

THE RETURNED

(Series 1 Episode 1, 2012)



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Section A: Television in the Global Age (A Level)

Focus Areas:

Media Language

Representation

Media Industries

Audiences

Media contexts

PRODUCT CONTEXT

- This product is the non-English Language product studied for Section A: Television in the Global Age at A Level, alongside an episode of *Humans*.
- The set product is Episode 1 of Series 1 broadcast in the UK on Channel 4. It was first broadcast on Channel 4 at 9pm in June 2013.
- *The Returned* is a French supernatural thriller created by Fabrice Gobert and produced by Haut et Court. It was originally broadcast on the Canal+ network in November 2012 and was inspired by the French film *Les Revenants* (2004). The programme ran for two series with 8 episodes in each.
- The main distributor was Zodiac Rights, and the programme was shown globally in over 70 countries.

PART 1: STARTING POINTS – Media Language

The codes and conventions of media forms and products, including the processes through which media language develops as a genre.

- In its simplest terms a genre is a type of media product, but it is more complex than that; genre provides a way for producers to communicate messages to audiences. Audiences need to be able to recognise genres and the codes and conventions are established over time. The audience have expectations that need to be fulfilled and establishing the genre is key to the effective marketing of the product.
- Genre has an influence on the production and distribution of television programmes, it affects

the way in which they are marketed and scheduled.

- The supernatural thriller genre has a well-established cultural history and has a recognisable repertoire of elements. These conventions have evolved over time and developed to reflect social and cultural change and the needs and expectations of audiences. However, these programmes share similarities which place them in the supernatural thriller genre including:
 - Supernatural thrillers may use a range of different narrative structures. The programme may conform to Todorov's theory where the structure is linear from the initial disruption through to a resolution, or non-linear where time and space is manipulated through for example, flashbacks or flashforwards. In *The Returned*, the narrative is fragmented and there are flashbacks to the crash at the beginning and end of the episode.
 - Narrative disruptions occur that change the course of the story, these can be events that happen or revelations that are made by characters. Sometimes the audience are in a privileged spectator position whereby they know more than the characters within the story world. For example, in the set episode of *The Returned* the audience is shown Victor's part in the bus crash, this allows the audience to anticipate how the narrative may develop in future episodes.
 - Binary oppositions function as part of the narrative structure in supernatural thrillers. In *The Returned*, these include past vs present, living vs dead, illusion vs reality, the truth vs the perception of truth and light vs dark. The resolving of some of these binary oppositions within the story world may have an ideological significance, for example the discourse around the nature of grief and

acceptance and the sense of unease within the familiar. (**Structuralism: Levi-Strauss**).

- Plot situations are included that are typical of the supernatural thriller genre. For example, the unexplained events, the arrival of the strange, cherubic child, apocalyptic weather, conversations about what cannot be explained, the slow opening of doors to reveal what is on the other side and the flickering of lights to connote a strange event.
- Story arcs and narrative strands occur in and across episodes of an episodic series. In *The Returned*, as the first episode of a new series, there are several complex, enigmatic narrative strands, which will be interwoven across the episodes, including: the focus on each of the returned in future episodes, in the first one the focus is on Camille, the dam, the quest to find the truth and the impact of the returned on the community of the living and the dead.
- **Stock characters** usually including a 'creepy' child, the undead, the maternal, nurturing characters, victims and representations of authority. Often the pairing of characters are binary opposites and their relationships contribute to tensions within the narrative, for example that between Julie and Victor.
- **Setting and locations.** These will become synonymous with the programme and the brand, may be used in the marketing and will relate to characters and the sub-genre. In *The Returned*, the setting is on the edges of a ski resort where the houses are isolated, the roads are long and empty and everything is surrounded by mist and darkness, typical of the genre. Within the individual homes there is a sense of claustrophobia reinforced by the darkness and the framing.
- **Iconography.** As well as conveying the genre, this can have a thematic significance. For example, mirrors and windows feature in this first episode as ways of replicating the world but also fabricating reality. Characters are often viewed through the windows as if being watched adding to the sense of unease, or look at themselves in mirrors as if trying to see the truth. At one point Claire and Jerome watch Camille through the windows from outside in disbelief at what they see.

