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## Outing the Score: Music, narrative and collaborative process in *Little Ashes*

Miguel Mera

### Introduction

As part of his essay 'Film Music and Narrative Agency' Jerrold Levinson argued that the narrative function of non-diegetic music is principally to enable that which 'would not otherwise be true, or not to the same degree or with the same definiteness.' (1996: 259) To demonstrate narrative agency music must make a difference; the question Levinson asked was: 'would deleting music in a scene change its represented content?' (1996: 259) This theorisation is part of a series of broader narratological debates concerning both the implied author and implied reader as discussed by Booth (1983), Bordwell (1985), Chatman (1990), Brannigan (1992), Lothe (2000), van Peer and Chatman (2001), Kindt and Müller (2006), Verstraten (2009), and many others. I do not wish to revisit these various multi-layered arguments again here but take it as a given that narrational effects are achieved by non-diegetic music, or as Levinson puts it: 'the music tells you how the presenter of the story regards the events being presented, or else how he would like you to regard them.' (1996: 263)

It is important to note that, for Levinson, the intelligent agent of the story is not necessarily a real person but a narrator that is constructed by the audience; tensions exist between imagined narrators that are internal to the fiction as opposed to those who comment on the fiction externally. Levinson ultimately sought to clarify the agency to which film music is assigned by a comprehending viewer, with the aim of identifying how music makes a narrative difference.<sup>1</sup> I want to extend this discussion by considering how filmmakers themselves, by which I mean the actual production team, discuss and explore some aspects of narrativity and subject position during the process of composing the score for a film. This intentionalist perspective will demonstrate how negotiations shape narrative representation in relation to gender and sexuality, particularly the depiction of gay male sex. Consequently, this article aims to bring together three under-researched strands in film musicology. The first is the role of music

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<sup>1</sup> There are, undoubtedly, several problems with Levinson's essay, not least the narrative oppositions between diegetic and non-diegetic music and especially composed music and pre-existing music. The result is music that seems, in Levinson's terms, to emanate from both the narrator and the implied filmmaker at the same time. Nonetheless I believe his debate on issues relating to agency and impact provides a useful starting point for the purposes of this discussion.

as a narrative agent, the second is the exploration of musical decision-making processes aligned to narrative, and the third is how these ideas impact upon sexual representation.

The focus for discussion is the feature film *Little Ashes* (Paul Morrison, 2009), which tells the story of the interweaving lives of the painter Salvador Dalí, poet Federico García Lorca, and filmmaker Luis Buñuel. As composer for the film I am uniquely equipped to bring an insider's experience to the discussion as an example of practice-led research. It is my contention that this will provide insights into the dynamics between intention, process and outcome, revealing at times tensions between the creators' and audience's imagined narrator, an issue that is further complicated by the fact that the audience brings biographical expectations to the film's central characters. A self-reflexive approach immediately raises the question of how a composer can discuss their own work, in hindsight, without post-rationalisation or descending into anecdote. I will attempt to avoid this by establishing a clear theoretical framework that allows exploration of the perceptions of the agency of the music, particularly in relation to the disclosure of emotional truth. Though the score for the film features several oppositional binaries that Eve Sedgwick might have described as an epistemology of the closet (2008), these do not function to present homosexuality as an unstable, deviant, or perverse alternative to the fixed norm of heterosexuality, as is the case in a number of other films made for a mainstream cinema audience. The score for *Little Ashes* attempts to treat homosexual love in the same ways that heterosexual love is frequently represented in film. At the same time, the film's narrative strategy evades some representational challenges by inverting musical practices and reveals a basic societal confusion in the way sexuality is represented on screen. Three scenes will be examined in detail: a moonlight swim in the waters of Cadaques, a visit to a church where religious iconography is interspersed with homoerotic imagery of a boxing match, and a hetero/homosexual 'threesome'. The first will foreground the challenges of romantic representation, the second will reveal the importance of the temp track, and the third will highlight conflicts between minoritizing and universalizing views of homosexuality. As such, the music in *Little Ashes* provides an interesting example of developing scoring approaches that seek to challenge existing modes of sexual representation on film. Audiovisual examples referred to in this article can be found at [www.miguelmera.com/music/publications](http://www.miguelmera.com/music/publications) .

