and comparative studies of the two aspects [of] pitch and duration.”¹⁷

Despite the possible discrepancies due to the subjective nature of transcription, Winkler provides validating points in his article for the answer to the question “why we transcribe music?” – one of them is particularly relevant to the purpose of this thesis:

1. To Show What’s “Really There”¹⁸: the transcriptions of the film score as heard within the context of the film will assist me in proving what I am claiming to hear, as well as possibly point out other interesting/important aspects of the score as related to the narrative of the film – the issue of subjective transcription is not as much of an issue because of the nature of the orchestration of this film score.

Music in itself is sound – but can be read and considered visually through the representation of the sound with signs – or in this case, notation. In his article “Music as Representation,” Philip Bohlman discusses the notion of music as representation through signs.¹⁹ Due to the lack of availability of the score to *Secret Window*, this representation of sound through notation (or transcription) is a useful tool for this thesis. Transcription allows for the process of representing these sounds as I hear them in the film *Secret Window* to be written down and therefore further analyzed within the context of the narrative. Bohlman also addresses this idea of music being representative in a given narrative – both by the extra-musical aspects (outside of the actual music or sound being heard such as the instrumentation or the words being sung) and through the sound itself.²⁰ The latter of these is what I will focus on in this thesis.²¹

¹⁷ List, 375-376.

¹⁸ Ibid, 193-194.

¹⁹ Philip Bohlman, “Music as Representation,” *Journal of Musicological Research* 24, no. 3 (2005): 213.

²⁰ Bohlman, 215-216.

²¹ Despite the strict nondiegetic scoring of *Secret Window*, the music does actively function within the diegesis, or narrative – although it is not audible to the characters on the screen.

In considering film technique, I will look at certain voice-overs and camera shots, and how these techniques, separate from and working with the film score, assist in portraying the duality of the main character thereby reinforcing what I claim to hear in the score. I will also look at how these techniques are used in comparison with both current films and earlier films of the mid-twentieth century: specifically Alfred Hitchcock's films and the incorporation of Bernard Hermann's scores in the films such as *Vertigo*. These are suspenseful story lines that will lend themselves to a better comparison of these techniques in a specific type of story line. I will also be comparing the various film scoring techniques used in these and other films (especially those scored by Philip Glass) – I will explore how the music is incorporated into the film and if/how this assists in the telling of the story in these other films.²²

Originally, the necessity of film music came from the desire for a musical accompaniment of the silent film (these were pre-existing works chosen to be performed live along with the viewing of the film) so that there would not be as much of a disconnect between the audience and the silent action on the screen²³. This incorporation of live music also assisted in drowning out the noise of the projector²⁴. With the development of the “talkies,” the idea of incorporating music into the film was possible, but still took a while to become a popular idea due to the cost of hiring a composer to write music specifically for that movie as well as paying an orchestra to perform the music for the film²⁵. However, with the addition of the Academy Award for song and

²² These comparisons will deal with techniques previously mentioned – Gorbman's narrative cueing and invisibility; Kassabian's sneaking.

²³ This was initially a problem for the viewing audience – the lack of expected sound that would normally correlate to the action seen on the screen.

²⁴ Gorbman, 36-37.

²⁵ Richard Davis, *Complete Guide to Film Scoring: The art and business of writing music for movies and TV* (Boston: Berklee Press, 1999), 25-29.

score in 1934²⁶, the incentive became greater for directors to include music specifically written for their movie or pre-composed music that brought with it meaning that would fit into the film. Once the type of music was decided upon, the director had to decide how it will be included in the film – diegetically or nondiegetically. As previously stated, some scholars, such as Gorbman, view nondiegetic film scoring²⁷ as being consistently subservient to the narrative, as opposed to diegetic scoring which is seen as playing a more active role within the film due to its placement/audibility to the characters on screen. If the characters in the film can hear the music, then they are more likely to respond to it and involve the score in an active way within the narrative. The setting ultimately depends on what specifically is being conveyed at the time within the context of the narrative of the film.

In the opening of “Secret Window,” there is no music for the first few minutes. The movie opens with the company logo accompanied by the sound that is pulsating and low. This is almost unrecognizable until the screen is lit up with a view of the main character’s face (Mort Rainey played by Johnny Depp), and you see that the low pulsating sound is in fact the windshield wipers on his car, with the dull constant noise of the car’s engine beneath that. In addition to these ambient sounds resulting from the on screen action, the main character’s voice is heard in a voice-over allowing the audience to hear his thoughts as he talks to himself concerning his current situation. This voice over is what Bernard Dick refers to as “the subjective voice”²⁸ allowing the audience to hear

²⁶ Roger Hall ed., *A Guide to Film Music: Songs and Scores* (Soughton, Massachussetes: Pinetree Press, 2002), 8.

