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Sound Changes Everything

In the short film *Pretty Dead Girl*, director, Shawn Ku, has taken a dark, disturbing story about necrophilia and transformed it into a hilarious musical with snappy show tunes and cheerful music. The music is a distraction like applying a cosmetic base to a pimpled face. Throughout the film the music and sounds cover up the disturbing aspects about the film with a thick coat of concealer. Sounds in the film have profound influences on what is seen on the screen and how the viewer interprets the story.

Pretty Dead Girl begins with the non-diegetic sound of a heart monitor, “Beep, beep, beep, beep, beeeeeeeep,” and immediately goes into an upbeat finger-snapping melody as a hospital ward comes into view. The viewer should be disgusted at the sight of a homeless man vomiting in the hallway and horrified by the sight of a man in a trench coat smothering a patient with a pillow; however, the cheerful music creates blinders, allowing the viewer to see only the happiness or comical aspects about the film. All the elements of the décor appear bright and cheerful. Vibrant pops of color overflow on the screen, creating a warm and friendly environment contradictory to the representation that all hospitals are sterile and cold. The main male character, Morty, emerges from the elevator singing about how he loves working in the hospital, and various other characters dance and sing around him, which adds to the warm and friendly feeling. Even the morgue appears warm, cozy, and inviting because of the music. The viewer is easily caught up in the melody causing him or her to overlook the unspeakable actions

being implied in the scene. The music is comforting, creating the illusion that the disturbing actions are completely acceptable.

Removing all the sound emphasizes the dreary atmosphere and draws attention to the grey monochromatic color scheme. There is very little warmth or happiness. The entire décor is washed out of color and enthusiasm. Even the white room scene at the shrink's office appears to be darker. The pretty dead girls in Morti's imagination seem to be dancing more sinisterly and seductively, enticing him to ignore the shrink's efforts to cure him of his necrophiliac eroticism. The heart-wrenching desperation can be seen clearly in the face of the main female character, Viola, in the apothecary's shop, where she tries to purchase a love potion. Instead she leaves the shop with a vial of poison. With the sound, that little vial did not seem very significant, but now, in the darkness, it is like the headlight on a locomotive. It overpowers the screen, engulfing everything in a warm green glow despite Viola's efforts to shield it from the viewer. The lack of sound has removed the blinders, allowing the viewer to focus on the story and see the true nature of the film.

Ku has flawlessly executed the technique of merging the unsettling nature of the story with memorable sing-along songs and cheerful music. If Ku had replaced the comical sounds with sounds and songs associated with horror films the viewer would see the film as being gory and grotesque. Sounds in the film directly influence the viewer's eyesight. Without sound, the film is seen as a dark disturbing story. With the sound, the film is viewed as a bright and cheerful love story; instead, sound changes everything.

Work Cited

Ku, Shawn. *Pretty Dead Girl*. Parts 1-3. *YouTube*, 2 Jul. 2007. [https://youtu.be/](https://youtu.be/6FNUUebapLA?list=PL83415C65438F89BF)

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