

Introducing Genre



'Genre' is a word - borrowed from French - which means a grouping of similar works.

Most movie-goers choose what they will watch by genre.

It is also an important concept as a basis for analysis and discussion of film.

All movies in a particular genre will include certain basic ingredients, the way

a chocolate cake



or a casserole does,



which does not mean they are all the same.

If you decide to bake a chocolate cake, you will need

- flour
- sugar
- butter
- eggs
- baking powder
- and baking cocoa



- but some recipes use cooking oil instead of butter



- some recipes use chocolate instead of baking cocoa



- some use milk instead of some or all of the eggs



- some use baking soda instead of baking powder



- or you could add dried fruit
- or coconut
- or orange juice and peel



so that each cake is slightly different – but is still a chocolate cake



Films are the same.

Films within a certain genre will have most of the same ingredients but each film will be significantly different in some way.

When a film is made that is not significantly different from an earlier one, we dismiss it as a 'clone'.

One of the traditional genres is the **western**.

Being a cowboy in the real American west was very different from the way most western films portray it,



yet the movie 'wild west' has become a real place to us, simply because we have seen so many westerns.



"There are some things a man just can't walk away from."

– Stagecoach



"Westerns are the major defining genre of the American film industry – a eulogy to the early days of the expansive American frontier.

They are one of the oldest, most enduring genres with very recognisable plots, elements, and characters (six-guns, horses, dusty towns and trails, cowboys, Indians, etc).

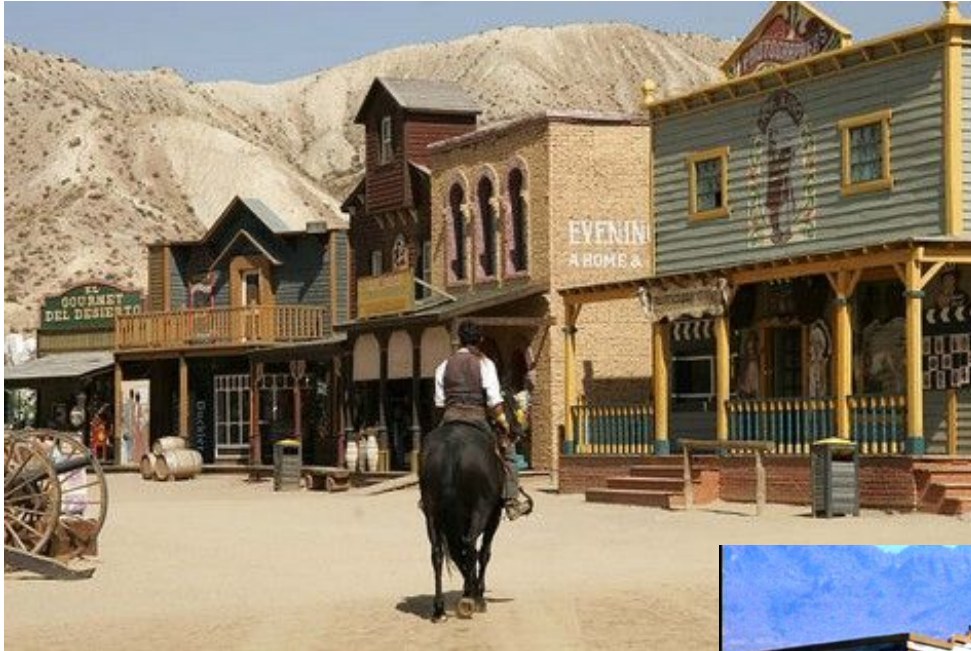
Over time, westerns have been re-defined, re-invented and expanded, dismissed, re-discovered, and spoofed."

– Tim Dirks, *filmsite.com*

**"Anybody that doesn't want to get killed best clear on out the back."
– *Unforgiven***

We expect and recognise common ingredients:

- a frontier town with a sheriff's office



- a saloon with swinging doors where cowboys play cards and drink whisky;



- a shoot-out in the main street;



- Indians (though only in old movies nowadays) or outlaws attacking the stagecoach.



- desert or mountainous settings



- men on horseback



Silverado (1985)



Christian Bale and Russell Crowe
in *3.10 to Yuma* (2007)

The characters are stereotyped too:

- the virtuous wife or daughter;



Grace Kelly in *High Noon*



Katy Jurado in *High Noon*

- the tough saloon girl;

- the treacherous villain, usually dressed in black



- and the hero who always fights fairly.



Gary Cooper as Will Kane in *High Noon*

they are not known for great dialogue, but...

"If he'd just pay me what he's paying them to stop me from robbing him, I'd stop robbing him!"

– *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*

"Damn that Texan. When you need him, he's dead."

– *True Grit*

"You see, in this world there's two kinds of people, my friend: those with loaded guns and those who dig. You dig."

– *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*

"We're gonna give you a fair trial, followed by a first class hanging."

– *Silverado*

Josey Wales: "You a bounty hunter?"

Bounty Hunter: "A man has to do something these days to earn a living."

Josey Wales: "Dyin' ain't much of a living, boy!"

