



**2017 specification**  
Exams from 2024

# Getting to Know...

## Component 2A: *Peaky Blinders* and *The Bridge*

Second Edition, May 2023

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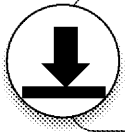
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# Teacher's Introduction

This resource has been written for the Eduqas Media Studies A Level specification (A680QS), with a specific focus on Component 2 Media Forms and Products in Depth: Section A: Television in the Global Age – Option 1: *Peaky Blinders* (E1S1) and *The Bridge* (E1S3) **for assessment from 2024**.



Pages from this resource which are relevant to the set products for final assessment in **2023** are available on the ZigZag Education Support Files system, which can be accessed via [zzed.uk/productsupport](https://www.zzed.uk/productsupport)

As a 'Getting to Know' pack, this resource has been constructed to actively engage students with the source material through a range of stimulating, focused and entertaining magazine-style articles exploring different topics across the media frameworks and theories. Discussion tasks are included throughout to recap knowledge. At the end of the resource, we have included a range of more challenging essay-style questions for students to test their learning.

The structure of the pack is as follows:

1. What Should I Know? – a brief overview of the key facts/information about both set products
2. Getting to Know – 20 articles on a variety of topics (nine on each separate text, two comparative articles), such as the production background, aesthetics, key themes and cultural context. In these articles, we have tried to focus on the more niche aspects of the texts, that may not have been covered by textbooks, to broaden students' understanding.
3. Show What You Know? – Five essay-style questions on the set products across a range of difficulty levels complete with an answer section.

Our aim with this resource is to provide variety for those students who may feel overloaded by textbooks and other learning materials with a solely academic writing style. Ideally, the blend of informative content and entertaining presentation style will help not only to strengthen a student's knowledge of the texts, but help to foster a genuine interest for the texts.

May 2023

## Second Edition, May 2023

Changes have been made to the resource to account for the changes made to the set products, for assessment from 2024.

# What Should I Know?

## Peaky Blinders

### E1S1 plot summary

Episode 1 establishes the key events and contexts that will be important for the rest of the series, as well as introducing us to the main characters: brothers Tommy and Arthur Shelby; Aunt Polly; Chief Inspector Campbell and Grace Burgess.

The episode opens in Birmingham, 1919, with our first glimpse of Tommy Shelby, riding a horse bareback through the streets of Birmingham's slums as people frantically get out of his way and hide from him. He has the 'powder trick' performed on the horse by a Chinese fortune teller, and announces the horse's name and its forthcoming race so the

Tommy arrives home. What seems like a quiet domestic setting at the front becomes part of the family's business. Tommy is chastised by Arthur, who announces a

Chief Inspector Campbell is making his way to Birmingham on the train. On the way, he

In a local factory, a meeting to decide on strike action is led by Freddy Thorne, an

Arthur holds a family meeting where he tells them that the police are recruiting constables to clean up the city. It is clear that Tommy already knows about this from

Grace Burgess, newly arrived from Ireland and looking for work, arrives at The Garrison. Harry Fenton, refuses to employ her because she is 'too pretty', but after she sings her favourite, he gives her a job.

Campbell introduces the 'specials' to the Birmingham police and makes it clear that the streets. While visiting the cinema, Arthur Shelby is arrested and taken to the

After a secret meeting with Winston Churchill about the stolen guns, Campbell

An associate of Tommy's, Danny Williams, kills an Italian waiter while experiencing

Polly tries to get reassurances from Tommy that he has got rid of the guns. He lies

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## Actors and characters

### **Thomas (Tommy) Shelby – played by Cillian Murphy**

Thomas (Tommy) Shelby is a decorated war veteran who is the natural leader of the family, but his experiences in the trenches have left him emotionally scarred. Although he has three brothers, Tommy is more ambitious than his older brother, Arthur. He wants to see the family business growing and sees developing and expanding the business as a way to achieve this.

Cillian Murphy is an established Irish-born film actor, starring in movies such as *Inception* and *Dunkirk*. His starring role in all six series of *Peaky Blinders* has made Murphy a household name.

### **Aunt Polly – played by Helen McCrory**

Aunt Polly is the matriarch of the family and has looked out for the Shelby children and their parents. A strong and determined woman, she held the family together during the war and during World War I. She holds both Arthur and Tommy to account for their actions.

McCrory, a renowned stage actress, was known to fans of Harry Potter as Narcissa Malfoy in the series of *Peaky Blinders* until her untimely death from cancer.

### **Chief Inspector Campbell – played by Sam Neill**

Brought in from Northern Ireland by Winston Churchill to clean up the streets of Birmingham, Campbell is both single-minded in pursuit of his task and confident. He is determined to bring the thieves of the weapons crate to justice.

Neill, born to an Irish mother (which accounts for his impeccable Irish accent!) and raised in New Zealand, is a veteran actor of stage and screen, best known for his role in the *King Kong* franchise. He starred in the first two series of *Peaky Blinders*.

### **Arthur Shelby – played by Paul Anderson**

Arthur is the oldest brother of the Shelby family, and he regards himself as the head of the family despite the obvious tensions between him and Tommy, who is a more natural leader.

Anderson has been a central part of *Peaky Blinders* and is a fans' favourite, starring in the series. He is also a film actor, starring in movies such as *The Revenant* and *Sherlock Holmes*.

### **Grace Burgess – played by Annabelle Wallis**

Grace Burgess is a beautiful and mysterious woman who initially arrives in Birmingham as a barmaid, a job she claims to have done in Dublin. However, it soon becomes clear that she is the daughter of Campbell, who worked with her father before he was killed by the IRA. As the relationship between Grace and Tommy Shelby develops, there seems to be a connection, and tension, between them.

Burgess is known as a film actress for her roles in *The Mummy* and *X Men: First Class*. She also starred in *The Tudors* as Jane Seymour, but her part as Grace Burgess in three series of *Peaky Blinders* is her most notable role to date.

## Production and broadcasting

The show was created by Steven Knight and based on the true story of the Peaky Blinders. The series was produced by Caryn Mandabach Productions – a London-based independent production company founded by award-winning producer Caryn Mandabach – and co-produced by BBC. The show is also produced by a British television production company known for producing situation comedies. The show was first produced by IMG Media in 2006 and then became part of Endemol.

The show was originally broadcast on Thursday evenings at 9pm on BBC Two and then moved to the more prestigious prime-time Sunday night 9pm slot on BBC One. The last series was broadcast in 2022. During its run, the show has included many well-known actors, including Alan Rickman, Stephen Graham and Tom Hardy.

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## The Bridge

### E1S3 Plot summary

The episode begins with two people arriving at a building site at night. They come across a woman's corpse posed with a family of mannequins at a dining table.

The case is given to Saga Norén and her Danish counterpart, Hanne, who find out about a lesbian named Helle who ran a gender neutral school in Lyngby. They find out that she was married as well as an adult son, Morten, from a previous marriage.

The two detectives struggle to work together as they interview the widow and the son. Morten is established as a veteran with PTSD who lives like a hermit. He barely speaks and is hostile towards the detectives. Later, he arrives at the house of the widow, appearing seemingly worried.

A man with a wife and children is introduced – he goes to a museum event where he meets Hanne, they chat, and eventually sleep together. This character is revealed at the end of the episode.

After more police work that unveils clues about the motive and how the corpse was found, the man ambushes Saga in the stairway of her apartment building, asking her to contact Hanne with her 'crime is forgiven'. Saga literally runs away and locks herself in her apartment for the rest of the series.

When Saga and Hanne return to Morten's shack, a bomb detonates – blowing Hanne away.

After this, we see Morten having a PTSD episode on a city street. When a passer-by goes to talk to him, he is overcome by panic and holds a knife to her throat.

A brief sequence of an older woman acting strangely with snakes and other reptiles in her home while wearing women's underwear is shown, seemingly signifying her as the killer.

At the end of the episode, the head of the Copenhagen police force assigns the case to Henrik, who seems to know Saga and is eager to work with her.

### Actors and characters

#### **Saga Norén – played by Sofia Helin**

Saga is established as the protagonist, although one with many troubles and a past of trauma. She has remained the primary lead detective from Series 1 and 2 after Martin Rohde for murdering the man accused of killing his son. She is gruff, emotional, and driven in the pursuit of justice. She has problems relating and connecting with others and is often misunderstood.

Sofia Helin had been an award-winning film and television performer in Sweden. The unexpected international success of the show has seen her receive praise and accolades internationally. She would go on to play Saga for the last time in the show's fourth season.

#### **Henrik Sabbe – played by Thure Lindhardt**

Although his role in the first episode of Series 3 is limited, Henrik's character traits are established. He has two young daughters, but his relationship with his wife is either an open marriage or a complex sexual dynamic between the two of them. His relationship with Saga becomes a central theme in the third series, eventually becoming sexual and intimate. He is shown to be alive to the world and to have a personality in a way that no one else has been able to grasp or relate to.

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Henrik Sabroe is played by Thure Lindhardt, a Danish actor who has worked in the *Saga*, and many other cast members of *The Bridge*, Thure was not a celebrity before working actor. Thure would also reprise the role of Henrik for the fourth series of broadcast in 2018.

### Production and broadcasting

*The Bridge*, or to give it its original title *Bron/Broen*, was pitched by lead writer as being a detective drama that tackled the issues of the relationship between the two neighbouring cultures. The show was a joint production of Danish and Swedish companies and broadcast in both languages. DR1 and TV2 are the public service broadcasters of Denmark and the show, via its Danish distributor, was produced by Filmlance International and Nimbus Films.

In the UK, the show was picked up for broadcast on BBC Four as a niche appeal programme but it achieved unexpectedly high viewership figures; consequently, later series were run on BBC One.

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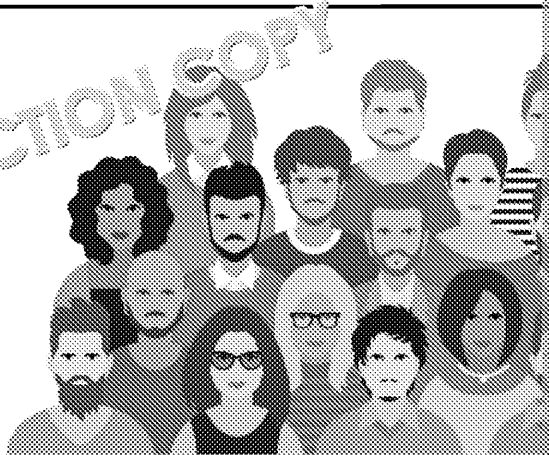
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# Getting to Know...

## 1. Audience targeting – who watches crime dramas

The appeal of crime stories to audiences can sometimes be hard to grasp – everyone loves a good mystery and intrigue, the human suffering, sometimes so realistic and bleak that it seems so close to home. An effective horror story might make you scared of the night, but an effective crime story might make you afraid of the day.



But that's perhaps pushing it a bit. No one is losing any sleep to the ungodly horrors of *Murders*. Modern crime narratives, without the clear-cut dichotomy of a good guy in a striped jumper and a bag with a dollar sign on it, are often more miserable and complex. Audiences want to watch media that can sometimes leave you feeling on edge and

### Audience profiling

There is a convenient overlap between the detectives who see on screen hunting for executives/producers trying to target an audience member that they have never meet. Take out the horrific violence from the equation, and you are left with the

*Peaky Blinders* and *The Wire* represent different types of crime drama and, the experience of the audience. *The Bridge* is a police procedural (albeit an unusual one) with Saga Norén and her team as they try to solve the crime and catch the perpetrator. In *Blinders* we are positioned with Tommy Shelby and the gang: they are the heroes in the position of rooting for them against the police, headed by Campbell.

Media producers, on the other hand, are trying to metaphorically capture audience. The viewer is in terms of their age, their social class, their gender, their background and so on. Media producers can tailor their work to appeal to that category of society.

### Demographics – who is watching?

Crime dramas are most definitely constructed for and targeted to adult audiences. If you were to show a class of primary school pupils a grizzly detective film such as David Fincher's *Seven*, you would expect a roomful of traumatised (or bored) eight-year-olds. Younger audiences can't grasp the permanence of death and violence, nor do they understand nor benefit from the emotional messages contained in these stories.

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### Catharsis and emotional processing – why are people watching?

Let's face it, the real world not everything ends happily like a Disney film. It might be one that *The Bridge* presents. Life for these characters is unforgiving and relentless. Undeserving people suffer acts of cruelty and malice, and happiness can sometimes be a distant memory. But there are moments of hope and optimism sprinkled throughout; moments of growth and development.

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Many pieces of media that aim to be 'realistic' tend not to have endings that are picture perfect where the good guys ride off into the sunset and the bad guys have been vanquished. Instead, **catharsis** is often the key to a narrative – learning to accept, cope with and overcome the challenges life presents

**Catharsis**  
to term  
emotio

Perhaps part of what appeals to audiences of these types of media is not just a chance of also seeing the characters heal and grow. *The Bridge* is not simply a pessimistic 'shit-ditch', but more that bad things may happen to you but you can carry on and overcome

### Morbid curiosity

One other reason why people watch crime dramas – that doesn't necessarily fit into the audience **psychographics** – is morbid curiosity. To be morbidly curious is to be intrigued by the ideas of death, pain or violence but not necessarily to enjoy these things. This is something we all experience from time to time, and it may be because we feel an unconscious need to try to understand or rationalise the bizarre and horrifying things that surround us. Fictional texts that explore these concepts may be a safe way to indulge in morbid curiosity and try to make sense of

**Psychographics**  
category  
character

### International audience psychographics

The various BBC divisions (BBC One, BBC Two, BBC Three, BBC Four) put out different specific audience profile. For example, *The Bridge* was broadcast on BBC Four, a channel for 'high-brow' culture – drama adaptations of literature, classical music, science fiction, independent/international cinema and so on. Domestically, *The Bridge* likely does the same way that a UK audience likely wouldn't receive a programme such as *Luther* to

However, because *The Bridge* is screened in a foreign language and, crucially, is not automatically gains an air of exclusivity by virtue of being international. The fact that the show and retains the original Danish/Swedish audio means that it is **profiled** as media for educational purposes (think back to Blumler and Katz's uses and gratifications theory)

Of course, the show is also an engaging murder mystery at heart, and audiences are drawn to **entertainment** (Blumler and Katz's uses and gratifications theory). But the fact that it allows us to look into the society and culture of two different countries that UK audiences may not have the learning experience is likely to entice BBC Four's intended audience. When it comes to the show using a similar core premise, this decision may have been made by production networks because their target audiences may not be looking to use media to learn. A similar name is perhaps the best example, as, historically, US general audiences have preferred in cinemas and have favoured dubs or American remakes (*Let the Right One In*, *Cold*, *Magnificent Seven*, to name just a few).

