Breaking Bad & The Polan Theory

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Introduction

For this paper, I will be studying how the character of Walter White in the AMC drama “Breaking Bad” fits the description and promotes the “Polan Theory” of how an audience is attracted to the “everyman”. Breaking Bad, in the simplest explanation, is about an unsatisfied middle-aged high school chemistry teacher that teams up with a former student of his to produce and distribute crystal meth to support his family after he is diagnosed with lung cancer. I will be looking at what made the show so globally popular despite the out-of-this-world series of situations that Walter White encounters. I will be studying this with the use of Dana Polan’s article, “Cable Watching HBO The Sopranos and Discourses of Distinction”, where Polan discusses how the “everyman” (in this case, Walter White) in these quality TV shows adds relatability and familiarity to their viewers. Also, I will be pulling quotes from the show and other scholarly sources. The importance of Breaking Bad was that it incorporated a high level of intense/extreme drama into the life of an “everyman”.

The Breaking Bad Film And Its Connection To Polan Theory

The theory of everyman mainly talks of an ordinary man in a movie with whom the viewers can easily identify since he/she is occasionally placed in extraordinary circumstances. According to the Breaking Bad film, Mr. White is a character who is all over and can be identified easily by the viewers; such characters link the movie to the Polan theory. Polan’s theory mainly deals with the factors that question the essentialism of a film/movie and provides conceptual frameworks that assist in understanding how films relate to culture, i.e., reality, arts, viewers, and politics in society. The AMC drama Breaking Bad is effective in applying crime as a medium for entertainment in an attempt to display various concepts pertaining to morality within society today (Banet-Weiser, Chris, & Freitas, 2007). The film mainly centres on Walter White, who is a middle-aged high school teacher. In the movie, various events and occasions are connected to the arguments of Polan’s theory, which states that every film/movie is usually based on the culture of the society where the storyline is based. The following occasions in the movie depict Mr. White as an ‘everyman’.

The Killing Of Krazy-8

In the early stages of the film, Mr. White is very polite and loves his career (chemistry teacher). In the third episode of the film, White takes most of his time trying to convince himself how he can let Krazy-8 go, who happens to be his rival dealer in the business. However, after he realizes that Krazy-8 doesn't have an intention of letting bygones be bygones, Mr. White makes the choice of violently strangling Krazy-8 to death using the bike lock. This situation gives the audience an early taste of Mr. White's capacity for brutality. This shows that he is a character who can be described as "Everyman" due to his involvement in extraordinary circumstances.

An Offer Refused

As Mr. White was attending the birthday party of his old business partner Elliot Schwartz, Mr. White was offered an easy out for securing finance to assist him in treating his lung cancer. He becomes prideful in accepting this offer since he sold his shares in Gray Matter Technologies at just $5,000. Mr. White is begged even by Elliot's wife, who was White's former girlfriend. Still, Mr. White refuses to take this chance because of pride. This event shows that Mr. White is an extraordinary man (everyman) since we all know that cancer is a deadly disease that calls for quick treatment. So, if such a chance comes, it is good for Mr. White to accept it.

"Half Measures" Occasion

After the attempts made by Mike to convince White to do whatever is necessary to deal with the insistence of Jesse on taking out the dealers who did murder Combo, Mr. White is seen to be torn between remaining loyal to his business partner or taking the option of staying on the good side of his recent boss, Mr. Gus Fring. However, as the events unlock, the growing presence of Heisenberg within Mr. White eventually wins out. Mr. White then refuses to toe Gus's line, and he swoops in so that he can rescue Jesse by deciding to gruesomely run over the rivals in the business with his trusty old Pontiac Aztek. This decision that Mr. White takes allows him the leverage that he needs to order Jesse to kill Gale. Such events portray Mr. White as an individual of extraordinary character.

The viewers start by loving him for his passion for chemistry as well as his encounter with the deadly disease (cancer); then, you find yourself appreciating his desperation, the self-righteousness he has and the situation that he stands up for Jesse and his involvement in drug dealing. One might think that he is just a good person who is involved in bad occasions. Things then start heating up when lives are put in danger, and Mr. White starts relishing small successes.

The Greed: Moral Choices In A Land Of Plenty

To some extent, Breaking Bad, through Mr. Walter White, offers a critical reflection on the identity of U.S. culture; this links the film and the Polan theory. For instance, the movie mainly revolves around one character, Walter White, who portrays respect to the narrative of the rise in society of the self-made man (everyman). In this way, the storyline breaks with society's moral restraints that are usually linked to such ideas. The movie gives a character who is categorically dedicated to his work and sacrifices himself to achieve something.

Majorly, Walter White represents a living image of failure. He has been confronted with misfortunes and frustrations for a long time; for example, his son suffers from cerebral palsy, he has two jobs, none of which meet his capacity, and he has not been able to provide for his family since he is currently suffering from cancer disease. The illness acts as a catalyst that precipitates a brutal transformation of Walter White's life. This is observed when he says ("I am awake", Walter White yells in the pilot episode). This contributes to the core of the series. Walter White later sets out and becomes master as far as his destiny is concerned. This starts with his need to prosper, which in a real sense is behind each and every person in the society (a connection to the "Everyman" fallacy). Walter White's greed here acts as a pretext, and this becomes the pioneer of the transformation of his character. For instance, through greed, he cooks methamphetamine, which earns him "easy money" but also gives him a chance to demonstrate the capacity of his profession (Martin, 2013).

