Media Analysis Of The TV Show “Breaking Bad”

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Introduction

Breaking Bad is an American television series that revolves around the story of a high-school chemistry teacher turned into a drug lord. The transformation of the character comes after he is diagnosed with cancer and is told that he has two years to live. Television communicates stories and information that take inspiration from the real world. It is a reflection of society and culture. The themes that are portrayed show aspects of multiple worldviews. The German word *Weltanschauung* means worldview. Worldview refers to the framework of values and beliefs that help people understand the world they live in. This understanding guides their actions, morals, and thoughts. Worldviews help us make sense of everything around us, such as who created the world. What is good and bad? Or how should I live my life? Or what is the truth? The worldview addresses it all. Worldview is a broad term that encompasses various approaches taken to make sense of the world. The worldviews are based on religion, ideology, and philosophy. They provide a framework for people to think and make choices and decisions based on right and wrong or good and bad (Godawa, 2009). This essay will analyze how the TV show Breaking Bad presents worldviews through its characters.

Breaking Bad And The Worldviews

Walter’s character, as a chemistry teacher, exhibits materialism, as in the first episode when he offers Jesse to work with him, saying that he knows the chemistry; Jesse tells him no, it’s an art to produce meth. However, once they produce the first batch, Jesse exclaims, “You’re a goddamn artist. This is art, Mr. White.” (Gillian 0:43: 03). He responds, “Well, actually, it’s just basic chemistry.” (Gilliam 0:43: 10). In another instance, Walter has a flashback of a conversation with Gretchen, where he says, “I don’t know. Just… doesn’t seem like… something’s missing?” to which Gretchen responds, “what about the soul?” and Walter responds, “the soul? There is nothing but chemistry here.” The worldview of materialism considers the universe only in terms of the physical, material, or matter form. It gives importance to material things only. So, even in the conversations referred to, Walter seems to dismiss the spiritual world. For him, the human body, its processes, and everything within is a physical world. Where various materials of the body interact and cause reactions, thus his statement that it’s all chemistry. Materialism has brought the American society to view the material as the only important and valuable thing to be pursued, leading to a capitalist worldview. This has largely benefited the

capitalist worldview (Schultz, 2013).

In his book, “Hollywood Worldview” Brian Godawa considers how the Bible uses stories and poems to teach religion. Therefore, television, with its storytelling, is essential to teaching us various aspects of worldviews. Man has always been worried about how he is perceived by others, and this impacts his everyday decision-making, as he aims to get the approval of others in society (Kim D, 2009). The show represents this in season 1, episode 1, where Walter is asked to fill in for an employee who did not show up for work at the car wash. While he is washing the car, his students show up, and they take his picture and mock him, saying, “Hey, Mr White makes those tyres shine, huh!” with the same incident playing in his head, he enters his home to a surprise birthday party. In the scenes that follow his brother-in-law, Hank is bragging about guns, his work, and how he catches drug traffickers. He hands the gun to Walter’s son. When he hands the gun to his father, Walter says, “It’s just heavy”, and Hank retorts, “This is why they hire men.” (Gillian 0:11:32). Mild insults and scorns of this nature are prevalent in the character of Walter and lay the groundwork for his future unkind decision-making. He uses gratuitous violence and does not hesitate to do what is necessary. The Christian worldview condemns such actions that promote a nihilistic approach. Just as in the Christian testament, most heroes have a redemptive storyline, which in the case of Walter can be seen by the end when he tries to leave money for his children through his old friends and colleagues (Godawa, 2009).

In season 5, episode 16, Walter meets with Skyler for the last time. He tells her that he did all of it for “himself” and not the notion “I did this for my family.” He continues saying, “I did it for me. I liked it. I was good at it.” (Gillian 0:33: 31). Before this final conversation in season 5, the notion that a low-paid chemistry teacher when diagnosed with cancer and a second child on the way sees making meth as the only quick money he can leave for his family when he dies. However, since this opening scene in season 1, episode 1, Walter’s decisions can not be justified. It makes the viewer think he is doing the wrong thing, but it is for the right reason. The postmodern worldview explains that nothing in the world is absolutely right and wrong. There is no absolute right or wrong. Truth and reality are constructed by individuals; therefore, postmodernism also claims that there are universal truths. Each person has their truth, which helps them build their identity. The idea of being a drug lord and the idea of the identity named Heisenberg all have consequences. In the case of Breaking Bad, the consequences are grave, not only in the wake of death and murder but also in how Walter’s whole family no longer wants anything to do with him. For Walter, one thinks that wisdom is nothing without virtue, as wisdom without restraint may wreak havoc on the world (Myers & Noebel, 2015). Humans construct their social identity, and as in the case of Walter, he creates his identity as Heisenberg. Under this identity, he carries out all that is needed: fraud, murder, or deceit. His initial identity as a hard-working, kind, and concerned chemistry teacher fades away as he emerges as the drug lord. In the last episode, he tells his wife that all that he did was for himself. The Christian worldview presents the idea of “Truth”, whereas postmodernism advocates that there is no absolute truth. Breaking Bad presents the dilemma of the character and how he keeps doing wrong for the right reason, eventually realizing that there is no right reason to begin with.

Conclusion

Television depicts many layers of ideas through its programs. A popular television show not only presents sound stories but also the complexity of ideas. Breaking Bad, through the development of its character and storyline, depicts the struggles of people's lives. Where worldviews help us make sense of the world around us, they may also make it difficult for us to survive. As in the case of Walter, as a school teacher, he was not credited with any courage, respect, or social approval. As he develops his identity as Heisenberg, so does his personality and confidence change. Dialogues and decisions characters make represent much about the fictional characters' thought processes and understanding of the world they are part of. Worldviews help in this understanding of what is thought to happen.

References

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