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### Discussion questions

Why do you think *The Bridge* was remade for US audiences in English and/or an English dub – even though it would be more expensive for TV networks?

The article above discusses the reasons why audiences watch crime dramas and how production networks can target potential effects. Consider the audience who consume crime drama and other crime media? Consider Blumler and Katz's uses and gratifications theory in your answer.



## 2. Compare and contrast – public service broadcasters and in Scandinavia

Unlike the US, where all mainstream media outlets are profit-driven corporations, the media industry landscape of the UK, Denmark and Sweden is very similar in that each country has a national public service broadcaster.

Public service  
a media  
taxes / TV  
institutions  
PSBs are

**Public service broadcasters** are the sole media outlets available, and just as we have Sky, Channel 4 and so on, Danish and Swedish viewers can also access media from other outlets (Fox, Viacom, Disney etc.) However, the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation), DR (Danish Broadcasting Corporation) and SVT (Swedish Television 1) are all based on a shared principle: impartial quality broadcast for citizens funded by citizens.

### Notable differences between the BBC and DR/SVT

One major difference between the BBC and both DR1 and SVT1 is the much larger scale of the BBC both across media industries and geographically.

DR1 and SVT1 are both pretty much limited to Denmark and Sweden, whereas the BBC has a huge international presence with a variety of regional offshoots. BBC World Service operates across continents.

The BBC's global presence is partially due to the fact that English is the third most spoken language in the world, coupled with the fact that Britain maintained colonies globally. Danish and Swedish, on the other hand, are rarely spoken outside of Scandinavia.

### Budget and funding

All three organisations are funded in a very similar manner. Essentially, if you have a television, you are legally required to own a TV licence so that the industry can keep producing content. If you don't, you can receive a hefty fine if you don't. (Note: Sweden switched from licence fee to a tax on television sets after the broadcast of *The Bridge* Series 3.)

But one key area in which the BBC is on the back foot compared to its Nordic counterparts is the amount of money that can be poured into each media product for broadcast. The UK is a much more populated country and the scale and breadth of the BBC means that its funding is spread thinly across radio, television and other media that is broadcast across the world.

Swedish and Danish viewers, on the other hand, can benefit from the fact that they are able to ramp up their production budgets for their programming. After all, licence fee revenue and the broadcasters don't have to cater to huge global demand. For example, the 'total expenditure' (running costs, budgets, etc.) of approximately £5bn. That seems like a lot of money, but BBC television received approximately only two billion of those five billion in 2014 (Source: BBC Media Centre).

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### Discussion Questions

- 1) How has digital technology and new media forms affected public service broadcasters?
- 2) Hesmondhalgh's cultural industries theory puts forward that modern media companies are artistically driven. Do you think this statement is correct with regard to public service broadcasters?

### 3. The production of *Peaky Blinders* – how it was created, distributed and marketed

*Peaky Blinders* is the brainchild (and labour of love) of screenwriter Steven Knight, whose family hail from the Small Heath area of Birmingham, which he was to immortalise in the series. Knight is known for writing the screenplays for films such as *Dirty Pretty Things* and *Eastern Promises*, as well as devising the format for the game show *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* – so, a varied output!

The initial idea for *Peaky Blinders* came to Knight 20 years before he finally wrote Series 1. Channel 4 was interested in the concept, but it didn't happen – something Knight was not entirely pleased about as the technology available at the time was not sufficiently advanced to create the series as he had conceived it. Years later, Knight was asked if he had any ideas and he ended up writing two scripts of what was to become *Peaky Blinders*. The BBC commissioned it and the rest is history!

Knight drew on his family history when writing *Peaky Blinders*: his mother had, as a girl, worked as a bookie's runner, collecting bets from neighbours which she hid in a laundry basket, and his father's uncles were the Sheldons, the original *Peaky Blinders*. The gang members were **mythologised** in Birmingham. Knight took the infamous Shelby gang from the mythologising of agricultural labourers in the USA as cowboys. He wanted to do the same for the *Peaky Blinders*.

When translating the exploits of the Sheldons to the small screen, Knight says he loves TV and both the freedom and control it gives him. Due to the technical budget restraints of a **public service broadcaster** like the BBC, the creative teams deal with the problems of a smaller budget and this leads to creative solutions in the production.

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#### Co-productions

Co-productions are important to the success of a series such as *Peaky Blinders*. The production was a joint effort between Caryn Manderson Productions, Tiger Aspect Productions, Screen Yorkshire and distributed worldwide by Universal Worldwide Distribution.

*Peaky Blinders* was the first production to benefit from funding by Screen Yorkshire that much of the series was filmed in Yorkshire. This had economic benefits for the employment of local crew to paying for the services of a range of local enterprises.

Interestingly, the show is also marketed as a 'Netflix Original' series. This is due to Netflix having bought the US and VOD distribution rights for the series from The Weinstein Company. *Peaky Blinders* film, rumoured to have a release date of 2024/25, will be streamed on Netflix which are rooted in a particular time and place but have international appeal.

#### Broadcasting

The first series of six episodes aired on 12<sup>th</sup> September 2013. The show started on BBC One with an indication that the BBC felt the target audience was likely to be more niche. However, due to its success, by Series 5 the BBC had moved the show to the BBC One prime-time slot. On BBC Two the series averaged 2.4 million viewers, while the final episode of Series 5 attracted 3.5 million viewers. Due to the adult themes and graphic violence, the series was broadcast at 9pm.

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#### Discussion Questions

1. What are the advantages and disadvantages of the BBC funding a show such as *Peaky Blinders*?
2. What do you think were the reasons for the initial scheduling of *Peaky Blinders* and the change to BBC One prime-time slot?
3. From your knowledge of S1E1, why do you think *Peaky Blinders* was shown **post-water** (a show scheduled after this time is thought to be unsuitable for children.) Can you think of any other shows that warrant this scheduling decision?

## 4. Flat caps, shell shock and unrest: life in 1919 (

Moving the world of the Peaky Blinders to Birmingham after World War I allowed Steven Knight to explore a variety of themes which he couldn't have if he had left his gang in Victorian London. 1919 was a time of change, of rebellion, of liberation and of searing poverty. It was time when working-class men (and women) were no longer happy with the status quo. Those in authority were trying to deal with the aftermath of the war as well as the threat of rebellion.



### Returning from the front

As well as returning from fighting in the Great War with physical injuries, many men suffered mentally from their experiences in the trenches. Commonly called 'shell shock' at the time, but now suffer from extreme tiredness, tremors and shaking, confusion and nightmares. To treat shell shock with electric shock treatment, many men were left to cope alone. Danny Whizz-Bang runs into The Garrison, overturning tables and shouting, before Freddie. When he comes to he asks, 'Did I do it again?' and it becomes clear where Danny imagines that he is back in the trenches and lashes out. It is during this that he kills an Italian waiter, which leads Tommy to fake his death. With the death he tells Danny that he has offered to kill him himself 'to stop a war breaking out and save you from their barbarity'.

Even Tommy, who we are told was decorated for his actions on the battlefield and responds much better than Danny, has to battle his own demons after the war. He imagines himself back in the trenches where he did the most difficult of tasks would literally tunnel under the lines and plant bombs to be detonated and killed. Tommy takes on himself; however, in the drug-induced nightmare montage of the war has affected even the strongest and bravest of men.

### The rise of the IRA

During the turmoil of World War I, Ireland was suffering its own upheavals. After republicans took part in the Easter Rising when, on 24<sup>th</sup> April 1916, forces led by James Connolly took control of the General Post Office and other key sites in Dublin. After nearly a week of fighting, the leaders surrendered and, after being tried, were executed. This angered many in Ireland who did not support the rising.

The Easter Rising led to the forming of the IRA in 1919. While they worked along with Sinn Féin, their purpose was to overthrow British rule in Ireland by using armed force to become an independent republic.

During 1919–21 the British were engaged in the Anglo-Irish War (also known as the Irish War of Independence) where republicans, led by Michael Collins, tried to force the authorities to negotiate in this environment that the British were determined to prevent the stolen machine guns from being used to force British rule at any cost. When Campbell meets Winston Churchill in an episode, his famous refrain of 'I will find them, and find the guns' (when asked by the communists who have stolen the guns) shows his determination to hunt down those who have stolen the guns. What is interesting to us is that Campbell is determinedly on the side of the law, it is not him we are rooting for, maybe it is his single-mindedness – or maybe his use of excessive violence – in that it is not warm to him (he gives us many other reasons to hate him as the series progresses).

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Grace's presence in Birmingham is also explained in terms of her relationship with Campbell and we realise that she is his mole, she is determined that the Peaky communists are too weak to have stolen the guns and it is the work of the IRA. But let her 'personal history cloud [her] judgement' and we find out that the IRA mu- assurances to the contrary, we absolutely see how clouded her judgement is.

## Trade unions and communists: Freddie Thorne

After the war, men returned home and resumed work in the factories of England. In England (before World War I) the trade union movement had grown, which served to secure better pay and conditions. This gathered momentum after the war when Tommy Thorne – felt that they were being rewarded for their service on the front. Freddie, a Tommy, is initially seen as a suspect in the robbery of the machine guns, due to his con-

After the 1917 Russian Revolution in which working people overthrew the Tsar, it spread to other countries, including England. As Steven Knight said, in an interview 'First World War, the soldiers came back and the Russian Revolution happened and a paranoia that there was going to be a revolution in England.' Winston Churchill, in this episode, was paranoid about this threat, hence Freddie's place on the suspect list.

When we first see Freddie, he is greeted as a hero by his fellow factory workers, but the back as he walks through them. Like many who were unhappy with their treatment, he gathers the men to discuss strike action (there were a number of strikes in England at the time). He asks, 'The blood shed on Flanders fields. The sweat of your brow. What are the rewards? ... And what is the reward they offer you for your sacrifices made? A few pence? ...' Freddie's anger reflects the anger of many working men who felt they were being treated so bravely.

## Women and change in 1918

World War I saw real changes in the role of women in England. With the men away, women were needed in industry and agriculture to fill the roles that men had left vacant. In 1914 the Women's Land Army and munitions factories to help the war effort. They worked in a variety of roles as nurses, factory workers, ambulance drivers and translators.

By 1918, five million women were working, which gave them a level of independence they had never had before. However, when the war ended and the men returned, women were expected to return to their previous domestic roles. Polly, for example, ran the family business during the war, but when her younger and less experienced brother comes back and take control, something is lost.

However, things were beginning to change. In June 1918 women over the age of 21 were allowed to vote, and the right to be extended under the Equal Franchise Act 1928. The strong women in *Peaky Blinders* reflect this change in gender roles at the time: Polly is seen as the fierce matriarch, Ada is a nurse and Grace is given a key role in Campbell's plans. However, also reflective of the time, the women's power in *Peaky Blinders* is often seen as limited and determined by the men.

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### Discussion questions

- 1) Why do you think Steven Knight wanted to set the show in 1919? What is attractive about this time period?
- 2) Although the show is set in working-class Birmingham, what about the context gives this a sense of class?
- 3) How important are strong women to the storylines in the set episode?

## 5. Who were the real Peaky Blinders?

The Peaky Blinders were an actual gang from Birmingham, known for their smart suits. But one of the really interesting things about the *Peaky Blinders* TV show is how it moved them from their original place in history and transported them to Edwardian London. In an interview: 'The stories in *Peaky Blinders* are based on what was told to me when I was a child. It's one of the things that happened to my parents when they were kids. They saw all of these things which makes everything more mythological, and it's a bit darker, and brighter. I've heard the stories [second-hand] and they've been double mythologised.'<sup>1</sup>

So who were these larger-than-life characters and what such an impact on Knight's imagination?

### The beginnings

The rise of gangs among the working classes of Birmingham was the inevitable result of **economic deprivation** leading to criminal activity. This, coupled with the rivalry created through **mass immigration** (the migration of Irish nationals to Birmingham during the period 1841–1851 nearly doubled the city's population), meant that areas like Small Heath (where *Peaky Blinders* is set) were dangerous places.

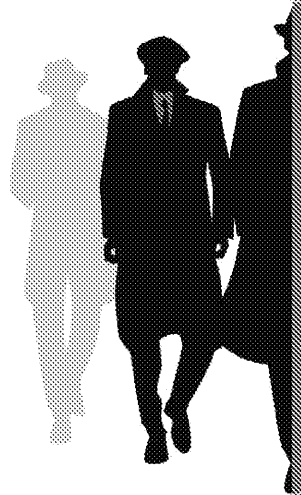
This rivalry led to the 1867 Murphy Riots where the homes of Irish immigrants were burnt down (with the help of the police). The 1870s saw the rise of mainly juvenile gangs, known as 'slaves' or 'petty crime' (the archives contain records of crimes such as bike theft and shop 'grabs', where gangs would 'steal' the goods). The Cheapside Sloggers were one of the most famous gangs. Peaky Blinders and these gangs fought many battles were common.

