

Abbie Cornish

Heath Ledger

Geoffrey Rush

Candy

more is never enough

Key Terminology

Conventions

Conventions are rules or commonly accepted ways of constructing a media text/product to suggest meaning. These rules may be related to the media products:

Form

Conventions of form are the technical characteristics common to a medium, such as the use of hyperlinks in web pages and the allocation of rewards to encourage players to move through a video game. In feature films, this relates to the aspect ratio, duration of screen time, editing, etc.

Genre

Conventions of genre include any sequence of codes that are common to a particular genre, and are often used to identify a film as belonging to a particular genre. Most recently in contemporary cinema, conventions often associated with genres are subverted and played around with, establishing genre hybrids such as the film *The Host* (Bong Joon-ho, 2006).

Narrative

Conventions of narrative can be understood as the fundamental building blocks and principles of storytelling that span across media forms such as literature, radio dramas, films and video games. Narrative conventions span the cause and effect sequencing of events; the opening, development and resolution of narrative arcs; the point of view from which the narrative is experienced from; whether the narrative has multiple storyline; the establishment and development of characters; the use of setting to convey meaning; the structuring (or rather re-structuring) of time.

Synopsis

Following protagonist Dan (Heath Ledger) his love for Candice or 'Candy' (Abbie Cornish) and addiction to heroin, the film brings the pair down a cycle of borrowing money, buying drugs, and attempting to get clean. Throughout the film their attempts to tackle addiction are continuously inhibited by their old friend and primary provider Casper (Geoffrey Rush), their difficult relationship and lack of hope in a promising future.

Narrative structure breakdown

The narrative of the film follows the typical three act structure, and among each act are repetitive cycles of inciting incident, climax and resolution. The development of the characters is non-linear, and as relative to the subject of the narrative, we see the characters cycle back to their initial state in the same way a drug addict relapses after recovery.

Inciting Incident



Narrative convention

The inciting incident in Candy is when Candice (Candy) overdoses on heroin while taking a bath. We get a view from the perspective of Dan. The focus on his reaction to the incident gives us the impression that he will be the protagonist and much of the story will centre around his perspective, like it does in this scene. This scene shapes the way their relationship plays out in the rest of the narrative, as they continuously reach complications with each other and one must rely on the other to hold everything together.

Technical codes

The washed out lighting and colours of the bathroom have been used to represent the energy draining from candy. The loud dialogue and fast paced music carries the sense of urgency of the situation.

Symbolic codes

Candy appears very pale and white, indicative of her innocence/purity when it comes to drug use, in comparison to Dan. The broken tiles above the bath are symbolic of the damage caused by the overdose, and the future damage drugs will have on their relationship. Dan is wearing a red shirt which stands out against the bleak colours of the bathroom. Red often symbolises passion and energy, something he brings to the relationship whether it's nature is positive or negative. Red can also represent danger, which ties specifically to the events of this scene being that Candy's life is in danger.

Written codes

The strong language and swearing (Dan's use of slang word 'fuckin' before almost every other word he says) tells us about the characters and their personalities, as well as increasing the intensity of the scene.

Climax



Narrative convention

Candy is represented in this scene by her voice narrating her writing as Dan is reading it. Commonly when characters are communicating with each other while apart, for example the various letter scenes in *The Notebook* (2004), a voice over by the writer will be used to indicate their expression/tone. At the same time this scene shows the miscommunication in their relationship and how it's causing it to deteriorate. The state of the house is a visual indicator that things are degenerating.

Technical codes

The handheld shots of the room tell us we are seeing things from Dan's perspective. The layering of audio while Candy is narrating further emphasises the chaotic tone of the situation. It also replicates racing thoughts as they are going through someone's mind.

Symbolic codes

The bright colours and messy handwriting are representative of the chaos of the situation and what is going on in candy's head. Dan's slumped body language indicates he's at a loss or feels like he's given up. He also desperately tries to wipe off the writing on the walls as if trying to solve a tough situation by avoiding it completely.

Written codes

The scattered wording of Candy's writing ("everything was gold... one night the bed caught fire... he was handsome, and a very good criminal...") shows us that she's unstable and no longer able to control her

Resolution



Narrative convention

The resolution of Candy involves the final scene, where Candy and Dan meet after a while and decide to go separate ways. This breakup scene is often shown towards the end of romance movies, and in this narrative it serves as closure for both the characters and the audience. The fact that neither of them explicitly say that they should break up shows that they are now both on the same page and are ready to move on.