Theoretical Approach: Narratology - Todorov

- All narratives share a basic structure involving movement from one state of equilibrium to another, separated by a disequilibrium. The

opening **equilibrium** in *The Returned* presents the bereaved community who are attempting to adjust to the deaths of their loved ones.

- The **disruption** to this equilibrium is the return of the dead, Camille is accepted by her family but there is further tragedy with M and Mme Costa and grief for Adele with the unbelievable return of Simon.
- The **recognition** that the equilibrium has been disrupted is evident in the tragic consequences, the suicide of M Costa and natural events, the receding of the reservoir waters.
- As this is an example of an episodic drama there would not be a **resolution** at the end of the first episode, instead there is a **cliffhanger** as the narrative returns to the initial crash and Victor is seen as the cause.



How genre conventions are socially and historically relative, dynamic and can be used in a hybrid way:

- Although genres have never been stagnant, it is increasingly the case that they are more dynamic and seek to challenge audience expectations. The genre now is a starting point to target the audience and then surprise them through hybridity and intertextuality.
- Some programmes, for example *The Returned*, are harder to categorise due to their hybridity and the fact that, whilst they employ more typical conventions of the supernatural thriller, they also borrow from other genres. For example, *The Returned* includes references to the zombie genre as the characters are 'undead' and also to fantasy, but is also set amongst families in a domestic drama setting.

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- The programme shares some similar codes and conventions of the science fiction genre in that it focuses on extraordinary events outside the realms of reality. However, whereas science fiction has a basis in some scientific reality and appeals because it could happen, supernatural thrillers are based on events that defy reality and explanation.

Theoretical Approach: Genre – Steve Neale

- Neale asserts that genres may be dominated by repetition, but they are also marked by difference, variation and change. The supernatural thriller genre has a recognisable repertoire of elements, but to appeal to audiences, new programmes need to display something different to set them apart from other examples. Difference is essential to sustain a genre, to simply repeat the codes and conventions of the form would not appeal to an audience
- *The Returned* demonstrates difference in that it focuses less on the gore and horror of more typical zombie dramas and more on the psychological impact on the community of the loss and then the return of the children.
- The children who return are not classic zombies in their appearance or behaviour, they outwardly appear 'normal' and are attempting to return to the life they left.
- In its style and aesthetics, the programme borrows from the 1930s French cinematic tradition of Poetic Realism. The visual style is minimalist, but lyrically constructed. The tone echoes with a sense of doom and the characters are on the edge of society within an isolated setting living with their grief. The focus is on the nature of the human condition and what it means to be happy.
- Genres exist within specific economic, institutional, and industrial contexts. The recognisable codes and conventions of the supernatural thriller make them easy to market to audiences. However, subverting and challenging these conventions by introducing more unique elements as with *The Returned's* characters, narrative and aesthetic, can also ensure commercial success.

How the combination of elements of media language influence meaning

Visual codes:

- **Codes of clothing:** The connotations of characters' clothing and appearance create meanings. Clothing is a rapid way of communicating messages in *The Returned*: the normal, everyday clothing of both the living and the dead challenges

the more typical codes and conventions of the genre and establishes the idea of the uncanny within the realistic.

- **Gesture and expression:** non-verbal communicators are quick ways of constructing meaning. Claire's shocked and confused expression when she sees Camille contrasts with Camille's apparent normality. The audience too are confused and empathise with Claire. Julie's gesture in holding Victor's hand and taking him into her home has intertextual references to the vampire genre.
- **Iconography and Setting:** the props, backgrounds and settings work to construct meaning and establish the supernatural thriller genre. The binary oppositions of the domestic setting, the isolated subway and the outdoor natural locations of the forest reflect the narrative themes and tensions. The opening scene when the butterfly escapes from the picture creates enigmatic unease foreshadowing the narrative. The fact that Camille's room has been kept like a shrine allows her to assume that everything is the same.

