

F A R G O

Presentation Script – Genre Case Study

TITLE

Welcome. I've decided to base my presentation around the FX series Fargo. I'd like to expand upon some ground already covered, as well as giving my own opinion of the themes at hand.

INTRO

The real backbone of this presentation, is about how Fargo (2014-) subverts the audiences expectations, in comparison to the original post-modern work of the Coen Brothers (Fargo [1996]).

OTHER EXAMPLES

Before we get into Fargo, I'd just like to take a look at some other films that have been adapted into TV shows within the last five years or so. As well as giving you some context, I'd like some point out something that these five shows have in common. They are in fact rehashes of the original story, that take it in a different direction to what has come before.

Watchmen (2009), however, has a TV due to air next year, that is in fact a continuation of the story. An expansion of the universe it's set in. There's a quote here from creator Damon Lindelof...

WATCHMEN

He wanted his TV show to be in the 'tradition of the work that inspired it'. Now the part of this quote that really stood out is how a new story, set within the same universe, must "vibrate with the seismic sensibility of its own tectonic plates". This really sums up Noah Hawley's approach to Fargo; create something original that works in the same way the previous story did.

FARGO

Like the previous quote, Hawley talks about how wants people to feel the same way they did when watching the original film.

From our perspective here, we know that he decided to expand upon Fargo's universe, rather than rehash the story. But he decided to tie the two narratives together through a single object.

BRIEFCASE SLIDE

This object, is a briefcase. It's a loose thread from the original film, used to signify that the TV series is in fact an expansion upon the story, tying the two mediums together in a very original way.

TIMELINE

For some context, I've created a timeline in which you can see where the film and the various series fit together.

- Fargo 1987
- Season 1 2006
- Season 2 1979
- Season 3 2010
- Season 4 1950 – Chris Rock to star as the lead character.

Of course, there's really a limitless amount of narratives to be told here, and yet they all exist within... The Coen's Universe.

COEN'S UNIVERSE

This universe of the Coen's is full of their usual traits; Strong female characters, unconventional plotlines, and characters facing up against or challenging their own morality. But we'll reign it back for the sake of this presentation.

COMPARISON FILM vs TV

I want to focus more on the intertextuality of the Fargo TV series, and how one's knowledge of the original film can enhance the audiences viewing experience. So, going forward, I want to get into the frame-of-mind of someone has indeed watched the original film but isn't aware of where Fargo the TV series stands contextually (e.g. adapted, sequel etc.) An obvious initial

comparison to make between the original film and TV series are the characters.

COMPARISON OF CHARACTERS

Initially, it's very easy to pigeon-hole these characters.

- J+L – Very similar last name. Repressed by life they lead.
- M+M – Both strong/determined female characters. Similar first name.
- C+G = LM – Initially, appears that Lorne is a combination. Backed up...
- W+J = PN – She appears to be the man of the house, like Wade.

You see, this isn't a coincidence, however. It's simply an awareness by the creator about what's come before. And if you're comparing characters, then you're playing into Hawley's hands. It isn't until the pilot, that you realise this is a very different picture.

JERRY – LESTER

Initially, Jerry and Lester are very similar. They're both repressed by the people around them, and at first, lack the masculinity and control to do something about it. But there is something that separates them, something that lies within the audience's remorse for both these characters. It's a case of Sympathy vs Empathy.

JERRY

Although Jerry shares the same traits as Lester does, his story (and the telling of it) is a little different. By showing his plan to kidnap his wife before we see his situation, we as an audience are halted by the structure to go as far as feeling empathy for him. It's more, sympathy.

LESTER

In Lester's case, the structure allows the audience (and gives them time) to empathise. There's a build-up of the problems in his life, which is punctuated by his indirect revenge against Sam Hess by Lorne Malvo. There is, however, a key moment that breaks past any kind of intertextual referencing that's come before; and that is the murder of Lester's wife, by Lester himself.

LESTER 2

Suddenly, the story becomes unpredictable, and starts to 'vibrate with the seismic sensibility of it's own tectonic plates'.

MARGE + MOLLY

The real initial difference here is that Marge is an experience cop, whereas Molly lacks this but has a true determination to her job. But even so, before this, one might not even associate Molly as a comparison to Marge.

VERN 1

If you compare these two scenes, you'll see that Molly here is a veteran – a truly experienced cop who has a pretty accurate idea of the crime that's occurred. Where as in a similar scene in the TV show, Vern takes the role of Marge, and leads the investigation into that particular crime scene.

Because of this, you'd think that Marge has been replaced with a male character, who is the unofficial adaptation of Marge. Even the next scene adds to this theory.

VERN 2

The belief could be sealed here, as Vern comes home to his **pregnant** wife. This scene is really a direct mirror of the scene that comes before the crime scene in the original film. So, if you're in the mind-set that this is the direction the show is going, then again, you're playing into the hands of Hawley.

VERN 3

Unfortunately, through an external force, Vern is killed off at the end of the pilot, rendering him a side character. This realisation also paves way for another character to unofficially fill the boots of Marge. And that is Molly.

MOLLY

When you take whole scene into context, Molly's entire character arc over the first season is really her transformation in the character of Marge.

MALVO 1

As previously mentioned, Malvo could initially be seen as a simple merging of the characters of Carl and Gaear. They share similar traits; cunning, manipulative, sociopathic etc. But know this isn't the case, because while Carl and Gaear are at the mercy of the story being told, Malvo is able to manipulate it. Here are some examples from the pilot. Even having never met Gus Grimly, it influences the audience to think that he in fact will die.

MALVO 2

This quote from Hawley suggest that Fargo is in fact a morality play. But really, it's kind of the opposite, with Malvo playing an incarnation of evil, tempting characters into becoming something eviller than they are. This is evident in one storyline.

MALVO 3

We meet Stavros Milos, the guy who found the money, and find that Malvo is raining down a series of biblical plagues upon him, much like what happened in the bible. This is his way of convincing him (Stavros) that he (the devil) does not exist.

EFFECT OF MALVO

Here, I wanted to show the benefits of character development in a TV series. Malvo's creation (Lester) is set loose, and when he returns to challenge him, he is rejected. When Malvo lets Gus go in the pilot, he comes back to challenge Malvo, and successfully kills him. It's the devils mistake that comes back to haunt him.

FINAL SLIDE

So, in summary, how has Fargo done this? Well, a simple awareness of what's come before, as well as a cunning desire to subvert their expectations, and a genuine respect for those that pay attention. Also, just as important, is utilising the TV format to its advantage. By doing this, Fargo the TV series has managed to subvert expectations of an expansion of a post-modern work.

Thank you.