²⁷ With the exception of about 10 seconds of background noise that comes from the headphones of an unnamed character who happens to be in the elevator with two of the main characters of *Secret Window*, all of the film score is nondiegetic.

²⁸ Bernard Dick, *Anatomy of Film*, 3rd ed. (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1998), 33.

the character's thoughts.²⁹ The first nondiegetic sound heard within the film is when Mort unlocks the door to a motel room – sound is no longer heard as falling within the visual context of the narrative, but rather an electronic manipulation of sounds that represents the state of Mort's mind at what the audience later realizes as him discovering his wife is having an affair.³⁰ This electronic manipulation of sounds begins an immediate shift from the ambient noise previously heard on the screen (car engine, windshield wipers, doors opening and closing) to that of nondiegetic sound. It is not until 2' 21'' into the film, where you hear D (which then leads into the "Main Title" accompanying the opening credits) that the audience gets any sort of musical film score (see example below). The ambient noises return (2' 22'' into the film) immediately after the initial D appears (the audience hears footsteps of people running into the motel room).

Example 1: "Main Title" as transcribed from *Secret Window* beginning 2' 21'' into film

The image displays two systems of musical notation for the "Main Title" from the film *Secret Window*. Each system consists of a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The first system is annotated with the following text: "pitch focus on D moves to upper voice (C-sharp to D to E-flat)" with arrows pointing to notes in the upper voice; "2' 21''" and "2' 25''" marking time points; "2' 28''" marking another time point; and "5th motion from D to G" with a bracket under the bass line. The second system is annotated with "C-sharp to D to E-flat continued in upper voice" with arrows pointing to notes in the upper voice and "2' 37''" marking a time point.

²⁹ This voice over is not the typical "narrating 'I'" (p. 28-29 in Bernard Dick's book) that can be found at the beginning of movies such as the original *Sabrina* (1954), where the main character's voice is heard providing an introduction to the scene and the character's in the film. The "narrating 'I'" can set the stage for a particular scene, whereas the subjective voice makes the listening audience privy to a character's personal thoughts about a situation that no one else within the context of the narrative can hear.

³⁰ It is at this moment when Mort enters the motel room 2' 7'' into the film that he discovers two people in bed, but it is not as yet clear to the audience what his relationship is to either of them at that moment.

The entrance of this D (2' 21'') occurs after Mort screams at the two people in the motel room – the camera zooms out of the view of the room back to where Mort's car is sitting outside, and then the score as seen in the second measure of example 1 enters (2' 25''). This does not enter as initially audible as the previous D, but quickly becomes louder with the accompanying of the open credits. It is my claim that this initial D heard 2' 21'' into the film is a nondiegetic aural representation of the character Shooter, who is visually introduced to the audience a few minutes later – 4' 40'' into the film. This distinction is important because the audience does not know Mort and Shooter are two different personalities of the same person until the end of the film. The significance of this D is emphasized by the lack of any music to this point in the film – this is the first note heard in the film, and this is the last note heard in the film, immediately following the final camera shot of the main character, thereby creating structural emphasis on the pitch D within the film. This D at the beginning which represents the emergence of Shooter, becomes the E-natural at the end of the opening credits (see ex. 3, p. 12), which, through a full shot of Mort, is representative of Mort's personality (E) compared to Shooter's personality (D). We are aurally introduced to Shooter and Mort before we are visually and officially introduced to them both within the first five minutes of the film.³¹ Notice in this example, even though it moves into some sort of G mode, the centrality around the pitch D in the upper voice of the second and third measures (heard 2' 46'' into film) – this specific motion is heard for the first twenty seconds (2' 25'' – 2' 45'') once the "Main Title" music enters 2' 25'' into the film, the end of which can be seen in example 2 on the next page. This focus on D in the upper voices is set against the G,

³¹ The audience is introduced to Mort's character from the beginning – however they do not know his name (Mr. Rainey) until a little over 4 minutes into the film; Shooter's name is revealed shortly after Mr. Rainey's.

which is a fifth below D. This audible emphasis on G in the bass is still based on an overall centricity on D, which is matched with the A in the bass voice in the fifth and sixth measures of example 2 is a fifth away from D (this time a fifth above). This fifth motion on both sides of D (G = fifth below, A = fifth above) reinforces the idea of pitch class D as a central axis for the film. As seen in example 2 below, this pitch class D moves up to E through E-flat and then back down to D.