Technical codes

The camera is held on Dan as Candy leaves the restaurant, so from this we can assume that they won't be seeing each other any longer and will continue on with their lives separately. The room is low-lit and shadowy, showing Dan is taking the damage from their separation. The long shot emphasises the distance between them.

Symbolic codes

Candy is shown walking into the bright natural light of the outside, showing she is moving on to a positive and hopeful life.

Written codes

Candy telling Dan 'i'm here now' tells us that she felt absent during their relationship while drugs were involved and her mental health was declining. Now that she has become clean and taken the time to look after herself, she feels that she can truly be there with Dan, and not have her presence damaged by external issues such as drugs or mental illness.

Characters

Abbie Cornish - Candice/ 'Candy'



A strong willed, fun-loving artist, who somewhat fits the 'manic pixie dream girl' convention. Her character in this film is Dan's love interest, represented in the same way his addiction to heroin is.

Heath Ledger - Dan



A gentle yet intense man in his twenties aspiring to be a writer, with little to look up to in his life apart from his love for Candice and using heroin. He maintains a rather unconventional appearance/nature and struggles to place himself in society in the way he is expected to.

Geoffrey Rush - Casper



A chemistry professor who serves as a father-like figure to the young couple, giving them the money and drugs they need but struggle to get on their own.



Tony Martin - Mr. Wyatt

A kind man who is accepting of his daughter's relationship and lifestyle, though unaware of her or Dan's drug habits.

Noni Hazlehurst - Mrs. Wyatt

A protective mother who is a little less lenient when it comes to Candy's lifestyle, and wants what is best for her daughter.

Focus on filmmaker



Neil Armfield is a director of film, theatre and opera born in Sydney, NSW in 1955. He was the artistic director of Sydney's Belvoir theatre for seventeen years of his career, and is now co-artistic director of the Adelaide Festival. He has worked alongside Geoffrey Rush in multiple theatre productions, as well as on *Candy*, which was screened at the Berlin International Film Festival in competition.

Filmography:

Twelfth night (1986)
The Ham funeral (1990)
The Castanet club (1991)
Candy (2006)
Holding the man (2015)

Theatre productions:

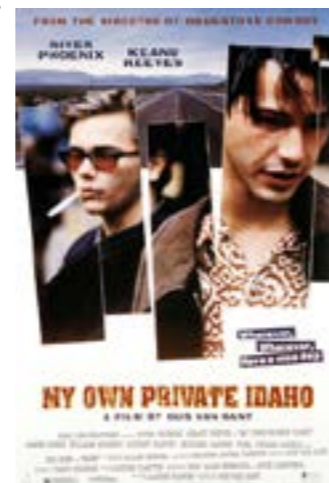
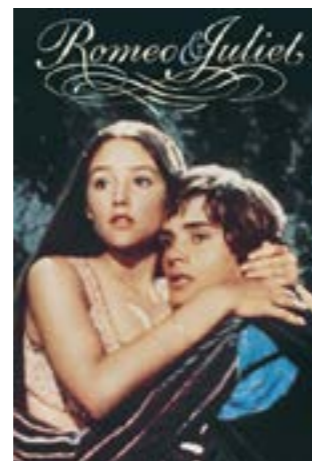
Cloudstreet (1999-2001)
Hamlet (1994)
The diary of a madman (1991)
Exit the king (2013)
The book of everything
The Judas kiss (1991-2016)
The secret river (2013)
King Lear (2015)

Reception of the film

The story of *Candy* (2006) was nothing new in the context of cinema at the time, so the film's depiction of heroin addiction was heavily critiqued. However, the chemistry and acting skills of Heath Ledger and Abbie Cornish have been praised. The gritty subject matter was common in Australian cinema during its time, which was not so popular among a mainstream audience as films of previous decades were. The film made a total of \$2.1 million USD in the box office, sitting quite far below other Australian films of the 2000s such as *Animal Kingdom* (box office \$6.8 million US). It currently sits on a 48% critic rating on Rotten Tomatoes, 7.2/10 on IMDb, and 3.6/5 on Letterboxd.

Genre

Candy (2006) follows many of the conventions of a romance/drama such as day to day life occurrences, themes of pregnancy, family struggles and the characters going separate ways. Director Niel Armfield's extensive experience in theatre had great influence on how he directed the film, as well as how he collaborated with writer Luke Davies to create the screenplay. The writing and character dynamic are reminiscent of theatrical film adaptations, for example Gus Van Sant's *My Own Private Idaho*, an adaptation of Shakespeare's *King Henry IV*.



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