

FEATURE CINEMATIC INSPIRATION

The story will be familiar to many of you. Set in a town in America's Deep South during the Depression, it is a commentary on racial prejudice as seen through the eyes of children. Atticus Finch is the lawyer who is asked to take on the case of Tom Robinson, a black man falsely accused of raping a white woman. Atticus knows that he has no chance of winning the case due to the ugly discrimination that pervades the town and is an endemic part of society at that time.

Atticus's own self-respect is dependant on the need to do what is right. In the film he explains why he is taking on the case to his young daughter, "If I didn't I couldn't hold my head in town. I couldn't even tell you and Jem not to do something again".

The children themselves are on a journey that chips away at their innocence. They inhabit a carefree world at the start of the film but become more aware of the realities of the adult world around them as the story progresses. Their curiosity in their father's position leads to memorable scenes, both at the jailhouse the night before the trial and in the courtroom itself. The trial is, of course, the main point of drama in the film. Atticus, in his pale linen suit, presents his case in the packed and segregated courtroom. It is a great cinematic moment which sees Atticus, in the light of no evidence against his client, imploring the jury to do their duty.

For me, Atticus represents the importance of the choices that we make. This is made apparent in the relationship he has with his children, teaching them to have respect for themselves and for others. The film manages to strike the balance of making a serious commentary on intolerance and injustice while being thoroughly engaging and poignant.

BRIDGET JONES: THE EDGE OF REASON

Maria Robertson,
Society of Advocates in Aberdeen
I realised how much I love the Bar Council Dinner scene. I'm not a lawyer and I am always amazed by some of the blinkered views that know nothing outside the law. At the dinner there is a quiz and poor Bridget is terribly bored through all the legal questions - and yes lawyers love law so much that they enjoy a quiz on the subject! It's only when the last round on popular culture starts that Bridget comes into her own whilst all around her look shocked and bewildered as to how she could know such things. Hilarious.

THE GODFATHER AND GODFATHER II

Ken Forrest, Murray Stable
Tom Hagen, played by Robert Duvall, is in-house lawyer and consigliere to the Corleone family in both magnificent Coppola films, and the range of legal skills on display is breathtaking.

His methods are not conventional - arranging to place a horse's head on an opponent's bed at the end of an unsuccessful mediation is not something students of ADR are likely to be taught any time soon. Suggesting to a witness that he kill himself, rather than go to court and give evidence against the family, is certainly an unusual way of taking a pre-cognition.

But they are effective (the opponent who woke up with the horse's head quickly conceded the point of dispute). Duvall-as-Hagen

epitomises the lawyer who understands his client perfectly. He knows his client's business, and what he wants to achieve. He is prepared to completely immerse himself in his client's affairs. If a major part of these affairs involves removal of opponents in a rather extreme way, then Hagen will render necessary advice accordingly.

Although only a supporting character, his advice is crucial to everything that happens in the Sicilian saga. Hagen also embraces change, adapting with the re-structure of the business from the New York rackets to gambling in Las Vegas and Cuba.

He re-invents his role as the family lawyer in Godfather II and becomes just as important to Pacino's Michael as he was to Brando's Vito Corleone. Surely a lesson to all older lawyers: embrace the changes, reinvent your role, and make yourself indispensable to the client. Wisely, Tom Hagen did not make an appearance in Godfather III. Creative lawyers like him know when it is time to retire.

JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR

Austin Lafferty, Austin Lafferty Solicitors

The suggestion that Pontius Pilate was born in Scotland is more fanciful than provable. Perhaps the same is true of the feet of Jesus Christ standing upon England's pastures. But they were main actors in a legal drama that has echoed down the age of Christianity - indeed, caused it.

Of all the accounts of the trial of Jesus by the Romans, my favourite, if that is the right word, is the operatic one. Jesus Christ Superstar the rock opera was made into a highly successful film in

1973. Directed by Norman Jewison, starring Ted Neeley as Christ, and Barry Dennen as Pilate, the setting was part Roman Judea, part Arab-Israeli war. I remember the scene where Christ is off in the desert contemplating, out of the giant sand dune behind him we see a line of vertical black pipes emerging, which develop to be four military tanks. The quiet musical accompaniment is suddenly drowned by a full-volume roaring of the tank engines as they breast the bank and hurtle towards him. Utterly brilliant staging.

But to our trial. Pilate in his seat of authority demanding answers of Jesus, who stands resolutely but mutely, until the Judge is worn down to a softer, more doubting tone - and the accused at last gives evidence - when Pilate tells him he has all the power and Jesus has nothing. They sing at each other debating what real power is - and real truth. The judge is cynical: "What is truth? Is truth unchanging law? We both have truths, are mine the same as yours?"

The jury gets its judgment in first, baying for crucifixion. And it is the worst sort of judgment that Pontius Pilate gives. He knows perfectly well there is no crime here, but panders to the mob - ordering 39 lashes on the superstar. These are meted out to a musical rhythm and Pilate barks out the numbers - breaking down in anguish at the end as he realises that he is committing judicial crime. But even then the mob is not satisfied, and the ultimate penalty ensues.

Whether or not you are Christian, it may be regarded as the Greatest Story Ever ... Sung.

STEWART RENNIE, PARTNER, HBJ GATELEY WAREING

'The Verdict' - you get to drink, sleep with Charlotte Rampling and David Mamet writes your closing address."