Technical codes

- Camera shots, movement and angles work together to communicate messages and 'show' the narrative.
- Close-ups advance the relationships between characters and establish tension and a dynamic. This is evident in the 'conversations' between Camille and her parents and her first meeting with Lena.
- Framing is also important in the establishment of characters and relationships, for example the interaction between Camille and Claire creates unease as Claire seems happy to accept that Camille has returned. The combination of framing, gesture and expression foreshadows the tension between Claire, Jerome and Pierre.
- Establishing shots are quick ways of communicating information. The early establishing shot of the town serves to create a sense of cultural verisimilitude establishing a real place in which the characters function, so reinforcing their believability.
- Long shots of the undead on the lonely road and Lucy alone in the subway are conventional of the supernatural thriller genre, as is Victor, the seemingly innocent child standing alone outside Julie's apartment.

Audio codes

Sound and music are effective in communicating meaning in this programme.

- **Music:** this effectively establishes characters and the genre. The sinister mood music at the start quickly establishes elements of the narrative and the genre. The audio track when Camille returns is disconcerting. When Claire, in a panic, hides the 'shrine' in Camille's room the music is discordant, contrasting with the seemingly normal act of fetching Camille's bathrobe.
- **Diegetic sound:** the panicked breathing as Camille is walking home is unsettling. The thunder is a conventional audio code in this genre signifying fear and unease. Camille's scream when she realises that Lena is her twin sister but is four years older than her communicates her grief, loss, and confusion. The disturbing noise from the film being watched by Julie before she sees Victor outside contrasts with his apparent innocence and offers a warning.
- **Dialogue:** this serves to establish the genre, advance the narrative, and construct the characters. The group meeting at the beginning of the episode adds to the back story and highlights tensions between the characters. The questioning by the undead of the living reinforces the strangeness of the situation and their confusion, for example Simon asking for Adele in the bar.

PART 2: STARTING POINTS – Representation

Consider how representations are constructed through a process of selection and combination.

- All representations are constructed and are not 'windows on the world'. Representations are constructed through media language, the information in the previous section will therefore be relevant when exploring representation in *The Returned*. Media products are created through a process of mediation to communicate meanings using elements of media language including:
 - **Technical codes.** Camera shots, angles, movements and editing combine to construct representations and to position audiences in relation to those representations.
 - **Audio codes:** diegetic and non-diegetic sound including a soundtrack, mood music and dialogue contribute to the construction of representations.
 - **Iconography:** clothing, props and settings, particularly in relation to the cultural context, contribute to the construction of representations and will have been a key consideration of the producers in creating the characters and their roles.

The way in which representations make claims about realism

- One of the aims of a television programme whether it is a documentary or a drama, is to make the audience feel that the representations constructed are accurate, plausible and true to life. This is regardless of whether the storyline is seemingly unbelievable and outside of the experience of the audience, as in *The Returned*. The aim is to suspend the disbelief of the audience.
- One of the ways this is achieved, particularly in fictional programmes, is through surface realism where the choice of sets, locations, costumes, and props contribute to an accurate representation.
- Another way is through generic verisimilitude, where the codes and conventions of the genre are adhered to and fulfil audience expectations, as a result the audience will believe what they see.
- Where representations are seen to be influenced by cultural and social circumstances, for example in the way gender and issues are represented in a programme, this contributes to the construction of realism. For example, the representations of gender in *The Returned* and the allegorical reference to the contemporary issue of migrants in France.

