

The *Peaky Blinders*: A Postmodern and Ideological Analysis of Class, Gender, and Nationalism

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INTRODUCTION

The show *Peaky Blinders* is a depiction of Britain post World War I. The historical fiction show documents the 1920s from the viewpoint of one of England's most powerful family gangs at the time: The Peaky Blinders. The show follows the Blinders' patriarchal leader, Thomas Shelby (Cillian Murphy), on what seems to be his ravenous rise to power in a hedonistic world.

Over the course of six seasons, the British Broadcasting Corporation's show takes audience members into a place of violence, corruption, and power that is the roaring twenties. Not only does the show follow a complex plot over the course of ten years, but it also presents complicated and diverse characters. These characters promote overarching themes such as identity, gender norms, and power and control within society. These themes encourage audience members to think about the ways in which the show promotes certain ideologies, but also challenges traditional narratives.

CLASS

Speaking to societies today, does the show make audiences subconsciously question their own chains to their places in society and the corruption of the upper class?

The Shelby family is originally a lower-class family from the poor industrialized city of Birmingham. With Tommy's fire to move the family up in the world, the issue of social mobility is presented.

The representation of social class warfare throughout the series encourages audience members to question upper-class corruption. Although throughout the series, the Sheldys do increase their capital assets, their past will not let them transcend social class status.

The depiction of the state against social classes begs audiences to examine the aspects that social class holds tightly to in society. Decoded by the audience, and further throughout the series, the corruption of the upper class reflects the ideology of the dominant audience, not the source. This challenges the traditional narratives of authority figures throughout television and encourages audience members to question the place they hold in society as well as the corruption that may be around them.

THE PEAKY BLINDERS



NATIONALISM

How is the idea of fierce nationalism for a corrupt government decoded by audience members?

The Shelby clan in general is fiercely nationalistic and proud of their English heritage. This nationalism is based on the past they have with England. This past however as Tommy is aware, can be manipulated and constructed

While the threat of fascism is truly what Shelby finds himself up against at the end of the series, fascism is deep-seated nationalism at its core. Therefore the show presents the contradiction parallel to that of Tommy as the antihero, to politician Oswald Mosley on his quest to sway England towards fascism. When Tommy feels his country is threatened by the idea of fully supporting the nation first before one's self-interest, Shelby cannot let the threat to nationalism that is fascism, come to fruition.

The series' depiction of nationalism comes from the present state of the European Union in which on the world stage patriotism is one of the most important indicators of a strong unified nation. This reflection of ideology encourages audience members not only to be nationalistic but to question who they are loyal to and possibly what their nations stand for.

GENDER

How are gender norms and stereotypes upheld and/or challenged through Peaky Blinders?

Aunt Polly, or Polly Gray, is known for her strong matriarchal role in the family, and Thomas Shelby's right-hand "man." She is also known for subverting traditional gender roles and expectations.

She is a strong woman who takes on a variety of traditionally masculine roles within the gang, such as acting as a strategist and negotiator. At the same time, she also grapples with the expectations and limitations placed on her as a woman in a male-dominated society. She is often forced to navigate and resist these limitations in order to assert her own agency and independence.

Thomas Shelby is a direct parallel to Aunt Polly in terms of gender roles and expectations, the epitome of masculinity. However, his vulnerability in solitude challenge audience members on what it means to be a masculine man.

INTERSECTIONALITY OF THEMES

War is a major theme throughout Peaky Blinders, and allows for the intersectionality of the themes already examined. Women were excluded from the war and continued to manage households and work in factories while men were fighting.

Men in turn can be considered throughout the show as being more nationalistic. Women throughout the show, display no signs of nationalism or allegiance to the Crown. Men of lower status are usually the most nationalistic while men of a higher social status seem to lack a more nationalistic sense due to their absence from the war. The ideology that women may be less nationalistic may undermine the gender norms that are broken in other aspects of the show, but also reflect the belief that women can be free to navigate politics without the influence of the male.

The depiction of class in terms of war can be decoded as a reflection of the dominant ideology that lower classes are the workhorses of society but also reaffirm that the upper class is undeserving of their social status due to lack of participation in the war.