Ex. 2: “Main Title” as transcribed (2’ 37” – 3’ 17”)

initial focus on E natural (2' 46")

C-sharp to D to E-flat continued in upper voice

E-natural vs. E-flat in upper voice (2' 51")

E-flat moves back to D natural

back to D vs. E-flat this time in upper and lower voices

The first few measures of example 2 are similar to that of the opening of the “Main Title” as seen in example 1, but then the G mode bass voice moves to an arpeggiation based on E-natural as indicated, with the struggle of E-natural vs. E-flat over the A in the lower voice. This A, as indicated earlier, represents the fifth motion above D, but also links the large scale D to E motion through its fifth relationship to D and E (fifth above D, fifth below E). After repeating this E-natural arpeggiation, the bass moves back to the motion

seen at the beginning of the example, with the struggle between D and E-natural/E-flat in both the upper and lower voice. This musical struggle around D natural (half steps C-sharp and E-flat, as well as motion up to E-natural) as shown in examples 1 and 2 is representative of the conflict between Mort and Shooter that will be explored further within the context of the rest of the film. When the initial D is heard, there is no one in the view of the camera. I interpret this delay in providing a visual for the audience to connect with the D as serving the overall narrative concerning the hidden duality of the main character’s personality. Therefore, as seen in example 2, this struggle is not initially obvious to the listener. The centrality around pitch class D is understood more as its (D’s) role is “played” out further in the film.³²

This “Main Title” transition ends on a full shot of the main character, “6 months later” in his cabin, with the score settling on an E (see example 3 below), showing this ascent (from D to E-natural) which is what I hear as the initial aural presentation of the split personality of Mort Rainey (the main character).

Example 3: “Main Title” as transcribed (3’ 52’’ - 4’ 22’’) into film

D vs. E-flat (3' 52'')

E-flat moves to E natural 4' 2''

E-natural tries to move up to F, but falls back to E - 4' 12'''

Similar motion of F falling to E-natural 4' 22'''

³² Both of these structural pitch Ds are in the same register.

Example 3 shows how the return to D in the upper voice moves up to F, in half step motion (D to E-flat, following by E to F-natural), falling back to the low E at the end of the example. This re-emphasizes the struggle of D vs. E-flat/E-natural through the step wise motion indicated in example 3 from D to E (3' 52'' to 4' 2''), with the half step upper neighbor motion heard within each repetition (D to E-flat at 3' 52'' into film, moving to E-natural to F-natural at 4' 2'' into film), as well as the lack of continued upward motion once the upper voice reaches the F – the music falls back to the E-natural heard 4' 12'' into the film. The bass voice at the beginning of example 3 shows the temporary return to G, which falls to E 4' 2'' into the film when the E-flat moves up to the E-natural in the upper voice. This E in the bass also begins with a struggle with F-natural, which eventually gives in, falling back once more and landing on the E-natural 4' 12'' into the film.

Example 4: “Main Title” initial D motion to E at the end of the “Main Title”

2' 21" 2' 28" 2' 51" 3' 11" 4' 2" 4' 12"

5th relationship = D down to G
and D up to A

As indicated in example 4, I hear the initial D moving to the E heard at the end of the opening credits, again representing this duality between Mort and Shooter (the two main characters) with the fifth motions (to G and A respectively) landing on the E heard 4' 12'' into the film. The D at the opening represents the emergence of “Shooter,” before the audience is even introduced to his character. The E-natural at the end of example 3

shown on the previous page (4' 12'' into the film) aurally and visually (through the full shot of Mort) focuses on the personality of Mort Rainey that, for the majority of the film, the audience believes to be the only side (personality) of Mort. The "E" at the end of example 3 comes to an end with the knocking on the cabin door – this awakens Mort, who answers the door to discover a man claiming "You stole my story."³³ The audience discovers after this conversation that the man's name is John Shooter – the antagonist of the story. Visually, we are introduced to Shooter 4' 40'' into the film, but the idea/aural representation of Shooter is initially introduced 2' 21'' into the film, with the initial D as seen in example 1.

The research tasks included in completing this project will be finishing transcriptions of the score to "Secret Window" (this process has already begun) – I have recordings of the music used in the movie as well as the movie itself to assist in these transcriptions. None of the individual pieces within the film are too heavily orchestrated, nor are they rhythmically complex, so it is a task that is realistic for the completion of this paper. In addition to the film score to this movie, I will be listening to other film scores (*Vertigo*, *The Illusionist*) and comparing the techniques used in setting the music. I will also be examining the film itself and techniques used as discussed by contemporary film scholars. I will also be searching for additional primary source materials in the form of letters and/or interviews with composers from the 20th century with thoughts and ideas on the process of writing music for film. I plan on completing this thesis by Fall 2008.

³³ 4' 40'' into film.