

# Film Studies Revision Elements

Component 2

## Section C: Film movements - Silent Cinema

<p><b>Buster Keaton</b> <b>two-reelers</b></p>	<p>One Week (Keaton, USA, 1920) The Scarecrow (Keaton, USA, 1920) The High Sign (Keaton, USA, 1921) Cops (Keaton, USA, 1922)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss how far your chosen film or films reflect aesthetic qualities associated with a particular film movement. [20]</li> <li>• Discuss how far your chosen film or films reflect cultural contexts associated with a particular film movement. [20]</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Key Scenes</b></p>	<p><b>One Week</b> - wedding - to the house / home box delivered / building house / piano - spongy floor / bath / spinning house / moving house <b>The Scarecrow</b> - votes / Rube Goldberg, Surreal house / running with dog, deep focus / scarecrow liquor / getaway on horse / vicar on bike <b>The High Sign</b> - off train / newspaper / shottig bottles / gallery, dog, bell &amp; hanging hat / kicking mule / running around the trap house <b>Cops</b> - behind bars / buy a horse / driving with horse along the street / chase- grabbing the car / ladder on the fence /</p>
<p><b>Film Form</b></p>	
<p>Cinematography</p>	<p>Lack if colour again allows for a dreamlike quality, a detachment from reality Use of mid and wide shots in order to enable gags to play out without edit A limited number of shot types in total in comparison with modern films Natural lighting (the sun) Close-ups for (written?) incidental detail Film stock having deteriorated over time. Some subtleties of the films have been lost. Cameras getting lighter and more portable - camera attached to moving objects, cars etc. Special effects in for the form of camera placement and matte painting Black and white - colour invented in the 1930s</p>
<p>Mise en Scene</p>	<p>Run-down settings/back streets/shops/small houses Signature gimmicks eg hats, glasses moustaches Suits - ill-fitting clothes/large shoes The prominence of props for comedic ends-objects used for comedy Cheaply fabricated large props and settings</p>
<p>Editing</p>	<p>Short film length due to the Cinema of Attractions Single film reel was 10 minutes (2-reelers = 2 x 10 mins) Use of intertitles Edits used to create more elaborate gags or reveal details</p>

	<p>Long takes</p> <p>Keaton employs long takes to construct stunts within the mise-en-scène, rather than camera trickery. The long takes and long shots allow us to marvel at his virtuosity as an acrobat and marvel at the stunt work (Keaton performed all his own stunts).</p>
Performance	<p>Physical humour</p> <p>“Sight gags” involving physical impossibilities or an unexpected occurrence</p> <p>Quick/clever gags</p> <p>Impossible gags</p> <p>Chase scenes</p> <p>Exaggerated bodily and facial expressions (Keaton uses stone face and veers towards verisimilitude)</p> <p>Echoes of Vaudeville theatre</p> <p>Lots of English actors were drafted to star in films. Vaudeville consisted of performances such as singing, dancing, magic, juggling, acrobatics and comedy.</p>
Sound	<p>Lack of sound allows for a dream-like quality/detachment from reality</p> <p>Piano sound-track - improvised and live</p> <p>Narrator reading intertitles for illiterate and immigrants</p>
Aesthetics	<p>Gags, long takes, realistic locations, mechanical comedy, deadpan, acrobatics</p> <p>Keaton was involved in all aspects of production and a true auteur. He wrote, directed, produced, edited and starred in these two-reelers. Most of these films were shot on location in the back streets near the studio lot.</p> <p>Keaton was interested in the geometry of a gag. Look at the use of frames, parallel lines and circles in all these two-reelers. Consider the composition of the hanging salt and pepper pots in <i>The Scarecrow</i> – the characters sit at the table at each end of the frame in symmetry and the hanging pots create horizontal, vertical and diagonal patterns. Some frames of <i>One Week</i> look like contemporary abstract paintings.</p> <p>2 reelers - not bound by narrative constraints, have a dream-like quality,</p>
Representation	<p>Cops = bullies and figures of fun, women = romantic interest,</p> <p>Simple man against an increasingly complicated world, masculinity, parody, modernism</p> <p>Women often function as romantic interests and an integral part of the plot. In <i>One Week</i>, Keaton’s wife is both his equal and foil to his gags. The heroines in <i>One Week</i> and <i>The Scarecrow</i> always retain a certain amount of independence</p> <p>The house in <i>One Week</i> can be interpreted as a metaphor for the dangers of idealising married life. The obstacles Keaton faces with the house shakes his idealised masculinity, as Keaton loses control and even begins to struggle with simple tasks.</p>
Context	<p>Vaudeville - lots of different types of entertainment. Slapstick</p> <p>Cinema of Attractions - went beyond every-day life representation. Hardly any narrative. 1907-1913 (The Spectacular Image)</p> <p>Trick films - slow-motion/fast-motion/camera cranking speed/substitution splice/multiple exposure (Melies’ Expanding head)</p> <p>Chase films - Keystone Cops/ Farce - Simple narratives/lots of gags/appeal to lower classes/big chase scene/gesturing of panto</p> <p>Population swarming to the city due to modernisation - Industrial expansion/population growth/noise/slums/technology</p> <p>The influx of immigrants (intertitles/reader at the front of theatre)</p> <p>Women’s suffrage/stereotypes and sexual politics</p>

