

## A2 Media Studies: Luther – TV Series

Technical codes: LAMES (lighting; angle; movement; editing; sound)

Visual codes: FILCC (facial expression; iconography; location; costume; colour)

-General information

-‘Luther’ and Audience

-Why is Series 3 Entertaining?

-Genre, representation, narrative

-Text, industry, audience

-Theories + application to Luther

## **General Information**

'Luther' is a British psychological crime drama featuring star Idris Elba (who also played a character in the television show 'The Wire'), commonly acclaimed as being in the 'top ten TV shows' as the eponymous protagonist.





## “Luther’ and Audience’

### **Who is the Luther target audience?**

The target demographic are male crime fiction fans, ‘explorers’ in terms of psychographics, and those subscribed to the A-C1 socio-economic demographic scale given the narrative twists require close attention to comprehend. Given that the show airs at 9PM (the watershed hour), it is unsuitable for children and thus targets people aged from 18-90, further supported by its execution of graphic imagery and serious subject matter, such as execution. British people are also targeted, due to the setting of London.

### **Twitter and Luther**

Twitter (a popular social networking site) features a site for Luther, named ‘BBCLuther’, which has 36.7 000 followers. That is, this number of people are essentially ‘subscribed’ to the page and receive updates on the show as they are posted to the page. The hashtag symbol is employed, which serves to group keywords together and ultimately presents these through searches, for example \*Excl

usive\* Take a first look at the new Luther trailer.' updates followers. with the embedded '@' following a comment serving the purpose of expressing thoughts which may be seen by the person referenced.

**What does the Luther website on the BBC site offer the audience?**

The BBC website features a page revolving around the show 'Luther' which has several options: to read a synopsis of the show and the pertinent characters; view graphic novels illustrating scenes from series 2 and series 3; as well as presenting methods to interact with the audience, for example through sending creative art pieces through electronic mail, and sharing articles on social media sites such as Facebook, Reddit and Twitter.





### Why is series three entertaining?

'Luther' is a British psychological crime drama, with its third series having been broadcast in July of 2013.

The abovementioned series is entertaining for a multitude of reasons (star; character; cinematography; and narrative twists), those of which shall be explored through the finale to series three. Key to comprehending the finale is the following information: the plot thread is such that a vigilante called Tom is holding a shotgun to characters Alice and Mary, threatening Luther that he shall kill both of them should he not choose one of them to be executed.

Part of the reason as to why series three is entertaining is due to the eponymous protagonist played by Idris Elba, a 'Golden Globe-winning and Emmy nominated actor', capable of exhibiting 'creative versatility' (cited from the official BBC website page on the show). Thus his performance can 'captivate audiences' (ibid.) in terms of the moral conundrums presented through the narrative – this is highlighted in the climax to series three, whereby his nonplussed reaction in the close ups in response to Tom's demand are believable and effectively convey a sense of desperation. Concerning characterisation, Luther remains subdued in terms of his past, hence presenting an enigma which the audience must watch the show to understand.

In terms of intertextuality, writer of the show Neil Cross claims that the character of Luther is inspired by two other fictional detective characters: Sherlock Holmes and Columbo. Therefore existing fans of said characters will be attracted to the show in question, further proving its entertainment value.

In addition to this, the cinematography and sound design is effective. The aforementioned final scene opens with an aerial shot of a building on which the characters are placed, which elicits a sense of unease within the audience whilst also invoking the trope of aerialism. Said trope is noted by some literary critics to symbolise freedom; the narrative is foregrounded by irony given that Luther's freedom is delegated to murder, the act which he strives to prevent through his occupation as a detective. Moreover, this sense of unease is exemplified by the sound design: a haunting, emphatic piece of string music accompanied by poignant female vocals.

In relation to genre theory, Neale claims that variation of genre provokes audience interest, thus the introduction of a romantic subplot

ot involving Luther and Mary foregrounds this theory and provides a narrative hook for the audience. Regarding Blumler and Katz's Uses and Gratifications theory, the audience derives escapism diversion from attempting to solve the crimes with the characters. For example, the audience is questioned as to whether a paedophile should be executed in an episode. The audience also seeks personal companionship from the show due to it exploring typically rare elements in average British life, as well as a round character in Luther himself and his reactions to situations as a detective, which also serves the function of introducing information on how detective life functions.

Withal, the show effectively shocks the audience. According to cultivation theory, audiences become desensitised to violence over time through its proliferation in the media; this is encapsulated when a close up shot portrays Tom a close up shot denotes Alice ruthlessly stabbing and subsequently tearing through Tom's flesh with a nail, a mundane item typically not encoded with connotations of violence, presented as an action code. Ergo, the audience derives voyeuristic pleasure from this act. Furthermore, in the final scene, Mary pushes Tom's shotgun out of the way, thereby presenting a narrative twist given her physically unimposing physicality and meek sensibilities, substantiated in a scene whereby she is told to 'sit down' and thenceforth passively complies.







## Genre, Narrative, Representation, Audience

### **Narrative/Genre**

Climax to series three's finale

Aerial shot. Evokes a sense of unease. Psych thriller

Use of depth of field. Medium shot of a shotgun – visual signifier – action code; iconographic imagery. Connotes conflict

Iconographic sound. Diegetic – sirens.

Non-diegetic sound: evocative, haunting piece of poignant string music featuring female vocals paralleling the audience's emotional diminuendo

Tom's dialogue: "you can have one" – enigma code. Who will Luther pick? Audience is involved – who does the audience pick?

Cuts create a sense of pacing

Luther makes his decision in response to Alice smiling (close up). Jovial facial expression

Culminates in Marie yelling and pushing the shotgun > Alice subsequently stabs Tom

New equilibrium – no Ripley

## **Representation**

Long shot of Luther. Represents a detective male in his 40s, motivated by his passion for his job. Limping due to being shot by Tom – in response, he constructs a makeshift tourniquet with his tie; didn't go to A&E – determined. Indifferent to fashion . Tweed jacket – iconic British fabric. Traditional. Hegemonically determined – tall, broad, rugged

Positive representation. Not a token character. Round character. Colour blind casting

Tom. m/c architect white male. Short hair. Stubble. Intelligent. Hegemonic in terms of masculinity. Vigilante. Enacts personal justice. Aggressive. Medium shot. Tom has the power in the final scene due to having a shotgun. Luther is given the power of choice; Marie, ironically, undermines both of their power

Marie. White blonde female in 30s, fragile. Physically unimposing

Alice. White redhead female in 30s, tailored clothes, intelligent, brave (self-sacrifice), viewing figures rose in light of her return

## **Audience**

Aerial shot elicits unease within the audience. Establishes location. Audience is shocked when Marie saves the day. Close ups of Marie – she is scared, ergo the audience is also scared. We also get voyeuristic pleasure. Exclamatory statements and close ups create pace and increase suspense. Non-diegetic sounds of flesh tearing.

### **Text, Industry, Audience**

Following the death of character Ripley in series three, there was a fan uproar in opposition through social media. Consequently, the BBC have stated a prequel film will be released featuring Ripley. This highlights the BBC's trust that is shared with the audience – a value that is the 'foundation of the BBC' (according to the official BBC website).







## **Audience Theory + Application to 'Luther'**

### **Gerbner's 'Mean World Syndrome'**

Texts are becoming increasingly violent with audiences being desensitised to them. Luther facilitates the increased number of violent acts on television, it may be suggested that Luther audiences are desensitised because series four is said to be more shocking