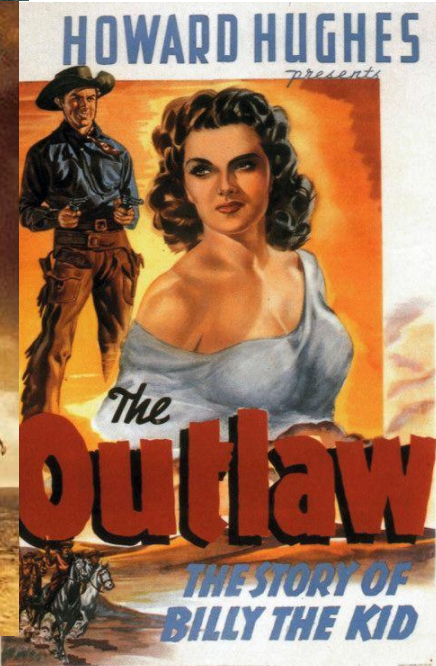
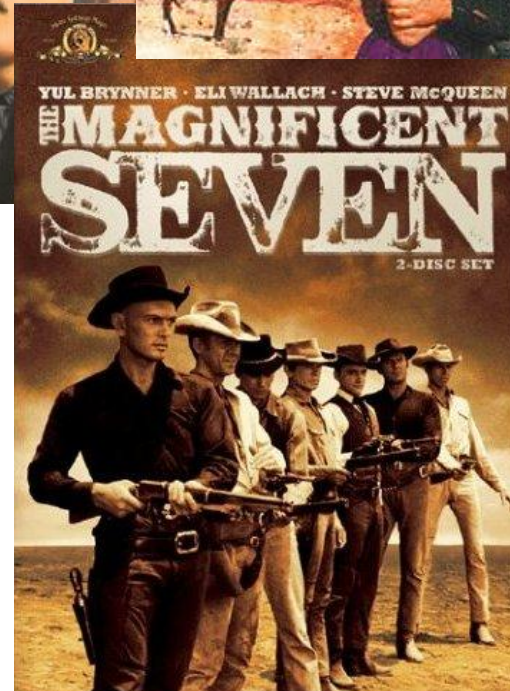
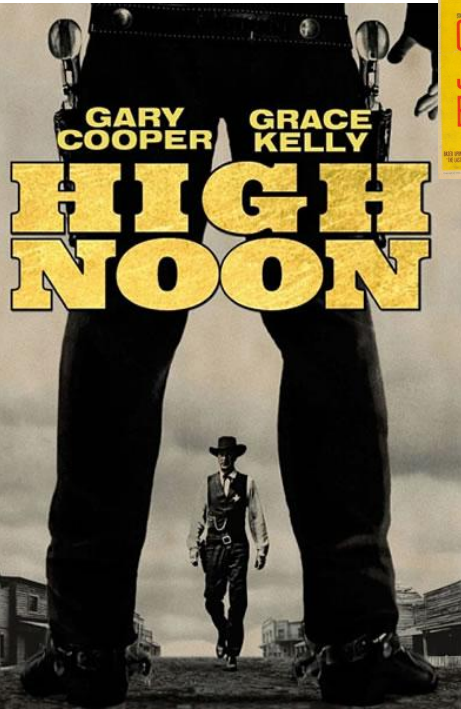
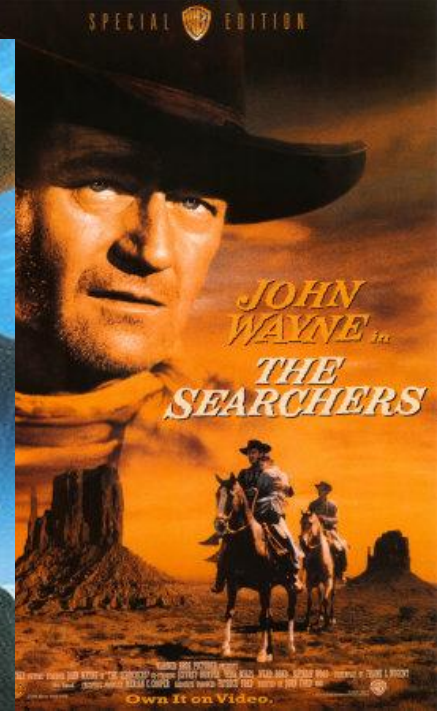
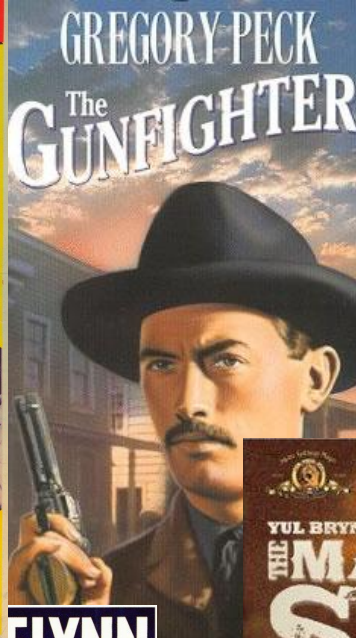
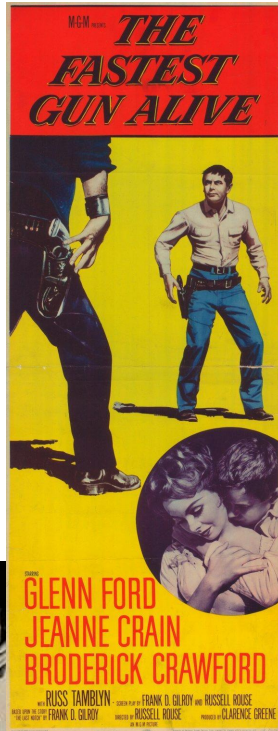
– *The Outlaw Josey Wales*

though it seems that the most famous western line of all

"A man's gotta do what a man's gotta do."

was never actually said in a western.

Some famous westerns are:



Many actors became well known for their roles in wes



John Wayne



James Stewart



Gary Cooper



Tom Mix



Will Rogers



Clint Eastwood



Henry Fonda

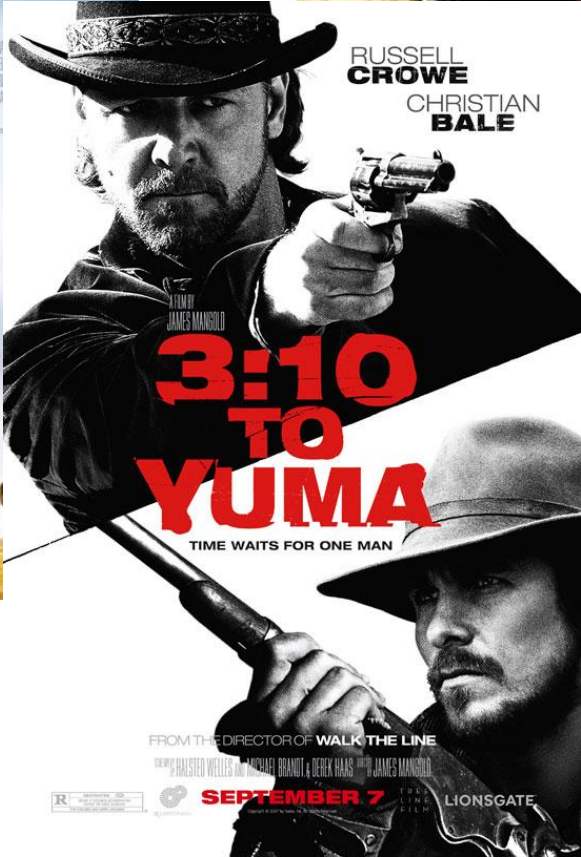
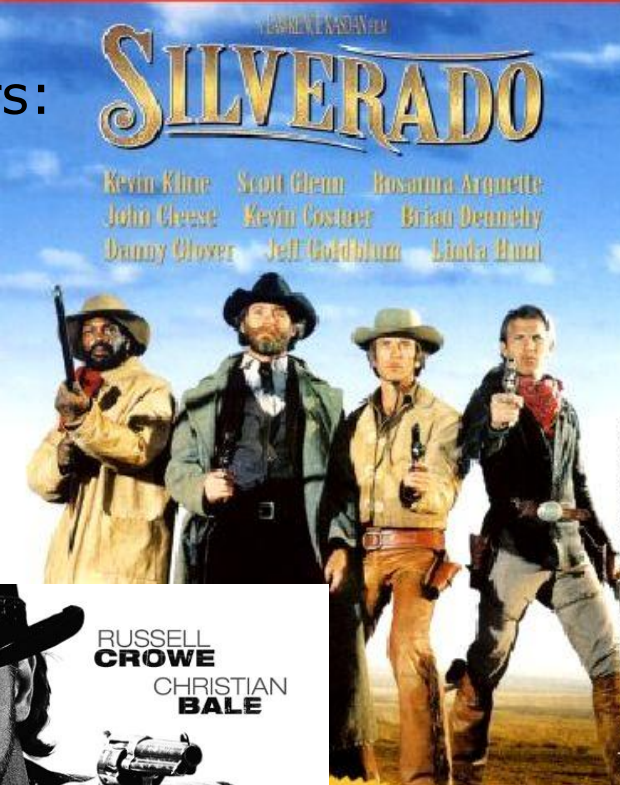
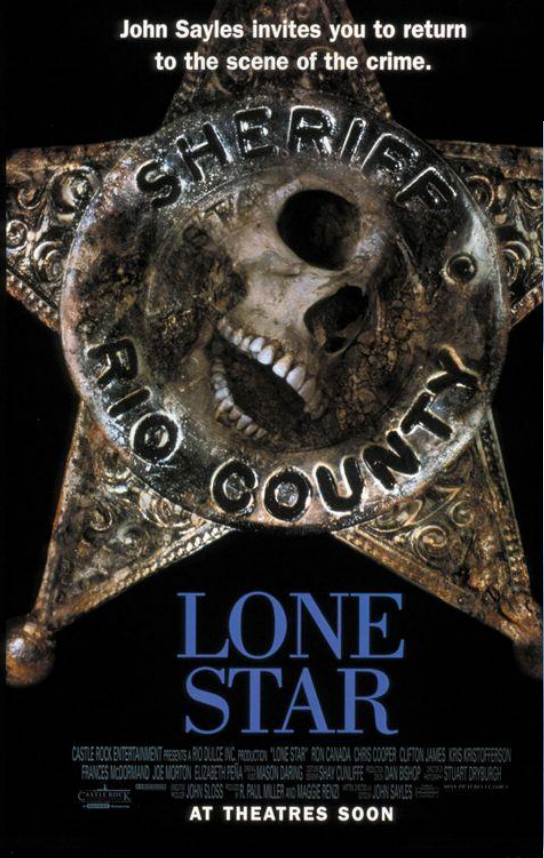
Westerns fell out of favour for a while, but in recent years –

