

Question 2: Using at least three examples, consider how storytellers have utilised film and/or music/sound design to explore at least one of the following: sublime, weird & eerie, transformation conflict, the self, silence, leitmotifs, symbolism, archetypes.

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Introduction

In this essay I will be taking and analysing 4 different examples of the leitmotif used in the lord of the ring's trilogy (2001,2002,2003)

The lord of the ring's trilogy is a 3-part film adaptation of the books written by John Ronald Reuel Tolkien, or better known as J.R.R Tolkien. Directed by Peter Jackson in the early 2000's. Do bring this universe to life properly and do it justice. Jackson enlisted the help of well-known film composer Howard shore asking shore directly himself "Yes, I received a phone call directly from Peter, he was in New Zealand" (Shore, 2018)

Shore had worked on a number of films before this most notably "the silence of the lambs (1991)" and "the fly (1986)" and in an interview expressed his interest in being a part of the making of this trilogy "it was a fascinating project that he described. I journeyed down to New Zealand after the call, the level of filmmaking was amazing and inspiring. I wanted to be a part of it." (Shore, 2018) Shore then went on to compose the soundtrack which took him 4 years "I worked on this score for almost four years. I

was writing and composing every day” (Shore, 2018) And created in my opinion one of the best soundtracks to a film ever.

What is a leitmotif?

“An operatic technique popularized by Richard Wagner, that fuses musical theme’s with specific people, events or places to aid and in some cases augment the dramatic development of a story” (Lord of The Rings: How Music Elevates Story, 2016 1:32)

A leitmotif, or the leading motive. Is a technique in cinematic sound design that creates a unique song or sound for a specific purpose. And the lord of the rings has many of them. “Over the course of almost four years, I developed over a hundred themes and leitmotifs for the film.” (shore, 2020) I will be choosing 4 of my favourite ones and analysing them to see what makes them a great addition to the film.

Leitmotif 1

The first example of a leitmotif I will be discussing is the theme of the one ring of power. We first hear this theme right at the start of the film. The film opens with narration from the elf Galadriel about the history of the world. But as she is speaking. The music which is playing in the background is overlapped by the theme of the ring, as the film title appears on the screen. Already the ring has established its presence. Creating an atmosphere surrounding the ring not a minute into the film. The ring’s theme plays many times during the 3 films, and almost every time the ring is on the screen, it plays. Different variations of the theme play through the trilogy, depending on the subject of the scene. But all keep the same rhythm and tone. Almost giving life to the ring, an inanimate object, as if the ring’s theme is its own dialogue. Giving

the audience feeling that the ring is just another character in the plot. Which it is. In the book "Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen" the audiovisual contract is discussed "a kind of symbolic contract that the audio-viewer enters into, agreeing to think of sound and image as forming a single entity." (Chion, et al., 1994, p. 216). This is present in the ring theme because it makes the sound feel as if it is a part of that character, like I said making it feel like the ring is talking whenever the theme plays. The audience immediately associates the theme with the ring as soon as it starts playing. Even if the ring is not present on the screen. Speaking from a nostalgic standpoint, this is one of my favourite themes in film. It is eerie and soft, it makes you feel comfortable and uncomfortable at the same time. And it's very recognisable. Anyone who has watched the films instantly knows it is the ring theme from the first 2 seconds. Shore does an excellent job at creating a theme for the film's main character that has become somewhat iconic. "Because we are expected to remember it when it comes back, a leitmotif is always made distinctive in some way" (Richards, 2012) The distinctive feature of the ring's theme is that it is soft, but menacing string section that can sometimes be quite piercing as well. Also, the addition of the female vocals at the end of the song make it quite memorable.

Leitmotif 2

The second use of leitmotifs I will be discussing is the theme of the Nazgûl. The greatest servants of the dark lord Sauron (the main antagonist in the series) We first hear this theme in the scene where the hobbits are being chased through the woods. But it's not in its entirety. It is only a derivative of the full theme. It features only the

use of the main string instruments, some use of brass and very faint choir vocals. This is only because there is only 3 of the nine Nazgul chasing our beloved hobbits. And seemingly only a 3rd of the theme is played.

This changes however in the next scene we see them in. The next scene we see them is the scene in Amon Sûl where the 4 hobbits are cornered on top of the abandoned outpost. Now there are 5. And now the theme really starts to show its teeth. Straight away you can see the difference in the two variations of the theme. The second is much fuller. More instruments from the start and is more intimidating. It creates a real sense of danger for the characters. The vocal choir also becomes much more prominent. Building up slowly as the Nazgul walk slowly towards the hobbits. As the Nazgul are getting closer to our hero's in the film, the vocal choir starts getting louder and louder, until it can be heard clearly. Giving the audience the feeling like they are there, with the hobbits experiencing the same danger they are. But it is still not the full theme.

We next see them all together as a full 9 chasing Arwen and Frodo. And the theme is at its fullest extent. Now that all 9 of them are together, its like all the pieces of the orchestra playing the theme have also come together. As if each of the Nazgul represents its own section of the song, even without one its not fully complete. Much like in the film where they at their strongest together, the theme is also at its strongest when all the instruments are playing together.

