

Section 3: Genre

THE TYPE OF FILM - Genre 1

One way we understand films is through their type or their genre. If we know that we are going to see, say, a western, then there will be certain plot devices, certain settings that we might expect to see in the film.

What **genre**, what type of film is *The Count of Monte Cristo*? Is it a revenge story, a historical story or a love story? Think about these three types of film. What would you expect to find in each, from the point of view of character types, settings, plot devices and typical scenes? Write down your expectations. You could also look back to the work that you completed in the first two exercises in this study guide to give you some additional ideas.

When you have seen the film *The Count of Monte Cristo* look again at your list of expectations and decide whether it is simply one type of story or whether it is a mixture of two or even three - possibly even more. Were there aspects of *The Count of Monte Cristo* that did not fit into any of the above categories?

THEMES AND ATTITUDES

If you look back over the work you completed on predicting the film's story you will see that there are different plot elements. Each of these elements could represent a different **theme** of the film.

In trying to decide what the themes of the film are, it is worth trying to write down what you think the film is about. This is not to say that you must retell the story. Far from it. Think about the following:

- it is a film about a naïve man coming to understand the world
- it is about greed
- it is about a discovery
- it is about friendship

Consider and add as many more **themes** as you can which you think appear in the film. Certain of these themes could be seen in many different ways.

When you have finally completed your list of themes, go back to your story chart and in the third column marked **themes**, write in which themes you think are dealt within the events of the story.

Are there any links between the themes that are dealt with in a scene and the genres that you think are connected with the scene? Do certain genres relate to certain themes?

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PLEASURE - Genre 2

If we say that we enjoy one particular type of film then where does the pleasure that we get come from? We have already seen the ways in which genre films repeat similar plots and contain similar characters. What is it that makes you want to go on seeing the same type of film over and over again when you know what might happen and appear on the screen?

In a sense the concept of genre supplies the audience and the film maker with a framework. In making a gangster film, a director and scriptwriter have certain ideas that they can **play** with. It is unlikely that any one genre film will use all of the conventions that you noted earlier. Twists and turns take place within the sense of the familiar. Each director will put into a genre film something different for instance, it might be the motives of a character or the settings could be slightly different. What we are talking about is the skeleton of a text - the structure - that always has similarities with others of the same genre.

Within that structure with which we, the audience, are familiar, lies the opportunity for change into an area of originality. The important question here is why an audience like this sense of the familiar. Can you think of any reasons why audiences go back and see the same types of films again and again?



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ECONOMICS OF GENRE - Genre 3

So far we have talked about genre as a critical term, a word which we can use when talking about films. It might well be useful to audiences when it comes to deciding on which film they would like to go and see. It is also useful to critics when it comes to describing films in reviews.

One thing to bear in mind about films is that they are very costly to make and they need to make money at the box office. Since films cost so much to produce the investors who put up the money for them often feel they need some kind of guarantee and that they stand a good chance of getting their money back. As films cost so much to make and, if they are to make a profit and need to sell well, the risk factor for investors is high. It is essential to reduce that risk therefore the idea of genre is very useful to film makers. Film makers, having looked at box office figures and the current box office trend, might feel that it is sensible to invest money in a similar genre of film that they think will attract a 'ready-made' audience.

Another thing to bear in mind is the fact that whilst we talk about there being many typical elements to a genre film including storylines we, as an audience, would not pay to go and see **exactly** the same film again and again. What transpires is that any director and scriptwriter will use the **conventions** and codes of the genre as a framework with which they can work.