### *Little Ashes*

*Little Ashes* opens in 1922 in Madrid, a city wavering on the edge of change as traditional values are challenged by the dangerous new influences of jazz, Freud and the avant-garde. The eighteen-year-old Salvador Dalí arrives at university, determined to become a great artist. His bizarre blend of shyness and rampant exhibitionism attracts the attention of two of the university's social elite—Federico García Lorca and Luis Buñuel. They become friends. However, as time passes, Salvador feels an increasingly strong pull toward the charismatic Federico—who is in turn oblivious to the attention he is receiving from his beautiful writer friend, Magdalena. Dalí and Lorca's feelings are shown deepening into a love affair, which the sexually repressed painter tries and fails to consummate. As a substitute, Lorca sleeps with Magdalena, with Dalí present as a voyeur. By 1936 Spain is teetering on the precipice of civil war, and the openly gay Lorca—now a highly acclaimed and controversial playwright—falls victim to a fascist death squad. Dalí is hosting a party when he discovers that Federico has been assassinated. The walls of self-denial that surround the artist come crashing down as he realizes, too late, the depth of his love for Federico.

The detail of the relationship between Dalí and Lorca has long been the subject of speculation and debate amongst historians and biographers (Santos Torroella 1984, Gibson 2004, Sahuquillo 2007, Edwards 2009), and is the central issue that the film explores. The scriptwriter, Philippa Goslett, defended the film's interpretative stance and its focus on the relationship between the two men: 'When you look at the letters it's clear something more was going on there.... It began as a friendship, became more intimate and moved to a physical level but Dalí found it difficult' (Goslett in Smith 2007: 7). This relationship presents a complex subject for filmic exploration of the fragility of interaction in a closeted society. What really happened? How did the two men relate to each other? Was there real love between them?

Between 1925 and 1936, during the course of their friendship, Dalí and Lorca exchanged numerous letters. The original manuscripts of Dalí's letters to Lorca are held by the Fundación Federico García Lorca in Madrid and those of Lorca to Dalí are held by Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí in Púbol, as well as in private collections. It is largely thanks to research undertaken by Christopher Maurer that the letters are available in an easily-accessible volume (2005), which appears to have acted as a spur for the creation of the film. There are twenty-seven letters from Dalí to Lorca and only five from Lorca to Dalí. Nonetheless it is possible to trace the path of a

passionate friendship through them, a friendship marked by a thoughtful exchange of aesthetic ideas as well as palpable sexual tension. In March 1926, for example, Dalí wrote to Lorca in anticipation of his visit to the north east of Spain.

...Look how affectionately I'm going to write your name. I'll do the whole thing in one breath.

Federico Garcia Lorca

And now I sign

SALVADOR DALÍ

Do you love me? ...

Come to Figueras, tout de suite.

(Dalí to Lorca, March 1926 in Maurer 2005: 55-56)

In July 1927, Lorca wrote to Dalí:

My dear Salvador,

When the car pulled away, the goose began to cackle and tell me about the Duomo of Milan. I wanted to throw myself from the car so that I could stay with you in Cadaques...

...I realize now what I have lost by our separation...

...I have treated you like an indecent mule —you, the dearest thing that I have...

...Remember me when you are at the beach and above all when you paint crackling things and my little ashes. Oh, my little ashes! Paint my name into the picture so that my name will mean something in the world, and give me a hug, for I badly need it. Your

FEDERICO

(Lorca to Dalí, July 1927, in *ibid*: 74, 76)

In this letter Lorca referred to 'little ashes' (*cenicitas*). This is, in fact, the title of a Dalí painting from 1927–28 (Fig. 1) and the film co-opted it as a symbol of the relationship between the two men. Several critics have highlighted the reciprocal influence evident in the poet's and painter's work of this period. Indeed, Rojas even argued, after Santos Torroella, that in *Cenicitas* the decapitated bust of Lorca lies on the beach on the left-hand side next to a ruler, alluding to a verse from Lorca's poem *Ode to Salvador Dalí*: 'The man who looks with a yellow ruler is coming' (Rojas 1993: 164). Dalí's profile stares at the decapitated head from the sand.

