

CRIME DRAMA

Crime drama is a **sub-genre** of drama that focuses on crimes, the criminals that commit them and the police that catch them.

There are many formats of Crime drama such as detective, forensic/medical, procedural etc...

The Sweeney features elements of the **action genre**, while *Luther* includes conventions of different genres such as **Thriller**....

Key Conventions of TV Crime Drama:

- Committing and solving of crime
- Medical/ Forensic/ Procedural
- Fictional accounts of real life stories
- Titles of the shows are regularly eponymous e.g. "Luther"
- Main character has conflict with authority or their partner in crime
- Set in the city
- Typical character types inc. villain
- Disequilibrium – discovery of a crime leads to equilibrium – solving of a crime
- Continuing narrative arc over multiple episodes

CONVERGENCE: Luther was initially broadcast on BBC1, then made available to download or stream via iPlayer. It was then available to buy on DVD boxset and then later sold to Netflix.



PUBLIC
-FUNDED BY TV LICENSE

PRIVATE/COMMERCIAL
-FUNDED BY TV & ONLINE ADVERTISING



REGULATION: Luther and The Sweeney were both given a 15 certificate and were broadcast at 9pm – post watershed due to the violence and adult themes which revolve around the serious crime unit settings for the drama.



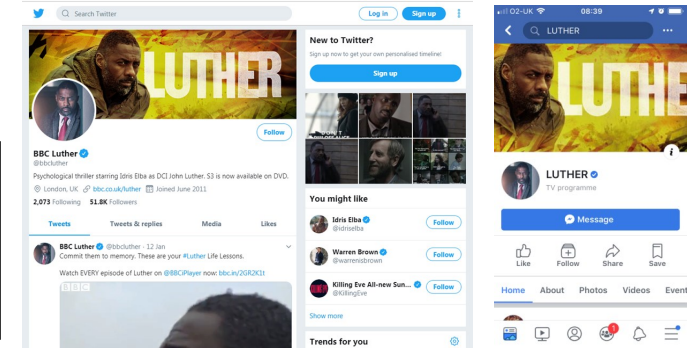
WATERSHED

There are strict rules about what can be shown on TV before the 9pm watershed. The watershed means the time when TV programmes which might be unsuitable for children can be broadcast. The watershed begins at 9pm and material unsuitable for children should not, in general, be shown before 9pm or after 5.30am. Unsuitable material can include everything from sexual content to violence, graphic or distressing imagery and swearing. For example, the most offensive language must not be broadcast before the watershed on TV or, on radio, when children are particularly likely to be listening.

LUTHER uses social media & the BBC website to connect with audiences, provide entertainment through streaming options, clips and information. Social media was specifically used to market and promote new series to audiences.

KEY TERMS

Conventions – what we expect to see in a TV crime drama
Hybrid Genre – some programmes share the conventions of more than one genre e.g. Jonathon Creek
Sub-Genre – programmes that share similar conventions e.g. detective lead shows
Watershed – After 9pm
Prime time – The most popular programmes shown between 7pm-8pm
Enigma code – something within the narrative raises questions for TA
Inverted Narrative – The criminal is identified to the audience early on, there is no mystery around who the villain is and the story focuses on how the detective is going to catch the criminal.
Action codes – progress the story quickly e.g showing a character packing a suitcase means they are leaving
Diegetic sound – natural sound that hasn't been added
Non – diegetic sound – soundtrack that is added over the action
High key lighting – bright light used
Low key lighting – dark light used
Cliff-hanger – the narrative is left unresolved
Mise-en-Scene – What's in a scene? Props, costumes, settings, composition, lighting etc.
Verisimilitude – The believability or realism of a film or TV show.





