Analysis Of Classical Hollywood Narrative Style

Explain either 'The heroes journey' or the idea of classical narrative, as a template in film comparing one film that fits the template and others that does not

When researching into the idea of 'Classical narrative' and the mainstream templates that surround the idea I wanted to research into popular classical narrative movies and how the template came about to the audience and why its been so successful when creating a film template and story, In the world of cultural theory and art history there has long existed a tradition of resistance against popular art (Schauer, 2017). I also delve into the topic of comparing classical and non-classical narrative movies that I've selected and the viewer's response to them, as I believe audiences have shaped the way Hollywood films have been made due to popularity and what's been made successful at the box office and what hasn't. When choosing the two movies to compare I wanted to choose two from different periods so that I could compare how the narrative has changed over the years and what aspects have changed as well as an audience response to this. I look into some theories when exploring a common structure, mainly using Todorov. I wanted to make my essay as fair as possible so I researched all sorts of information and looked at the pros and the cons of the research, putting my knowledge into making it more subjective. Starting with this essay I wanted to look into the meaning of 'classical narrative' and the definitions brought along with this and the templates within the classical structure brought to Hollywood.

The Classical Hollywood Narrative Style is the grand style of narrative storytelling wherein motion pictures are put together in a given set of procedures and rules in a linear sequence of events. 'The Classical Narrative Structure' is called this because it is the way most movies in Hollywood are made and it's the most common structure of storytelling in mainstream films. It's based on a three-act format that organises a story in the following way; One - The beginning: Here we are introduced to the main characters in the story, their goals, and the obstacles they are likely to face to achieve their objectives. The main conflict in the story is introduced, as well as the major antagonist who will stand in the way of the protagonist's objectives, this is the disruption awaiting to happen. (My site, 2020) Two - The Development: Here the plot complications are added to the story. An increasing sense of urgency is created when the main characters encounter obstacles that stand in the way of their journey. This generally occupies the middle two-quarters of the film and it often includes a false resolution to the main conflict set up, which either tricks the audience or adds a twist. Once the false resolution has been encountered, the action in the movie generally points toward a necessary climax. Three - The Resolution: In the final segment of the film, the results of the story's main conflict comes to a dramatic clash. This is called the climax and it is the point where key struggles are waged and an eventual victor is determined. In Hollywood films, needless to say, the eventual victor is usually our hero, this is where the equilibrium is restored and a popular ending is a happy ending where the protagonist reaches their goal. Many films star this template whether it's subtle or not this is the clique mainstream narrative to follow if you are wanting to make a successful film.

When delving into more research into 'classical narrative' I came across another approach, a traditional three-part framework for the course of events in a narrative (Chandler, 2016). Typically characterised as equilibrium–disruption–equilibrium a chain of events corresponding to the beginning, middle, and end of a story (Todorov technique). The three-act structure commonly employed in writing for stage and screen sometimes referred to as exposition, complication, and resolution. Such structures may serve mental tasks for individuals and broader social functions such as resolving tensions, this is where a villain may come into the narrative. This is the basic formula for mainstream classical Hollywood movies in which the storyline is given priority over everything else. Hollywood is home too many famous television, movie studios and record companies (History, 2020). Looking at 'the top 10 most-watched movies of all time'(IMDb, 2020) all of them possess a classical narrative template, for example looking at No.1 'of the top 10 most-watched movies of all time'(IMDb, 2020) is 'Titanic' (1997) which was a major Hollywood movie it was the most expensive film ever made at that time with a production budget of $200 million and making a total of $2.187 billion, this shows how popular a classical narrative movie can be as mainstream audiences seem to like this structure. After looking at the rest of the Top 10, I decided to pick one from the list and proceed into more detail looking into the more popular techniques of the classical narrative and then, later on, show how this differs with a film that doesn't conform to the 'classical narrative' structure.

A film that fits the mainstream template of classical narrative would be 'The Wizard of Oz' (1939), this film is ranked No.3 from the list I looked into. The story is about a girl who embarks on a quest with her new friends to see the wizard who can help her return home to Kansas and help her friends. She comes across villains along the way that distrust her journey but by the end, all things are resolved and things are as they should be. It has one of the clearest uses of narrative structure especially styled with the Tzvetan Todorov technique. There is a state of equilibrium and the equilibrium is disrupted by some action or crisis the characters than set goals to resolve their problems. The Characters attempt to achieve goals, obstacles are overcome to restore order. Todorov's theory suggests that all narratives follow a three-part structure where they begin with equilibrium–disruption–equilibrium which is something I looked into at the beginning of this essay. Character drives and motivation play a huge part in narrative structure and how their motivation affects the entire plot. David Bordwell states how 'Narrative development is dependent on how characters motivate this cause-effect logic through their desires and needs.' (Bordwell 2020) The Wizard of Oz reflects this well as all the effects of the movie are caused/surrounded by Dorothy's determination to get home causing her to go on this journey (Narrative structures 2020). As classical Hollywood narrative came around due to the popularity the audience gave the movies I thought that looking into some reviews left by the viewers would help me back up the movie's success. I found this quote left by a member of the public 'American Classic Film with all the frills.' (Kirstanuci, 2018) this shows that the movie is recognised by the viewers as being 'classic' and something the audience is used to seeing over and over again. Another review left read 'This movie is a timeless classic that I will cherish for years to come' (Hannah Brush, 2017) this again shows how the movie is a 'classic'.