Throughout the letters the imagery of Saint Sebastian recurs. Both men were aware of the

homoerotic symbolism of Saint Sebastian that had developed during the nineteenth century and functioned as a metaphor for covert homosexuality. Sebastian was shot with arrows and left for dead, and the artistic representation of physical penetration came to reflect a metaphorical penetration in which serenity and open posture were interpreted as a sign of enjoyment and enthusiastic desire. In a letter to Lorca dated September 1926, Dalí signed off as usual: 'I love you very much' (Maurer 2005: 63), but also referred to the image of Saint Sebastian arguably teasing Lorca for his unconsummated desires: 'Didn't you ever think how strange it is that his ass doesn't have a single wound?' (ibid: 62). Lorca later wrote in August 1927: 'His arrows are made of steel and the difference between you and me is that you see them fastened in him—fixed, stout, short arrows which never grow rusty—and I see them as long ones, at the very moment they have wounded him' (ibid: 78). Perhaps the men were simply discussing aesthetics.

**(Fig. 1) Salvador Dalí, *Cenicitas (Little Ashes)*, 1927–28. Oil on panel. 25 x 19 in. (63.5 x 48.3 cm). Museo Nacional Centro De Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid.**

The debate among scholars about the degree to which homosexuality or intellectual excitement fuelled the relationship between the two men is ongoing. Certainly, their friendship cooled dramatically after 1928 and Dalí remained uncharacteristically silent on the matter until an interview in 1969, where he more than insinuates that there was some kind of attempt at a physical relationship.

He was homosexual, as everyone knows, and madly in love with me... He tried to screw me twice... I was extremely annoyed, because I wasn't homosexual, and I wasn't interested in giving in. Besides, it hurts. So nothing came of it. (Bosquet 2003: 19)

In the repressed Spain of the mid-1930s, Lorca's homosexuality seems to have provided an additional thrill to his murderers. Lorca's biographer Leslie Stainton has suggested that the killers made remarks about his sexual orientation, and that it played a significant role in his death (1998: 460–475). According to Ian Gibson, a successful, liberal homosexual could not be tolerated in Franco's Spain, and one of the assassins, Juan Luis Trecastró, boasted: 'We have just killed Federico García Lorca. We left him in a ditch, and I fired two bullets into his arse for being a queer' (1987: 136, for further context see Sorel, 1977: 222, and Sahuquillo, 2007: 36).

The questions posed by the film relating to societal attitudes towards homosexuality and closeted relationships, therefore, raise interesting challenges for the narrative positioning of the score.

### **Awakening**

Although gay images have proliferated in Hollywood films, several writers have outlined how homosexual characters have been made to signify in very limited and clearly defined ways. In *The Celluloid Closet* (1987) Vito Russo argued that homophobic stereotypes have not only shaped 'straight' ideas about homosexuality but also often altered the gay community's self image. In *Now You See It* (1990) and *The Matter of Images* (1993) Richard Dyer showed how the figure of the homosexual in film has shifted from buffoon to outright threat. Joe Wlodarz went even further, suggesting that dominant homophobia—based on anxieties surrounding sex between men—is such a danger to straight masculinity and male subjectivity that in Hollywood 'it can only be presented as an act of rape' (2001: 68). He highlighted a number of examples from the 1990s, including *Pulp Fiction* (Quentin Tarantino, 1994), *The Shawshank Redemption* (Frank Darabont, 1994), *Sleepers* (Barry Levinson, 1996), and *American History X* (Tony Kaye, 1998). However, in the Noughties, following the successes of New Queer Cinema and the increasing dominance of independent filmmaking within Hollywood structures, the idea of homosexual threat appeared to dissipate somewhat. A particular turning point was the mainstream success of *Brokeback Mountain* (Ang Lee, 2005), which explored the closeted relationship between two cowboys. Since the cowboy is the ultimate symbol of American heterosexual masculinity it was a bold move to blur the boundaries between the homosocial and



