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There's Meth in the Madness: Music and Incongruity in AMC's *Breaking Bad*

AMC's *Breaking Bad* became the darling of television critics, with some lauding it as one of the greatest television shows of all time. Its soundtrack combines an original score and pre-existing music, both of which are central to the development of the show's aesthetic and to the moral decline of its protagonist, Walter White. Though the lyrics of these songs are uncannily reflective of the onscreen action, the musical style is often completely at odds with it. In its earliest seasons, the show often used pre-existing music to underscore ignominious scenarios in a humorous or ironic way. In the later seasons, however, the music-image combination becomes representative of Walt's sociopathic disconnection from the brutal consequences of his actions. This disconnection is often made more obvious when contrasted to other scenes where the original score intensifies the overwhelmingly traumatic situations in which the show's characters find themselves. The use of incongruent music is so central to the show that its final scene is underscored by a song whose lyrics are both ironic and fitting, but whose musical character is inconsistent with Walter's poignant death. This paper examines how this incongruent pre-existing music functions in relation to Walt's disconnection from his actions which is initially due to his naiveté but later becomes emblematic of his descent into moral turpitude. I interrogate how this music-image relationship is developed throughout the series to its climactic ending, and the effect that it has on the development of its tragic-hero, Walter White.