most notably since Clint Eastwood's Oscar-winning *Unforgiven* –

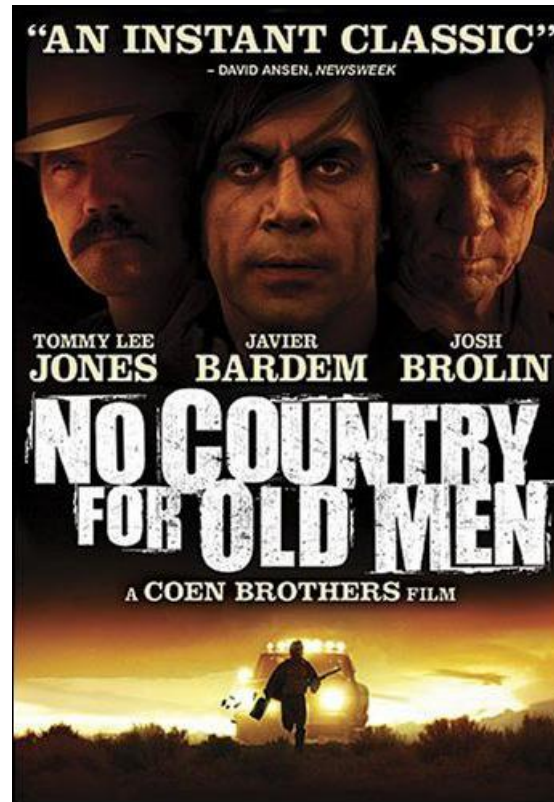
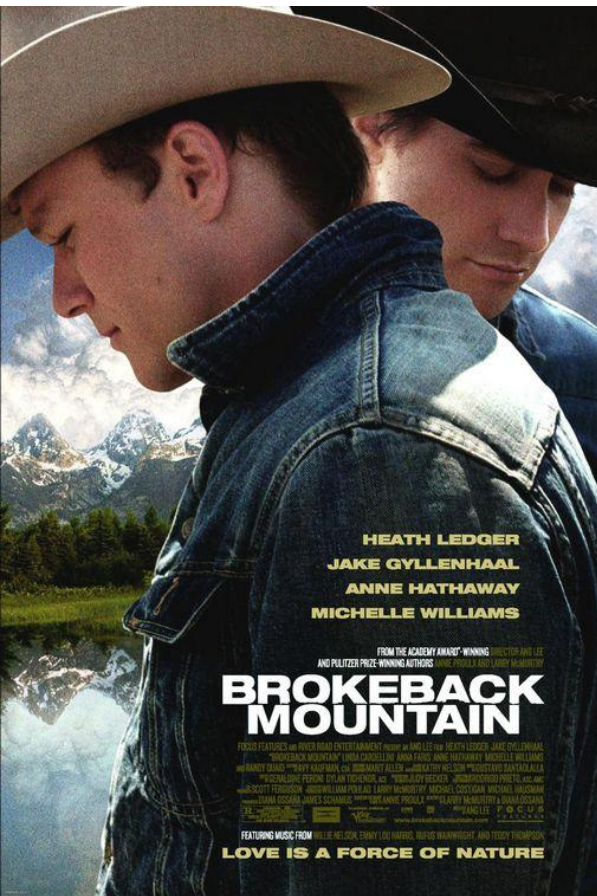


there has been a return to the genre, and some revision of the ingredients, to include more contemporary issues

Some of the impressive westerns in recent years:



some really revised the genre:



If you want to learn more about westerns, check out the website quoted earlier: filmsite.com

Look at the following pictures.

It won't be too difficult to work out the genre that they all belong to.



musicals

Before we go any further, perhaps you could jot down what you think are the genre features that distinguish the **film musical**.

Remember that just because a film has music in it, it is not necessarily a musical.



The most escapist of all the major genres, musicals do not depend on realism for their effects.

What most musicals share – whether they started life as stage shows –



like *My Fair Lady* (1964)

– or were written directly
for the movies –

like *Singing in the Rain*
(1952)

– is **artificiality**.



It just isn't realistic for people to stop what they are doing – often in public – to sing a song or to dance.



Leslie Caron and Gene Kelly dance beside the River Seine in
An American in Paris (1951)

But for nearly three decades – from the 1930s to the end of the 50s – film musicals were among the most popular and successful of genres, and the best are still enjoyed on TV and DVD by millions.

the ingredients:

- **songs** – lots of them – with bystanders or passers-by joining in as chorus

During the 'Golden Age of Musicals', all the great song writers – Cole Porter, George Gershwin, Irving Berlin, Sammy Kahn, Harold Arlen, Jerome Kern etc – wrote musical scores and songs for Hollywood.



Marilyn Monroe in
Gentlemen Prefer Blondes
(1953)



Doris Day in
Calamity Jane (1953)

- **dancing** – often very elaborate numbers involving a large troupe of dancers



An American in Paris



West Side Story (1951)

High School Musical (2006)

- usually centred on a **love story**...



