“World Needs Bad Men”? TV-Noir and the Limits of Empathy

Alberto N. García

Conference “Crime Days, Crime Pays”
Aalborg (Denmark), 1-2, October 2015
True Detective (HBO, 2014)
1. Genre: *Noir*, Neo-*Noir* and TV-*Noir*

- An open concept: genre, style, movement, hybrids
- Essential features
  - Criminal plot
  - Moral ambiguity
  - Urban realism/sense of place
  - Socio-political critique
  - Antiheroism/alienation
  - Expressionism
  - Weight of the past
  - Existentialism/Tragedy
1. Genre: *Noir*, Neo-*Noir* and TV-*Noir*

- An open concept: genre, style, movement, hybrids
- Essential features
- Neo-*Noir*: “self-consciousness” and “crime does pay”
- TV-*Noir* and the lack of closure
2. Emotion: character engagement

- Identification, empathy, sympathy…
Hannibal (NBC, 2013-15)
2. Emotion: character engagement

• Identification, empathy, sympathy…

• Levels of engagement (Smith):
  • Alignment
  • Allegiance
3. Engagement in TV Narrative

- Textual duration
- Broadcasting rhythm
- A more complex, changing and challenging allegiance
4. TV, *Noir* antihero and Empathy

1. Moral comparatism
The Shield (FX, 2002-08)
4. TV, *Noir* characters and Empathy

1. Moral comparatism
2. Family
4. TV, *Noir* characters and Empathy

1. Moral comparatism
2. Family
3. Acts of contrition
Breaking Bad (AMC, 2008-13)
4. TV, *Noir* characters and Empathy

1. Moral comparatism
2. Family
3. Acts of contrition
4. Victimization
*Dexter* (Showtime, 2006-13)

*The Sopranos* (HBO, 1999-2007)

*True Detective II* (HBO, 2015)

*Southcliffe* (Channel 4, 2013)
5. The Limits of Empathy

• Cyclical re-allegiance
John Luther (*Luther*)

Andy Sipowicz (*NYPD Blue*)

Mike Ehrmantraut (*Better Call Saul*)

Thomas Shelby (*Peaky Blinders*)
5. The Limits of Empathy

- Cyclical re-allegiance
- Switching allegiance
Ben Sherman (*Southland*)

Lester Nygaard (*Fargo*)

Shane Vendrell (*The Shield*)

Bodie Broadus (*The Wire*)
6. The Sense of an Ending

- The emergency of “ars moriendi”
- Moral clarity
- New trend in TV- *Noir*: redemption, optimism, happy-ending.
7. The rise of “Bright Noir”

“You keep your chin up Gus Grimly. We're winning this thing! Don't you forget”
(Molly Solverson)
Fargo (FX, 2014-)
7. The rise of “Bright Noir”

“The dinner you wanted to treat me to. How about now?”.
(Saga Norén)
7. The rise of “Bright Noir”

“Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgive one another as God in Christ forgave you”. (Rev. Paul Coates)
“You don't have to go. I just take a left up here, hop on the freeway down to Mexico. In a couple of hours, we're sitting on the beach in Baja having margaritas”. (Hank Dolworth)
7. The rise of “Bright Noir”

“I said you’d be fine”.
(Raylan Givens)
7. The rise of “Bright Noir”

“Once, there was only dark. If you ask me, light is winning”.
(Rust Cohle)
True Detective (HBO, 2014)
Alberto N. García Martínez

School of Communication
University of Navarra (Spain)
albgarcia@unav.es

Web - unav.academia.edu/AlbertoGarcía
Blog - gmentedigital.es/comunidad/series/
Twitter - @AlbertoNahum