The Pride And Family Alibi

Even though Mr. Walter White's drive to earn money is for the wellbeing of the family and is considered a genuine objective, it is at a later stage converted as a mere excuse. White is portrayed as a man full of pride and, on many occasions, almost traditional when it comes to issues pertaining to his family. He believes that a man should, at all costs, provide for his family, and he is sort of embarrassed since he cannot provide as he suffers from cancer. He even goes further to seek the help of Pinkman to cook as well as sell the meth. White believes that with the knowledge he has and the skills that Pinkman has concerning the streets, they can cook more meth until they make a lot of money that can help him sort out the chemo bills and also assist his family in the event that his inevitable inoperable lung cancer kills him.

The same pride not only marks Mr. White's internal conflict but is also considered the determinant of the kind of relationship that exists between him and other characters in the film. For example, White and Jesse waver during the fourth season when White sees that his leadership role is threatened; thus, he starts to feel expendable. These events connect to the theory of Polan since the true features of individuals within the society we live in today are revealed here. This pride also makes him almost give himself up to police officers due to a murder case (the assassination of Gale), since he is not able to tolerate that his genius and cooking craftsmanship is associated with another chemist. For

example, this excerpt of the film shows the clear pride of Mr. White:

“We had a good thing, you stupid son of a bitch, we had Fring…

You could have shut your mouth and cooked and made as much money as you would have ever needed. But no, you just had to blow it up! You, your pride, and your ego just had to be the man! If you’d done your job, known your place, we’d all be fine right now…”

Why The Movie Is Popular Globally

The characters in Breaking Bad are intricately developed and continuously evolving throughout the series. This creates the desired effect of realism and relatability for the audience, which is what all actors strive to accomplish. The characters depicted in the show are relatable because they are not perfect: they make mistakes, they grow, and they provoke feelings of sympathy from the audience. It is the diligence and skilled interpretation of the script that these actors undertake that brings the Breaking Bad characters alive. In “Gliding over All”, Anna Gunn, who plays Walter’s emotionally distant wife, Skylar, sends an important message of “how much is enough?” (“Gliding over All) to Walter when she dramatically reveals the large pile of drug money that she is forced to keep in a storage locker because it is too much to launder. Cranston’s character is dismayed and shocked when his accountant wife has “no earthly idea” (“Gliding Over all”) as to the dollar amount of the stack. This is the scene in which Walter internally decides he has had enough and begins his metaphorical climb back down from his pedestal. This is an important scene because, after many weeks of rising to the top of the illegal drug retailing business, Skylar is the one to bring Walter back from his accomplished empire.

The writers behind Breaking Bad do not have the actors rush the dialogue, but they still are more than capable of keeping the audience on their toes. Head director Vince Gilligan explains that “there is no need to rush anything in Breaking Bad, so we have time to actually let people move through spaces, down halls, into homes. In broadcast network television, you sometimes have to advance the story (much quicker)” (Gajewski). This enables the actors to express their characters through wordless actions and facial expressions. The plot is written independently, with complex and intertwined stories surrounding each character. Walter has always expressed a slight obsession for perfection, exclusively as he struggles with his inability to manufacture meth above his current 99.1% purity. This is delicately mirrored in his fascination with flies. In the opening scene of “Gliding over All”, Walter is staring at a common house fly as it sits on his desk. The fly has made multiple appearances throughout the series and represents the variables Walter cannot control.

Conclusion

Breaking Bad is the innovative masterpiece of the decade. At the very end of the “Gliding over All”, Hank comes to the ground shaking, realizing who Walter has become and leaving the audience

guessing what his next move will be. During the dialogue-free scene, the shock that crosses his face is just another great example of the wordless communication of emotion. This hard-hitting combination of talented actors, directors and writers makes for a brilliant and captivating series. In a short amount of time, audiences can look forward to experiencing the culmination and conclusion of this captivating series.

With the constant struggle between good and evil every person is faced with, people assume that a drug dealer who dropped out of high school is the bad guy while a middle-aged man dying of cancer is obviously the good guy. Pinkman is still the same drug dealer that was introduced at the beginning of the show, but he is not a killer, is not a fighter, and the only reason he produces methamphetamine is because that is all he knows. Pinkman has never hurt anyone and never stopped anyone but himself from succeeding in life. As the series goes on, viewers realize that Jesse Pinkman is not the bad guy and never was. The drug users he sells to are all fully consenting adults who know what they are buying. White had a choice; he has always had the choice, and his friends have offered to fully pay for his hospital bills. White has this fatherly pride, though, that he must take care of his family; he must put the food on the table for his family. When a normal person hears that, they do not think of a monster; they think of a good husband or great father, but not in White's case. This never really created the monster that Walter White was or humanized the monster that was Jesse Pinkman; it was more of an enlightenment on breaking down social norms.

References

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