... with a **happy ending**



Fred Astaire and Judy Garland in
Easter Parade (1948)

- the songs may help to develop the plot or may simply be there as decoration
- there are often novelty numbers



Judy Garland with
Margaret O'Brien in
Meet Me in St. Louis (1944)

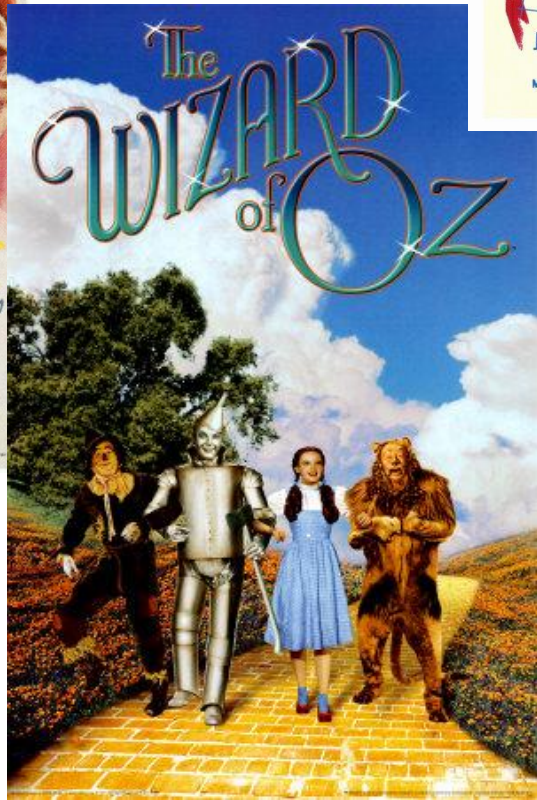
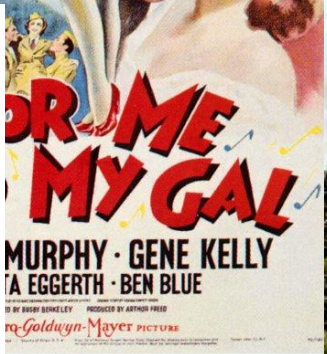
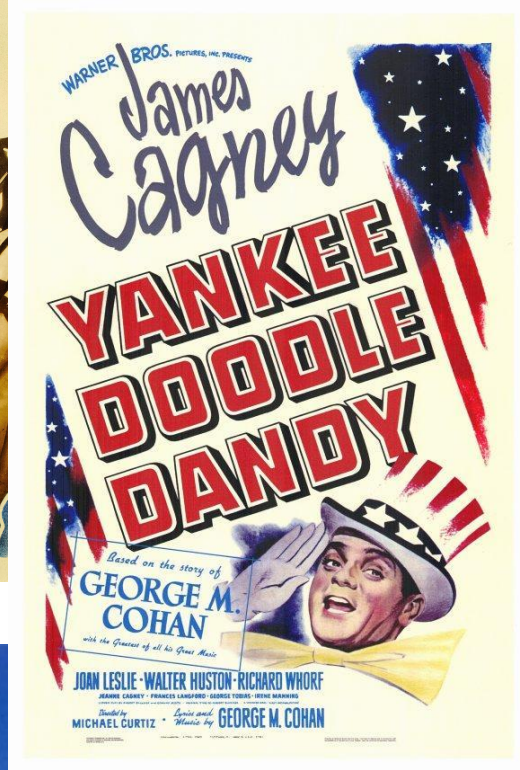
Fred Astaire in *Easter Parade*

- musical comedy includes quite a bit of humour as well

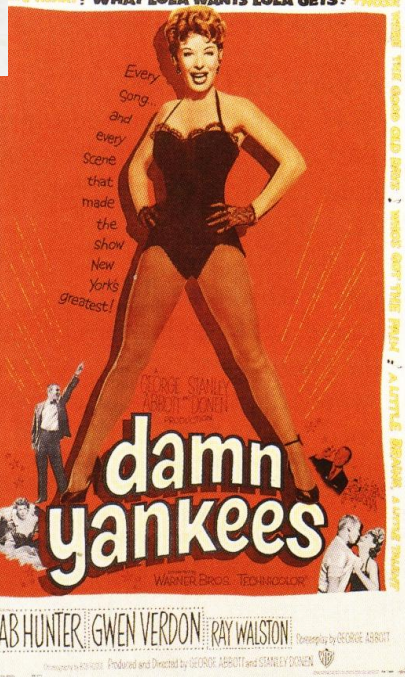
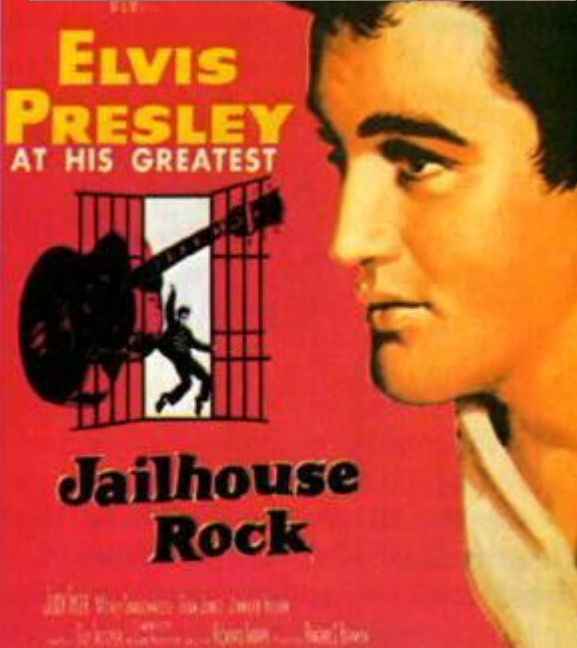
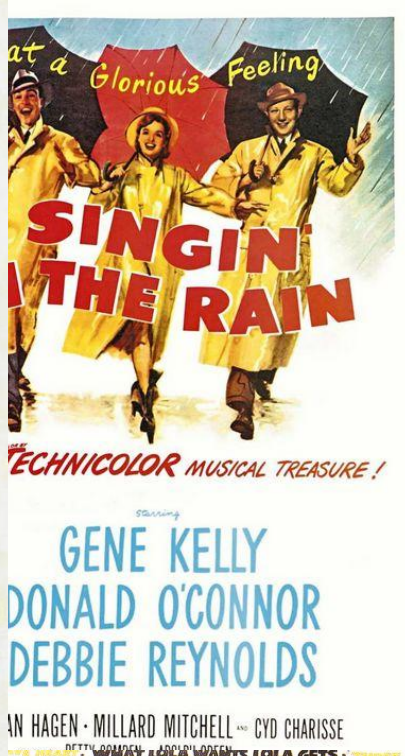
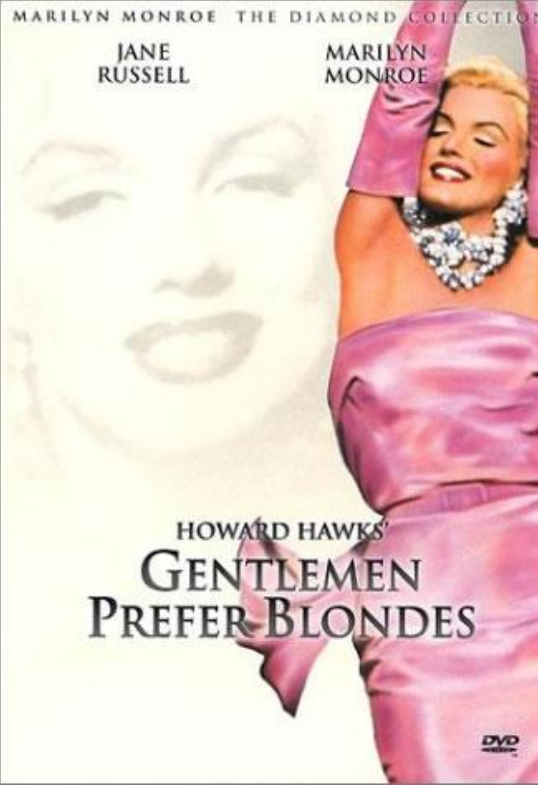


Fred Astaire and Judy Garland in
Easter Parade

'the golden age'



1950's



With the public's taste changing towards the end of the fifties towards more realistic film, musicals declined in popularity.

