The Style of Nolan: Analysis of the Batman Trilogy

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Abstract: **This study aims to understand the works of Christopher Nolan in the light of Auteur theory and to understand if he can be referred to as an auteur. For the same, three of his works belonging to the Batman Trilogy namely, Batman Begins, Dark Knight and Dark Knight Rises were chosen and a textual analysis was done. Through the analysis of recurring themes and symbols in his film, the presence of Nolan as the central consciousness was to be observed. Textual analysis was done on the three films which belonged to the superhero genre and brought with them many rules and regulations to be followed.**

Keywords: **Batman, Auteur, Author, films.**

1. INTRODUCTION

There are no works but only authors. Anything and everything an author does is interesting, though some maybe more interesting than the other. (Truffaut, 2011) The Auteur theory argued in favour of the Author and shifted focus away from the art. In the case of films, this meant that there was the need to have an author considering the large number of people collaborating in various facets of film-making. To identify a central consciousness or the one person to whom the film can be attached with, the most likely candidate was the director considering his connection and control over every stage of film-making. The choice of Batman was considering the huge following the character has acquired over the ages and also the culture identity the character has come to acquire over the years.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Auteur theory originated as part of the French new wave, which as a movement which included Jean Loc godard, Claude chabrol, Jacques rivette and was primarily inspired by the writings of Alexandre Astruc whose article "Camero stylo" published in 1948 argued that film as a medium had an author and the author was none other than the director himself. (Fabe, 2004) Certain visual patterns are regular in the films of certain directors who made a conscious choice in adopting such a style so as to arouse certain feelings or response from the viewers. (Bordwell & Kristin, 2008)

The trilogy has a political nature to it with the protagontist being a capitalist and everyone opposing the same are shown as villains. Miranda Tate and Bane try to start a revolution which is a parallel to the communist ideology of revolting and overthrowing the capitalist system. (Zeynip & Muge, 2012)

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Analysis of the trilogy and the various elements of the film was crucial to understanding the position of Christopher Nolan in the film-making history, yet another functioning craftsman or an Auteur. Despite the many criticisms associated with Auteur theory and the choice of a collaborative theory, Auteur theory still exists as a powerful theory in discussions and research because of the impetus it gives to the director as the person who is responsible for the final output. Textual analysis was chosen for the following reasons: Availability of content and adequate amount of film material enabling an in-depth analysis of the works. To identify whether or not Christopher Nolan fits into the label "Auteur", it is crucial to define and create frameworks which help to distinguish an auteur from a functioning artist. To establish Auteurship,

following signatures were identified- thematic signature, narrative signature and other signatures like character similarities.

Hypothesis: This Study aims to understand if Christopher Nolan is an Auteur with respect to the Batman Trilogy. The Auteur is defined and it is to be observed what all traits of the same are shared by Nolan.

4.   DATA ANALYSIS

The Trilogy despite its foray into different themes and problems still carry much similarity with it. A certain political consistency is evident throughout the series. This political consistency can be accounted to the presence of Nolan as the Auteur during the production of the film and his full control over the film. As discussed earlier, such a control exercised by the director is the lynchpin of auteur theory. The theme of identity or identity crisis, besides being prominent in all of Nolan's films, is especially evident and strong in the batman trilogy. It is through the quality and content of his films that Nolan's auteur persona of being an intelligent, innovative, independent, and creative director emerges. An analysis of various levels and content of the trilogy helps understand the auteurship of Christopher Nolan. The films of the trilogy are filled with ambiguity and unease, which are partially transmitted through journeys of identity construction and through the films' endings. It is often unclear who the "good guy" may be, and there are not any firm resolutions. By never allowing the audience to sympathise fully with the main protagonist, despite visual signals that the audience should sympathise with him, there are no clear allegiances. Furthermore, the endings of the films are left in an uneasy truce between characters and meanings, with the audience being offered only a partial resolution.

