Case Study – Luther & The Crime Drama Genre

Key Facts: Luther
- British crime drama television series starring Idris Elba in the lead role as DCI John Luther
- Written by Neil Cross
- Series 1 was first broadcast in May 2010.
- So far, there have been 5 series
- Created by BBC Drama Productions and distributed by BBC Studios

Context
Social – reflects current attitudes towards the role of women in society. E.g. Zoe, Rose & Alice are all professional women in senior positions.
Social – reflects current attitudes towards racial equality. DCI John Luther is black. His ethnicity is not a major focus of the programme, which shows that there is now greater social equality in society.
Cultural – constructs a representation of central London by featuring iconic landmarks and modern buildings which suggest it is a successful financial centre.
Historical – reflects recent developments in forensics. E.g. Alice goes to extreme lengths to destroy evidence of the gun so that she cannot be convicted.

Genre
Recognisable as a crime drama due to conventional characters, themes and iconography. Hybridity with other genres including:
- Thriller: low key lighting, intense non-diegetic music and dramatic cross cutting, femme fatale character
- Horror: graphic shots of the murder scene and use of jump scares
- Psychological: Luther’s psychological analysis of WHY Alice committed the crime. E.g. she is a narcissist

Media Language
Camera
Close ups used to show character’s emotion & to highlight items of importance e.g. close up of the Morgan’s dog covered in blood to suggest its significance. Camera framing of Luther often includes lots of empty space to signify a sense of isolation.
Editing
The use of fast paced editing and cross cutting during the scene where Luther chases Henry Madsen to create tension and excitement.
Mise en scene
Props used to construct the crime drama genre, creating verisimilitude e.g. police tape, cars, interview recording equipment
Locations tie in with the crime drama genre e.g. deserted warehouse to create a feeling of isolation and threat, typical UK street to suggest anyone could fall victim to the crimes committed.
Lighting is dark to signify the dark themes of the programme.
Sound
Diegetic sound is used to construct the crime drama genre e.g. through ambient sounds such as sirens & recognisable police dialogue. Non diegetic sound is used to create tension and to create atmosphere.

Representation
John Luther is an interesting representation of a black male.
- He is a successful senior police detective
- He has a brilliant mind for solving crime
- He sometimes uses questionable methods to get results
- He is highly committed to his job, at the expense of his personal life
- He is highly emotional and this is exhibited through frustration and violence.

Luther’s representation embodies masculine stereotypes as he is shown to be forceful, independent and lacking in emotion. Could be considered to be a more progressive representation of masculinity as he is also shown to be vulnerable and not completely in control.

Female Characters
Alice – The antagonist of the set episode, suspected of murdering her parents and using her advanced IQ to get away with it. She displays many traits stereotypically associated with masculinity e.g. unemotional, highly intelligent, ruthless and violent. However, she is also shown to be an attractive female who uses her femininity to taunt and flirt with Luther.
Zoe – Luther’s wife and is a successful humanitarian lawyer. Alongside this progressive representation, she is shown to be dependent on male characters.
Rose – Luther’s boss. Shows strength of character by believing in Luther when others doubt him and she works hard to try to ensure that he follows the rules.
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**Narrative**
- Could be described as an **inverted detective story** because we know who the murderer is from the outset.
- The narrative contains **non-linear** elements in the form of **flash backs** to the Henry Madsen case.
- Some of Propp’s character types are evident in the episode E.g. hero, villain, side kick, dispatcher, donor, but due to the complex nature of the characters, they do not fit precisely.
- The set episode contains a number of **narrative strands** e.g. the murder, Luther’s relationship with Zoe. The end of the episode sees only partial **narrative resolution** due to the ongoing nature of the series.

**Audience**

**Target audience:**
- Wide to reflect BBC One
- Adult due to adult themes e.g. murder
- Both genders – range of complex male & female characters
- All ethnicities – diverse cast
- Fans of crime drama
- Fans of Idris Elba

**Audience Appeal:**
- Crime drama is a **popular genre**. Includes expected conventions along with unexpected elements
- **Star appeal** in the form of Idris Elba, familiarity with audiences and appeal to male and female audiences
- **Engaging narrative**
- The range of complex **characters** for audiences to appreciate and identify with

**Uses & gratifications theory**
- **Surveillance** – could learn about police procedure
- **Diversion** – audience can immerse themselves in a fantasy world
- **Social Interaction** – talking with other fans, social media interactions
- **Personal Identity** – audience may be able to relate to the characters

**Audience Reception theory**
Consider how different audience members might read the following aspects of the programme differently:
- Luther’s crime solving skills
- Luther’s violent responses to challenging situations
- Alice’s intelligence and resourcefulness
- Alice getting away with the crime of killing her parents

**Industry**

**BBC One**
- BBC One is the BBC’s primary channel. It offers a wide range of programmes and aims to appeal to a wide audience
- BBC One has a remit to create a high proportion of original programmes and to reflect the diversity of the UK
- BBC One programmes should exhibit the following characteristics:
  - High quality
  - Original
  - Challenging
  - Innovative & Engaging
  - Nurture UK talent

**Production**
- Luther is an original BBC Production
- Writer Neil Cross pitched the idea for Luther to the BBC Drama commissioning department who look for dramas that: will get people talking, are relevant to audiences, reflect the diversity of life in Britain
- In 2012, BBC America began co-producing Luther based on the success of the 1st two series

**Distribution**
- Series 1 of Luther was aired on BBC One at 9pm on a Tuesday
- Prime time slot early in the week means audiences are likely to stay in and watch TV
- Also available on BBC iPlayer
- Also broadcast on BBC America (a commercial part of the BBC)
- Also broadcast in European countries including: France, Germany & Denmark, and in countries in Africa and Asia

**Marketing**
- Trailer released on 16th April 2010 on BBCs YouTube site
- Behind the scenes footage released on the website
- Inside look video produced for BBC America for USA launch
- The website includes a range of interactive content: a crime board allowing audiences to create and share their own investigation board, postcards from Alice where audiences were invited to create their own post cards from Alice’s travels and send them to Luther, a series of graphic novel images. Links to a Facebook page & twitter feed

**Regulation**
- BBFC rated the series 1 DVD 15 for strong violence
- Shown after the watershed to reflect the violence and dark themes
- Clips on the website contain a warning about adult themes