### The real Peaky Blinders

The name of the gang in the series seems to allude to the razor blades sewn into their collars and designed to inflict real physical damage on enemies (in some cases literally). It is unlikely to be the real origin of the name as disposable razor blades were considered a luxury at the time. More likely is the idea that 'peaky' refers to the fact that many of the gang members wore flat caps so as to hide their identity, and the word 'blinder' was a slang word meaning strikers. Looking at some of the mugshots of the original gang members, this seems highly likely.

As the Peaky Blinders gang developed, so did their crimes, and there is evidence of drug dealing, robbery, protection rackets and fraud. The authorities found them increasingly difficult to control. There were many leading figures in business, the law, etc. who were in their pay. In 1899, the police force itself; when, in 1899, there was an attempt to control the gang's activities by appointing constables (very similar to what happens in our series, *Peaky Blinders*), this was unsuccessful.

If you look through the original mugshots you will see the following faces (including Sam Sharkey (the inspiration for Tommy Shelby) and many more). The uniform adopted by the gang: a peaked cap, leather boots, waistcoat, silk scarf and a flat cap. This attire can be seen as a status symbol and may also be a mark of defiance.



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<sup>1</sup> Quote from: <https://www.historyextra.com/period/20th-century/peaky-blinders-behind-the-scenes/>

## The prominence of the Peaky Blinders

The gang seems to have been at the height of its powers in the late 1800s, but its rivals, the Birmingham Boys (led by Billy Kimber – another familiar name from the past in Birmingham, expanding their ‘business’ into betting and racecourses and more). The Peaky Blinders moved out of Birmingham to the countryside around this time and more. Billy Kimber and his gang maintained control of their territory in Birmingham. It is interesting then that Steven Knight moved the action of the series to just after WWI. It makes Tommy Shelby a more interesting character – a war hero who is also a criminal. He has a sense of familial loyalty and is struggling with his own demons (what can be seen in the audience as him suffering from PTSD).



### Discussion questions

1. Why do you think that Knight moved the setting of *Peaky Blinders* from the Victorian era to the interwar period?
2. How does an understanding of the real Peaky Blinders help an audience enjoy the series?
3. Why do you think that Knight kept some ‘real’ historical figures in the series and yet created fictional characters?



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## 6. The aesthetics of *Peaky Blinders*

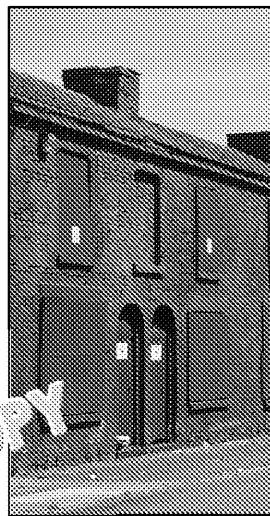
When a production team is **world-building**, it is important that, for the audience, we need to believe that we are being transported back to that world – in this case, Birmingham, 1919. However, what makes *Peaky Blinders* stand apart from the rest is that while the costumes, the houses, the pubs of the *Peaky Blinders*' world, Steven Knight also manages to make his world **symbolic** and **hyperreal**.

### Locations and sets

One advantage of a series set in a real-world environment is that there is no need for money built sets because these already exist, right? Well, unfortunately, Birmingham in 1919 and the area of Small Heath was one of the challenges for the programme's producers.

Unfortunately, the area of Small Heath has changed beyond recognition from the days of the *Peaky Blinders*, and the producers had to search further afield for the street of Victorian terraced houses that they needed for the Shelbys' home of Watery Lane. They found this in Powis Street, Liverpool, along with a number of other locations, including St George's Hall, Liverpool Cathedral and Port Sunlight Village. You can actually go on a *Peaky Blinders* tour in Liverpool.

Closer to home, the Black Country Living Museum provided several locations, such as Charlie String's yard and the canal bridge where Freddie and Ada meet in our set episode. Baudrillard would have a field day with this, as the museum is a place where original buildings have been reconstructed to offer the visitor an 'authentic' experience, but is ultimately a **simulacrum** at work!



What is interesting about the sets produced for *Peaky Blinders* is that, while there is a sense of **verisimilitude** about the world, Knight and the producers also create a nightmarish sense of **hyperreality** about their Birmingham. Tommy's and Campbell's journeys through the city create a sense of hell. This idea is also seen in a shot of The Garrison. After a close-up of Campbell on the train approaching Birmingham, we are shown Tommy making his way to The Garrison. The high-angle shot makes Tommy look small and vulnerable – the audience feels anxious for him in light of the threat Campbell will pose. As he walks, we see sparks and flames fly out of a factory on the right and then these flames are reflected in the glass of the pub's doors as if the 'hell' that could be unleashed by Campbell on Tommy, giving the effect that the pub is a window into hell. Later, as Campbell arrives in his cab through the streets of Birmingham, they are reminding the people that God 'will smite the unho'ly'. Again there are fires in the streets. As Campbell looks out from the cab, he sees a drunk, lying in the street corners, couples having sex in the dark, and people begin to throw stones at the cab, using a very dark aesthetic: true to the contemporary vision of hell.

### Costume and appearance of the actors

The costumes and hairstyles used in the show are striking and reflect the time period. The hair of the members of the gang sport comes directly from the trenches (the style was supposed to be hair free of lice!). Both the costumes and the hairstyles contribute to the 'Peaky' look, so popular (there are YouTube videos and Pinterest boards full of advice about how to get the look), and even glossy magazines like *Esquire* have articles on 'The Definitive Peaky'.

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crew cuts that were adopted by soldiers in World War I to help combat lice, when Murphy, become cool and authentic to the period. The flat caps are made with thin metal had razor blades sewn in so that the gang could use them to maim their enemies.

As for the women, they too reflect the time period in terms of dress code and style. The change is beginning to happen as England moved beyond the Edwardian era. Ada is dressed in her bobbed hair, dropped-waist dresses and strings of pearls. She reflects the more rebellious of the younger women who rejected the more restrictive corsets of the previous generation. A woman, sports longer hair and more conventional hairstyles and skirts; in the first episode she wears a tailored pinstriped jacket which seems more masculine, perhaps reflecting her aloof attitude. She seems more conventional than her brother, although her shorter skirt is a departure from the norm where a woman would have shown her ankles!

While it is important in a costume drama to give a sense of the period (in this case through the hairstyles and many of the props), in this case the production designers wanted to create a new version of post-war Birmingham. The look is really important to the success of the show, saying that the feel of the show is gorgeous to 'slick, ad-style art direction'.<sup>2</sup>

### Discussion questions

- 1) How effective is the visual style of the show in helping us enjoy *Peaky Blinders*?
- 2) How do the costumes of the characters reflect the changing world after World War I?
- 3) Which other scenes can you think of in the set episode where the set might be used more effectively?

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<sup>2</sup> Quote from: <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/tvandradioblog/2013/sep/12/peaky-blinders>

## 7. The tale of a gangster family: narrative in *Peaky*

We join the Shelby family at the end of a decade that has seen much turmoil. And Knight throws us right into their story. We meet Tommy first, riding through the streets of Birmingham like a lone cowboy. And then we are introduced to the whole family network, with their concerns and desires. The narrative of their lives moves at a fast pace in this serial of family life.

Tzvetan Todorov suggests that narratives work in three acts:

**equilibrium, disruption and re-establishment of equilibrium.**

However, film recognises that modern film and TV dramas are more complex, challenging and subverting the three-act structure. So, how can we understand *Peaky Blinders* in light of Todorov's ideas?

We have already explored the fact that *Peaky Blinders* owes much to the American gangster genre where we follow a family through the trials and tribulations of life. Think *The Godfather* and *The Sopranos*. As these characters navigate their way through life in the criminal underworld, it is obvious they will face many threats and challenges to their safety and well-being. Todorov would describe these as **multiple disruption sequences** and these are certainly evident in our set episode: the mistaken theft of the machine guns (and potentially Tommy's refusal to return them), the arrival of Campbell (and Grace) and Danny Whizz-Bang and his crime. At each point the lives of the Shelbys are thrown into further turmoil. And this is what keeps the audience interested: we enjoy the sense of threat that comes with the lives of our main characters.

Todorov also suggests **condensed equilibriums**, where narratives can start with the disruption (something which is evident in our set episode of *The Bridge* and which works as we join the story in Series 3). This isn't quite the case with *Peaky Blinders* but we are thrown into the action, with little sense of an **exposition**. A woman from the Chinese community is summoned to perform the powder trick on a horse. We then see Tommy riding said horse through the streets of Birmingham. At this stage, we don't know who he is or why he has organised this trick – **classic Barthes' hermeneutic code**. We call this type of opening **in medias res** (which is Latin for 'in the middle of things').

The main plot of the episode is clear: the theft of the machine guns and Campbell's establishment in Birmingham's police force to clean up the streets and retrieve the missing guns. Like any good western we have the **binary opposition** of man of law versus criminal – Campbell versus Tommy Shelby – and this drama the lines of morality are blurred and they are themselves, for once, siding with the criminal.

And *Peaky Blinders* is yet more complex still: the drama consists of a number of **subplots** to establish the intricacies of the Shelbys' lives. We learn about those whose lives are bound to theirs, both friends and family. Danny Whizz-Bang, who fought with Tommy in the war, who is suffering terribly from PTSD and whose accidental killing of an



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Italian waiter leads Tommy to fake his death and bring him into the protection of Freddie Thorne, old friend and comrade of Tommy, who arrives home full of a fervour which earns him a place as a suspect in the theft of the guns. And then Al as Freddie's lover, something they must keep secret from a family who would not

And throughout this episode the audience is in a privileged position – unlike in a *The Bridge*, when we watch Saga trying to work out the identity of a ruthless killer

### Discussion questions

- 1) Do you think the in media res opening is effective at the beginning of a new TV show?
- 2) How important are the plot points to the audience's enjoyment of the set episode?
- 3) What is the narrative of episode 1 that ensures audiences will keep tuning in?

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## 8. Tommy Shelby as an anti-hero (*Peaky Blinders*)



Claude Lévi-Strauss suggests that we understand the world through **binary oppositions**. We see crime drama in light of this. We are almost exclusively positioned on the side of the law as they pursue the criminal and bring them to justice. In a traditional crime drama the binary oppositions of good vs evil, justice vs lawbreaking, the police vs the criminal can clearly be seen. Even though *The Bridge* is an original crime drama it is still possible to see these general oppositions.

Not so *Peaky Blinders*. This is a **crime/gangster drama** where the lines of morality are blurred and we are positioned with the Shelbys – and Thomas Shelby in particular. He is our hero and we root for him against the heavy-handed chief inspector, Campbell. But Tommy Shelby is also involved in criminal activities and is not afraid to use extreme violence when he deems it necessary. In this respect he is presented as an **anti-hero**.

Many of the reasons we are encouraged to empathise with Tommy Shelby, despite his being part of a criminal gang, are due to his experiences in World War I. It is made clear that Tommy Shelby fought bravely in the war and won medals for his bravery. However, the war has severely scarred Tommy and, like many other men returning from the front, he is haunted by memories of what happened to him in France (what modern-day viewers might recognise as **PTSD**, but for Tommy and his contemporaries there was little recognition or treatment of this condition).

In our set episode, Tommy takes opium to blot out the memories that haunt him. Tommy because, despite his criminal activities, Tommy has a strong moral compass and a sense of morality. As soon as he confirms the name of Monaghan Boy, his racehorse in his betting scam, he drops money into a blind man's collecting tin. He is always generous. The Garrison and yet he always leaves money on the table. In a fiercely protective scene with fellow war veteran Danny Whizz-Bang, we see the lengths he will go to with an elaborate plan to shoot Danny with a rifle loaded with sheep brains in order to fool the police. This shows his sense of loyalty and honour.

Tommy is a complex character. From the first scene where we see him riding through the streets on a racehorse, there are many shots in this episode where we are shown Tommy alone unless conducting business or dealing with the family. We are told by Freddie that they are close but since the war they have grown apart. In an interview for Rotten Tomatoes, Cillian Murphy says 'He's burdened by his intellect.'<sup>3</sup> This is confirmed in his argument over the power

<sup>3</sup> Quote: <https://editorial.rottentomatoes.com/article/cillian-murphy-on-becoming-peaky-blinders>

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tells his brother, 'I think, Arthur; that's what I do. I think.' He clearly sees himself superior and this certainly might be one reason he isolates himself.

Also, despite being the younger brother, he views himself as being much more capable than Arthur (and, indeed, most of Small Heath thinks the same). In the opening shots are from a distance, voyeuristic shots that position us with the locals of Small Heath, looking over fences and walls, in doorways and behind washing as Tommy's classes pass. But a man who finds himself overreaching. Tommy's plan to set up a betting scam in episode 1 and his advice about the machine gun robbery all show a criminal mind that, in its ambition, puts himself on the wrong side of the law, and indeed other criminals like Billy Kimber and Arthur who feels that he, from the streets of Birmingham, has the right to run the betting scam.

It is in the rivalry between Tommy and Chief Inspector Campbell that we can see how this binary opposite **subverts** our expectations of the crime genre. We are usually positioned to sympathise with the police against the criminal but, even in this first episode, Campbell is represented as a sadistic bully who enjoys excessive violence. The scene where Arthur is questioned and beaten up by Campbell and his men is particularly hard to watch. The balance of power looks at here: Campbell might be appointed by Winston Churchill himself and have subduing groups like the IRA, but the streets of Birmingham belong to Tommy, who soon to be King' and declares 'you are the law round here'.

