

**“Already Broken:” Analyzing Production Techniques in Season 1, Episode 2 of “Peaky
Blinders”**

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COME 467: Television Criticism

Dr. Glantz

February 18, 2021

Introduction

In this essay, I will be analyzing a scene from the second episode of the Netflix show “Peaky Blinders.” For context, the show is about a gang that runs rampant around Birmingham, England in the early 1920s. This specific scene is important to the overall story of the first season because of how tonally different it is to the usual scenes of bloody fighting and conducting serious business. Directly prior to the scene I will be analyzing, main man Tommy Shelby has to put his horse down because of a curse that was placed upon it by a rival family. Additionally, Tommy recently found out his sister got pregnant by his former best friend. Tommy decides to drown his sorrows at The Garrison, where the scene begins. There, he meets Grace, the barmaid who the audience knows is actually a spy working for the crown against Tommy but which is unknown to Tommy at this point. The intense energy created throughout this scene is meant to make viewers question whether this will be the moment Tommy finds out Grace’s secret. This scene is also pivotal for Grace and Tommy’s growing relationship, and this importance is illustrated through the use of production techniques involving sound, framing, camera angle, and lighting,

Sound/Music

The only non-diegetic sound in this scene is right in the beginning as the music from the previous scene fades out. The song being played is a hard rock song, and its fading out suggests a change in the tone of the new scene, one that will be more serious than the previous. Instead of segueing to a new non-diegetic song, the original song fades out into nothing, grounding the audience in the reality of the new scene. The use of only diegetic sound from here on out makes everything else in the scene feel more realistic and reduces distractions for the audience. This technique places the focus of the scene on the characters and their dialogue rather than the

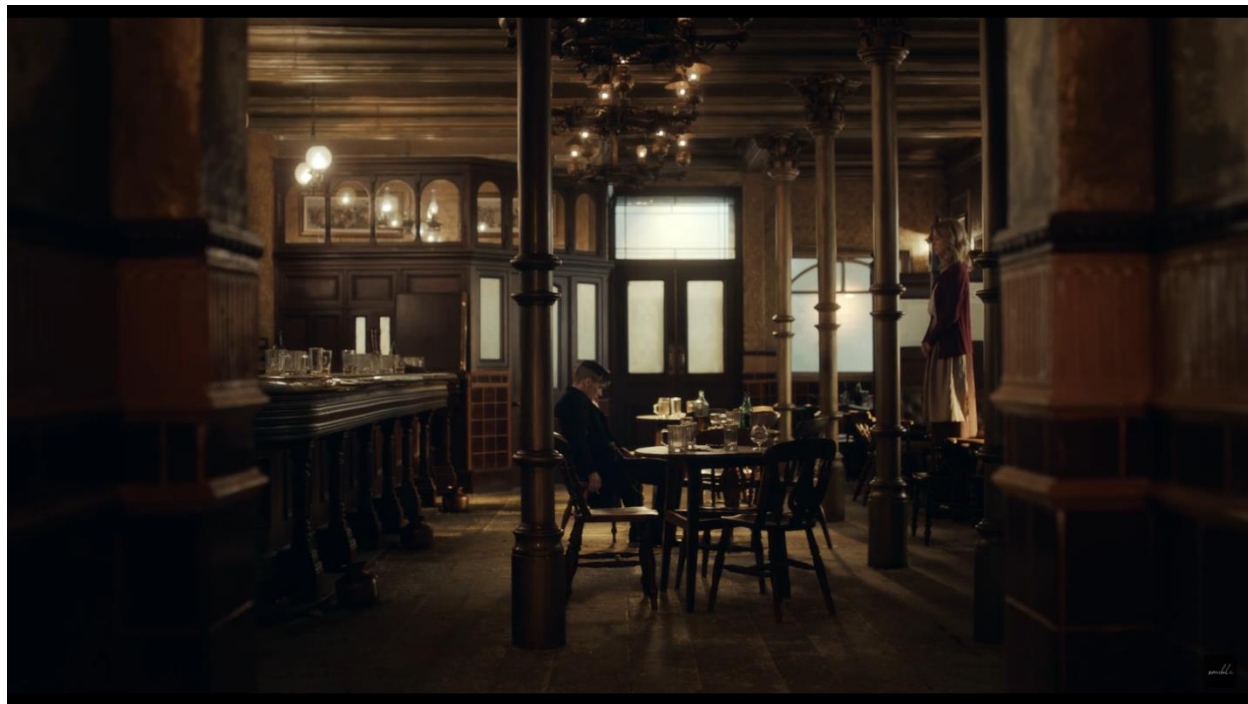
sounds. Some examples of diegetic sounds in this scene include Tommy's knocks on the door of The Garrison, coughing, glasses clanking, chairs being pulled out, sipping, and matches being lit.