How representations may invoke discourses and ideologies and position audiences

- Representations carry ideological significance and reflect the time in which the product was made. There is ideological significance to the way in which representations are constructed in *The Returned* which positions the audience to look at social groups and issues in different ways, reflecting cultural shifts. For example, this episode invokes discourse around 'the unknown' and how those who are perceived as 'other' are treated in a culture – with fear and trepidation.
- The way in which the representations are constructed in *The Returned* means that French audiences who have personal experience of the migrant issue are more likely to take this reading from the programme.
- In *The Returned*, the way in which the representations are constructed positions audiences. For example, Claire's representation as the maternal figure positions audiences to empathise with her reaction to the return of Camille. The construction of Victor as the innocent young child positions audiences to sympathise with his enigmatic situation and Julie's initial response to him.

The effect of social and cultural context on representations

The effect of historical context on representations Representations of gender: Women/ Femininity

There is a range of female characters in the first episode, presenting different representations of women and they are central to the narrative. The construction of female representations creates a discourse around how women are presented and how the audience is positioned in relation to the female characters.

- The female characters are represented generally as passive and emotional in *The Returned*. They perform roles related to nurturing and domesticity. In the early scenes of the episode Sandrine announces her pregnancy, thanks Pierre and heralds it as a way of healing the past.
- **Claire** and **Julie** are both represented as carers, Claire welcomes the return of her daughter Camille without questioning the unbelievability of the event, whilst Julie tends to the basic needs of the unknown child Victor, feeding him and letting him stay the night.



- **Adele** is first seen by Simon in a wedding dress representing her more traditional female role. She is also seen to be emotional and hysterical after assuming that she has seen the ghost of Simon.
- Technical codes contribute to the construction of representation, for example the close-ups of Claire reinforce her passive representation, the intra-diegetic gaze between her and Jerome or Pierre show that she looks to others for help and explanation. In the meeting at the start of the episode, the camera repeatedly cuts to Pierre as the leader of the group, the women look up to him.
- **Camille**, the focus of this episode, goes some way to breaking the passive female stereotype. She is seen as active and resourceful in escaping from the valley and determined in her need to return home.

- **Lucy** is constructed as an object of the male gaze. Her clothing, gesture and the technical codes construct this representation and the fact that she is trapped in a menial job, in a subservient relationship with an older man on whom she relies for money. However, she does have some control over Jerome as he pays for her in a spiritual role to communicate with the dead Camille.
- **Lena** is constructed as a stereotypical rebellious teenager who has regular confrontations with her parents. Her representation is constructed through her code of casual clothing, her truculent behaviour and expressions. She is sexual, if not overtly sexualised. The shots of her in the bar reinforce this representation, particularly in her conversation with Simon. However, she is also vulnerable, as she is happy to take him to a remote part of the village.

Representations of gender: Men/ Masculinity

- Some of the men in *The Returned*, for example **Pierre**, are represented as dominant, rational and in control within the community. It is to Pierre that Claire turns initially after the return of Camille and he questions Camille about what she can remember, taking control of the situation.
- **Jerome** challenges this typical masculine representation and is presented as more emotional and unable to cope with his loss and grief. In the community meeting he is seated on the outside and questions the 'ugliness' of the memorial to the dead. The fact that he believes that Lucy can communicate with Camille reinforces his vulnerability. In the filming of the shot when Camille comes outside to join them in the storm, he cannot bear to look at her.
- Similarly, **Simon** is represented as 'other' and an outsider. Other than the bar, in the first episode he remains outside, looking into the life he once had.



Theoretical Approaches: Theories of representation - Stuart Hall

Hall's idea that stereotyping tends to occur where there are inequalities of power, as subordinate or excluded groups are constructed as different or 'other', can be explored in relation to *The Returned*:

- Stuart Hall discusses the notion that the powerful elite groups, for example white, middle class males, control the media and create a 'norm' which reflects themselves. Representations of other groups are then constructed in terms of their difference to this, their 'otherness'.
- In constructing the representations of the undead in binary opposition to the living, Gobert has in *The Returned* created an allegory of the migration of Syrians into Europe, specifically France, and invokes a discourse around global migration.
- In making connections between the undead and migrants Gobert is making a political point about a humanitarian crisis.
- The returned/undead are not human, therefore are 'other' and are feared by the living in the same way that the French people feared the impact of migration on their communities. In *The Returned*, the community is established in the beginning as the equilibrium that will inevitably be disrupted.
- The undead are further reinforced as 'other' by linking them to unnatural events, for example the receding of the dam waters.