The rivalry between the police and the Peaky Blinders is clearly established. Unlike Campbell we fear, and Tommy, despite his flaws, who we find ourselves rooting for in the films Knight so admires, Tommy Shelby is a charismatic anti-hero.

### Discussion questions

- 1) How far is Tommy Shelby a character that is difficult to like?
- 2) The representation of masculinity in *Peaky Blinders* has been described by some viewers as 'hyper-masculinity'. How does Tommy Shelby represent this hyper-masculinity?
- 3) Can you apply Stuart Hall's reception theory to our response to Tommy Shelby and the other characters in the series?

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## 9. *Peaky Blinders* as a postmodern text

Postmodernism in media texts can be seen in a number of ways: Baudrillard talks about the creation of a **simulacrum**, the **hyperreal**, whereas Jameson cites one quality of postmodernism as being 'historical amnesia'. But how can we explore *Peaky Blinders* as a postmodern text?

The first and most obvious way is as a simulacrum of Birmingham in 1919. There has been much criticism of *Peaky Blinders*, from the lack of reality of the narrative to the 'dodgy' accents. And despite the fact that there are *Peaky Blinders* locations in Birmingham, very little of the series was shot there. Series 1 was shot on location in Yorkshire (as a result of the Screen Yorkshire funding), and Watery Lane, the home of the Shelbys in Series 1, was shot in Liverpool (a city which was used for a number of the locations). So, although the setting is Birmingham, what we are seeing is a simulacrum, as much of the Birmingham of 1919 is recreated in a modern setting.

This idea can also be seen when we look at the characters and narrative of *Peaky Blinders*. While much has been made of the fact that the *Peaky Blinders* was a real gang in Birmingham and Knight has said that he has drawn on stories from his family for characters, it is clear that the life of the gang has been exaggerated to create entertainment. Firstly, we have the movement from the late Victorian period to the beginning of Series 1. Then we have the fact that the *Peaky Blinders* were involved in petty criminal activities whereas here we have organised crime on a much larger scale. The inclusion of 'real-life' historical characters – like Jeremiah the preacher, who is seen briefly in episode 1 – adds to this sense of realism. However, what we are given can be called **historical fiction** or **metafiction**, which is the reimagining of a historical period in order to drive the narrative. The fact that the audience does not know where the story ends and fiction begins creates a hyperreal.

The music of *Peaky Blinders* also fits into the idea of postmodernism. There is no real effort at **verisimilitude** (making the music authentic to the time period). Instead, the show is stylised, using modern music to offset the 1919 setting. This again creates a TV show that is hyperreal: the modern music (featuring artists such as Nick Cave, The White Stripes and The Raconteurs) against the historical setting. The popularity of the music led to the launch of a *Peaky Blinders* festival in 2016 which featured music as well as other immersive events.

**Genre hybridity** is a feature of postmodernism, with texts showing the influence of other genres as **parody** or **homage**. *Peaky Blinders* can primarily be seen as an example of a historical crime drama. However, in this first episode of *Peaky Blinders* we straight away see the influence of the western in the opening shot of Tommy riding through the streets of Birmingham on a horse, reminiscent of Clint Eastwood in a Sergio Leone film. This is something Steven Knight has chosen to look at in *Peaky Blinders*: in the same way that the cultural labourers were mythologised as cowboys in the American West, Knight wanted to do the same for the *Peaky Blinders* in Birmingham.

The family saga of mainly male characters working for the 'family' with all the problems this entails is also very much a homage to the conventions of American gangster films such as *The Godfather*. Being able to make these links and connections helps the audience to understand the narrative that is being presented.

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viewing experience a richer one. This idea of homage can also be seen to an extent to have been adopted by fans across the world. From the distinctive flat caps to the buzz cut, which was originally adopted when soldiers went to war to stop them from getting head lice, it has become more of a cultural 'event', and has attracted a whole army of loyal fans, keen to dress like the gang, who are the epitome of cool.

### Discussion questions

- 1) Which specific shots and scenes in *Peaky Blinders* pay homage to a) westerns and b) gangster films?
- 2) How might an audience who is familiar with the above genres still enjoy *Peaky Blinders*?
- 3) In what ways do you think *Peaky Blinders* might mythologise the characters in *Peaky Blinders*?



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## 10. The women in *Peaky Blinders*

One of the successes of *Peaky Blinders* is its portrayal of strong female characters. A variety of ages and backgrounds are represented, characters like Aunt Polly, Grace, and Mrs. Shelby. An interesting thing to consider is how far these women are realistic reflections of the time they have been created with a modern audience in mind.

### Context

Britain after World War I was a period of great change for women. Having had to run the country while their men were at war certainly gave many women a renewed sense of purpose and it was in the post-war era that women were finally given the vote (the right to vote at the age of 30 in 1918) and then women were given the same voting rights as men in 1928.

1919, when Series 1 of *Peaky Blinders* is set, also saw the first woman enter Parliament. While women were fighting for equality with men, it is appropriate that we encounter so many strong female characters that reinforces the ideas of feminist theorist **Liesbet van Zoonen**, who states that gender is a social construct and its meaning varies according to cultural and historical context. This is reflected in the show's writer, in an interview with *Radio Times* magazine, when he said: 'In the early 20th century, the workplace – including illegal gambling rackets – had been run perfectly well, if not better, than the workplace after the war was over, legislation was passed saying men must once more be preferred over women. Women were quite rightly baffled by the idea they were suddenly being told not to work.'

'I wanted to reflect that – and do justice to those women. Tommy, to his credit, is a man who respects a woman doing what needs to be done; he sees it's in the natural order of things for women to make the decisions and for less smart people to carry them out. It's not at all surprising that strong, intelligent women would rise to the top.'

### Genre

It's important to think about the role of women in crime dramas and how the women in this genre. In classic crime dramas women are objectified, seen as victims or as the femme fatale. In *Peaky Blinders* women should be considered alongside these stereotypes.

### Polly Gray

'Aunt' Polly is the formidable **matriarch** of the Shelby family. During the set episode she is seen as outspoken and unafraid of the Shelby brothers, even though they are feared by many of the local men. We first see her in the 'hidden' family betting shop where she takes a central role in what is going on. Despite van Zoonen's assertion that women in the media are seen as caring, nurturing and compassionate, Polly is not afraid to show strength and even aggression, as we see in the sequence where she berates (and boxes the ears of) John Shelby when he carelessly leaves a loaded gun in the betting shop, which nearly has disastrous consequences.

Later, in the family meeting, we clearly see the tensions that have arisen from the changing role of women during and after World War I. When Tommy says he has nothing to say that is 'women's business', Polly retorts saying 'This is everybody's business while you boys were away at war. What's changed?' Tommy's reply is telling and asserts the authority of men at the time: 'We came back.'

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<sup>4</sup> Quote from: <https://www.radiotimes.com/tv/drama/peaky-blinders-series-4-women/>



Polly meets Tommy in the church and she is unequivocal in her condemnation of the stolen machine guns. She acts as the voice of common sense and reason, but doesn't get rid of the guns and asserting that he will 'do the right thing'. While in with her comments although he lies to her later. This suggests that, despite her ability to run the family business, her power is ultimately limited. This links back to war, men were preferred over women in all aspects of work and society. Polly's is seen to reflect her frustration at having to hand over control of the business to the experienced than her, just because they are men.

## Grace

On the surface, Grace could possibly be seen as the **femme fatale** character as seen by Campbell. Information about the theft of the guns. She is placed in The Garrison as a way of getting close to the Shelbys. From the first shot of her, dressed in bright which stands out against the industrial landscape with ash falling about her like a 'music box' soundtrack, there is a touch of the mythical about Grace.

When she arrives at The Garrison, the landlord is really reluctant to take her on, though she produces good references. This is very much to do with her appearance looks attractive and refined, maybe too refined for the environment she finds herself in only when she beautifully sings a traditional song and suggests this is how she calms the customers down, that he relents and gives her a chance. At this point, the audience does not know Grace's role and sees her as she presents herself, a girl from Ireland looking for work. However, some viewers might, at this point, make links between Grace and the beautiful sirens of Greek mythology, who lured men to their deaths with their beautiful but deadly singing. We are already positioned with Tommy so he might see Grace as a threat.

It is only in a later scene, when Grace meets Campbell in the museum, that we see her background is explained: she had worked for Campbell and was murdered by the guns to fall in love with her. This has meant Grace is keen to help. This reveal obviously audience view in subsequent scenes. As we are aligned with Tommy, we notice in by getting close to Grace.

The first time Tommy and Grace meet is in The Garrison. He comes in to buy a bottle his injuries from being beaten up by Campbell. When he sees Grace he asks if she is shocking to the audience in its bluntness. But this reflects the attitudes of the men would choose to work at a pub like The Garrison. Women like Grace would simply this. Feminists such as **bell hooks** might talk about intersectionality with respect to her gender and her class both affect the way men like Tommy respond to her. The potential victim is shown when the landlord warns her off Tommy. But Grace shows the episode, she is leading a sing-a-long in the pub and the Shelbys enter. All the defiantly continues singing to the end.

The tension between Grace and Tommy is palpable and the episode ends with Tommy on the street outside The Garrison but walking on without acknowledging her. The direct connection they have, but at this stage we don't know whether this spells danger. Grace prove to be the classic **femme fatale** and the cause of his downfall? Or his

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## Ada

The final female character in episode 1 is Ada Shelby, younger sister of Tommy and Arthur. Ada is represented as a spirited young woman who is sure of her own mind and is secretly dating Freddie, once a friend and fellow comrade of Tommy on the battlefield but now a communist and agitator. The fact that the two meet in isolated and seamy locations (under a canal bridge and in Freddie's room) reflects the attitudes of the time that sexual relationships outside of marriage were frowned upon and the two discuss how the brothers would react were they to find out about the relationship. Ada is confident though that Freddie 'love[s] [her] more than [she] fear[s] them'. Ada's defiance can be seen as reflecting the increasing strength of women after World War I: they had been during the war and were keen to experience more of this. This attitude is reflected in her bobbed hair and shorter hemlines are a far cry from the long, dressed hair and long Edwardian dresses.

## The women in episode 1

### The Bechdel test

The American cartoonist Alison Bechdel in 1985 stated, as a way of reducing the number of film and TV shows needed to do the following to pass the Bechdel test:

- have at least two female characters (preferably who are named)
- that they should talk to each other (preferably about something other than men)

The producer of *Peaky Blinders*, Caryn Mandabach, has said that the show's creator

It is interesting to look at the women in *Peaky Blinders* in light of **Judith Butler's** gender theory. The women in this episode are all different, representing different ways of being 'female' and demonstrating a strength that would traditionally be attributed to male characters. Grace, in particular, is a subversion of gender performativity: her dress code and gesture codes suggest that she is a woman and yet the fact that she is working as a doctor for Campbell is at odds with this.

### Discussion Questions

- 1) How far do you think the representation of women reflects the social and historical background of the show?
- 2) Does the representation of women reinforce or subvert crime genre conventions?
- 3) How does the representation of the three women in episode 1 reflect ideas of both gender and class?

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# 11. The success and legacy of *Peaky Blinders*

In a media environment where there is so much choice (we can decide between terrestrial TV and any number of streaming services), it is vital that, to survive, a series has to have something unique. Despite the proliferation of costume dramas, *Peaky Blinders* offered something different: a gritty representation of working-class life which was a far cry from the glories of *Downton Abbey* or the sanitised world of *Call the Midwife*.

## Ratings and reception in the UK

Despite the reputation of *Peaky Blinders* as quite a niche show, its reputation in the UK was high, and this led, as we have said previously, to the BBC moving it to Series 5. Critics seemed impressed by the lavish sets and a story that is so well plotted. From the critics, especially Cillian Murphy, who had been lured back to the small screen and really made the role his own. However, there were criticisms of the 'glamour' which seemed less than realistic, and much debate has been made about the toxic masculinity of the show. However, despite some misgivings on the part of TV critics, the growing fan base has made the show a success. Series 5 opened on BBC One with an audience of 6.4 million viewers).

## Overseas success

So, how does a show that is about working-class gangsters in Birmingham become a success? Many other seemingly niche British TV shows and films, overseas fans love it. Maybe it is the themes (love, family, loyalty, etc.); maybe it is the nostalgia of the show with its costumes; maybe it is Knight's idea of creating a mythology, akin to that of westerns. Whatever it is, the show is loved and has been screened worldwide. Making it in the USA was a key to the show's international success. And Netflix stepping in to fund the series had initially been a disaster for the BBC. Netflix Company (after the scandal that came from the #MeToo movement) was an important partner in the show's success. At the time of writing, Series 1 had racked up 16.4 million views.

And the awards have helped raise the profile of the show. From winning the British Crime Awards for Best TV Series (for Steven Knight) in 2016 to the BAFTA TV Award for Best Drama Series in 2020. The show has won many domestic awards. However, the show has also done very well internationally, with awards for acting, directing and costume design at a number of award ceremonies across the world.

## Beyond the series

You know a show has widespread appeal when its influence transcends the TV screen. The popularity of the '*Peaky Blinders* look', which fans from across the world have embraced on social media platforms. There are the *Peaky Blinders* tours in a variety of cities that boast local bars that can sip cocktails in *Peaky Blinders* bars in Manchester, Liverpool and Birmingham. The show has inspired a musical scheduled for 2024 and the Rambert Dance Company toured in 2022 with a show inspired by the series.