Perhaps the most important use of diegetic sound in this scene is the choice of song Grace sings to Tommy and the way in which she sings it. The traditional folksong is titled "The Black Velvet Band," and it is about a man who gets betrayed by a woman he is in love with. The dramatic irony created with the utilization of this specific song is incredibly evident, as the audience knows who Grace really is and that she will betray Tommy but Tommy does not. Because the song also includes the idea that the man is in love with the woman who betrays him, the audience is also given insight into how Tommy is starting to feel about Grace, feelings he will not admit out loud. These feelings are also emphasized through the use of framing, which will be analyzed later on. Additionally, Grace sings "The Black Velvet Band" acapella, giving the song an uneasy and almost off-putting feel. With no accompanying music, importance is placed on the lyrics of the song, and an audience has almost no choice but to pay attention to them and their significance to Grace and Tommy's relationship.

Framing

An interesting technique done with the framing during this scene directly relates to the dialogue between Grace and Tommy. When the topic of their conversation is serious and tense, extreme close-ups are utilized. For example, when Tommy tells Grace that he knows she never worked in Dublin, both Tommy and Grace are shown in extreme close-ups. The utilization of extreme close-ups increases the tension and again cut down on other distractions in the background. The audience has no choice but to focus on facial expressions and dialogue. When the topic of conversation switches to the Cheltenham races, the pair are shown in close-ups, easing the tension. Another interesting aspect of framing comes in the final shot of the scene. It

is a wide shot that shows both Grace, Tommy, and the surrounding setting of The Garrison. The use of a wide shot makes the difference between Grace and Tommy very apparent; Grace is standing on a chair, looking down at Tommy who is sitting. This creates very interesting foreshadowing for the series as Grace looks almost like an angel who is watching over Tommy. The final shot is shown in the image below.



Camera Angle

For the majority of this scene, the camera is kept at a neutral angle, right about at eye-level. Therefore, when the camera does change angles the few times it does, it makes its meaning all the more important. Even the idea that Grace and Tommy are both shown at an eye-level angle is important. Throughout the series, Tommy is very often shown using a low angle, making him look large and threatening. In this scene, however, he is on the same level as Grace and does not need to appear in charge like the normally does. One of the most important parts of the scene is Grace's song, and the camera angle plays a large role in generating meaning. Grace is standing

on a chair while Tommy stays sitting down, which already puts Grace above Tommy. In addition, she is shown using a low angle, further emphasizing her position in relation to Tommy's. Grace has the upper hand here because she is playing Tommy, and Tommy has no idea. This low angle is shown in the image below.



Immediately after Grace's song ends, the camera utilizes a high angle to show Tommy. While this extreme close-up does not necessarily make him look "small" in size, it emphasizes the downward spiral of his current mental state and broken heart. Because Tommy is rarely shown in a high angle throughout the show, this moment is important in showing that Tommy is human and is capable of showing his emotions. The high angle is shown in the image below.



Lighting

In general, the lighting of this scene is poor, which makes sense given the time period the show takes place during. The yellowish hue to the inside of The Garrison gives the scene a very old-timey feel. There are a few other aspects of the lighting in this scene that are worth noting, too. Throughout the majority of the scene, Tommy's face is shown with high-key lighting; he is evenly lit and there is low contrast between light and dark. This choice is interesting because it shows that Tommy has nothing to hide in this moment and that he is open. The lighting on Tommy matches the dialogue of the scene in which Tommy is uncharacteristically open about his troubles to Grace. The high-key lighting is shown in the image below.



On the other hand, Grace's face is shown in low-key lighting, high contrast between light and dark. During the majority of the scene, half of Grace's face is very dark while the other side is well-lit. The purpose of low-key lighting is to create mystery, and in this context, it suggests that Grace is hiding half of herself from Tommy, which is true. Interestingly, in the first ten seconds of the scene, before Tommy comes into The Garrison, Grace's face is evenly lit. It is only when she starts talking to Tommy that these differences in dark and light are apparent. This low-key lighting on Grace's face is shown in the image below.



Conclusion

This scene from “Peaky Blinders” utilizes production techniques such as sound, framing, camera angle, and lighting to create a tense and serious interaction between two of the show’s main characters. Many of the techniques used work to create a simplistic scene with very little background noise or distractions, placing importance on the dialogue and the facial expressions of the characters. Extreme close-ups are used to increase the tension and leave audiences on the edge of their seats wondering if Grace’s secret will be revealed. In a broader context, this scene is integral to the first season of “Peaky Blinders.” In just under seven minutes, viewers learn more about Tommy as a person than they did in the entire first episode. This is the first moment where we see Tommy portrayed as a real human being with emotions, not just a businessman/gangster. In terms of Grace and Tommy’s relationship, the combined production techniques work to create an air of tension, yes, but also a growing trust. This scene shows that “Peaky Blinders” curates a lot of meaning in very small but distinct ways.

References

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