- **Luther** is a British crime drama television series starring Idris Elba as the title character DCI John Luther.
- Prior to Luther Elba was well established in the US crime drama *The Wire* and the US version of *The Office*.
- Written by Neil Cross.
- The first series comprised six episodes which ran in **May 2010** on **BBC1** in the **9pm timeslot**
- BBC Studios handles the distribution of the series.
- The series has been highly successful receiving numerous awards and critical acclaim for the production, writing and the stars of the show.

STYLE:

50s Noir conventions are borrowed e.g. dark lighting and long overcoat Alice Morgan is pale and wears red lipstick – ‘femme fatale’ again borrowed from the 50s . This is noted in the opening credit sequence, with its use of reds, blacks and crime-drama genre iconography. Reinforced by enigmatic silhouettes and the whispering, secretive theme tune.



OPENING SCENE MEDIA LANGUAGE:



ESTABLISHING SHOT –industrial setting, implies ‘gritty’

TRACKING SHOTS on Luther pursuing Henry Madsen

LOW ANGLE SHOTS –intimidating, powerful

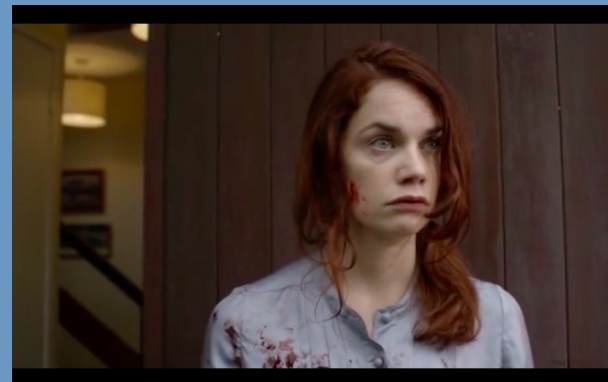
CROSS-CUTTING: Between scenes at the crime scene and the chase implying they are happening simultaneously, the music is used to convey a sense of urgency –a race against time

Our initial impression is that Luther is the **villain** –dark, hooded figure pursuing the smart businessman. We initially don’t see Luther’s face creating **enigma**.

MEETING ALICE MORGAN MEDIA LANGUAGE:

SETTING: At Alice’s family home , environment creates high level of **verisimilitude**.

BODY LANGUAGE & GESTURE: Creates a sense of vulnerability, she is in distress and represented as the **victim** when we first meet her. She waits for the police to rescue her, a ‘damsel in distress’.



REPRESENTATION & CONTEXT:

ETHNICITY: Luther challenges stereotypical representations of black men in crime drama which is typically negative. This is further reflected in Luther’s highly educated, successful mixed race wife. This reflects the diverse, multi-cultural setting of this contemporary drama.

GENDER: Masculinity is represented in a very complex way; Luther is represented as an aggressive, alpha male, yet also vulnerable through his psychological instability. Typical masculine stereotypes are challenged through characters such as Justin who is openly admirable of Luther; and Mark who is gentle and represented as a ‘sensitive’ contrast to Luther. The representation of femininity **challenges stereotypes** in all lead female characters; Alice subverts expectations as a manipulative, intelligent villain, Rose Teller is a powerful, authority figure, and while Zoe Luther is by far the most typically ‘feminine’ representation (vulnerable, weak, lead by love), she is also represented as a highly successful humanitarian lawyer. These female representations reflect the contemporary context of the setting.

CRIME & THE POLICE: Crime is represented as dark & sinister and Luther is represented as a vigilante, rule-breaker who will stop at nothing to stop criminals. Rose is the calm, steady influence who encourages him to stay on the right track.