Instead of dozens of new musical films a year, there were maybe one or two.

Most of the successful musical films in the 60s were films of popular stage shows: *Oliver*, *My Fair Lady*, *Cabaret*, etc

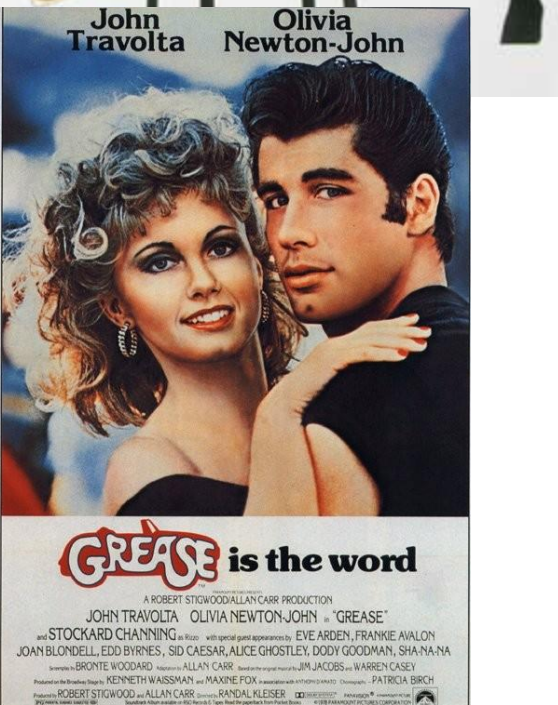
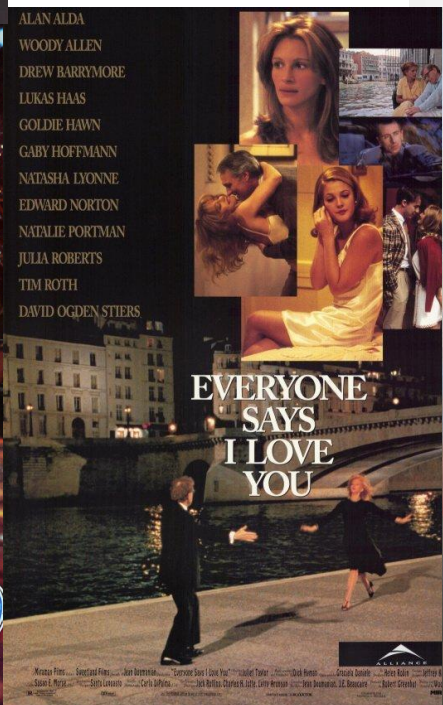
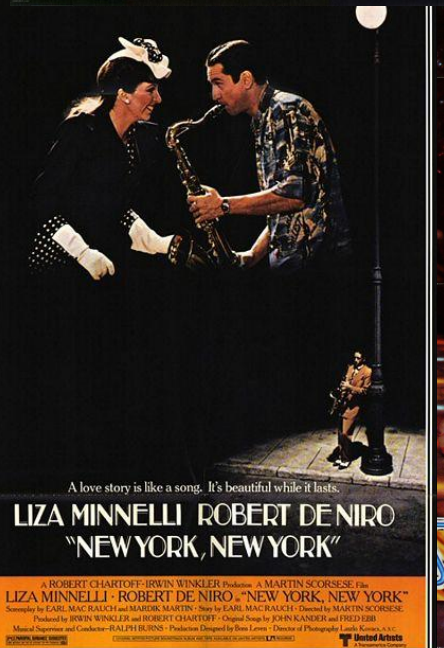
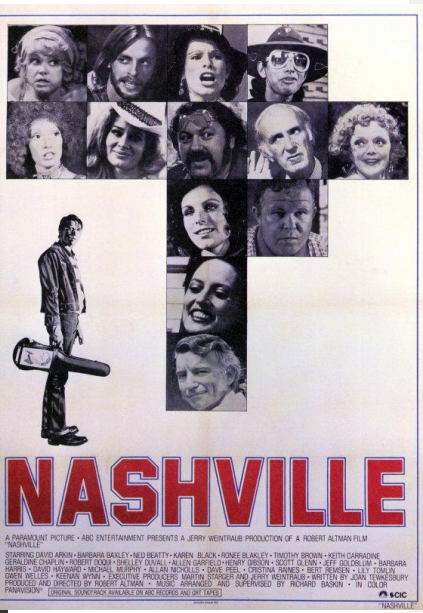
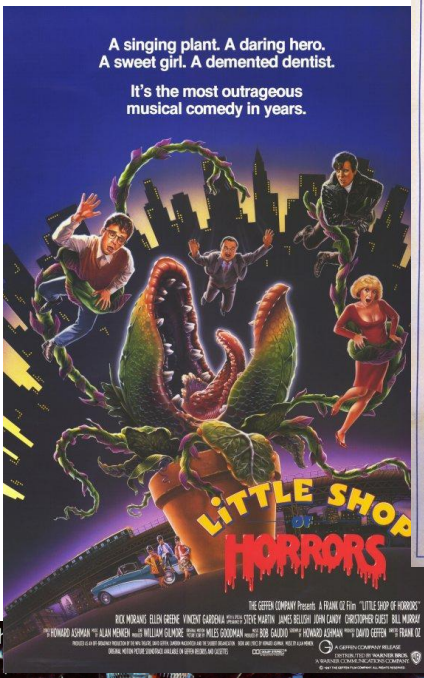
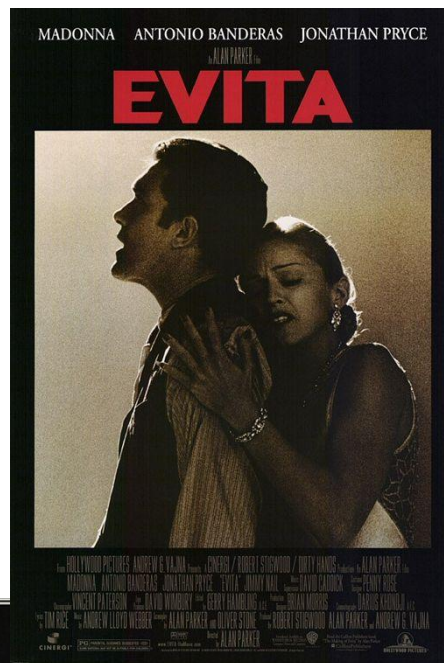
Some attempted a greater naturalism; in *Cabaret*, nearly all the numbers are sung as night-club performances.

However, they have never entirely gone away.