Theoretical Approaches: Feminist theory - bell hooks and Van Zoonen

- bell hooks' assertion that feminism is a struggle to end sexist/patriarchal oppression and the ideology of domination can be explored in relation to *The Returned*:
 - Men are seen to be in dominant positions in the programme. They display the character traits associated with masculinity; they are on the whole rational, efficient, unemotional. Pierre is the one who attempts to rationalise the situation and to talk to Camille.
 - Claire is represented in a domestic role. She is maternal and a nurturer, she turns to the men in her life Jerome and Pierre for help, but her maternal instinct is dominant and overrides any rational questioning of the return of Camille. Similarly, Julie is a nurse and therefore in a role as a carer and responds maternally to Victor, welcoming him into her home.
 - Lucy is a clear victim of patriarchal oppression; she is on display for the gratification of men and is used by men.

- Van Zoonen's assertions can be explored in relation to *The Returned*:
 - The idea that gender is constructed through discourse, and that its meaning varies according to cultural and historical context
 - The idea that the display of women's bodies as objects to be looked at is a core element of Western patriarchal culture
 - The discourse around constructions of gender in *The Returned* requires the audience to consider how culturally there has been little change in the roles of men and women which function as binary opposites. The women in the programme are associated with domesticity, nurturing and appealing to men. They are emotional and less active in the narrative. Men are active, make the decisions and are rational, reinforcing the patriarchal diegesis.
 - Men are constructed more through the intradiegetic gaze; for example, Pierre is looked up to by the others with respect as a leader.
 - Lucy is sexualised and is an object of visual pleasure for both the audience and the male characters. Her role is passive and she is the one being looked at as an object of the male gaze (Mulvey). It is Lucy, who at the end of this first episode, is murdered by a man and seen as disposable.

PART 3: Starting Points – Media Industries

Processes of production, distribution and circulation by organisations, groups, and individuals in a global context

- Channel 4 was launched on November 2nd, 1984, 18 years after BBC2. The Annan Committee set up during the Wilson government of 1970 had recommended the setting up of a fourth channel. This was authorised by the 1980 Broadcasting Act.
- Channel 4 embraced the remit that it should cater for minorities and encourage innovation. In the early days, the channel caused controversy and was fodder for the tabloids who nicknamed it 'Channel Swore' and 'Channel Bore' and waged war on its tendency to show more sexually explicit material, to give voice to gay people and other minority groups and to discuss material regarded as too risky by other channels. This was echoed in their 2013 rebrand with the slogan 'Born Risky'.
- Channel 4, along with the BBC, has been at the forefront of broadcasting non-English-language programmes. *The Returned* achieved critical acclaim and was popular with audiences, but was the first fully sub-titled drama programme to be broadcast by the channel in over twenty years.

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- Channel 4 was set up with a unique model as a publisher-broadcaster, meaning that the channel does not have any in-house production, but instead commissions content from production companies throughout the UK, or enters into co-production with other media companies. *The Returned* for example was originally broadcast by Canal+, a premium French cable channel, which is owned by multi-media conglomerate Vivendi.
- Channel 4 fulfils its statutory public service remit comprising 15 elements, including:
 - Be innovative and distinctive
 - Stimulate public debate on contemporary issues
 - Reflect cultural diversity of the UK
 - Champion alternative points of view
 - Inspire change in people's lives
 - Nurture new and existing talent(www.channel4.com)



The significance of economic factors, including commercial and not-for-profit public funding to media industries and their products:

- Channel 4 is a publicly-owned and commercially-funded UK public service broadcaster, with a statutory remit to deliver high-quality, innovative, alternative content that challenges the status quo.
- In 1993 Channel 4 became the third largest broadcaster in Britain with an average audience share of nearly 11%. It also became the largest investor in the British Film Industry and a major investor in British Screen Finance Ltd, a company investing in new British films. It has played a key role in the revival of the UK film industry as co-producers of the Film on Four series.
- Channel 4 is in a unique position as a broadcaster as it is a self-sufficient business that reinvests all profits back into programmes, at zero cost to the taxpayer. 'A *'Robin Hood' model of cross-funding means programmes that make money pay for others that are key to delivering our remit but that are loss-making e.g., News and Current Affairs.*' (www.channel4.com).

- The channel regularly reminds its audience of its public service status through taglines used in advertising campaigns, for example 'Paid for by advertising, owned by you'.
- However, in June 2021, the government announced a consultation into the possible privatisation of Channel 4 in order to make it more able to compete with the big tech giants including Google, Amazon and Facebook, where at the time there is not a level playing field.
- Channel 4 argues that it is operating a remarkably resilient model and even during the pandemic had a surplus of £74 million. Its concern is that changing the channel's funding model will inevitably mean changing its remit to offer distinctive and diverse programming.
- Television programmes are funded in a range of different ways. *The Returned* received funding from regional agencies to support its production including The Rhone-Alpes Regional Fund that supports film and television projects in that region of France and the Centre National de la Cinematographie.

How media organisations maintain, through marketing, varieties of audience nationally and globally

- It is essential to use marketing to gain audience interest for a new programme. Different strategies are used designed to suit the genre, the narrative and the target audience.
- Programme makers and channels now have access to a range of digital platforms which facilitates creativity and audience reach including traditional television slots, posters, YouTube and social media platforms.
- Channel 4 created a multi-platform campaign for *The Returned* placing the audience in the seemingly realistic world of the programme. This created a social media buzz focusing on the recognisable genre with a narrative twist. The campaign included:
 - A trailer introducing *The Returned* as 'The No1 French thriller' and emphasising its hybridity through the inclusion of taglines including, 'When The Dead Return', 'History Resurfaces', 'Wounds Reopen', 'Murder Returns', 'Love Reignites' underscored by a haunting soundtrack.
 - Merchandising including T-shirts to target the fan community.
 - An innovative, interactive website.
 - A 360 virtual navigation of the town on multiple platforms.

AS/A Level Media Studies - Set Product Fact Sheet

- The marketing of the programme as a quality drama through focusing on Canal+ as a reputable broadcaster and the subsequent BAFTA Awards.

The regulatory framework of contemporary media in the UK

The role of regulation in global production, distribution, and circulation

- Channel 4, similarly to other commercial broadcasters, is licensed to broadcast and is externally regulated by Ofcom, which is accountable to Parliament and publishes standards which must be adhered to by broadcasters. One of the duties of Ofcom is to examine specific complaints made by listeners about programmes broadcast on channels that it has licensed.
- Channel 4 is in a slightly different position as it does not produce its own content, it is therefore the responsibility of all programme-makers together with Channel 4's editorial staff, taking advice from the lawyers in the legal and compliance department where appropriate, to ensure that programmes comply with Ofcom's code.
- Television companies and specific channels operate self-regulation through scheduling decisions, the watershed and announcements at the beginning of programmes giving information about possible areas of offence. *The Returned* was scheduled at 9pm, this post watershed slot indicates to viewers that the programme may contain content that is unsuitable for children, 'Unsuitable material can include everything from sexual content to violence, graphic or distressing imagery and swearing.' (www.ofcom.org.uk)
- Where versions of the programme are broadcast in different countries, there may be issues around different regulatory systems. Attitudes of other countries to offensive material including sexual content, violence and swearing may differ and amendments may have to be made to the programme.