PROPP CHARACTER FUNCTIONS:

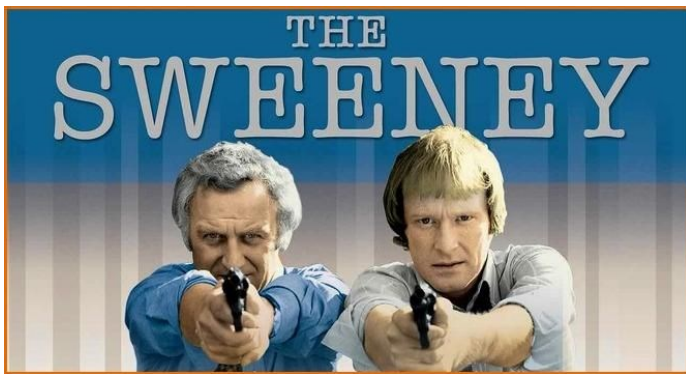
HERO: John Luther, troubled but brilliant detective; a rule-breaker who will do anything to bring criminals to justice.

VILLAIN: Alice Morgan, femme fatale, highly intelligent, manipulative and an obsession with Luther.

HELPER: Justin Ripley, faithful side-kick who idolises Luther and is eager to learn. Ripley asks questions that the audience need to follow Luther’s thoughts and processes of detection.

DISPATCHER: Rose Teller, Luther’s boss, keeps him focused , tough but fair –see’s Luthers brilliance and willing to put her job on the line for him.

DONOR: Both Ripley and Benny provide Luther with the means to achieve his goal



BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

- Sweeney Todd is the cockney rhyming slang for “flying squad” (a division of the police who dealt with serious, violent crime)
- Produced by Talkback Thames
- Main star is John Thaw as Regan; this show established him as a television star
- First broadcast 1975-1978 in the 9pm timeslot.
- Filmed all around London

MEETING CARTER: (Helper/side-kick)

Long shot –allows us to see the smartly dressed professional man.

Clean cut, smart –good attitude, pride.

Lighter coloured suit/coat implies he is the good guy links to hero character.

Introduced in a professional setting suggesting he takes his work seriously and this will be the focus of the character in the narrative



MEETING JACK REGAN: (Hero)

Medium close up –close to him –focus. Implies he is important. Closeness creates personal connection.

Introduced in a ‘personal’ location suggesting that personal life may be a relevant aspect in the narrative

Haggard –hungover –on a work night!!!! Hints to a rebellious lifestyle perhaps?

Heavy drinker –issues?

In lady’s dressing gown –adds an element of humour and suggests he doesn’t take himself too seriously, might be a bit of a ‘character’ –particularly given the era and the overtly masculine stereotypes of men.



STYLE:

The Sweeney was produced in the 70’s and looks very dated; this is due to both the production values and the costumes & props.

The production is grainy, poor quality image in comparison to today’s high-definition digital film, this is also reflected in the sound quality.

The costumes and styling is from the 70’s and looks very dated, the props such as phone boxes, cameras and typewriters also reflect the lack of technology at the time.

These reflect the historical context of the time in which the production was made



Created by THAMES for ITV
–a **commercial** channel

SIMILARITIES WITH LUTHER:

- Troubled male lead, aided by faithful, professional side-kick.
- Gritty London settings, filmed on location to create **verisimilitude**.
- Genre iconography
- Opening title sequence –grainy editing & silhouettes

CONTEXT:

Genders were less equal in the 1970s; there were very few females in the police. This is clearly reflected in The Sweeney. The only female in the episode is not involved in the investigation and is sent to look after Regan’s girlfriend, Jenny, who has been threatened by Kemble’s men.

Minority groups weren’t reflected or were misrepresented in The Sweeney.

This contrasts significantly with representations of gender & ethnicity in Luther.

MEETING KEMBLE: (Villain)

Mid shot/over the shoulder shot allows us to see him in his ‘lair’.

Setting –red connotes danger. Opulent –ornate mirrors, leather wingback chair, suggests wealth.

Costume –Suit clearly connotes authority figure/incharge, anchored by the two henchmen who sit listening to him, trying to impress him. His patterned silky tie a reference to his wealth as opposed to the plain ‘work’ wear of the police.

Props –Pipe is reflective of the era, plans/maps suggestive of his ‘cunning’ attitude.

