

Q4 - Genre (Crime Fiction)

The conventions of the crime fiction genre have almost always helped the composer maximise the impact of his/her text for his/her contemporary audience. This can be clearly seen in David Williamson's Snow Falling On Cedars, Howard Hawks's film The Big Sleep, David Fincher's film Seven and Robert Lewis Stevenson's short novel The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll & Mr Hyde. Each of these texts works with the crime fiction conventions to maximise the impact of the text.

Snow Falling On Cedars focuses around the courtroom drama of ~~Kakoo~~ ~~the~~ introduced early as 'the accused man' who 'sat upright with a rigid grace'. From here the text delves into histories of the characters.

displays of prejudice and hatred and a 'tragic love affair,' however the focus always returns to the courtroom 'crime fiction' aspect and the 'crime' of prejudice. The 'criminal' for this text is the ^{rampant} prejudice symbolised early as ~~other~~ wind-whipped flakes of snow 'lashing violently against the window pane,' and it is this prejudice that is the cause for much of the ~~imp~~ impact on the audience in the text. The audience knows that Katvo is innocent ^{approximately} ~~about~~ halfway through the story, the weak and circumstantial prosecutors case, relying on the prejudiced views of Etta Hine and a few odd ^{pieces of} material evidence that fails to prove anything ensures the audience knows of his innocence, but ~~the~~ ^{it is} prejudice that

continues to keep the trial going, and almost convict Kabro. This 'obscuring' the course of justice, is quickly seen as the criminal of the text.

Within a conventional court-room drama, one that involves regular questions & cross-examining, David Watterson with his novel is able to highlight the theme of prejudice, the theme that has the most impact, and the theme that carries the most of Watterson's vision of exposing the weaknesses and failings of society. In essence, by using the conventions to create a background, Watterson is better able to foreground & privilege the theme of prejudice.

A similar use of conventions of the crime fiction genre can be



seen in Dr Jekyll & Mr Hyde, where Stevenson creates a standard detective character - Mr Utterson with lines such as 'Mr Utterson the lawyer was a man of subdugged countenance,' in order to instead focus reader attention on the notions of the limits of science that he has mentioned. Written at a time where science was a worry to society when they were not sure of the dangers associated with it, Mary Shelley's Frankenstein is another example of a text that plays on these themes. Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde creates a bleak, almost gothic setting ('And literally nothing but lamp posts to be seen') to instill upon the ~~the~~ audience of the time a sense

of dread and fear. The transformation of Dr Jekyll into Mr Hyde is deliberately constructed to be horrific, having a maximum impact on the audience, while around this horror, the story generally reads as a conventional, now clichéd detective piece, with a straightforward detective process, questions raised & answered and so on.

Like Snow Falling On Cedars, Dr Jekyll & Mr Hyde uses the conventions of the genre to instead focus on a theme that would have the maximum impact on the audience and hence the conventions of crime fiction have greatly supported the impact of the composer's vision.

The Big Sleep uses visual impact

to have the greatest impact on an audience, the story itself is quite conventional, however this in itself makes the story of film quite effective. The character of Marlowe, a typical 'tough, sarcastic' detective

Q: "How do you like your Brandy?"

Marlowe: "In a glass."

is also a character the audience can empathise with, he is an easily likeable, filmic character. The ~~story~~^{plot} is well-built for film, seven murders, plenty of action and a dark, atmospheric setting and the darkness, which quickly becomes a symbol for the criminal underworld - most of the dealings with criminals take place at night - lends the film enough weight to be making

a serious social message - that the criminal world is all around and there is no escaping. Camera techniques enhance this idea, the camera rarely leaves the perspective of Marlowe, this is furthered by the screen having 'dark corners' on it:



- that suggest Marlowe is in the 'spotlight', suggesting to the audience that he is 'alone' in his battle with the evil, and thus his eventual victory is seen as all the greater, the 'impact' of the victory is heightened. Sound is used to enhance the feel of the film as well. Fairly 'conventional' music, with slow, low music as Marlowe makes a discovery, to

fast-paced 'action' music in a gun fight or something similar, however, it is the music that draws the viewer in, subtly ~~reminding~~ telling them which scene is which, and hence the music has a strong impact on the audience.

A combination of a conventional 'action crime fiction' plot and a 'conventional, but effective, camera work and sound assist in having the maximum impact on an ^{contemporary} audience who were suffering with the effects of war and were as a result in a dark, bleak mood. The film plays on societies feelings to get the most emotional impact possible and as a result, The Big Sleep is effective in using crime fiction conventions to maximise & support the impact of Howard Hawks vision.

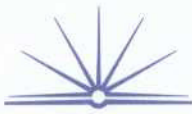


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The film Seven is similar to The Big Sleep in that it also uses visual impacts strongly, has a modern ~~contemporary~~ conventional crime fiction story and belongs to the same dark & dreary film noir film genre as the 1940's film. With a society that is no longer in a generally 'dark' mood from the war however, David Fincher has had to make his film's visuals even stronger, as well as carry a stronger message in order to have a heavy impact on the audience. The detectives - Mills & Somerset no longer are the heroes' conventional crime fiction detectives are, and yet they are still portrayed as a 'hardboiled' detective.



Sommerset displays the anti-social 'ruggardness' of a detective, shown early by his refusal to accept a coffee by four M.I.s and M.I.s display the willingness to 'bend' the law for the 'greater good' - an aspect found in conventional detectives such as Sherlock Holmes or Hercule Poirot. This is demonstrated when he pays someone to give a false testimony to get the gain the ability to enter a house without a warrant. The visuals, while 'conventional' crime fiction ones, are significantly more graphic & disturbing than the norm. The murders of the seven deadly sins, one for each, ~~are~~ and ~~one~~ each done to resemble the



sins, are appalling. A fat man forced to eat himself to death to resemble 'gluttony' is an example. Finally the message, while a typical 'Society is depraved' that is seen, 'as both Snow Falling On Cedars and The Big Sleep is that much more strong that it is shocking. We see a deadly sin around every corner and tolerate it because it is common, trivial and other such lines cause an audience to take a close look at their society.

Seven ~~is~~ perhaps the ~~most~~ ^{has the} greatest impact on a modern audience, as it has strong visual images, a shocking relevant message, and while



still being a firm member of the crime fiction genre, everything in this film is still conventional, is perhaps changed slightly, but still clearly a crime fiction text.

Each of the four works - Snow Falling on Cedars, Dr Tophill & Mrs Hyatt, The Big Sleep and Seven follow the main conventions of Crime Fiction, a detective, a message about society, a detective process involving violence or murders, and strong imagery to enhance the message. All these texts have a strong impact on the audience that reflects the composer's vision, and this is done either through backgrounding the conventional to foreground the message that would have the



greatest impact (Snow Falling on Cedars, Dr Tekyll & Mr Hyde), or by making the conventions into a strong visual image that viewers would either be empathetic with or be repulsed by (The Big Sleep, Seven), in all cases though, the composer has worked with conventions to have them support his vision of his text.