In all the three movies,Bruce Wayne struggles internally, and then externally, to attempt to determine what he believes to be his authentic identity. To achieve this, however, Bruce must perform an alternate persona. Thus the performance that Bruce Wayne plays in being Batman helps make him into a more complete person, rather than being a distinct persona that is only enacted to disguise the trueself, as each person performs at least one aspect of their identity. Therefore, Batman is another facet of Bruce's identity, helping make him into the person he is, rather than a completely separate identity. This also suggests that multiple narratives guide each person's identity, although they are intricately related. The playboy and Batman both exist because Bruce Wayne can fund them, and because each narrative provides a crucial part of his overall identity. In deciding to become Batman, Bruce comments that "people need dramatic examples to shake them out of apathy. I can't do that as Bruce Wayne – as a man. As flesh and blood I can be ignored. I can be destroyed. But as a symbol, as a symbol I could be incorruptible. I can be everlasting." Bruce realises that he needs to perform an identity beyond his own to become what he needs to be, which ultimately evolves into a new form of the Bruce Wayne identity. The construction of the character is further emphasised through the narrative structure leading to the decision to perform Batman. Nolan inserts frequent flashbacks throughout the early part of the story so that Bruce's past and present are woven together without clear delineation between the two.For example, the film begins with young Bruce (Gus Lewis) playing in the garden with young Rachael (Emma Lockhart) before Bruce falls down a well. The film then shifts without obvious transition to an older Bruce in a Chinese prison camp meeting Ducard and the League of Shadows before returning again to the incident in the garden with young Bruce. There is little indication apart from the age of the actors that one scene is occurring in the past and one in the present. Since neither scene fits the traditional notion of the Batman narrative presented in earlier films, the entire sequence is assumed to be a form of flashback. It is only with Bruce's speech, quoted above, that it becomes clear how the past has informed the present, leading to the formation of Batman.). In the trilogy, the character of Bruce Wayne is forced to replicate and identity that is more socially defined. He is forced to create a character to show the world, that of the rich playboy which is in contrast with the mask he wears every night. Rachel (Katie Holmes) admonishes "Bruce" for acting the playboy; "it's not who you are underneath; it's what you do that defines you." It is the identity that is on display for the world, interacting with others, that ultimately, for Nolan's characters, defines who they are as "identity needs to be understood not as belonging 'within' the individual person, but as produced between persons and within social relations". Similarly, the auteur and his vision is generated through the filmic experience that society has, not just internally through the films. The identities formed, of the auteur as well as the character, are never fully stable or declared authentic, but always left with some unease. Emphasising the changeable and uncertain nature of identity presented in the film, Batman Begins refuses to have a concrete ending leaving questions rather than resolving them. Jim Gordon (Gary Oldman) informs Batman that things will only get worse with inmates from Arkham Asylum, including the Scarecrow, escaped and a new villain appearing, one who leaves joker cards at his crimes. Although this could be seen by some as simply an opening for the inevitable sequel, it can also be read as a refusal of a

resolution. Bruce/Batman seems to have become comfortable with his internal struggle of dual (triple) personas, but he ignores the larger picture presented to him. The victory is not conventional or rather a victory evades Bruce, rather he has passed through a philosophical turbulence to be a changed human being. Placing this as the last scene of the film, rather than the lighthearted dénouement in the ruins of Wayne Manor with Alfred and Rachel, Nolan has chosen to challenge the audience's ideas of good versus evil by suggesting that Batman's war against crime is unfinished. There is not a space for victory and happiness in Nolan's work.Apart from the narrative parallels and contrasts of the characters, there are specific visual aspects linking the three main characters of Dark Knight- Bruce Wayne, Harvey Dent and Joker. All three characters are portrayed early in the film in action, with Batman fighting criminals in the car park, Dent attacking a would-be assassin in the court room, and the Joker performing a magic trick for Gotham's underworld bosses. Each character is developed in relation to each other rather than individually, resulting in the construction of what a hero actually is, a theme throughout the film. Nolan leaves the idea of the hero undefined, which allows the audience to interpret the meaning in the film in several ways. However, as in his other films, the framework for meaning is always firmly established by Nolan. The Dark Knight creates an ambiance of unease throughout the film by constantly shifting identities and allegiances. There is no clear good guy or bad guy, with the Joker standing up to the crime lords, Dent dissolving into Two-Face, and Bruce retreating into Batman. In the final scenes of the film, the Joker and Batman ultimately refuse to kill each other, while Dent attempts to shoot a boy. To protect the ideals he shared with Dent, Batman adopts the role of anti-hero, rejecting traditional notions of good or bad, explaining to Gordon, "sometimes truth isn't good enough. Sometimes people deserve more. Sometimes people deserve to have their faith rewarded." The creation of an antihero, or at least a non-heroic protagonist, to help preserve a semblance of morals and ideals occurs throughout Nolan's films, but most prominently in the traditional superhero role of Batman. Although some members of the audience would recognise the work of Frank Miller's Batman graphic novels influencing this focus on Batman as an anti-hero, it also continues the idea of the postmodern identity. It is no longer possible, in the world created by Nolan, to have traditional heroes or villains. However, as with his other films, in the end this in itself may be a performance, as there are still certain morals and guidelines. The final scenes of the film indicate an end to a world of heroes, and Gordon notes Batman is "not a hero. He's a silent protector, a watchful guardian, a dark knight." As in the end of Batman Begins, Nolan positions the resolution as incomplete, full of explosions and confusion, rather than the "good guys" beating the "bad guys", as it is unclear who falls in to which category. Many of the characters in these films, especially with Bruce, must pretend to be a specific role – the anti-hero, the clown, the saviour – to ultimately reveal who they really are – the hero, the criminal, and the fallen idealist.

5.   CONCLUSION

The success of Christopher Nolan as a director who has captured the hearts of the ordinary viewer to the extreme senses of the film critic served as the primary motivation for the conduct of this paper. Thus, we find thematic similarities and character traits repeating throughout the trilogy. Similarities can also be observed in the conflicts of the characters. These all are part of the vision of the director and could be part of what he wants to say. Using the medium which he loves or finds appropriate, an artist tries to pass his vision to the viewer or the audience. Here, the author in Christopher Nolan impresses his stamp deeply on his works and continue creating the movies of the trilogy.

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