the homosexual.<sup>2</sup> Although this film shows the two central male characters having sex, the scene is not scored by composer Gustavo Santaolalla. In part, this is because the relationship has not yet ‘earned’ the emotional validation that music would provide. In a tent the two characters huddle together for warmth and an awkward pass turns into rough and urgent sex. One wonders how a heterosexual equivalent of the same scenario might have been handled, but it seems unlikely that the scene would have been shot in almost complete darkness as it is in *Brokeback Mountain* with only the sound of grunts and groans as accompaniment. The narrative function of music, at least in countless heterosexual sex scenes, is to demonstrate emotional depth between characters. The moment of sexual union is also the moment of musical outpouring of emotion. In heterosexual sex scenes, as Tanya Krzywinska argues, music aims to engage viewers emotionally and physically by compensating for cinema’s ‘missing dimension of tactility’ (2006: 230). In *Brokeback Mountain*, however, we see but do not hear emotional depth in relation to gay sex; the filmmakers do not seek to engage us with tactile music. The scene represents an animalistic lust for sex rather than a representation of love. In the interests of balance, it is important to note that plenty of emotional depth is evident elsewhere in the film, but this sexual act itself is not part of the narrative trajectory of an emotional journey in musical terms.

The lack of music in *Brokeback Mountain* suggests one approach to the representation of gay male sex. A scene of sexual awakening in a biopic about the playwright and poet Oscar Wilde also provides further material for discussion. *Wilde* (Brian Gilbert, 1997) does contain music in its gay sex scene, but its narrative function seems problematic. Robbie Ross tells Wilde: ‘There has to be a first time for everything Oscar, even for you.’ The meandering, descending oboe theme (see fig. 2), consistently dark sonorities, and expressive minor harmony seem to represent gay sex as something dangerous, lascivious, and morally confusing for the central character. The music suggests that Wilde’s hidden desires are both beyond his control and act as a threat to the family, not least because the scene is framed by the sight and sound of Wilde’s wife and children. Furthermore, major root-position string harmonies accompany the preceding and ensuing scenes generating a musically oppositional dynamic where homosexuality is presented as an unstable alternative to the fixed norm of heterosexuality. The composer for the

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<sup>2</sup> The scriptwriter for *Little Ashes*, Philippa Goslett, indicated to me that the success of *Brokeback Mountain* suddenly made it possible for *Little Ashes* to be made. After years of development difficulties finances became more readily available.

film, Debbie Wiseman, explained that Wilde's theme was designed to be precariously chromatic.<sup>3</sup>

The aim was to write something that had a sense of tragedy about it, slightly unsettled, so it was quite chromatic. The chromaticism came from—I suppose it sounds quite crude—him not quite knowing his sexuality. It could go one way or the other. It was kind of a musical interpretation of that. You don't know if it could be a D sharp or an E Flat. (Interview with the author, July 1998)

**(Fig. 2) Descending oboe melody in *Wilde*.**

In both *Wilde* and *Little Ashes* homosexuality, as abhorrent to the society of the time, is presented as the significant reason for the downfall of the central character, yet in *Little Ashes* we took a different narrative and musical stance. In a parallel sequence of sexual awakening, Dalí has invited Lorca to spend time with him at his family home during the summer vacation. The men take a moonlight swim in the phosphorescent waters of Cadaques Bay, the location of their first kiss. The cinematography and guitar-based chamber music, above all else, attempt to portray this moment as one of beauty (Audiovisual Example 1). Figure 3 shows the solo guitar opening of the scene before the string quintet enters

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<sup>3</sup> There may also be a subconscious connection with the *fin-de-siecle* chromaticism of Richard Strauss, particularly given the connection with Wilde's play *Salomé* and Strauss's subsequent opera based upon it.

