

## Presenter:

Crime Dramas on TV rely on strong narrative conventions to appeal to their audiences and to enhance the **verisimilitude** required to make the plots believable and engaging. This **realism** could almost be seen on a sliding scale.



Sometimes the **hybridity** of a Crime Drama will determine its realism. Torchwood (2006), as a Sci-Fi crime drama, relies on fantasy and an extreme version of reality whereas a retelling of a true story, such as In Plain Sight (2016), will try and keep the story as close to the truth as possible. The two Crime Dramas that we are studying, Luther and The Sweeney, both fall safely in the centre of this scale as works of fiction, created to be as close to a reflection of real life as possible.

If we were to apply **Propp's theory** of narrative to our two crime dramas we can see two readings that make for a considerably strong comparison for both their similarities and differences with regards to context.

In Luther and The Sweeney we have two identifiable **hero** figures in Luther and Regan. The cinematography, framing, dialogue and character interaction imply their importance as the central figures. We seem to be following their **journey** in their workplace.

The characters are both significantly flawed and almost take on the role of the **anti-hero** as they challenge the **typicality** of how a hero should behave. They seem to challenge the boundary between good and bad and therefore blur the lines of **binary oppositions** that we commonly see in Crime Dramas. If the audience cannot tell who is the **villain** and who is the **hero** we can sometimes become engaged in the **dramatic conflict** created by the characters as they battle their own moral position.

In Luther we can see some other identifiable character types in the episode. Alice Morgan and Henry Madsen take on the role as the **villain(s)**. Alice initially manipulates the narrative to try and occupy the role of a **damsel-in-distress**, but we soon discover through our **hero's journey** that this is not the case. DSU Teller adopts the **dispatcher** role as she sends Luther on his journey and supplies him DC Ripley as his **sidekick** (or **helper**). Multiple characters take on the role of **donor** as they supply new information for the plot; including DCI Reid and Mark North. Luther's ex-wife Zoe takes on the **atypical damsel-in-distress** role; not only in her relationship with our hero, but also in her interactions with the villain.

If we jump across to The Sweeney, the application of Propp is more **typical** and simpler to identify. Our **hero** Regan is flanked by his **helper** DS Carter. The **dispatcher** DCI Haskins and the Commander taking on the role of **donor** neatly fulfil their roles in the **narrative**. Regan's girlfriend Jenny exemplifies the **damsel-in-distress** role, especially as she is challenged by Merrick and Brooker, the **villains**. Cinematography, dialogue and editing help determine each of the characters and their role. A deeper analysis of the villains in The Sweeney suggests that they have their own **dispatcher (s)** and **donor** in the form of Kemble, Prosser and Billy respectively. The identification of the **binary opposites** is more obvious in The Sweeney due to this deeper analysis.

The structure of the narrative is also very key when analysing the use of **narrative arcs** and the **episodic** nature of the programmes. The Sweeney conforms to a very **traditional** structure of television drama, making sure each episode is **self-contained** leaving very little room for larger **narrative arcs** and giving a sense of satisfaction for the audience with a complete **resolution** of the crime at the end. The Sweeney was broadcast on ITV with commercial breaks, and this allowed the producers to create a **three-act structure** for each episode and enhanced the **linear** nature of the story.

In both traditional and contemporary Crime Dramas, the **set-up** of each crime will usually occupy the first part of the episode, leading to the **conflict** between our **hero** and the **villain**; this **conflict** is played out until a **resolution** is found and the **villain** is stopped towards the very end of the episode.

Luther takes a more **contemporary** approach to **narrative**, popularised in the late 1990s and early 2000s where they experimented more with the narrative structure and order. Luther embeds multiple **narrative-arcs** from the very first episode. With the opening sequence with Henry Madsen, Luther's relationship with his wife, DCI Reid's own cases and the main Alice Morgan investigation being interweaved with skill and complexity by the writers and producers of the programme. These **narrative-arcs** continue across multiple episodes and potentially even over multiple **seasons** to engage and excite the audience. Luther was broadcast on the BBC, and then streamed on Netflix allowing the episodes to be watched without any breaks in the **narrative**.

**Narrative Enigmas** are key to the success of a Crime Drama in any format. The audience being able to question and become detectives themselves is ultimately the key to a successful crime drama. The producers, writers and directors all have key roles in deciding which information needs to be held back from the audience at key points in the story-telling, but also whether the same information is being kept back from the characters too! Some crime dramas such as The Sweeney will show the **antagonists** committing the crimes and then watch the **protagonist** try and work out the potential **resolution**. In Luther, we have a much more **cryptic** delivery of the **narrative**; with the discovery of the crimes being revealed for the **protagonist** and the audience at the same time. The identity of Alice Morgan as an **antagonist** is even held back for a considerable time in the structure of this episode.

**Enigma codes** and **action codes** can be key for the successful telling of a story in Crime Dramas. The way in which the director uses cinematography can sometimes enhance the audiences' involvement in the plot. The lingering of the shot on Regan's notepad and camera could indicate that this will become key to the **narrative** at a later point; the satisfaction to the audience when this becomes fact later and Billy steals the car with the notepad and photos in is key to the rich **composition** of the **narrative**. In Luther, the regular shots of the murdered pet dog, and then the later scene of its cremation seems out of context when the crime is focused on Alice's murdered parents. This is later justified by a key part of the **narrative** developing from this situation, again bringing satisfaction to the audience.

As you can see there are lots of different aspects of narrative that can be talked about in both of our Crime Dramas and they can provide a rich basis for discussion and comparison.