Theoretical Approaches

Regulation: Livingston and Lunt

- Channel 4 as a public service broadcaster operates both a consumer-based regulatory model offering choice for audiences through the C4 remit which details the range of content that must be produced by the channel including news and current affairs, and also a citizen-based model playing a role in shaping society and taking responsibility for media content through self-regulation. This ensures a diverse range of

programming with an aim to offer programmes that challenge the status quo and 'represent unheard voices' (annualreport.channel4.com). For example, decisions made about the scheduling of *The Returned* ensured that citizens were protected from potentially offensive material.

- The fact that television companies now operate in a global market has introduced challenges with regard to regulation of content. In addition, the ways in which television content is distributed to audiences across a range of digital platforms means that regulation is more complex.

Cultural Industries: Hesmondhalgh

- As Hesmondhalgh suggested in his theory, cultural industry companies use a variety of strategies to minimise risk and maximise audiences. One of these strategies is **horizontal integration**. An example of this in relation to *The Returned* is the acquisition of Television Par Satellite by Vivendi's Canal+ Group in 2006. In doing so Canal+ bought out its main rival in the French pay television market and re-established control.
- **Vertical integration** is another strategy used by media companies. *The Returned* was produced and distributed by Canal+, a vertically integrated company.
- The consultation on the future of Channel 4 launched in June 2021 illustrates the issue of smaller companies having to compete against larger ones operating across a number of cultural industries.
- It has been suggested that public service broadcasters need help in order to survive against the big tech giants, including for example having more prominence on the apps on televisions and the programme guides. For example, More4 does not appear on the menu of many televisions.
- Another key strategy is the formatting of cultural products. Where audiences can anticipate what to expect from new products through, for example familiarity with genre conventions, then the risk in minimised. *The Returned*, whilst containing an enigmatic narrative, also contains typical codes and conventions of the supernatural thriller/zombie genre. The marketing materials for *The Returned* incorporated formatting by playing on the audience's fear of the unknown within the familiar.
- The programme format for *The Returned* was sold to the American A&E Studios and a US Version of *The Returned* was produced and broadcast in 2015 on Sundance TV.

PART 4: STARTING POINTS – Audiences

How media organisations reflect the needs of mass and specialised audiences, including through targeting.

- *The Returned* appeals to a more niche, less mainstream Channel 4 audience who are targeted through their expectations based on the brand identity of the channel, offering something different and innovative. Channel 4 is able to commission programmes to target more specialised audiences by using their more commercial mainstream programmes to subsidise more niche productions.
- Whilst *The Returned* was initially broadcast on Channel 4, it was moved to the sister channel More4 which targets a more specialised audience.
- *The Returned* appeals across ages and gender due to the range of characters that audiences may find attractive or relate to. The primary target audience may be fans of the supernatural thriller/zombie genre, but the hybridity of the programme's genre will broaden the appeal. The fact that the programme is subtitled, and its aesthetic may appeal to a more specialised, intellectual audience.
- The programme may attract an inherited audience and fan base who will be familiar with other non-English-language programmes broadcast on this and other channels, for example in the Nordic Noir genre.
- The appeal of the genre. The supernatural thriller genre is popular and successful as it offers a range of audience pleasures. Audiences have expectations of the genre and gain pleasure in seeing expectations fulfilled (Neale). The genre offers escapism where the audience can be involved in alternative realism constructed by the programme.
- Narrative appeal. The narrative effectively highlights Neale's theory of how repetition and difference ensure the dynamic nature of genres. *The Returned* incorporates the typical codes and conventions of the supernatural thriller genre, whilst offering something different in terms of references to French culture and the surreal narrative structure.
- Marketing: the marketing campaign established the brand of the programme and created a buzz.

How audiences interpret the media, including how they may interpret the same media in different ways

- Modern audiences may identify with the characters as the alternative world is similar to their own, this is helped by the surface realism and generic verisimilitude within the programme. Universal themes including love, loss and grief are

explored and the domestic, family setting will resonate with audiences.