**(Fig. 3) '3M1: Cadaques Bay' opening, bars 1-11.**

This music is deliberately sentimental yet genuine, affectedly and extravagantly emotional yet intimate. Interestingly, it was not composed to picture. Initially, I composed the music to the script as one of my pitches in order to secure the job. After the sequence had been edited, the picture editor and director tried the music against the sequence and thought that it worked perfectly both in terms of timing and mood. Discussions after an early screening of the film indicated that some members of the production team found the music too romantic and were slightly hesitant about this approach, but the director was clear about how the scene should be read. He thought that some viewers might find it sentimental, but this sentimentality could be both celebrated and enjoyed. In the final version the music as composed in the initial pitch was re-recorded but not altered in any other way. In terms of narrative intention, my response to the script appeared to have aligned with the director's representational approach (presumably one of the reasons I got the job in the first place). Or was it that this music, composed before the sequence was edited, influenced the narrational perspective of the scene? In terms of intention, a number of contributors—the scriptwriter, myself as the composer, the picture editor, the director, and producers—all shaped the nature of the score in some way, but equally the music remained

unchanged from pitch to screen. Did we as creators collectively speak on behalf of our own imagined cinematic narrator and did this evocation match the audience's perception?

Following the première of the film one audience member thanked me for 'making gay sex beautiful' and following the commercial release of the film numerous appreciative emails confirmed the importance of this representational approach to some viewers. However, critical reception of the film and the sequence was mixed. One reviewer quipped that the scene was 'practically a Calvin Klein advertisement' (Wissot 2009). Well known for their sexually charged advertisements, which also question hegemonic masculinity, the criticism intended by the reviewer points to the fundamental strategy in the representational politics of the sequence. I would argue that the scene aims to treat homosexual love in the same way that heterosexual love is normally represented in film, and this may explain initial hesitation about the musical strategy employed. It could even be suggested that the music heterosexualises the gay love scene, an attitude that will be observed in operation in more pronounced terms elsewhere in the film. Principally the scene makes the homoerotic beautiful and, significantly, it attempts to do so to a mainstream audience.

### **Temp Tracks**

In film production, both during the editing process and while the score is being composed, preexistent recordings are often used to help concentrate the ideas of the production team and the composer. Later, the so-called temp track is usually replaced by the composer's score, although on some occasions a particular piece of preexistent music will remain because the filmmakers have become especially attached to it during postproduction; composers often refer to this as 'temp love'.<sup>4</sup> Much of the scholarly writing on temp tracks focuses on the constraints it places upon composers. Kathryn Kalinak, for example, refers to the temp track as tyrannical (1992: 192), a view that she has continued in her more recent work: 'The temp track can be a kind of straightjacket, locking composers into imitating specific pieces of music' (2010: 95). George Burt reinforces the idea: 'There are two words that will strike horror into a composer's heart: temp track' (1995: 220). My own experience, however, has been diametrically opposed to this perspective. I have often found the temp track to be extremely useful in clarifying detailed aspects of narrative intention largely because the discussion it has generated has frequently

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<sup>4</sup> For an exploration of the temp track from a practical composer's perspective see Karlin and Wright (2004), Chapter 3: Role Models and Temp Tracks. See also Sadoff (2006).

provided insights that no other method would have been able to do as effectively. To illustrate this process I intend to discuss the development of music for two related but temporally separated scenes that also connect to the central question of the representation of emotional truth in relation to homosexuality.

In *Little Ashes* several of my own pre-existing pieces of music, recordings of other works I had provided, and music found by the picture editor and director were used as temp tracks for the purposes of stimulating discussion. For a scene where Lorca and Dalí visit a church, a piece of choral music by the Renaissance composer Tomás Luis de Victoria (1548–1611) had been used. My first attempts to score this scene largely ignored the temp track. My perception was that the overt religiosity in the music would simply repeat what could obviously be seen on screen: we see a church; we hear religious music. Instead, I focussed on the intimate sound of two guitars that was increasingly becoming an important feature of the score (Audio Example 1). However, the director's response to this music revealed a more subtle perception of the value of the original temp track than I had initially perceived:

**From:** Paul Morrison  
**Sent:** 18 January, 10:51  
**To:** Miguel Mera  
**Cc:** Rachel Tunnard  
**Subject:** Re: New Cue

Hi Miguel

The new music is lovely and I can see that thematically it will make sense. But I'm not sure it is right. We terribly miss the choral music. This is the one point in the film where the homoerotic undertones of Catholicism are brought out - indeed it was your response to this scene that renewed our confidence in it - so it would be a shame not to underline the religiosity in the music. Is there no way we can get permission to use your piece?