Liza Minnelli



1970 - 1999

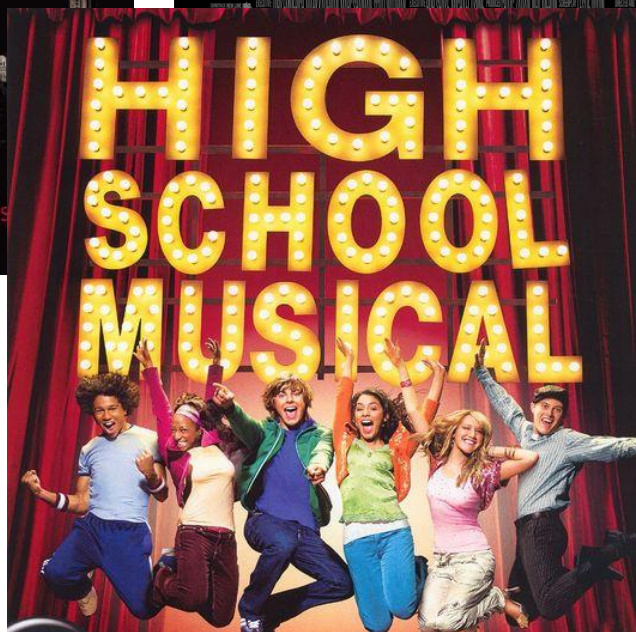
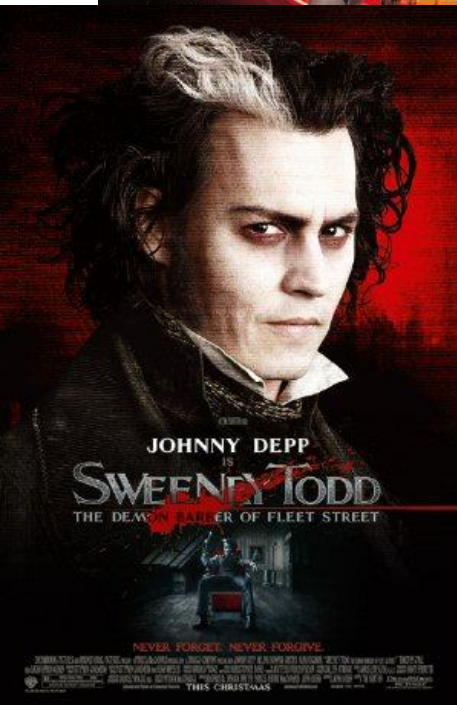
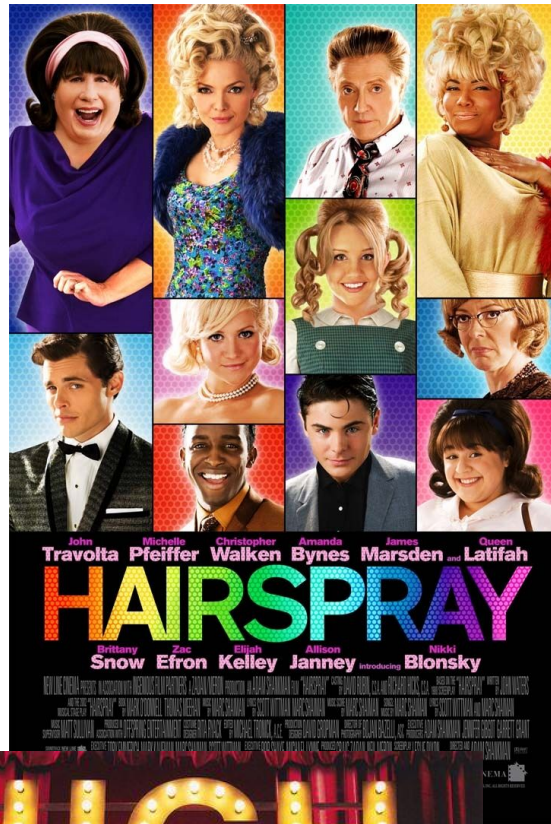


Since *Moulin Rouge* (2001), which took its plot from opera and its music from popular singers like Madonna and David Bowie, musicals have made a bit of a come-back.



Nicole Kidman

since 2000



a popular sub-genre that has been around since the very start of musicals is the musical biopic

the story of a musician is told interleaved with their music

Early Hollywood biopics – such as Warner Brothers' story of Cole Porter – bore very little resemblance to the truth of their subject's actual life



recent ones have tried to
be more honest

Kevin Kline as Cole Porter and
Ashley Judd as his wife Linda



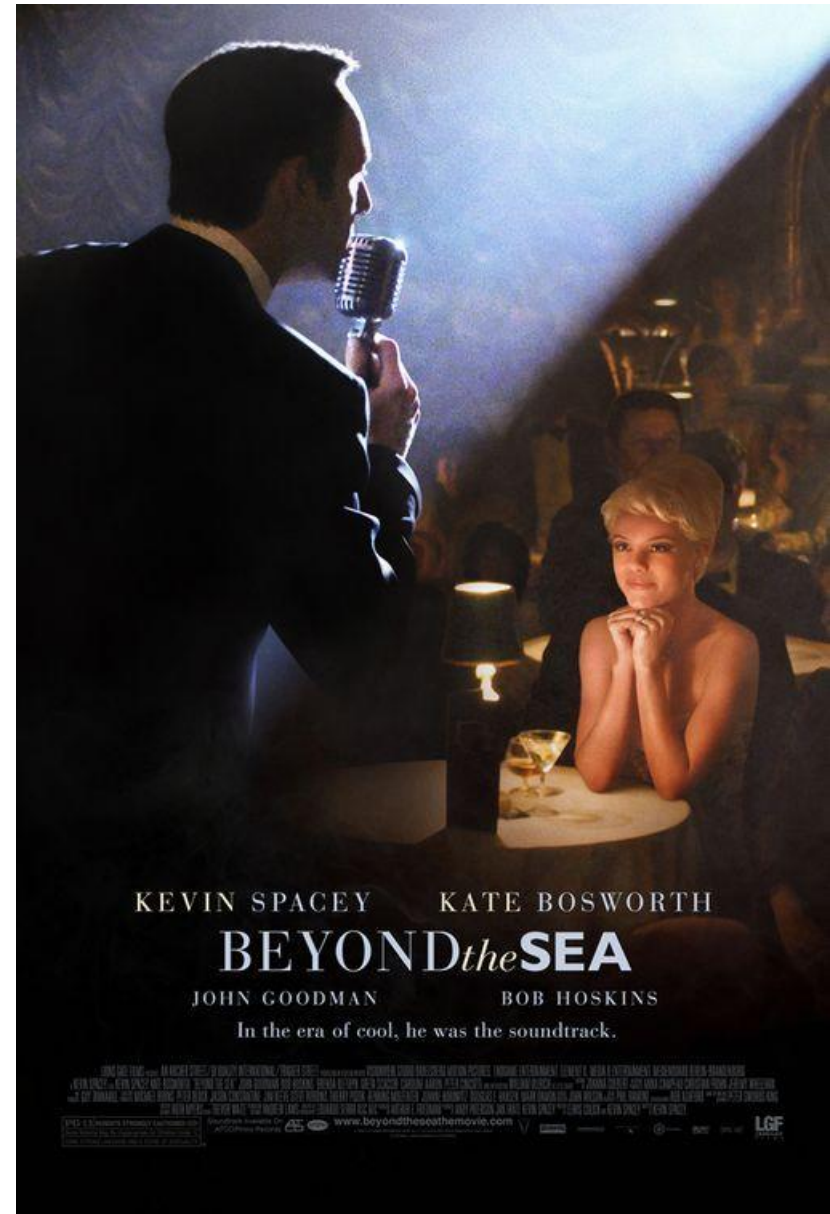
in some, the actors lip-synch to original recordings,



as in Jamie Foxx's Oscar-winning portrayal of Ray Charles (2004);

in others, they actually sing the songs themselves,

such as Kevin Spacey who played Bobby Darin in *Beyond the Sea* (2004)



and Joaquin Phoenix and Oscar-winning Reese Witherspoon as Johnny Cash and June Carter in **Walk the Line** (2005).



