



Golden Globe winner for Best Director, and Academy Award nominated for Best Picture, Best Director, Best Actress, Best Supporting Actor, Best Supporting Actress, Best Original Screenplay, Best Cinematography, Best Costume Design, Best Film Editing, Best Art Direction, Best Score, Best Sound Editing, and Best Sound Mixing.

"All know that the drop merges into the ocean, but few know that the ocean merges into the drop." (Kabir, 15th Century Mystic Hindu poet). I cite this poem as a lens through which to see Guillermo del Toro's latest film, "Shape of Water," a romance between a mute woman and a foreboding godly Amphibian Man from the sea, a kind of Beauty and the Beast fairy tale. The codes of society, that dictate who we are, often deny us the opportunity to get to know what we don't know, about the world and ourselves, and instead fill us with fears, robbing us of freedom and self-discovery.

One might ask what happens to the drop, to us humans, if indeed we let the ocean come all the way in to occupy and merge? As in his other films, "Pan's Labyrinth" and "Hell Boy," del Toro's fascination with monsters as symbols of political power force us to face our inner most fears.

Some critics have dismissed this film as being an incomplete, shallow fairy tale, expecting there to be more complexity to the intimate relationship at the center of this story. Elisa Esposito, played in all its complexities by the character actor Sally Hawkins ("Happy Go Lucky," "Maudie," "Paddington") falls in love with a captured beast under scientific research at the lab where she is a maid. The Amphibian Man, played by Doug Jones who also played the Faun in "Pan's Labyrinth" and the Angel of Death in "Hell Boy," is a god-like beast with magical healing powers, understood only by Elisa and her neighbor, a closet gay man, Giles, played by Richard Jenkins ("The Visitor"). Elisa has scratch marks on her neck that imply how she might have lost her voice. Could they be from some fantastical monster that visits her every morning in her bath tub where she routinely masturbates before going to work? She seems to have an immediate private understanding with Amphibian Man. She feeds him her hard boiled eggs, steals him away from his imminent death in order to keep him alive. She seals off her bathroom, turns on the water and indeed lets the sea merge into the drop of her existence to make love with this creature. She gets Giles to help her protect and deliver Amphibian Man back to the sea. In the end the scratch marks on Elisa's neck turn into gills, giving her a life with the god like monster. As a drop in the sea, she finally has a voice in another world because she let the sea into her life.