And, in true Shirky style, the fans of the show have been really active creating their own online platforms. There are Facebook fan groups and a community site. You can find fan fiction on sites such as Wattpad and Archive of Our Own. These sites give fans the chance to explore the world of the show and create alternative scenarios for favourite characters. It's a powerful testament to the fact that the show carries on beyond the TV screen.

## Discussion Questions

- 1) How far do you think developing media technologies have contributed to the success of *Peaky Blinders*?
- 2) How important is a presence in the USA to a TV show's success?
- 3) Explain the importance of fans to the success of a TV show like *Peaky Blinders*.

## 12. Production background of *The Bridge*

### You get what you pay for – TV licensing in Scandinavia

Known domestically as *Bron/Broen*, *The Bridge* is a joint production by both the Danish and Swedish public service broadcasters DR1 and SVT1. Respectively, these two acronyms stand for Danish Broadcasting 1 and Swedish Television 1. As well as having equally uninventive names as our own BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation), these public service broadcasters have similar operating principles. Funded by television licensing charges (Sweden scrapped TV licences in 2019), these media organisations have certain requirements they must meet, and aim to produce quality content across radio, TV, journalism and so on.

Danish and Swedish residents pay higher rates of tax to fund their social institutions, and this carries over into public broadcasting. Licence fees in the UK (£170) a year per screen, whereas Danish citizens have to pay over double that (€ article by the *Irish Times*). This means that the two countries can allocate higher broadcasting outputs.

### Is the show prestige television?

The term 'prestige television' is not precise and can be debated, but generally those in order to be classed as prestige talent are considered to be some combination of

- a high production budget per episode
- serious subject matter / genre (sitcoms are out of the running here, sorry)
- critical acclaim and large audience numbers
- respected talent in the cast and crew

The most famous examples of this style of high budget, often high-concept television are *Bad*, *The Walking Dead*, *Westworld* and *Game of Thrones*. *The Bridge* might not fit these texts in terms of sheer viewership numbers, but the high production values and 'cultural' text mean that it definitely falls under the name of 'prestige television'.

### Production companies

The series was put together collaboratively by two companies: Nimbus Films and Filmlance International (which are located in Copenhagen and Malmo respectively). A possible reason for the critical acclaim that the programme has received for its high production values and cinematic aesthetics could be down to the fact that Nimbus Films has primarily worked in the world of Danish arthouse cinema. Since the mid 1990s, the company has mostly produced independent feature films by directors including Lars von Trier, being involved in the radical Dogme 95 cinematic movement that was spearheaded by controversial **auteur** director Lars von Trier.

Filmlance International, now owned by 21<sup>st</sup> Century Fox, is a small Swedish company located on the other side of the Øresund Strait. As an independent firm, Filmlance International has produced a variety of television, shorts and feature films for Swedish release, but *The Bridge* has been its highest-profile and most successful output to date. On the company's website, you are greeted by a large still of Saga Norén, and their 'about us' section proudly states their role as producers, as well as the success of the premise being sold around the world.

Considering the typical industrialised nature of mainstream television production, whereby major networks would utilise a **vertically integrated ownership model** and would have in-house production

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companies (e.g. BBC Studios, Sky Production, ITV Studios), the fact that *The Bridge* is produced by **independent companies** is unconventional. The production is estimated to have cost around 10 million per series, which places it firmly in the realms of 'prestige' television. It might not be as expensive as the 15 million per single episode of *Game of Thrones*, but it's definitely a comfortable amount for a crime drama.

The fourth and final series received an extra injection of funding from Copenhagen, placing a stake of around half a million euros into the marketing of the show. This demonstrates its domestic and international success, and the Copenhagen Film Fund recognises the cultural export of the Danish capital. The arts organisations such as the British Council support shows or films that have a proven following and proven their worth but haven't made any box-office or streaming records.



### Discussion questions

- 1) Why do you think the core premise has been so successful with regard to international audiences?
- 2) If the BBC raised TV licence fees to those of Denmark/Sweden, do you think the show would be positive for the organisation?
- 3) What benefits do audience members receive from public service broadcasters?



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## 13. Cultural background of *The Bridge*

From the perspective of British audiences, it can be easy to simply view Denmark and Sweden as places because of their geographical location, and the shared aspects of their cultural history. But much in the same way that international media can often combine a country like Scotland and Northern Ireland into one singular entity of 'Britain', the same could be said for Denmark and Sweden.

### Friendly neighbours – what common ground do they have?

Historically, Denmark and Sweden have been closely intertwined from the days of the Vikings and ancient Norse civilisation. This close relationship remains to this day and can be seen in many different areas of society and culture.

Both Sweden and Denmark are wealthy nations with a similar model of democratic socialism for their governments – taxes are high, especially on imported goods, but social welfare is very well funded as a result. Labour unions and workers' rights are highly protected legally, and worker satisfaction rates rank very high on global league tables. The standard of living and the average income in both nations rank among the top in Europe and in the entire world. Both countries are also low in terms of population – where the UK has nearly 70 million inhabitants, Sweden has around 10 million and Denmark a mere 6 million.

Socially, both Denmark and Sweden have cultural norms that prioritise spending time with loved ones and enjoying quality time as part of a group – the Danish idea of 'Hygge' became fashionable globally in recent years, a concept that can be roughly equated to being cosy and comfortable. Many employers in both countries make generous allowances for employees to look after their family (paternity leave, school holiday allowances, etc.)

Both countries also share a similar political model of democratic socialism, where citizens pay high taxes but also receive the benefits of well-funded institutions such as healthcare, public transport and education, to name a few.

### Where do the two countries diverge?

This topic might get quite complex, so let's start simple with climate and geography. Yet again, they're similar yet different (noticing a theme yet?). For one, Sweden is a much larger, emptier country with a noticeably harsher and more extreme climate than Denmark, stretching all the way north into the Arctic Circle. There are vast areas of uninhabited tundra, jagged mountain ranges, and lakes carved into the snow-covered landscape. Swedish horror film *Let the Right One In* (2009) showcases how this landscape can be so cold and frighteningly ambience.

Denmark, on the other hand, is further south and has a climate much more on par with the weather we get here in the UK. Equally, the country shares a land border with Germany, the heartland of Europe an easy feat.

Denmark and Sweden also have their own languages, and, while many people in the UK does mean that there can be a language barrier between these neighbouring nations, it's different money – the Swedish krona and Danish krone which both mean 'crown' and 'cost of everything'. Groceries and shopping is much higher in Sweden due to different

Culturally, there is a bit of a friendly rivalry between the Danes and the Swedes, similar to the South cultural divide in the UK. Swedish people, according to the Danish, have a very image focused, whereas the Danish are supposedly stand-offish and a bit more aren't based on fact, and have come about simply from years of social gossiping. The two countries perceive each other to be is an important part of their sociopolitical relationship.

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## How does *Bron/Broen* convey these concepts?

Separated physically by only a narrow stretch of icy water, it should theoretically cooperate cooperatively, right? But, unsurprisingly, the reality is not so simple. Organisational differences between the two police departments, and conflict between the Danish and Swedish police, throws up all forms of obstacles.

In Series 3, the body is discovered in a construction site in downtown Malmo, but the victim is a Dane, meaning another investigation that could become increasingly complex. The events of Series 1 and 2 are re-examined in the arrest of Saga's Danish counterpart, creating a clear tension between the two departments.

In the episode, the characters are provided with an insight into varying political perspectives on the bridge in the attitudes shown by Danish detective Hanne Thomsen towards the issue of 'political correctness'. Although this could at first be seen as just personal opinion, whether she believes gender neutrality to be irrelevant/useless, to which Hanne Thomsen, a 'Swedish' and mockingly comments that Sweden is very keen on being politically correct. Saga (also of an older generation than Saga) makes a small blunder when speaking to the police about the staged murder scene as a 'proper family', which Helle Anker's widow finds offensive. This is a comment, a scene that takes place at around 15 minutes into the episode.

While Hanne is an individual, her dialogue and stances on the issues of the tradition of gender neutrality (and how she frames these as being 'Swedish' ideas) could be seen as a representation of the prevailing ideology in Denmark. If *The Bridge* was seen as a way to mock/insult these attitudes, but, as it is a joint production, it is a genuine point about the two countries' differing stances on these issues.

It is easy to see why the core premise of *The Bridge* not only works as an effective and engaging story filled with inevitable tensions and clashes, but also as a way to connect both Denmark and Sweden. The commentary is very common in crime fiction – and *The Bridge* is a prime example of this.

## Relevance outside Northern Europe

The main premise of *The Bridge*, in which a major crime falls under the jurisdiction of two countries (acting to highlight both the common ground and tension between the two), resonates with a wide range of audiences. As mentioned in the article 'What is the Nordic noir genre?' on page 3, *Tunnel* focuses on the Mexican–American border as a catalyst for crime, violence and cultural conflict. *Tunnel* was a British–French adaption that swapped out the Øresund Bridge for the Channel Tunnel. These adaptations show that, while the content of the original series is specific to Denmark, the underlying concept was malleable enough to apply to a whole host of locations worldwide.

### Discussion questions

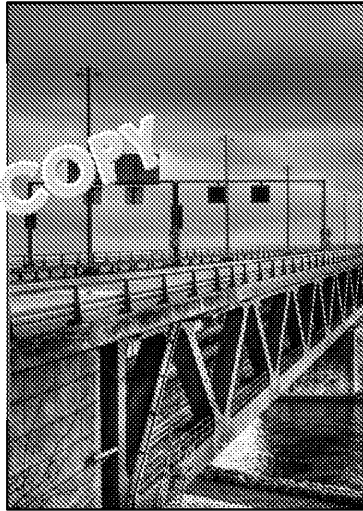
- 1) What similarities do the UK and Scandinavia have in common?
- 2) Considering semiotics and the conveyance of meaning, why might the producers have chosen the title for the series?
- 3) Why do you think the series is bilingual, i.e. dialogue is spoken in both Danish and Swedish, even though the series is set in separate countries?

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## 14. What is the 'Nordic noir' genre? (*The Bridge*)

In the world of 'prestige' television, there was a phenomenon that started around a decade ago with the 2007 Danish series *Forbrydelsen*, better known internationally as *The Killing*. This cold, moody and rain-soaked phenomenon of Scandinavian police/crime series became collectively known as Nordic noir. *The Bridge* was one of the standard-bearer texts that emerged out of this trend.



The subgenre of 'Nordic noir' (sometimes also called Scandinavian noir) very succinctly signals the two key aspects of the movement – a distinctly Scandinavian setting and cultural basis coupled with plots, characters and visual techniques that are strongly reminiscent of classic film noir.

For context, film noir was a movement of American crime and detective films that took place over the course of three decades, starting in the 1920s. So, what set film noir apart from other media that focused on police and criminality? Visually, film noir was characterised by dramatic lighting (extreme contrast between small areas of light and large swathes of shadow), a stylised use of smoke and rain, and characters peering out through venetian blinds.

Equally, the stories being told – and the troubled, morally ambiguous characters embroiled in them – appeared in the heyday of classic noir cinema. At the heart of the third series of *The Bridge* is a story that needs solving, conflict within the team, betrayal and deceit, and a story struggling to find the way to keep their own lives together. While the story plot have been updated to be relevant to modern-day Denmark/Sweden, the core themes are undeniably reminiscent of noir crime films such as *Double Indemnity* (1944) and *The Maltese Falcon* (1941) – just a couple.

Nordic noir makes use of many of these visual techniques from classic noir films – see the article 'Visual Style of *The Bridge*', page 32.

The Nordic aspect is, as you would expect, what sets these texts apart. The icy, urban landscapes of contemporary Denmark/Sweden, the cultural norms of these countries are central to these programmes. For example, *The Bridge* gets its title from the Øresund Bridge between Denmark and Sweden, and is emblematic of the political and cultural relationship between the two countries. *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* looks at corruption in modern Sweden and the influence of the far-right supremacists in the Nazi Party; *Borgen* is focused on Danish politics and is named after the Danish government meet.

If a Scandinavian director and production company had produced a crime film set in London, this would not be classed as a Nordic noir because it would not be commenting on the Nordic context.

### The rise of the genre in popularity of the style

But what exactly made these films and series so popular internationally? High production values aside, what was the spark that set interest outside of Denmark and Sweden? Steven Neale's work on genre classification puts forward the idea that a genre survives through repetition (to establish the category) and variation (to keep audiences engaged). It is this variation that may have played a part in this phenomenon.

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For UK, European and North American audiences, large budget, highly produced series have historically tended to be American (*NCIS*, *CSI: New York*, *True Detective*, *Morse*, *Luther*, *Broadchurch*, etc.). While these shows have been successful in their reception, they reflect the culture and society they have been produced in. Globally exposed to American and British media that frames issues – crime and corruption – from an American or British perspective. For example, we don't have the FBI in the UK armed with guns, the criminal justice system is different, and so on. This repetitive crime films and TV could have contributed to the success of *The Bridge* and other crime and policing that audiences weren't used to.

Another aspect was that foreign language texts can often be marketed as inherently intellectual. In English language texts. *The Killing*, *The Bridge* and others were sold on a channel that usually caters to people looking to consume more 'highbrow' media. Their popularity by signalling their quality ('Well, if smart people watch it, then it must be good').

The genre's decline in popularity can be linked back to Steven Neale's genre theory: once a product (not just in media) that becomes popular, a whole host of similar texts are produced, and it becomes oversaturated again. Nordic noir, like many other trends, faded out of popularity as it was no longer new and fresh, which is an entirely normal and expected trajectory. English-language remakes, such as the American remakes of *The Killing* and *The Bridge*, and the Øresund Bridge for the bridge between the USA and Mexico – El Paso-Ciudad Juárez – from the original series.