A leitmotif is always consistent in its presentation in order for it to remain recognizable with each statement. This is not to say that leitmotifs are always played in exactly the same way, because they certainly aren't!

(Richards, 2012)

Leitmotif 3

The 3rd theme I will be discussing is that of the fellowship. Now the fellowship is an interesting one. It follows the same development process as the Nazgul theme, but it also gets reversed. To start shore plays the theme in a few variations. The first time it is just with Frodo and Sam as they make their way to Rivendell and its it played but only briefly using minimal instruments. "To say that a leitmotif is short does not mean that it can't start out as, or be developed into, something longer" (Richards, 2012)

It appears again in a slightly different variation when the hobbits meet Aragorn, growing slightly in form as more instruments are added. During the scene previously discussed with the Nazgul, the two themes are intertwined as the Nazgul chase Arwen and Frodo. As if the two themes are doing battle to see who comes out on top. Which creates tension for the audience because whilst there is a chase happening on the screen. There is also another chase going on in the music, which was a brilliant choice by shore. To amplify this battle, using both of the sense sight and sound.

The next time we hear this is in Rivendell. At the council where the fellowship is formed. Brining us the full extend of Shore's theme. As the fellowship is formed. The orchestra comes together and is also formed. Bringing life to an amazing song in which its final form starts to diminish. As our hero's enter the mines of Moria. Gandalf falls in battle with the balrog, and the rest of the fellowship retreat. We next hear the theme in what could be described as broken. whilst the fellowship is making their way down a river. Its clear that the theme is missing integral instruments, and something is not right with it. Because the fellowship has lost their leader. Its broken

so the theme conveys it such. This gives “added value” to the scene “the expressive and informative value with which a sound enriches a given image so as to create the definite impression” (Chion, et al., 1994, p. 5) Because we know as the viewer that the fellowship is broken, and the music solidifies that knowledge by being broken also. The last time we hear the theme in the first film is when Boromir dies. After his death there is a rendition of the theme that sound very bleak, and empty. As if it is dying. This signifies the breaking of the fellowship with the party going their separate ways and the group slowly coming undone.

Leitmotif 4

The last leitmotif I will be discussing is not one of a group of characters, or an object. But it is one of a place. The shire.

The shire theme is very upbeat, simple and happy. Much like the hobbits who live there. Its played throughout all 3 of the films with its happy flutes, and cheerful violins. It a very peaceful theme. It is however, also played in the darker times of the trilogy. You find yourself hearing it whenever the hobbits are missing home whilst on their great adventure, or Frodo and Sam are going through struggles on their way to destroy the ring. Its used as a reminder of what life was like for them before the ring. It serves as hope and comfort to the hobbits. And by extension the audience. In scene where Frodo and Sam are walking through the crop field and bump into Merry and Pippin it quickly turns into a light-hearted scene where they fall down a hill and find some mushrooms. Over the top is a light-hearted theme to accompany it. Truly playing to the life of a hobbit. But then it slowly gets drown out by the appearance of the Nazgul rider on the road. It then changes to Nazgul theme, completely stripping away the innocent theme of the hobbits. This signifies the hobbit’s journey into a

different world. Something they have never experienced before this. This is one of the last times that the shire theme is played in the happy upbeat form that we first introduced to. Showing the development in the hobbit characters as they face the world. We hear a rendition of the theme once more in Rivendell when Frodo and Bilbo are talking. But it is much softer and more meaningful. Further establishing Frodo's change in character.

Almost a third of the first film is set in the shire. Establishing where our main protagonist lives. A lush green peaceful area with little to no connection to the outside world, other than Gandalf who enjoys the company of the hobbits. At the start of the first film. We are thrown into a birthday party for Bilbo, celebrating his 111th birthday. And in this there are celebrations, food, drinks etc. But the most interesting thing is that this scene is one of the few scenes that contains diegetic music. "Diegetic music is understood to emanate from a source in the fictional narrative or "diegesis"" (Richards, 2013)

The instruments that are being played are visible on the screen with flutes, horns, drums etc. "Noises of trumpets and horns, pipes and flutes, and other musical instruments." (TOLKIEN, 1954) This use of diegetic sound makes you feel a part of the scene, it makes you feel involved. As if you are there partying with Bilbo on his 111th birthday. It really sets the scene for the type of people the hobbits are. And it makes you understand the world that they are about to be thrown into. A world so much darker and less happy than they are used to.

Conclusion

That brings me to the conclusion of my Analysis on the leitmotif use in the lord of the ring's trilogy (2001,2002,2003). Its safe to say that Jackson and Shore created a wonderful and magical cinematic universe using the works of Tolkien. They created a fascinating and indulging world that will be loved by generations to come. I for one have learnt a lot about the film itself and will never watch it the same way after doing more research into the workings behind the musical score. The way that shore used leitmotifs to compliment the storytelling that Jackson achieved is truly wonderful.

Think of a whole soundtrack as an entire painting, the leitmotifs as the sections of a painting your eyes are most drawn to, and the selected orchestration as the brushes.

(Goble,2018)

Goble describes a soundtrack perfectly here. And that's exactly what Jackson and Shore have achieved in these films. A beautiful painting filled with joy and sorrow. Excitement and suspense.

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