Here are some of the more common genres:

- action-adventure
- animated feature
- comedy
- costume drama
- crime
- disaster
- documentary
- drama
- gangster
- fantasy
- horror
- love story
- martial arts
- road movie
- romantic comedy
- science fiction
- splatter movie
- sports
- thriller
- war

Look at the following pictures.

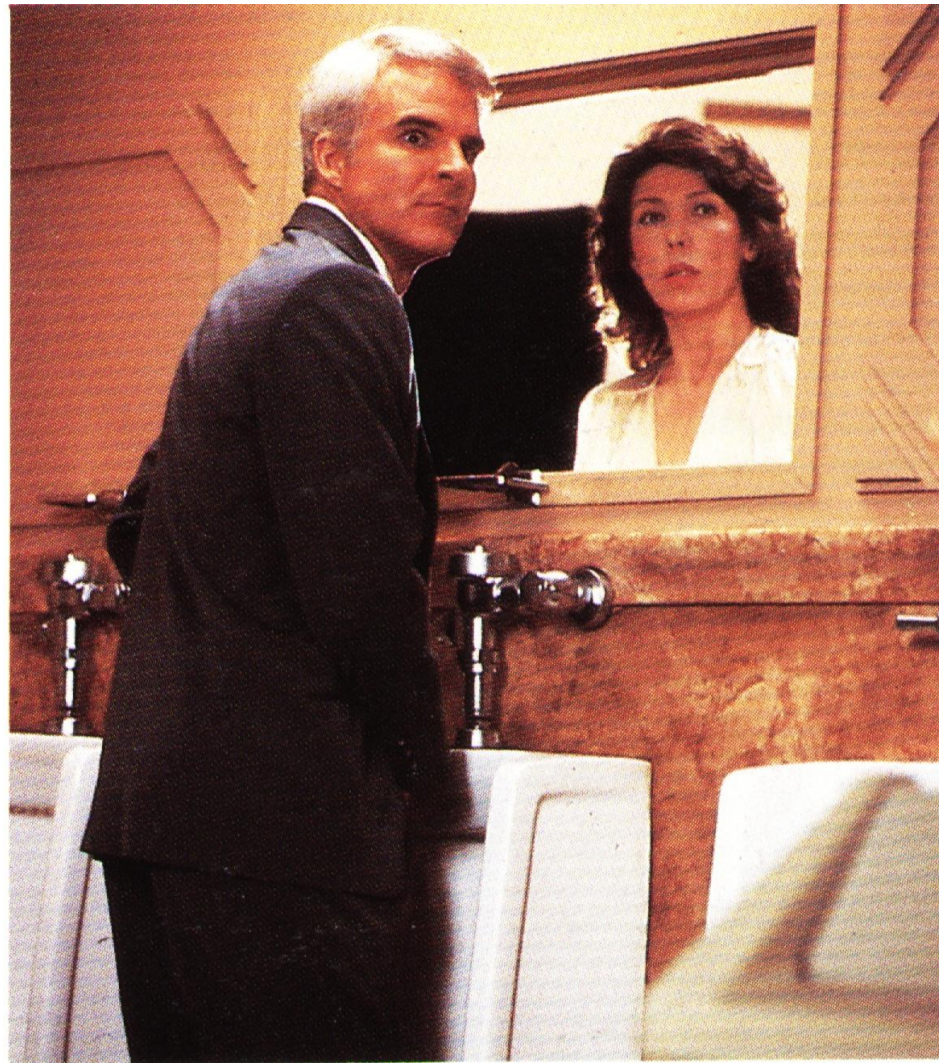
For each, decide which genre it belongs in. Some will be easy, some less so. What you are looking for is an identifiable style.

You need to have a reason for your decision. Knowing what movie the picture is from isn't a good enough reason.











