

Some Like it Hot

(1959, Billy Wilder, USA)

Component 1: Varieties of Film and Film-Making (AL) Component 1: American Film (AS)

Core Study Areas: Key Elements of Film Form Meaning & Response The Contexts of Film

Specialist Study Area: Auteur (AL)

Rationale for study

- *Some like it Hot* is one of the great American comedies, with witty dialogue, memorable images and one of the most famous endings in film history.
- The film's cross-dressing and entangled identities challenge traditional sex-roles and enable complex readings.

STARTING POINTS - Useful Sequences and timings/links

- "Jello on springs" 23mins
- "I'm through with Love" and "Nobody's Perfect" 1hr 50mins

CORE STUDY AREAS 1 - STARTING POINTS - Key Elements of Film Form (Micro Features)

Cinematography

- The film is shot in black and white to connote the historical period (1920s) and to make the costume and make-up seem less garish and outlandish.
- Sugar Kane is often in the centre of the frame with a full light to display her features. The lighting often highlights Marilyn Monroe's blonde hair, wide eyes and cheekbones.

- Spotlighting is used when Sugar Kane (Marilyn Monroe) sings "*I Wanna Be Loved By You*", emphasising her beauty and hiding in shadow her transparent dress.

Mise-en-Scène

- Objects and costume connote characters' social status; Spat wears expensive shiny shoes, indicating his superior gangster status, while Charlie's toothpick suggesting his low status.
- Forms of transport, such as the train, bicycle, yacht and motorboat, are key motifs emphasising the theme of journeys and transformation.
- The characters are doubles - Sugar and Daphne are both blondes and act like sisters, while Osgood and Jo dress alike, give the same gifts, and use the same boat.

Editing

- The film adheres to the Classical Hollywood mode of continuity editing throughout.
- Rapid whip-pans are used in the cuts between Sugar and Jo on the yacht and Daphne and Osgood on the dance-floor to connote the two sites of action happening simultaneously.
- The famous "*nobody's perfect*" ending is held as a two-shot at eye-level to heighten the comedy - we see the reactions of Osgood and Daphne simultaneously.

Sound

- Sugar's musical performances momentarily halt the narrative and function as both spectacle and an insight into Sugar's inner feelings e.g. "*Runnin' Wild*" and "*I Wanna Be Loved by You*".
- "*I'm through with Love*" is used as a dramatic device to reunite Jo and Sugar.

CORE STUDY AREAS 2 - STARTING POINTS - Meaning & Response

Representations

- Sugar Kane is first represented from a male perspective. The camera fetishizes the bottom half of her body from Jo and

Jerry's point-of-view. On the train, Sugar's body is further displayed as she removes the brandy flask from her garter.

- However, the film then goes beyond presenting women simply as objects of desire, as Jo and Jerry/Daphne gain a greater sensitivity towards women and question their own roles as men.
- The film's playfulness with gender roles and the film's ending can be read as a performative view of gender which defies heterosexual romantic norms.

Aesthetics (i.e. the 'look and feel' of the film including visual style, influences, auteur, motifs)

- *Some Like it Hot* is cine-literate, evoking the gangster films of the 1930s with black and white photography and generic iconography. It combines elements of gangster film, the comedy and the musical.

CORE STUDY AREAS 3 - STARTING POINTS - Contexts

Social

- *Some Like it Hot* reflects a changing, more permissive America and the decline in adherence to the Hollywood production code. Marilyn Monroe's overt sexuality represented

a new, more open attitude towards sex.

Institutional

- The 1948 Paramount Decree marked the end of the dominance of the 'Big 5' studios. As a result, smaller studios such as United Artists (UA) took the opportunity to produce major pictures. UA was hugely successful in the 1950s, with increased profits and A-list stars on non-exclusive contracts, such as Tony Curtis and Rita Hayworth.

SPECIALIST STUDY AREA - Auteur

Starting points

- Billy Wilder wrote and directed a diverse range of commercial Hollywood films, including film noirs (*Double Indemnity*, *Sunset Boulevard*) and comedies (*The Seven Year Itch*, *The Apartment*). What unifies Wilder's diverse films are the themes of deception and disguise, a tight script and witty, memorable dialogue.
- Billy Wilder cultivated Marilyn Monroe's star persona, having previously directed her in *The Seven Year Itch* (1955). This film, along with *Some Like it Hot*, contributes to Monroe's persona as a combination of naivety and alluring sexuality.