Hay's Code - 1934 (Keaton was 1920)  
Cinema of Attractions Keaton's films lie in-between the non-narrative 'Cinema of Attractions' of early cinema and narrative-driven features.  
Vaudeville / Slapstick / Chase and trick films / Rube Goldberg / Flatpack house / Goat gland specialist  
Charlie Chaplin and Harold Lloyd  
The Star System of Hollywood, Arbuckle scandal  
Modernism  
The wider context (German Expressionism - Nosferatu 1922, Soviet Montage - The Man With The Movie Camera 1929)  
Art movements (e.g. Cubism, Surrealism) or a broader cultural movement (Modernism)  
Goat Gland Specialist!

**Specialist area:  
The realist and the  
expressive**

Andre Bazin - 1940s - German Expressionism and Soviet Montage are against the Realist calling of cinema. Lumiere Bros = Realist. Melies = Expressionist  
**Realist** traits = Mirror of the actual world - unobtrusive film-making/simplicity. Spontaneity and directness  
**Expressionist** traits = Stylised and distorted / different from the perceived world - passive audience  
**Expressionist** Keaton acts gags in front of **Realist** settings  
Use of Kuleshov effect to direct the spectator's eye  
**Expressive** (egs)  
1. Unfolding the enormous newspaper - exaggerated mise-en-scene, a trait of German Expressionist films. This also relates to surrealism. Expressive.  
2. Buster appears as if he is in jail. The next shot shows he is just standing behind a gate; the use of camera tricks to **manipulate** the audience's interpretation of the film is an expressionist technique.  
3. When the shady man across the road is looking at Buster, the **Kuleshov effect** is used to show the man's intentions as the shot is **intercut** with shots of Buster handling his money. This is an example of **Russian Soviet Montage**, a form of **expressionism**.  
**Realist** (egs)  
1. the shot where buster joins the parade is an example of **realist** filmmaking, as the shot uses a deep focus, natural lighting and it is an extended take.  
2. when the dog sees the cat around the side of the building - a realist approach to film - natural lighting, deep focus - what happens on-screen is what actually happened in real life.  
3. The parade that is showcased in Cops made more realistic by the masses of crowds surrounding the marching police. The extreme scale of the event presents it as a more public and therefore authentic setting. It also portrays the patriotic values of America.  
Keaton was at the birth of narrative filmmaking in Hollywood. American Silent COmedy helped shape the language of narrative film. Note that the gags in these two-reelers are far more surreal than Hollywood's later feature films and do not always have a narrative function. These films lie in-between the non-narrative 'cinema of attractions' of early cinema and narrative-driven features. Such films demonstrate Keaton's ability to play with the flexibility of cinematic rules and draw our attention to cinematic devices. Keaton borrows elements of realism **and** expressionism where he sees fit. To him, as long as the audience is being entertained and laughing anything goes.

**Watch these other films to**

Charlie Chaplin - The Immigrant 1917

**get a better understanding:**

Harold Lloyd - Number Please 1920