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Symbolic Imagery in Silent Films

As the movie starts, the first thing that caught my attention was the triumphant sounds of victory in the score. Although there were no audible celebrations or cheers, the triumphant sounds of horns set the mood. This feeling was reinforced by a black screen displaying the text "To the people of this city we donate this monument; 'Peace and Prosperity'." Interestingly, when the characters started speaking, the character who I believe is the mayor of the city had no actual sound of talking. Instead, there was a noise that sounded like a kazoo. Despite the visuals helping to explain the movie, the sounds of the movie so far have set it apart by telling a different story. However, for some reason, when one character stood up to speak, you could hear him say "Thank you."

As they unveiled the monument, we were introduced to Charlie Chaplin's character, who was lying on top of one of the statues in the monument. We were quickly introduced to Charlie Chaplin's infamous use of physical comedy and a comedic situation as the crowd stopped yelling at him to get down due to the playing of the National Anthem. Although we could see the crowd yelling, that was not a prominent part of the sound's storytelling. The sounds lent to the comedy of the situation on Charlie Chaplin's part instead of the crowd.

The next scene takes place in the afternoon, as indicated by another black screen. The following scene is humorous, as Charlie Chaplin's character ogles a nude statue, while a trap door opens and closes without his knowledge. The use of dramatic irony, where the audience knows about the trap door, but Charlie does not, adds to the comedic storytelling of the movie so far. Then, we see Charlie meet his love interest who is selling flowers, and we find out along with Charlie that she is blind. During the scene, lines of dialogue appear to help visually tell the story, as we see the two characters interact.

As the movie is in black and white, it can be challenging to tell the time of day. Therefore, the main way to communicate this to the audience is through lines of dialogue written on the screen. When the scene moves to night, it becomes clear due to how dark it is.

The movie's score is synchronized with the characters' actions, which is different from modern films where the score follows the overall tone and mood of the scene. The scene relies on black screens with dialogue written to convey the characters' conversations. There is a particular scene where two characters walk in as the lights turn on, visually showing the audience what is happening.

The rest of the film follows this pattern: black screens as the scene changes, either displaying the time of day or the changing of what the characters are going through, speaking told through screens of dialogue, physical comedy from the actors, and lighting changes to show as time passes or as the characters enter a new setting. As with most silent films, the sound plays a significant role in the storytelling of the film. Because the actions of the characters are narrated by the score of the film, it was easy to look away from the film and be able to know what is going on. In the same way that when there's dialogue in a movie, you are able to look away and know what is going on, even if you miss visual cues of the storytelling of the film.

Because "City Lights" is an older film, there are elements that would have been more influential if the story I am writing had been released back in those days. The physical comedy and directing of the movie did not inspire my film, but what stood out to me was the use of music and score in the film. Even in modern films, the score is a crucial part of the storytelling, but in this movie, it was essential. The movie and story would not have been able to be told if it were not for the sonic storytelling of the movie, which at times was more impactful than the visual storytelling. This is something that I will be incorporating not just in my film, but also in my approach to writing the film.