### Discussion questions

- 1) How can chiaroscuro lighting create/convey meaning?
- 2) What are the five Nordic countries?
- 3) Discuss why *The Bridge* and similar Nordic noir series were marketed as being 'highbrow'.



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# 15. Visual style of *The Bridge*

## Film noir influences – rain, smoke and peering through windows

Beyond a similar cynical and troubled attitude, **Nordic noir** also share a large overlap with the visual style and **iconography** of the classic cinematic style. Many of the hallmarks that are familiar to modern audiences are present in series such as *The Bridge*.

Police officers **investigate** a crime scene in the dark with torches, characters **stare** and **glare** peering through windows at suspicious men on the street below. **Dark**, **rain-soaked** urban environments only illuminated by the harsh beams of streetlights; these are all visuals from S3E1 of *The Bridge* that could easily have been plucked from the film reels of a 1920s detective noir thriller. But, like every media text, *The Bridge* has its own visual language composed of a variety of different influences and sources.

## Lighting

The lighting style used in *The Bridge* is more in line with modern crime dramas than the highly **chiaroscuro** cinematography used in film noir. The high-contrast lighting design means that scenes are often drenched in shadows, with only characters and foregrounds being light in the frame – an effective method of making safe, familiar domestic and office spaces feel unfriendly and cold. The same lighting methods are utilised in exterior shots – daytime scenes are bathed in **daylight**, while night-time scenes often make use of **streetlights** and torches to starkly cut through the **darkness**.

## Iconography of crime and the underbelly of society

As with any **procedural**, imagery relating to crime and the darker sides of human nature is at the forefront: crime scenes in unfinished building sites, back alleys, warehouses and car parks – all cold, uninviting places that we see every day. These locations impart a gritty yet believable atmosphere to the events of the show – this is a world away from a Sherlock Holmes-esque country house murder. Props and set dressing depict violence and criminal investigation. We see police tape, mundane-looking clipboards, etc. The Malmo CID headquarters is an ordinary-looking office with **no** *CSI: Miami* style sci-fi 3D hologram devices to help the detectives. The idea that, in this world, violence and hatred are simply a part of everyday life

## The backdrop of Malmo/Copenhagen

There are no scenic vistas of the Swedish countryside or city shots of the city at environments in *The Bridge*. Instead, we see **construction sites**, office buildings and other places where you'd rather not be come nightfall. Even family homes (Saga's boss), are starkly lit to impart an unnerving feeling.

Weather is a **key** player in the visuals of the series. If you're reading this, the **weather** will be **grey** longer to gloomy grey skies and year-round drizzle. It's also likely a 'fallacy' (probably in GCSE English Lit.), where the weather acts as a reflection of the tone of a scene / an event.

The combination of these grimy, dimly lit environments set against an equally drab like a potential crime scene.

Nordic film Scandinavian Chiaroscuro lighting Iconography of crime and the underbelly of society

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## Colour palette

Unlike the cynical, smoky, neon-lit film noir texts of the past, *The Bridge* is shot in a way where the use of colour is calculated and deliberate.

Primarily, shots in the series are comprised of an undersaturated, low-contrast palette of blues, greys and earth tones, which work to create a cold, unsettling atmosphere. Another advantage for the producers is that the bright scarlet hue of blood stands out against other tones, making scenes of violence feel more significant and powerful.

## Shot composition and camera movements

The way images are constructed in *The Bridge* S3E1 is neither hugely interesting nor highly stylised nor unconventional for a crime television series. The director and cinematographer have chosen to follow **conventional** compositional guidelines, such as: using the **rule of thirds** to place important visual information; avoiding extreme tilts/slants; making the movement of the camera seem 'invisible'.

The technique of **frame within a frame** is frequently used to make characters seem trapped or to convey a claustrophobic, tense atmosphere. For instance, we see an **OTS** shot of a character peering out from behind a curtain down onto a strange man lingering on the roadside below. We also see shots of Saga framed within the glass windows of Malmo CID as she works alone at night, conveying a sense that the metaphorical walls are closing in around her.

**Conventional**  
to standard

**Rule of thirds**  
where key elements  
dividing the frame

**Frame within a frame**  
elements (e.g. windows,  
etc.) surround the  
them seen

**OTS** – over the shoulder

## Discussion questions

- 1) How have the producers of *The Bridge* used a colour scheme to create an emotional atmosphere?
- 2) What is the symbolic meaning behind a character staring through a window?
- 3) If the murder of Helle Anker had taken place in a public park instead of a construction site, how would this affect the mood and meaning of the scene?

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# 16. Key themes in *The Bridge* Series 3 Episode 1

## Bigotry and hatred

At the very heart of the show is the murder of Helle Anker, a lesbian who was instrumental in opening the first gender-neutral school in Denmark. Her body is found staged in a bizarre scene of a mannequin nuclear family (husband, wife, two children) with large smiles drawn on all of the faces and toy food placed on the table in front of them. Gruesomely, Helle's heart has been removed.

Crime, especially murder in fictional texts takes on greater symbolic meaning than in real-world events. As a result, ideological terrorism, crime and violence in everyday existence is often unmotivated, random and chaotic. But as fictional texts are constructed, crime in a story holds significance. Who commits it and why, the spot of the act, whether the perpetrator faces justice or escapes capture – these have carefully chosen by the media producers to convey a message about society.

The murder of Helle Anker and how her corpse is displayed is intentionally symbolic (this type of symbolism is unusual'). The mannequin family tableau is a calculated visual metaphor for the perpetrators, seemingly a hateful backlash to Helle's work and her identity as a mother, very relevant to modern Western society, not just Nordic society.

Lise, the (seemingly single) mother who is introduced in this episode reprimanding and bullying of her daughter, is shown recording a video about Helle Anker 'defying Denmark's family and being a 'threat' to traditional values. While she doesn't outwardly use inflammatory language, her rhetoric of 'destroying traditional families' is in line with the same groups. Lise is later revealed to be a lawyer with a strong online presence as a conservative.

## Family relationships

Family is a key theme that appears in the episode, but with a focus on dysfunctional and perfect relationships.

1. Saga is being pushed by her distant mother who cries out that Saga's father is not their real father, to which Saga runs up to her apartment and locks the door, leading to a tense encounter. (This is a key example of Barthes' enigma code as the scene reveals hints at a whole backstory that may be revealed.)
2. We see a man, later revealed to be Danish detective Henrik assigned to the case, who has a happy family life but cheats on his wife. Confusingly, he later shares information with his wife, who seems unfazed. (Again, an enigma code within the narrative.)
3. Prior to the crime, Helle Anker's family life was happy and stable; but the murder of her husband, the instability, especially when Helle's estranged son Morten reappears.

Personal relationships are a common theme and source of conflict in many crime stories. This subgenre is no different. In these stories, there are very few relationships that are perfect. In the dangerous world the characters inhabit.

## Post-traumatic stress disorder

The son of Helle Anker, Morten, is a combat veteran of the War in Afghanistan. Suffering from PTSD, he has taken to living in a bunker, surrounded by traps, such as the bomb that exploded towards Hanne towards the end of the episode, and has isolated himself from everyone. The explosion, which makes him homeless, and a traumatic episode causes him to nearly strangle a passer-by in a violent panic.

As a combat veteran with severe mental health issues as a result of being in war, Morten can be seemingly representative of veterans not receiving the support they need once they have returned. This is not an exclusive problem to Denmark and is a common problem in many 'developed' countries across the world.

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## Deception

Deception is inescapable in a crime narrative as (shockingly) murderers tend not to be trustworthy of people. Helle Anker's murder is a deception as the killer(s) has/have those responsible for an act of terrorism are likely to do); they are looking to avoid. The use of deception in a narrative generates enigma codes, one of semiotician Roland Barthes' usage. If the audience knows someone is lying, or if viewers and/or a character suspects someone is untruthful, it raises the questions: *Why are they lying?* and *How have they got to hide it?* Deception is a fundamental part of these narratives. After all, you don't get to be a

### Discussion Questions

- 1) How does deception help build suspense in a story?
- 2) Why do you think the series' creators chose to include the ideas of bigotry and homophobia?
- 3) Do you think these themes are conventional or unconventional for a crime narrative?

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## 17. Morality and cynicism in *The Bridge*

### The strained connection between legality and morality

Traditional crime fiction has presented the law as being morally 'correct' and criminality as being 'wrong' (an example of a **binary opposite**), with very little in the way of nuance. But in the late 1920s, noir cinema introduced a more realistic and cynical view of the law and the criminal justice system. Dishonesty and corruption are no longer solely reserved for criminals, but also tainted the detectives, lawyers and judges who traditionally were presumed to be clearly on the side of justice.

It could easily be argued that the intention of mainstream media producers to depict the law/police as morally correct and criminality as being always evil, regardless of circumstance, is an *ideological decision*. It is beneficial for governments to portray narratives that the police and legal institutions can do no wrong, and media that questions this idea could be a potential threat to their power.

But, over time, as the landscape of media industries has become more diverse and able to comment on and criticise society with much more freedom. Modern crime are far more critical and complex in their depiction of the law and the inner work of the 'thin blue line'.

### Saga Norén as the moral compass

Relentless in the pursuit of justice, often to the detriment of her own health and Saga Norén is positioned as being the moral compass of the series. But another sign of Saga is rarely rewarded for being right. Traditional police procedurals, courtroom often end with the protagonist being vindicated in some way. They may have been nearly defeated, over the course of the story, but eventually they would be rewarded with determination and action that result in capturing a killer, she remains troubled.

For example, in Series 1, we see an after-effect of Saga's arrest of Martin Rohde – he is in Series 2 who was uncovered to be a murderer and is now serving 10 years in prison with Saga, Hanne voices her displeasure and states that she doesn't believe Saga to be a detective, even though the audience has been repeatedly shown that she is.

### Postmodern morality

It is important to note that *The Bridge* isn't nihilistic in tone, and there is still an idea of right and the notions of 'right and wrong'. However, the series could be described as being

The attitude of *The Bridge* towards morality could be described as **postmodern**. In this 'school of thought', postmodernism rejects the overarching grand narratives that art, literature, religion and ways of thinking. One of the most pervasive and fundamental narratives is the idea that these two ideas of 'right' and 'wrong' are fixed, distinct. If you take these ideas and throw them all in the bin, what are you left with? Well, a sense of moral ambiguity and subjectivity.

- Moral ambiguity – ethical decisions are not always clear-cut, and some actions are neither 'right' and 'wrong'
- Moral relativism – the 'right thing' to do depends on your situation and circumstances. 'Is it ok to steal bread to feed your starving family?' is an example.

The culmination of Series 2 sees Martin eventually arrested (by Saga) for killing her child, whether violence is always concretely wrong or whether it is dependent on the situation. If you see your child, how would you react? Would you kill them if you had the chance? This is the question, and that's precisely the point the show aims to convey.

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In Series 3 Episode 1, we can see examples of this ambiguous attitude to ethics: it seems accepting of this; Saga's mother mentions '*her crime*', implying a darkness disrespectful towards a grieving widow despite her role as a detective. There are evil people in the world of *The Bridge*, and the only important difference is when to unleash the darkness inside them.

### Discussion questions

- 1) Why might postmodernist theorists dismiss the idea that the law is morally right in any circumstance, regardless of context?
- 2) Why do you think the producers of *The Bridge* decided to present Saga as the morally ambiguous character?
- 3) What moral questions are raised by presenting police, detectives, judges and other justice workers as morally ambiguous? This can be either positive or negative.



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## 18. Gender representation in *The Bridge* (and Nordic noir)

### Updating 'noir' to the modern day

Many elements of noir crime films still resonate today, but the representation of women as either femme fatale seductresses, damsels in distress or lawful motherly characters is something that does not translate into contemporary media. So, when it came to reviving 'noir' as a style, how did the producers of series (including *The Bridge*, of course) choose to depict gender?

As a subgenre, Nordic noir has become known for turning the expected gender dynamics of crime films on its head. Part of what generated critical acclaim for *The Killing* (*Forbrydelsen*) was the character of Sarah Lund. A high-rank, relentless and uncommunicative with everyone – traits and attributes that were the genre.

Detectives in crime stories have long been brooding, troubled men. Ex-wives, alcohol, excessive force, etc. are all things audiences have seen before. *The Bridge* does not, instead, presents a much more complex and realistic depiction of gender.

### Saga Norén

Saga Norén, much like Sarah Lund of *The Killing*, is a world away from the female cinema. Instead, she is our lead detective – relentlessly investigative and dedicated to her past and her problems with interpersonal relationships.

A notable decision by the producers of *The Bridge* is Saga's car. Having a stylish vehicle is a common trope with male detectives (see Detective Chief Inspector Geth). And being interested in cars is not adding to any male character attribute. But in *The Bridge*, Saga's Porsche, while almost all other characters make do with a 'washing-machine-on-wheels', has long been a staple of male protagonists in detective fiction.

One important aspect of how Saga is represented is that she, and her body, is not a 'spectacle' in the way that feminist theorist van Zoonen puts forward that many female characters are. She is shown to be sexually active in the fact that she occasionally picks up men. This is framed to show her inability to connect with people on an emotional level; it is a character development rather than being titillation for a male spectator.

Conversely, feminist theorist bell hooks may make the argument that the representation of gender stereotypes is slightly 'safe' due to the fact she is a white woman in a position of power (and law enforcement). Hooks' revised model of patriarchal society states that the hierarchy of power has men at the top of this pyramid, white women are still ranked above all people of color, and racial prejudice in the system.

