**Sherlock Jr.**

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DFP-331: Visual Storytelling

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Sherlock Jr. is a silent film made by Buster Keaton and he was also the one to star in the film as well. The film is about a projectionist at the movie theater, and he wants to become a famous detective. He is also in love with a woman but is pushed out of the light by a love rival that buys her lots of gifts. While the love rival is trying to impress her, he steals her father’s watch and frames Keaton for it. Keaton is caught with the watch and the woman loses respect for him. He wants to clear his name and earn her love back.

Due to the film being a silent one. They had to use different ways to tell the audience what was going on. One of the ways they use was at the beginning of the film and they use text to tell the audience about who the main character is and help build the atmosphere of the film. During the film they had music playing the whole time and they used this to also help tell the story in the film and this was done by changing the tone of the music. Like during the scene when the receipt of the watch was placed into his pocket. The music right before that was soft but while it was being put into his pocket the music turned intense and it made the mood of the scene change. They had to be a lot more expressive with their faces and actions, due to there being no dialogue. So, whenever they were doing something that had to show more emotion than what would be seen in a film now.

The smooth motion between the film set and the real world shows Keaton’s physical prowess and creativity. His movements were carefully done to fit within the dream’s logic, emphasizing the contrast between his mundane reality and the dream’s fantastical nature. Keaton’s interaction with props shows how things can be animated by his physical actions. This motion gives the illusion that the dream world is as real as the world he lives in, making the gags funnier and more entertaining to watch. Keaton uses camera angles and framing to help create humor and show the dream world’s nature. In the famous scene where Keaton’s navigates a moving car that turns into a revolving door, the camera angles shift to transform objects. Cinematography merges the dream world with the real world. Match cuts and clean alignment of camera shots allow for smooth transitions between the two worlds. This enhances the storytelling by making the dream world feel like a natural extension of Keaton’s dreams. The sets are designed to be both functional and funny. The dream world’s sets are exaggerated to help show humor. Props are designed to interact with Keaton’s character in unexpected ways. This production creates an engaging environment that supports the film’s humor and narrative.

There were multiple instances of symbolic imagery, and this can be seen in the movie screen scene. In the dream sequence, the movie screen symbolizes the protagonist’s aspirations and imagination. He interacts with the screen as like it’s part of the real world, which makes it seem like the dream world and the real world are starting to merge together. This symbolizes his desire to live out his detective fantasies and the power of cinematic illusions. Then the dream world symbolizes the protagonist’s perfect version of himself as a heroic detective. This is different from his real life, which highlights the gap between his ambitions and reality, and his eventual success in the dream world represents his inner confidence and resourcefulness. In the climactic scene where the protagonist performs various stunts and solves the mystery in the dream, the symbolic imagery of the protagonist’s seamless interaction with the movie’s sets and props. It shows his growth from a projectionist to a detective, both in his dreams and in real life.

There are many visual storytelling techniques that were used in Sherlock Jr., which I really liked and want to explore how objects, motion, cinematography, and production design can elevate my own short film. Buster Keaton’s smooth integration of reality and fantasy through visuals will help me in my own creations in the future. It’s a great movie to go back to watch, when I’m stuck and can’t come up with any ideas. One thing I liked was how Keaton uses motion to show emotions and story development. With how smoothly he moves between the real world and the dream world shows how physicality can help the plot without relying on dialogue. What I could do for my own film in the future is experiment with movement as well. Using my characters’ actions or using the camera to help with shifts. By making interactions with objects in interesting ways, I can express inner conflicts or desires, much like how Keaton’s character finds his way through the dream world. Cinematography also plays an important role in Sherlock Jr., because camera angles and transitions help bring fantasy and reality together. This has helped me to think about how framing and transitions can be more than functional. They can help the narrative and create a sense of wonder. Using match cuts or creative angles could help my film in the future. Keaton’s use of production design in his dream sequence shows how distinct environments can reflect a character’s mind or personal world. For my project, I’m interested in designing or coming up with sets that symbolize character motivations or conflicts, using. This approach will allow me to create a rich narrative that speaks to my personal style, with a focus on engaging audiences through visuals.