Now that I've looked into a popular movie and how classical narrative is popular with the audience I wanted to research into why this is. Why having a mainstream structure so successful with the audience? Popular movies grab and hold our attention. One reason for this is that storytelling is culturally important to us and is something we are grown up with and something that has been historically developed over time. But another is that general narrative formula has been told over prosperity and that specific film form has developed and has been perfected over the last century, gaining popularity from the audience (Cutting, 2016). 'Hollywood

cinema is that a narrative should consist of a chain , that is easy for the spectator to follow' (Thompson, 1999) audience doesn't want something difficult or complex to maintain concentration and having a 'structure' gives the audience a pattern. Using the 'the top 10 most-watched movies of all time'(IMDb, 2020) It showed me that most popular movies have a mainstream narrative as its what people know and what is known to satisfy an audience. The audience always wants to leave a movie feeling satisfied not disturbed which is why having a structure that has both of these elements and a happy ending has worked so well in the cinematic industry and is why not many films have challenged this. When watching a film the audience wants to concentrate on the plot and the characters rather than the template of a film.

Looking at films that don't follow a classical narrative and are non-linear in a contemporary screenplay I decided to look at the Hollywood film 'Mother!' (2017) A movie directed by Darren Aronofsky. The plot follows a young woman who lives a peaceful life with her husband at their country home but is then disrupted by the arrival of a mysterious couple, terror soon strikes when the wife tries to figure out why her husband is so seemingly friendly and accommodating to everyone but her, the story doesn't have a typical Hollywood classical narrative as the ending of the film isn't a mainstream ending and is seen to be unsatisfying to the viewers. Backing this up I wanted to look into some reviews of fellow audiences that have seen the movie and their responses. I researched a website called 'Screen rant' (EXCLUSIVES et al., 2020) and found a quote left by Chris Agar 'mother! is an ambitious work that bucks traditional storytelling techniques with its aspirations, but its approach will not be for all moviegoers.'(Agar, 2017) this quote suggests the film challenges the traditional structure of classical narrative and summons the 'mainstream'. By Aronofsky directing a film like this, left many mixed reviews, I believe this is due to the fact the movie is pushing mainstream cinema and the audience aren't used to this, another review I found reads (audience reviews) 'Mother is by far the most confusingly interesting insightful movie that I've seen in almost a decade.' (LiLi Nicols, 2018). Releasing a film branching away from the classical narrative structure causes the audience to become 'confused' as I mentioned earlier viewers want something easy to follow giving them a structure. When looking at articles written about the 'Mother!' I came across many quotes highlighting the movie's unusual narrative 'mother! is the kind of film that just doesn't get a wide release in Hollywood—it's violent, it's weird, and it's genuinely trying to baffle viewers and spark debate.' (Sims, 2020).

Here I've shown quotes looking at the unusual side of the movie and to make this research fair I also picked some positive reviews which I thought would link well in the evolvement of classical narrative and how the cinematic industry is slowly changing. Here is a quote is taken from a member of the public from a review site 'Mother! is one of the most thought-provoking and intelligent films that Hollywood has ever made. Sinfully underrated and highly controversial' (Achutam Jha, 2019) This review is praising the movie for its uniqueness and feels the movie is underrated which also shows that this type of narrative structure hasn't had much public attention due to the fact its different from the norm. Although the viewers have found this movie mainly 'confusing' and 'weird' it's proven to push the mainstream templates.

Now that I've looked into a classical narrative movie (The wizard of Oz) and a non-classical movie (Mother!) I can now compare the two in their different aspects. I thought I'd start first with the audience and their response to the two movies as they are both very different in their ways. 'The wizard of Oz' was described to be a 'classic' and a movie the audience we're comfortable with and understood whereas the film 'Mother!' Was describes as 'confusing', 'weird' and said to 'buck traditional storytelling', the response to the audience makes it clear that cinematic viewers

are used to the classical narratives and when something doesn't conform to that structure they find it confusing and start comparing it to what they know, which is a classic Hollywood structure. The two movies differ a lot with release dates which also tells us a lot about how cinematic structures have evolved, the wizard of Oz was released in 1939 and the film 'Mother!' It was released in 2017, this shows how directors are now trying to push the boundaries with narrative and create something new rather than the old Hollywood classic structures. I did want to include two movies with different release dates so that I could get an idea of the evolution of narrative and the changes that have taken place in films. I found that the 'Wizard of Oz' was the more popular movie although this may not be all because of the structure. I also feel that movies being released now have more flexibility with their audiences than they would have back when 'the wizard of oz' was released as a cinema back then was only available to certain people and in terms of editing and software it has developed much more since. Although I'm comparing the two films I do feel that without the classical narrative structure being introduced a movie like the 'Mother!' Wouldn't be looked upon as 'confusing' as the viewers wouldn't have anything to compare it to.

In conclusion to the question looking into both classical narrative and non-classical narrative, I can gather from my research that although classical Hollywood will carry on as its a very popular template for the audience to follow I do think in the future the cinematic world with venture away from it and create new templates challenging the 'classic', especially with new technology and software of today. Comparing both narratives you can see which the audience prefers, but this could also be an unfair judgment as 'The wizard of Oz' (1939) was released way before the film 'mother!' (2017) and introducing something new into film and cinema is a big movement as its a very hard industry to be successful in. I feel if more movies were created like 'Mother!' The viewers wouldn't think the template is as confusing because they'd be more used to it seeing movies around them conform to structure similarly. From researching classical narrative structure I can say that this movement in film as been one of the most influential as its shaped the way the audience pick films wether it be because of a certain genre the narrative fits into of the comfort of understanding the structure and having an easy template as the viewers want to be concentrating on the film rather than the template.

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