### Masculinity

Morten's character could be seen to embody traits relating to traditional values of masculinity. Crucially, he is a war veteran, a role that has historically been held up as being the most masculine. Decades have gone by since they opened their ranks to women, so, over thousands of years, men have been encouraged to fight for their country. Morten, however, is extremely damaged and his experiences isolate him, struggles to express his emotions, and is unconsciously shown in flashbacks due to his PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder). His character could be seen to challenge the notion that men should be emotionless and that violence is a masculine virtue.

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Although his name and role as a detective are revealed to the audience only at the representation of masculinity. A loving father in a (seemingly) stable marriage, he comes to earth in his interactions as he flirts with the woman in the museum/stairwell. He appears to be fine, and could potentially be an open marriage – but this thread is explored in a later episode.

The unidentified male character, who we see only briefly feeding his snakes, is in fact Helle Anker. Being the first episode, we are shown very little here hint as to his personality or appearance in this brief scene. From the way he interacts with the woman, we know that he embodies some of the traits typically associated with masculinity, such as a gruff exterior and the potential for violence.

In Series 1 of the show, Martin Rohde was the Danish detective assigned to solve the major cases in the series arcs. Intentionally, the writers decided to make Martin a female detective and a counterpart to Saga's gruff persona. He was a caring father figure with his own whims, unlike Saga's rigid methodology. However, he is ultimately arrested for protecting his eldest son, August. Martin Rohde eschews the typical gender stereotypes of men and is instead a more nuanced realistic character.

## Gender roles and stereotyping – does the show conform to traditional gender roles and stereotyping?

While the way in which the show's writers and creators have constructed the characters often contradict the traditional roles and traits of men and women in the crime genre, the show also explores gender roles within the story itself. (This idea is explored more in the article 'Key Themes in *The Bridge*'.)

Overall, gender stereotyping is largely avoided. Male characters often exhibit 'feminine' traits, and this decision by lead writer Hans Rosenfeldt was a conscious choice to reflect reality. The gruff, stony machismo of the classic Hollywood detective has been replaced by diverse personalities that don't easily fit into tropes. The show is an example of how female roles and personality traits of their male counterparts in the Nordic noir movement have changed. Theory on how the media depicts masculinity and femininity have become more complex in recent years.

When it comes to hierarchical power, male characters still occupy important positions in *The Bridge* itself (such as Hans Petterson, Henrik and the owner of the Danish haulage company). Female characters (Saga, Hanne, the head of the Copenhagen police force) are given power and authority.

### Discussion questions

- 1) Why do you think there are more female detectives and characters in modern crime media texts?
- 2) Why do you think the writers chose to make the killer a man?
- 3) If Saga's character were swapped for a male lead, how do you think this would impact *The Bridge*? Consider Steven Neale's theory on genre classification.

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## 19. How successful was *The Bridge*?

As mentioned before, *Bron/Broen (The Bridge)* has been one of the notable pieces to emerge from the brooding, ominous Nordic noir wave of the late 2000's / early 2010's. We get into a marketing mindset and see what the cold hard numbers have to say about successes (or failings) of the show. Unlike a film, it's harder to tell how profitable a television programme is because there are no box office results for broadcast television.

### Domestic success

This is where the programme was always expected to shine, so it's not a huge surprise that it made it appealing and relevant to audiences in two countries, a large series budget, sensibilities of a production company, and a style that fits into a hugely popular genre. These factors provided a solid foundation for *The Bridge* to build upon.

Viewing figures were fairly reasonable from the outset and solidly grew over the course of the recent series saw a combined audience figure of 3.3 million in Sweden, Denmark, Finland, considering the later timeslot and mature content, is a sizeable market share.

### International success

As you will have picked up on by now, the global success of *The Bridge* was the unknown for the production companies and creators.

The UK has been one of the largest non-domestic audiences for Nordic noir media (rain-drenched Northern European settings clicked with our collective consciousness), in this success has been distribution by the BBC.

The BBC's model of having a variety of channels, radio stations and online media outlets to cater to audiences' needs/wants means that it can sometimes distribute niche media with a single TV channel. If you were the commissioning editor for the BBC, and you decided to commission a crime series about a horrific murder at prime time on BBC One, you can bet you'd produce it the following day.

But BBC Four has an established reputation for broadcasting niche appeal programmes, waters with *The Killing*, which drew unexpectedly large viewing figures (climbing to a peak of 1.2 million) in the UK, UK enthusiasts of international television and/or crime drama, and a mix of chilly Scandinavian mystery and intrigue in the shape of the first series of *Bron/Broen*, laid down by risk-taking channel executives, *The Bridge* surpassed viewing figures of *The Killing*, soaring to a peak of 1.1 million viewers.

### Critical acclaim

It's important to note that, on a general level with any piece of media, critical acclaim is not always correlated with viewing figures or box-office sales. Glowing reviews from trusted critics can help, for example, in the marketing of a film. Arguably the goal for any mainstream media producers is to create a text that is both

*The Bridge* has been well-received by audiences and professional reviewers but has received less critical coverage compared to more popular global media products. Compared to a series such as *Game of Thrones*, series 1–3 of the show don't have enough professional reviews on IMDb to get a score. Overall, on IMDb (Internet Movie Database), the entire show has an aggregate score of 8.8, all reviews into a numerical score.

### Legacy

The original series has come to an interesting final conclusion by the creators, as opposed to many other series on television networks. The legacy of the show lies in the *franchising* of the format internationally and welcoming other producers of the original.

### Discussion questions

- 1) Why do you think *Bron/Broen* was remade in other countries rather than the original?
- 2) Despite the fact that the show was successful and could have continued running, it ended *The Bridge* in 2018, with the fourth series being its last. Do you think this decision was unconventional for a modern media text?

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## 20. Two sides of the same coin – how *Peaky Blinders* and *The Bridge* treat the same ideas in different ways

As you will know as a Media Studies student, a lot of focus and attention is given to film in context to their genres. What generic conventions does a film contain? Could it be such and such a category?, etc. While this is an important part of a critical analysis, one often overlooked is the *tone* of a media text.

The tone of a text is unrelated to its content or form and is better thought of as the attitude towards the subject matter. For example, saying 'really cool' to someone sarcastically doesn't alter the meaning, it just suddenly shifts the meaning significantly. It is interesting to examine how *The Bridge* and *Peaky Blinders* deal with themes (crime, politics, etc.) but deal with them in very different ways and in very different tones.

### Crime as a theme

Crime is integral to the plots of both series, but this is hardly a profound thing to say. However, as it is used as a means of commenting on society, *The Bridge* and *Life on Mars* take two very different approaches.

In *The Bridge*, the crimes are the focus. They are grotesquely symbolic, and they are used to be a pointed commentary on modern life either side of the Øresund. Helle Anker, a lesbian, has started a gender-neutral school, is murdered and posed in a mannequin family scene for ideological reasons, and this conflict underpins the mystery driving Series 3.

Meanwhile, Tommy Shelby's dystopian-style world of Birmingham in 1919 is a world where the lines of morality are blurred and, unusually for a crime drama, we find ourselves aligning with the Shelby's (though obviously not always condoning their actions) against the heavy-handedness of the police, exemplified by Chief Inspector Campbell.

### Satire versus social commentary

The intention of the producers is a key factor in why these two shows are very different. *The Bridge* has the intent of reflecting the dark, gritty realities of Denmark and Sweden, with the major focus on the social issues that these countries are affected by right this very second. Hans Rosling had no intention of making the show comical or satirical in any way, something that *Peaky Blinders* is made for. *The Bridge* is made for serious, but 'funny' would very much be pushing it.

*Peaky Blinders*, in its genre hybridity, was written more as a way of mythologising men who aren't normally the focus of TV drama: here we are introduced to the harshness of the world of Birmingham, where fighting for king and country does not gain you respect and status, but you must forge your own way in the world.

### Audience appeal

One of the reasons why these two texts differ dramatically in tone and atmosphere – despite an overlap in themes and story beats – is audience appeal. *The Bridge*, with its unrelentingly dark and suspenseful atmosphere and serious treatment of the genre/style, could appeal to dedicated fans of detective dramas more than *Peaky Blinders*, which might be seen to appeal more to fans of historical drama and family sagas than principally fans of crime drama.

As Blumler and Katz outlined in their work on uses and gratifications, audiences have different terms of what they seek to get out of media content. The international audience of *The Bridge* might use the show to gain perspective into life in a unfamiliar country, with entertainment being a secondary concern, whereas the audiences of *Peaky Blinders* might use the show to learn more about life in Edwardian Birmingham, as well as enjoying the tension (and even perhaps the violence) in the show.

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### Discussion questions

- 1) Discuss the differences between *Peaky Blinders* and *The Bridge*.
- 2) Discuss the similarities between *Peaky Blinders* and *The Bridge*.
- 3) Which show do you prefer, and why?

## Show What You Know

Below are a number of practice essay questions. Have a go at answering them using the knowledge you have gained.

- 1) In *The Bridge*, Helle Anker's corpse is displayed in a bizarre scene. Discuss this scene and how it relates to the key themes of the series. Use the set episodes to support your answer.
- 2) Todorov argues that all narratives share a basic structure that involves a moment of equilibrium, a disruption, and a resolution. Evaluate this narrative theory. Use the set episodes to support your answer.
- 3) Both *Peaky Blinders* and *The Bridge* are media texts that have a strong link to their respective cities and were very successful domestically. Evaluate the success of both series in terms of their production factors, audiences and global society.
- 4) Liesbet van Zoonen suggests that in the media 'femininity is about care, nurturing and protection'. Evaluate this idea in light of the representation of women in both *Peaky Blinders* and *The Bridge*.
- 5) How far could *Peaky Blinders* be described as being 'realistic'? Consider how the series content has been used to create a representation of the 'real world', and evaluate the choices made to do this.

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# Answers

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## 1. Audience targeting – who watches crime dramas, and why?

- 1) The decision to remake the series instead of dubbing the original would be more general audience would watch the remake compared to a small, niche audience.
- 2) Audiences of crime dramas are not likely to imitate the criminal behaviour. do these texts frame crime as right and wrong, they are also focused on justice. Equally, *Bandersnatch* was focused on child audiences, and crime dramas by adult audiences.

## 2. Compare and contrast – public service broadcasters in the UK and in Sweden

- 1) Public service broadcasters have to incorporate new technology into their services. has expanded into online media, streaming services (iPlayer) and digital audiences.
- 2) Public service broadcasters are funded by taxes / TV licences, meaning that they do not need to make a profit to survive. This means that they can take more risks and have financial security.

## 3. The production of *Peaky Blinders* – how it was created, developed and broadcast

- 1) As a PSB the BBC has the creative freedom to take risks with shows. This means more niche or which might not otherwise have been made. There is also an obligation to payers and this gives a voice to areas of the UK (like Birmingham) which might otherwise be ignored. The BBC might not have the budgets that some other productions might have. As a problem: instead he loved the creativity with the production team.
- 2) Before the show had an established fan base, the scheduling reflected the niche audience it would attract. However, as the reputation of the show grew (through social media) the BBC felt justified in moving the show to its prime-time slot.
- 3) While S1E1 does not show some of the extreme violence we see in later episodes. number of scenes which are violent, disturbing and graphic and which would be in a different position. scenes such as the beating of Arthur Shelby and the shooting of Danny. journey of Campbell through Birmingham where we see couples having sex in public. taking would all suggest that this show belongs post-watershed.

## 4. Flat caps, shell shock and gambling: life in 1919 (*Peaky Blinders*)

- 1) 1919 was a period of change in Britain, with a generation of young men coming back from the trenches damaged and disgruntled. As a result, the growth of communism (and the way those who felt let down by the government could make their voices heard) and the independence of women (who had begun with their roles in World War I) created strong women in the series.
- 2) There is a value in learning about any unfamiliar society, and in this way *Peaky Blinders* explores universal themes and representations are also explored and will have a wider audience: themes like family loyalty, honour vs love, betrayal, secrets and lies, and an appealing show.
- 3) The women in this era are all different and all fulfil differing functions. They are feared and respected by the men. She challenges Tommy in a way others cannot. women who kept families and businesses going through the difficulties of World War I. more liberated after World War I, eager to take control of her life and more. Grace at this stage is a typical femme fatale: beautiful yet a threat to Tommy.

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## 5. Who were the real Peaky Blinders?

- 1) Moving from the Victorian era allowed Knight to take some of the elements (locations, outfits, etc.) but set them in a time of greater change. It also means he doesn't have to follow the 'truth' exactly: he could be more creative with his portrayal of them.
- 2) Knowing the gang actually existed and lived in the Small Heath area of Birmingham makes them more 'real'. It gives fans the opportunity to explore the real gang (note all the documentaries that explore them and have led to the gang becoming a phenomenon in its own right).
- 3) The 'real' characters give the series a validity that the myth of Birmingham lacks. Blending the real with creative characters makes it feel more like bringing history to life.

## 6. The aesthetics of *Peaky Blinders*

- 1) The show is beautifully shot and realised: lots of the scenes feel symbolic and the way the camera helps us think about the sets and costumes and make links between these and the hell imagery in particular is really striking in this first episode.
- 2) In addition to what was explored in the article, there is a real sense of hierarchy and status. As was definitely something said in newspapers and historical accounts about the Peaky Blinders, the gang dress in a smart, aspirational way which evokes admiration and fear in other characters. Note Freddie's allusion to Tommy as a 'prince'. This would show how the Peaky Blinders, seen after World War I, the Peaky Blinders (and those under their protection) were seen as a new breed of gangster.
- 3) There are so many: the train journey, which is shown for a reasonable amount of time as symbolic of the danger 'rushing' towards Tommy and the Shelbys; the car chase between Tommy and Freddie's relationship from her brothers; and the church where Polly and her brothers have connotations of morality, is an ironic place to discuss a theft and for Tommy to be seen as a criminal.

