THE SWEENEY

JOHN THAW   DENNIS WATERMAN

The Sweeney: Context

Product Context:

- *The Sweeney* was based on the real **'Flying Squad'** that achieved much success in the 1970s, but was also involved in high levels of corruption within the police force. There is evidence of this in the programme.
  - Sweeney Todd is cockney rhyming slang for 'Flying Squad' - hence the name!
- John Thaw was the main star of the show and this established him as a TV star who would go on to many more significant roles on UK TV such as Inspector Morse.
- As it was produced in the 1970s the programme looks dated by today's standards - production values and the costumes and props contribute to this.
- Filmed on 16mm film meant cameras were more lightweight and allowed for on location shooting - this meant more action/stunts/car chases, etc.
- Location shooting also added to the realism making it more engaging for audiences.

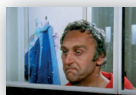### Social and Cultural Context

- Socially and politically, the 1970s was a period of social upheaval. Economic problems from the decline of manufacturing led to increased imports putting pressure on British industry. The 1973 oil crisis and miners strike also led to electricity shortages meaning TV broadcasting ended at 10.30 every night - this would have meant the shows that were on air had a higher sense of worth.
- Urban Britain was turbulent and lacked order and *The Sweeney* reflected this.

4.2 Genre

Conventions of TV Crime drama

- *The Sweeney* was groundbreaking in the 1970s as it introduced new elements into the police/crime genre, It was still showing elements of the **police procedural** but also borrowed from the action genre to incorporate greater levels of violence, i.e. use of guns, and more complex crimes that are not easy to solve.
- Jack Regan is a **maverick cop** who believes his methods are necessary. This is shown when he threatens suspects and challenges authority.
- Obvious loyalty between Regan and Carter - their relationship is typical of the detective/hero and sidekick/helper dynamic.
- A number of cameras being used in studio setting meant a range of shot types and more exciting editing - immersing the audience in the action more fully, i.e. fight sequences, etc.
- Language used throughout establish The Sweeney as a threat, e.g. *'You've kept us waiting, so unless you want a kicking you tell us where the photographs are.'*

Media Language - Meeting Jack Regan

- **Close up** - audience are immediately close to him, creating a personal connection and implies he is important to the narrative.
- **Setting** - personal location and intimate moment on first meeting - he is late, getting dressed - not in his own home. His personal life is important to understanding the character.
- **Costume** - in a lady's dressing gown - ads an element of humour and suggests he doesn't take himself too seriously. This is particularly relevant given the 1970s context and the masculine stereotypes used throughout the series
- He is haggered, hungover - **props** suggest a heavy drinking session the night before. Does he have a reason he drinks so heavily? Troubled?

Media Language - Meeting Kemble

- **Mid shot/Over the shoulder** - presents him in his 'lair' surrounded by his henchmen, who sit the other side of the desk, listening and trying to impress.
- **Setting** - Ornate mirror and leather wing-back chair - suggests wealth. Oranges and browns connote the 1970s context.
- **Costume** - Suit and patterned silk tie connote wealth in contrast to the 'work wear' of the police.
- **Props** - The pipe reflects the 1970s context. Plans/maps connote the planning and 'cunning' of the antagonists.

4.3 Representations

ETHNICITY
- Britain was becoming more racially diverse and **multicultural** in the 1970s, especially in cities such as London, but along with this was racial discrimination.
- The media did not reflect the multicultural nature of Britain, any minority-ethnic groups were underrepresented and at time misrepresented.
- There are no characters from minority ethnic groups in The Sweeney.

GENDER
- Genders were less equal in the 1970s and 1980s and this was reflected in the structure of the police force,
  - This is reflected in The Sweeney where the force is extremely male dominated.
  - The female officer in the episode has very little to do beyond looking after Jenny.
- There are many examples of masculine stereotyping, including:
  - **patriarchal attitudes,**
  - heavy drinking,
  - discussion and assumed knowledge of football,
  - objectification of women
  - violent behaviour.

FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES
- Women feature as girlfriends, wives and mothers: stereotypically **passive** roles
- Jenny is unidentified in bed in the opening sequence - seemingly an object. Her role in the narrative is as Regan's girlfriend despite her being independent with her own job, car and home!

CRIME AND THE POLICE
- The police force is shown as a male-orientated organisation with a clear hierarchy. The officers call their bosses 'sir' and Regan is reprimanded by a senior officer who says he should have known what was happening sooner.

1.4 Theoretical Approaches

Hero = Jack Regan - troubled but brilliant detective; a rule breaker who will do anything to bring criminals to justice.

Villain = Frank Kemble - Gang leader

Helper = Carter- faithful and loyal partner of Regan, takes his work seriously and protects Jack when he has to.

Victim = Jenny - kidnapped and threatened with violence by Kemble's men, who also objectify her. She needs to be rescued and protected by Regan.

4.5 Key Terminology

Flying Squad
a division of the Metropolitan Police that dealt with serious and violent crime.

Codes and Conventions
the expected elements that will be included in products from particular media forms and genres

Police Procedural
a sub-genre that focuses specifically on how the police solve crimes

Maverick cop
an unconventional and independent police officer or detective who doesn't think or behave in the same way as other people.

Close up shot
shot taken of a subject or object at close range intended to show greater detail to the viewer.

Mid Shot
camera shot in film and television that shows an actor approximately from the waist up. It is used to emphasise both the actor and their surroundings by giving them an equal presence on screen.

Over the shoulder shot
where the camera is placed above the back of the shoulder and head of a subject. This shot is most commonly used to present conversational back and forth between two subjects.

Multi-cultural
relating to or containing several cultural or ethnic groups within a society.

Patriarchal attitudes
a social system in which men hold primary power and predominate in roles of political leadership, moral authority, social privilege and control of property.

Passive
accepting or allowing what happens or what others do, without active response or resistance.

Reprimand
a formal expression of disapproval.