The idea that the religious music could contribute to a focussing on the homoerotic undertones of Catholicism in the scene provided a fascinating perspective. I was aware that we could not afford a choir (certainly not for a single cue) and instead suggested that we use a solo voice, but this suggestion was, perhaps, indicative of an attempt to signify along stereotypical gender lines.

**From:** Miguel Mera  
**To:** Paul Morrison  
**Sent:** Monday, January 21, 10:19 AM  
**Subject:** New Cue

Paul,

We could try and use a counter-tenor voice (sometimes referred to as a male alto), basically it is the highest male voice and it used a lot in Baroque music. This could help give a bit of a religious element to the score, but I would also want to use that voice elsewhere, probably including Lorca's death and the very final scene of the film. The voice has a delicate and pure quality which I think could be very appropriate. Also, it is not the sort of thing I've heard much in film scores so it could be a very distinctive sound.

Anyway, it is hard to explain what I am thinking of, but here is a recording of counter-tenor David Daniels singing an aria by Handel. Have a listen to the type of voice and then imagine that quality added to the style we are pursuing for *Little Ashes* and that might give you an idea of the possibilities.

Thanks

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Miguel

The director's response later the same day—after listening to Handel's aria 'O Lord Mercies Numberless' from *Saul* and consulting with the picture editor—was: 'Sounds great to us. It also evokes Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears, which is not a bad thing. Lovely, and a good idea to use it also where you suggest...' The fact that both Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears are mentioned clearly indicates the significance of the counter-tenor voice to the director. In this context, the voice itself acts as an emasculated signifier for homosexuality, coding that taps into a variety of cultural and historical stereotypes. For example, in the Catholic Church during the Renaissance and Baroque periods, counter-tenors were required because women were not permitted to sing publicly. In most cultural understandings of male singing the counter-tenor is able to extend his range beyond normal vocal production.<sup>5</sup> Edward Miller (2003) observed that this blurs the boundary between gender distinctions:

He is entering into tonalities usually designated for women and mimicking a range attributed to women. But the falsettist is not authentically female. It is a form of drag: a vocal masquerade. In this way, the falsetto voice challenges the authenticity of gender-assigned voices.

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<sup>5</sup> There has been considerable debate about the extent to which head voice or falsetto is used by counter-tenors. Giles (1994, 2005), for example, refuses to use the term falsetto because of pejorative connotations of the term, and refers instead to second-mode phonation.

While some scholars would find the use of the term falsettist employed by Miller inaccurate, there are clear cultural associations with a vocal type that moves beyond defined binaries of male and female. For me the use of highest male voice with its particular pure quality was a valuable timbral addition. The scene in its final version begins with a boxing match in the *residencia de estudiantes* in Madrid in which Luis Buñuel displays his masculine virility. Slow-motion naked male torsos are juxtaposed with religious iconography and the action moves to a church in Cadaques, northern Spain. We hear the counter-tenor voice, first solo and then accompanied by a string orchestra (Audiovisual Example 2).

Towards the end of the film various characters learn of Lorca's assassination; a scene which the audience has already witnessed. As Dalí's reaction becomes more emotional we see a flashback to the scene in Cadaques Bay. Significantly, this is the moment that the counter-tenor voice returns (Figure 4, Audiovisual Example 3). It could be perceived as an angelic voice from beyond the grave, but given its earlier coding in relation to homoeroticism, it also reveals the emotional truth of Dalí's love for Lorca. Indeed, Dalí's recollection now shows both men completely naked as they kiss (the first time both men were sporting underwear). Dalí's memory goes further than he was physically able to, suggesting his unfulfilled desires. Thus, in narrative terms, the boxing match-church scene represents what Genette and Chatman would have referred to as a 'retrospective prolepsis' (Chatman 1980: 64). The musical narrative takes an excursion into its own future to reveal significant parts of the story that have not yet occurred; the music is engaged in the anticipation of retrospection.