## 7. The tale of a gangster family: narrative in *Peaky Blinders*

- 1) This creates a sense of energy and mystery and tension. It gives the audience's mind something to really easy to start with a long exposition about the family and character. It sets up so many questions in the audience's mind. But what is brilliant about it is that we are nowhere are we lost or confused.
- 2) There is a continuity between episodes so that even subplots (like the relationship between Tommy and Arthur, Danny Whizz-Bang) all fit into the main narrative. The ideas of power, loyalty and danger and they help us build up a picture of the family, the characters and the world of Tommy.
- 3) Where do you start?! There is so much threat and danger here, from the very beginning. The erratic behaviour of Danny which threatens the peace among Birmingham's characters, like Freddie, are linked to the main plot through his connection to the family.

## 8. Tommy Shelby as an anti-hero (*Peaky Blinders*)

- 1) There are so many qualities that make Tommy difficult to like: he is a loner, he is violent, he lies. But Knight is keen to highlight his positive qualities: his intelligence, his sense of duty, his protection of weaker characters like Danny. We also see him as a war hero and his experiences. The performance of Cillian Murphy also helps us to find it hard to dislike him. His performance is incredibly intense and totally 'cool'.
- 2) So, in terms of the violence shown by Tommy and the other members of the Peaky Blinders, the masculinity, especially as we are positioned with a female audience, and they are portrayed as having little respect for women: he is dismissive of Grace in episode 1, and he accuses Grace of being a 'whore' to her face.
- 3) It is easy to see how audiences might have an oppositional reading to the Peaky Blinders due to the explicit violence and the qualities outlined above. However, we can also see that Tommy is a damaged and conflicted character: he is not wholly admired and respected. As an audience we are obviously drawn to the family as the heroes of the piece, despite the violence they commit and the way they break the law (the preferred reading). In the same way that we root for outlaws in classic Westerns like *and the Sundance Kid*, so we are encouraged to want the Shelbys to triumph over the Campbell. The fact that the representation of characters like Arthur, Tommy and the other Peaky Blinders means that the way we view them could be problematic as they live immoral lives and commit violence on their rivals (negotiated reading).

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## 9. *Peaky Blinders* as a postmodern text

- 1) The opening sequence where Tommy rides through the city on horseback is western. Also the idea of the gang as outlaws, evading the 'lawmen' like Carson, the scene of the house being divided (family home at the front and bookies at the back), film, reminiscent of the speakeasies that aimed to fool the police.
- 2) Being able to see the intertextual references certainly adds to the viewer's pleasure. It is so compelling and the themes (e.g. good vs. evil) are so universal that it is easy to enjoy the programme.
- 3) In the way that these characters are more than life, the working class pitted against a supercool and aspirational world, the show is aiming to mythologise their story. And the 'Peaky Blinders look' has become a way into the public's consciousness, we can see the

## 10. The women in *Peaky Blinders*

- 1) In the way that the women reflect the time period in which the drama is set (women had been given more independence and were keen to hold onto this). However, that, in working-class communities, women always had more agency than in other dramas. Having strong women also helps draw in a modern audience by showing being in positions of power with weak women around them.
- 2) Grace as a femme fatale is typical of classic crime texts. Polly is less typical: she does not have a patriarchal set-up. Women are loved and respected but very much pitted against men.
- 3) As said above, strong women were much more prevalent in working-class communities. Ada is seen as innocent and vulnerable (see the reaction to Grace's desire to work). Ada as a woman who knows her mind: she is happy to defy her brothers and go it alone with Freddie open and above board.

## 11. The success and legacy of *Peaky Blinders*

- 1) The development of streaming services like Netflix has had a massive influence on the industry internationally. Streaming services like this make it easy for fans across the world to watch. It takes time to distribute through traditional methods. The importance of social media in the show, post images and create fan fiction again helps to ensure its success.
- 2) The US is a massive market and can absolutely help a show's success internationally. It is really lucky to both strike a deal early on with The Weinstein Company and secure its distribution, not only in the US but also in other territories. And with more money: and more opportunities to develop the show and increase its production value.
- 3) As *Peaky Blinders* started off as a niche BBC Two show, the fans have been instrumental to its success. Sharing opinions and recommendations, by word of mouth and online, has helped to encourage a bigger audience. Copying the '*Peaky Blinders* look' has raised it to become a part of our culture. And the fan responses from community sites, podcasts, etc. mean the show has a life beyond the TV screen.

## 12. Production background of *The Bridge*

- 1) There are many places in the world where relationships with neighbouring countries are a core concept can be made easily relatable to international audiences through the use of metaphors.
- 2) This question is intentionally open to encourage the student to consider the different answers could be:
  - a. Positive – high-quality content would result in better-quality content from other countries.
  - b. Negative – PSBs could turn away viewers who may switch to solely commercial channels in the BBC losing funding.
- 3) Benefits of PSBs include: impartial content; media industries can't be monopolised; regulated by watchdog organisations unlike private companies.

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### 13. Cultural background of *The Bridge*

- 1) Similar climate; shared Viking history; both located in Northern Europe; share wealthy regions; both regions are technologically advanced – any reasons are acceptable.
- 2) Symbolically, a bridge can signify a connection between people and parts of a function. The producers may have chosen the title because it encapsulates the idea of being connected in many ways, including through language.
- 3) A high proportion of Danish and Swedish people can speak both languages; dubbing version rather than dubbing two separate versions.

### 14. What is the 'Nordic Noir' genre? (*The Bridge*)

- 1) Any answer that indicates the fact that the high contrast between light and dark – conflict – emotional, physical, verbal, internal, etc.
- 2) Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Iceland
- 3)
  - The assumption that media texts that aren't English language are inherently more serious
  - The high production values coupled with the serious tone of the genre are perceived to be more cultured than comedy.

### 15. Visual style of *The Bridge*

- 1) The use of desaturated greys, browns, blues and blacks could evoke an audience that is unnerved, sad or unsettled due to the complete lack of bright, warm colours.
- 2) A character peering through a window could symbolise paranoia, feeling trapped, or the desire to leave home, fear, etc. Any reasonable interpretation is acceptable.
- 3) If the murder had taken place in a park, this would change the meaning of the setting to a place to relax, a place for families, a place for nature, etc. – it would create a positive atmosphere of a park and the grim nature of the murder.

### 16. Key themes in *The Bridge* series – Episode 1

- 1) Deception and mystery as it acts as an enigma code (instils questions in the audience when the audience knows the truth).
- 2) Any answer that explores the idea that fictional media that aims to be based on a reflection of a real-world issue. The writers/producers are looking to convey a message in the real world, not just in the story.
- 3) For the genre and style, these themes are conventional – there is no major theme that appeared in other films or series.

### 17. Morality and cynicism in *The Bridge*

- 1) The law is a human construct and is flawed – rejecting established ideas of justice, whether the law is just and fair.
- 2) Saga is an unconventional lead for the genre, and she is the most dedicated in catching perpetrators, despite her own flaws and questionable actions.
- 3) The depiction of law enforcement could force audience members to question whether lawyers, judges, etc. are doing the right thing to protect people.

### 18. Gender representation in *The Bridge* (and Nordic noir as a subgenre)

- 1) Because the genre has changed, and there are more women in both law enforcement and crime fiction. According to the number of women in fictional depictions of the police / crime genre – has changed to reflect this.
- 2) Choosing a male killer could be seen as a way of grounding the show in reality as most murderers and serial killers are male, and *The Bridge* is trying to create a believable world.
- 3) The crime/detective genre has had male leads for decades – repetition – but the unique aspects of the show and contributes to keeping the genre fresh through its characters.

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## 19. How successful was *The Bridge*?

- 1) Because the content of *The Bridge* was specifically related to Swedish and Danish audiences may have found it hard to connect with / relate to the original text.
- 2) Unconventional because profit-driven companies would keep the show running in order to maximise commercial success.

## 20. Two sides of the same coin – how *Life on Mars* and *The Bridge* treat crime in different ways

- 1) *Life on Mars* is in English, *The Bridge* is in Swedish/Danish; *Life on Mars* is a detective drama, *The Bridge* is set in the 1970s, *Life on Mars* is set in the present; *The Bridge* does not; *Life on Mars* is a satire about UK policing, *The Bridge* on the other hand is faced by Danish and Swedish society
- 2) Both are focused on police procedure and solving crime; both have detectives from Northern European cultures; both have been produced by public service television series; both have been successful (commercially and critically); both have been franchised and remade
- 3) This is down to personal taste, but the answer should be articulate and clear.

### Practice essay questions

- 1)
  - Unsolved violent crime – murder especially – is a convention of detective fiction.
  - Helle Anker was an LGBT activist, a married lesbian, and the founder of a women's shelter.
  - Her murder, followed by her corpse being displayed like this, is a stark deviation from the traditional norm of a heterosexual couple having a funeral through brutal violence.
  - This visual imagery also indicates that this is an intentional killing.
  - This scene establishes that the murderer is motivated by bigotry and hatred.
- 2)
  - Both set episodes, as starting points in a series, do not seem to fit in with the disruption of equilibrium in episode 1 so that in the rest of the series we work towards the re-establishment of the equilibrium. This is more of a post-occasional, we see the police trying to uncover the identity of the murderer. *Peaky Blinders* works towards this end. *Peaky Blinders* is more complex and harder to define.
  - Both set episodes have multiple disruption sequences. In *Peaky Blinders* (with the plots and subplots) makes the narrative rich and multifaceted. *The Bridge* although in this series the variety of characters who are involved in the crime although the audience has no idea how (classic hermeneutic).
  - There is a condensed equilibrium in both episodes. *The Bridge* starts with the posing of the body in a bizarre family group. We see Saga arrive to investigate within the first few minutes: as this is the beginning of Series 3 there is a sense of equilibrium as the writers expect the show will be watched by the established audience. In the first episode of *Peaky Blinders* being Series 1 episode 1, we are again thrown into a sense of exposition. Instead the audience pieces together aspects of the story as the episode (and series) progresses.
- 3)
  - *Peaky Blinders* was made for and distributed by the BBC with worldwide distribution. This creates a strong perception of the show being seen as a BBC production (on the 'main layer') and a 'Netflix Original' (being available on Netflix on a secondary level). This is a common strategy with outlets in North America, Asia, Oceania, Africa and Europe. This is a common strategy for a media text to be distributed globally through these networks.
  - *The Bridge*, on the other hand, is a joint production by both the Danish and Swedish broadcasters DR1 and SVT1. The Danish and Swedish PSBs only broadcast the same reach compared to the BBC.

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- The production of *The Bridge* was managed by Nimbus Films and Filmia, one of Sweden's top production companies and has sold *The Bridge* to worldwide.
  - International audiences, especially in North America, will often prefer subtitles rather than English subtitling or dubs: there is a US version of *The Bridge* (*Bridge of the Americas* – the bridge connecting Mexico to the USA (similar to *Tunnel*, which takes place in the Channel Tunnel)). However, both of these versions have been criticised for not capturing the idea behind *The Bridge* as really marketed.
  - English is one of the most-spoken languages globally, compared to Danish with a smaller number of speakers in Scandinavia: this has an impact on the series. However, a US audience website cites *The Bridge* as one of its key inspirations.
  - Netflix's purchase of rights to *Peaky Blinders* has had a huge impact in terms of audience for the programme.
- 4)
- *Peaky Blinders'* depiction of women
    - Variety of women in terms of age and background gives us a rounded picture.
    - Women are treated as objects of desire, as delicate and as needing protection. Grace works the job at The Garrison initially as she is seen to be too pretty; Tommy calls her a 'whore' if she is working behind the bar. This fits into the virgin/whore dichotomy: if not a virgin, then she must be a 'whore'.
    - In reality, women in the series are strong. Polly has kept the family together. Grace is working for Campbell as a mole. Polly's outfits are tailored to her power, reflecting her power within the family.
    - Ada is a good example of a liberated young woman in post-war England. She dresses, has her secret affair with Freddie, etc.
  - *The Bridge* depiction of women
    - Women – Saga, Hanne, the head of Copenhagen CID – are shown as strong and independent.
    - Saga embodies traditionally masculine traits – emotionally stoic, but caring.
    - Women are still shown to be on the receiving end of sexual assault and the murder of Helle Anker. This is a good example – indicating that women are still vulnerable.
    - Overall, the depiction of women, female sexuality, the issues of gender inequality and violence towards women is nuanced and complex, and the series offers a realistic representation of these issues and concepts.
  - The difference between the two
    - Peaky Blinders* presents strong women who have some agency and power (as their roles during World War I might suggest). However, also in *Peaky Blinders* the power of the women is limited and this can be seen as a frustration for women like Polly who resent the way the power has been taken from them (from war). Men tend to objectify the women (Tommy suggests Grace is working behind the bar).
    - The Bridge* is aiming to present a nuanced and realistic depiction of women. Influences how it chooses to depict women. Women are the protagonists, have agency and act in ways van Zoonen suggests are typical of masculinity.
- 5)
- The use of real-world locations instead of sets (although the use of the sets could be seen as hyperreality).
  - The use of settings in Birmingham, Liverpool and Yorkshire means that the series is a simulacrum of Birmingham 1919.
  - Use of naturalistic acting – exaggerated caricatures are avoided.
  - Believable, nuanced characters – characters have flaws, quirks and behaviours that are realistic.
  - Protagonists and antagonists are shown as being complex in their motivations, not purely 'good' and 'bad'.
  - 'Happy' ending narrative resolutions are not present – endings are often partially positive.
  - However, stylistic sets (which can be seen to be symbolic) and the use of hyperreality which makes the series postmodern.

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