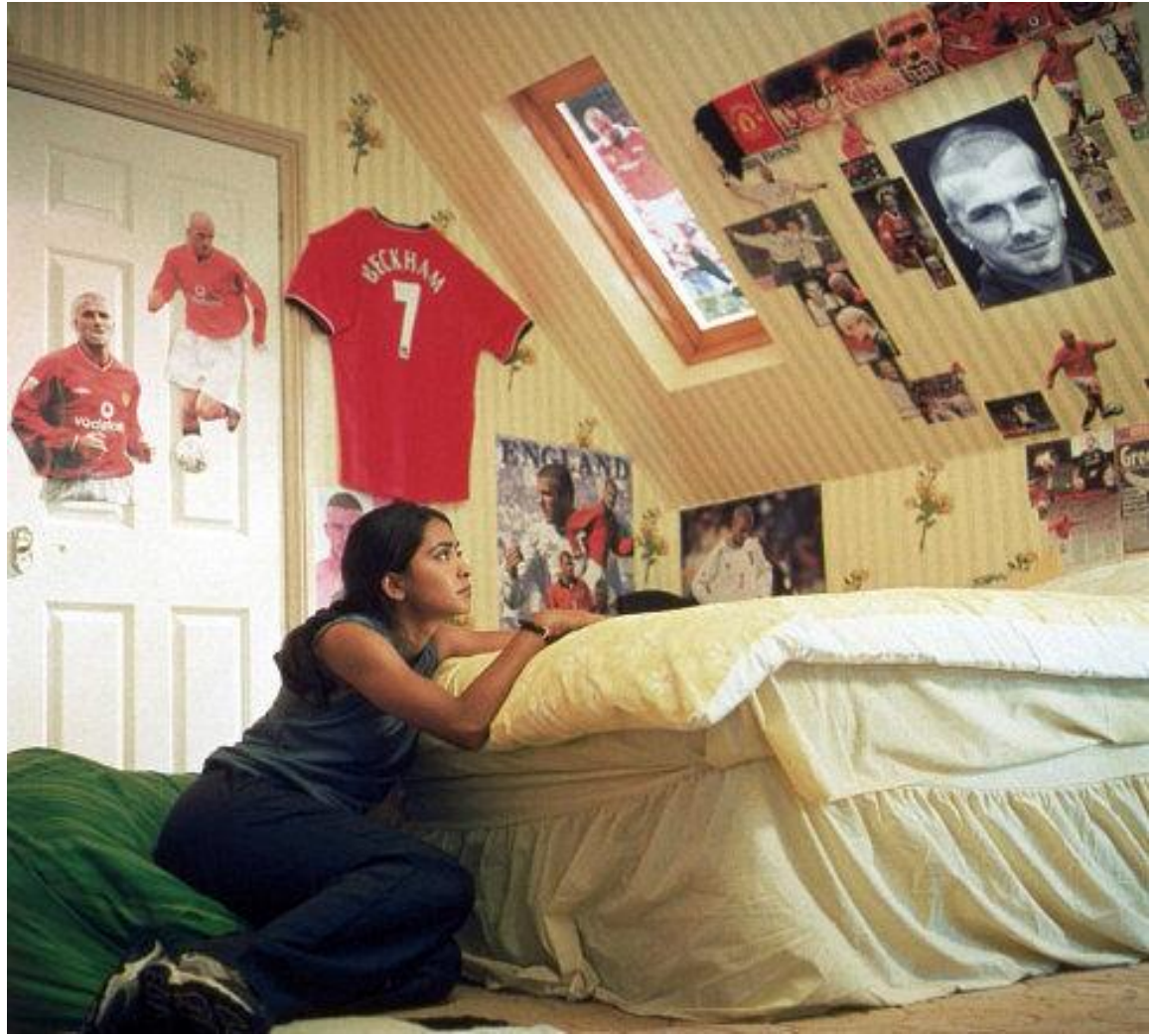




















































crime / thriller

high angle; blue filter; armed police

V for Vendetta (2005)



drama / family drama

hospital setting; sombre tone; unhappy faces

Whale Rider (2002), with Vicky Haughton



action / thriller

two men fighting with evidence of explosions and fire

Quantum of Solace (2008), with Daniel Craig and Mathieu Amalric

comedy

Steve Martin and Lily Tomlin both tend to do more comedy than drama

he is in front of a mirror in the men's room, and she is the reflection – not that usual

All of Me (1984)





sports – if boxing can be considered a sport

Russell Crowe wears boxing gloves; the ropes of the ring can be seen behind him

with Paul Giamatti in *Cinderella Man* (2005)



documentary

the two men are obviously posed – actors in films would be more natural

Enron – the Smartest Guys in the Room (2005)



thriller / crime

there is something very *noirish* about the light and colours,
and the narrow and deserted street

V for Vendetta (2005)



animated feature / comedy

Shrek (2004)



prison drama

the uniforms, the numbers, the cold colour, the mesh fence

The Shawshank Redemption (1994), with Morgan Freeman



costume drama – or, in this case, comedy, though nothing in the pic makes that distinction

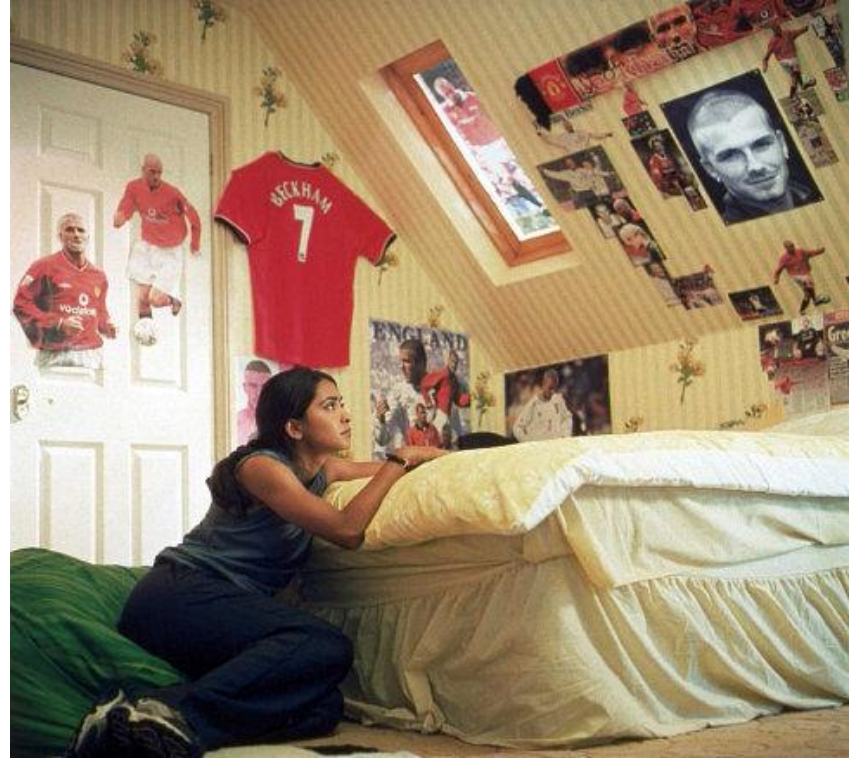
details of setting: Tudor house, animals, market stall, costumes

Shakespeare in Love (1998)

sports

everything on the walls is about football and David Beckham
in particular

Bend It Like Beckham (1999)





war

marching soldiers, evidence of bomb damage in the rubble
and on the building

The Pianist (2002)

fantasy

swords, armour, unearthly light

Excalibur (1981)





costume drama – though actually biopic

old car, the hats and clothes

Finding Neverland (2004) with Johnny Depp and Kate Winslet



crime

seedy ambiance; hats and coats set it in the 40s or 50s;
low angle shot

Farewell, My Lovely (1975), with Robert Mitchum



a tricky one – could be a love story except for the sense of unease the colours and the facial expressions give

he looks haunted; she is taunting him, enjoying her power over him

in fact, it is a supernatural thriller/horror: *The Gift* (2000), with Katie Holmes and Greg Kinnear



action

explosion, running man; it's Bruce Willis

Die Hard (1988)



thriller / crime

has a futuristic look about it but that is misleading; the big round door is the door to a bank vault

Inside Man (2006) with Clive Owen



love story / romantic comedy

also a sports film, but you can't tell from this

Tom Cruise and Renée Zellweger in *Jerry Maguire* (1996)



fantasy

a chariot pulled by polar bears!

The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe (2005), with Tilda Swinton



thriller / crime / gangster

someone holds a gun on Bogey; the white braces and tie are the uniform of a crook

Key Largo (1948), with Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall



wild-life documentary

they aren't singing or dancing

March of the Penguins (2005)



horror

the eerie blue, the menacing pose, the long fingernails, the mistiness

Nightmare on Elm Street (1984)



serious drama / crime

concerned faces and a burning cross

Mississippi Burning (1988), with Willem Dafoe and Gene Hackman



a tricky one to call – there is something both futuristic and retro about the costumes, and the setting gives little clue

it is in fact **sci-fi** – but set in a universe that is more like the wild west than the slick environments usually dreamed up

also thriller, action-adventure

the wonderfully original Joss Whedon's *Serenity* (2005)



comedy

the poses, the number of people crammed into a small room

the Marx Brothers in *A Night at the Opera* (1935)



courtroom drama

he is in court and is a lawyer

Paul Newman in *The Verdict* (1982)



fantasy – though some might argue for sci-fi

the look is more sci-fi; whether supernatural mutants can qualify is another argument

X-Men 3 – the Last Stand (2006)



comedy

he is in a dinner jacket and seems to be perched on the front of her bicycle

Barbra Streisand and Ryan O'Neal in *What's Up, Doc?* (1972), Peter Bogdanovich's homage to screwball comedy



action-adventure

plenty of action but also a comic element to it which suggests it isn't to be taken too seriously

Harrison Ford in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981)