(Fig. 4) 6M4: Dalí's Recollection, bars 11-14.

### **Outing the Score?**

One of the most important scenes in the film in terms of the characters' sexual relationships involves a threesome. Magdalena, unaware that Lorca is gay, is frustrated that her friendship with him is not progressing to a physical level. Unclear about what she is doing wrong, she resorts to desperate measures and goes to his dormitory room to seduce him. However, when she arrives she discovers Dalí and realizes that the two men are more than just friends. In a scene of harrowing sexual confusion, Magdalena and Lorca have sex while Dalí watches them and masturbates. Lorca is only able to become erect because Dalí is in the room and during sex with Magdalena he turns to face Dalí. Magdalena wants to make love to Lorca, but ends up acting as a substitute for Dalí. Everyone is having sex, of a sort, but no-one is physically or emotionally engaged with the person they want to be with. In one sense the scene represents the love that Lorca and Dalí are not able to consummate, a form of mediated sexuality perhaps, but it is a significant filmmaking strategy that this is achieved through heterosexual sex. We have already observed the musical 'heterosexualising' of a gay love sequence in the Cadaques Bay sequence, a scene where genuine, overt emotion was in evidence. Here, however, there is nothing



conventionally or intentionally erotic about the slow pulsating vibraphone, piano and string harmonies. Repressed B-flat minor harmonic relationships, unstable but constrained tonalities, represent the scene as a tragedy for all three characters. The music is intimate but emotionally hollow and distant. A bowed vibraphone slices through the texture to signal the desperation of the unattainable and unconsummated (Figure 5).

**(Fig. 5) *Little Ashes*, '4M3 Threesome', opening, bars 1-7.**

In *Epistemology of the Closet*, Eve Sedgwick argued that contradictory depictions of gay people (gay men in particular) are not just differing accounts capable of factual resolution, but rather are signs of a basic incoherence in the way society thinks about sexuality. In describing these contradictions she proposed that they should be considered as an opposition between a minoritizing view and a universalizing one (Sedgwick 2008, see especially Chapter 1). A minoritizing view takes the position that homosexuality is of primary importance to a relatively small group of actual homosexuals. A universalizing view suggests that homosexuality is of importance to people across a wide range of sexualities. In the musical examples discussed in this article both audiences and filmmakers are caught between these two positions. The film

*Wilde* showed gay sex, but presented it as a danger and a threat; *Brokeback Mountain* showed gay sex, but was not able musically to emotionalise the actual act; and in *Little Ashes* we opted for a different strategy by portraying heterosexual sex (or mediated homosexual sex) as a tragedy for true love.

One would have imagined that in the year 2009 audiences might be interested in how societal attitudes forced homosexuals to remain in the closet rather than be upset by the notion of sexual orientation or experimentation. Astonishingly, however, the vitriolic reaction that *Little Ashes* received from bloggers and critics regarding the gay aspects of the film's narrative position suggested otherwise. Many reviews objected to the filmic focus on the relationship between the two men and particularly to the representation of Dalí. One reviewer even argued that the film should have been called 'Little Asses' or 'Fops and Fascism' (McCarthy 2009). Furthermore, during the editing process, the Dalí Foundation requested several cuts to the film, particularly those that suggested that Dalí and Lorca had engaged or attempted actual gay sex.

Though issues of representation and narration in relation to gay characters have been widely discussed in film theory, the role music has played has been very rarely explored. Indeed, film musicology has generally been reluctant to explore sex and sexuality. Perhaps this is because, as Susan McClary has observed, music is the 'cultural medium most centrally concerned with denial of the body, with enacting the ritual repudiation of the erotic' (2002: 79). Though cinema is becoming bolder at showing sex in a variety of forms, musically the basic incoherencies that Eve Sedgwick highlighted are still being grappled with. In many ways film music remains firmly in the closet.

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