- Audiences may use the programme for escapism and diversion. Although the domestic setting is familiar, the elements of fantasy, the surreal and the non-linear narrative offer diversion. The enigmas in the programme, the relationships and the puzzle of the flashbacks also offer diversionary appeal. The aesthetic pleasure of the visual aspects of the programme also offers escapism.
- The buzz around the programme facilitated social interaction whereby audiences used social media to discuss the programme and their ideas about 'solving' the puzzle set up in the programme's narrative. Active audiences engaged with the fan community and interactive experiences related to the programme.

Theoretical Approaches: Reception Theory – Stuart Hall

Consider Hall's assertion that there are three hypothetical positions from which messages and meanings may be decoded, in relation to *The Returned*:

- An audience may understand and accept the producers' intended meaning, to construct a programme that appeals to audiences by including some typical conventions of the supernatural thriller genre, whilst offering something through the aesthetic that challenges the typicality. Some audiences will be attracted by the fact that it is French and by the allegorical narrative referencing the relationship between France and its migrant community. Audiences with cultural capital will be aware of how *The Returned* is influenced by French Poetic Realism.
- Some audiences may assume a negotiated position. These audiences may have been persuaded to watch the programme by opinion leaders including reviews and articles. They may enjoy elements of the programme including the narrative enigmas and the adherence to the more typical codes and conventions of the genre but may be more uncomfortable with the slow pace and the sub-titles.
- Some audiences may adopt an oppositional position and may feel that the programme offers nothing new and is merely an unsuccessful re-working of old ideas. They may feel that the more stereotypical codes and conventions of the genre, for example the violence and gore, is missing from the programme. Some audiences may be unhappy with the unfamiliar French aesthetic and the slow pace of the programme: '*Man, is it French — in the most stylish, morose and occasionally aloof ways. Episode by episode, 'The Returned'*'

unravels, savors (sic) and even overthinks its central mysteries... 'The Returned' is so beautiful to look at that it's easy to miss its shortcomings... the show takes a tad too long to connect its many plot threads; like most stylish Euro-mysteries, it has a habit of raising more questions than it can ever answer.'

(https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/tv/the-returned-a-morose-mesmerizing-tale-that-offers-a-new-twist-on-the-living-dead/2013/10/30/97b0160a-3b63-11e3-a94f-b58017bfee6c_story.html?utm_term=.db3c0ed7e56)

PART 5: STARTING POINTS – Media Contexts

Social and Cultural contexts. Consider:

- The role and remit of Channel 4 as a public service broadcaster and its cultural and social aims: *'We aim to create change in the wider world through all of our activities: from TV, to streaming, social media and film – and our day-today roles at Channel 4. It's the impact that Channel 4 has on society, on viewers, on British culture, on the creative industries and on the wider economy. It's why Channel 4 is – and will continue to be – different.'* (www.annualreport.channel4.com)
- The channel, in the commissioning of its programmes, reflects cultural diversity and stimulates debate over contemporary issues, for example in *The Returned*, the discourse around the environment and the way in which migrants are viewed in French society.
- *The Returned* is set in an alternative place, but in its domestic reality reflects contemporary themes of loss and grief.
- Audience responses to *The Returned* may reflect social and cultural circumstances.

Economic contexts. Consider:

- Channel 4 is in a unique position in that it is a public service broadcaster owned by the government and funded by advertising. In 2021 the government raised concerns regarding the difficulty of the channel in competing against the tech giants and is considering privatisation, this is despite the channel demonstrating its financial success in the 2021/21 report.
- This move may help the channel to compete more successfully globally. This may also be facilitated by the international marketability of the supernatural/zombie genre illustrated by the global reach of *The Returned* format.
- In the television industry, money can be made by owning intellectual property which Channel 4's publisher broadcaster model does not facilitate.

- In the present system of UK broadcasting, the advertising market is fragmented with channels competing for the same advertising revenue.
- Canal+, the original broadcaster of *The Returned* uses a subscription funding model and its vertical and horizontal integration strategies have ensured its financial stability.

Acknowledgements

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