

Jake Goldberg

Eng-W 131

Fenton

24 March 2015

Lens-driven Analysis

“Batman Returns,” directed by Tim Burton, tells the tale of how Batman saved the city of Gotham once again. Throughout the movie we watch Selina Kyle, a busy business woman just trying to make ends meet, transform into the Catwoman. In a scene where Selina Kyle returns to her home, it is very apparent that her life is not where she wants it to be because of all of the external pressures put on her and that she wants a change. One can tell by her body language and dialogue that she is unhappy and stressed that she has not secured a respectable job and obtained a man in her life. This pressure to meet the standards that society set induced a change in Selina’s life that had negative impacts on her. When looked at in regards to Susan Bordo’s essay “Beauty Re(dis)covers) the Male Body” when she discusses the eating disorders and other disorders people obtain by trying to become something society wants them to be, it is apparent that Selina’s transformation wasn’t a freak accident, but was induced by the pressures set. On the surface, “Batman Returns” is a super hero movie, but after deep analysis Batman Returns is also about a woman struggling to meet societal expectations, which turns her into a super villain.
In the sixth section of Bordo’s essay,”My World…And Welcome To It?”, Bordo discusses the disorders connected to people being unhappy with the way their body looks and the way their body should look according to society. Anorexia is the most common disorder she discusses, but she also notes that it is common for males to have an ironic disorder known as “bigorexia” which is when a male feels they are not big enough, or doesn’t have enough muscle. A study mentioned in the essay said that 90% of undergraduates say they feel like they do not have enough muscle. The actions associated with these disorders have a negative impact on the person, instead of the anticipated positive results. This backfire of actions is shown in Batman Returns when Selina Kyle transforms into super-villain Catwoman. Although the change isn’t in the scene, the scene depicts why Selina is unhappy and what made the change occur. The need to meet standards set upon her by society and her mother is similar to the beauty standards set on women Bordo talks about because they both cause the person to go down a path that isn’t ideal. When a women sees in the newspaper a celebrity with perfect features, they feel that’s the way they should look to, which can lead to the disorders. Likewise, when Selina’s mom gets on Selina’s case about not meeting expectations, it lead Selina to become the Catwoman.

In the scene, Selina Kyle’s dialogue and body language shows that she is unhappy with her life due to not being able to secure a meaningful job and meeting a husband or significant other. One can infer that she is stressed that she is not married, by her coming home and sarcastically saying “Honey I’m home…Oh wait I don’t have a husband”. The phrase seemed to be said routinely and is reused
later on in the movie, which shows it has been on Selina’s conscious for a long time. She also tells her cat that she is pathetic and says out loud she is a lowly assistant. Her gestures and tone of voice hints that she is defeated, frustrated, and is looking for change. The change she is looking for is being an independent woman, and not an appendage, as hinted by the unnamed man who left a voicemail cancelling their vacation plans. When Selina says “The fun never stops…” she is once again portraying the feeling that she is unhappy with her life because she is not married, has a cruddy job, and her life seems to be going nowhere. Similarly to how the women who want to be skinnier become anorexic, Kyle becomes a super-villain. This is similar because both parties feel that the actions they take are beneficial but in reality the actions are only hurting them. Being anorexic or bulimic is not helping a person become the person they think they should be, and being a villain isn’t helping Selina become the person her Mom and other people in her life want her to be.

In Tannen’s essay “There Is No Unmarked Woman”, Tannen claims that women are “marked” by everything they do, which means every action a woman does reflects her. Tannen says that things like hair, shoes, and makeup are attributes that are heavily judged for women, but are looked over for males. In the scene Selina Kyle is being marked by her mother for not having a husband and a meaningful job. She is also being marked as an appendage by the man who calls her to cancel their vacation plans. These markings are the societal pressures that she could not satisfy. Selina seems defeated, and the viewers can see that she is defeated. Her alter-ego is completely different from her, and therefore is marked in different ways. Catwoman
is aggressive and dominant, and uses her sex appeal as a tool, instead of not using it at all. She therefore is viewed differently, and is marked as an authoritative figure. If Selina Kyle was the same way as Catwoman, she would be able to obtain a better job and not be “an appendage”, as hinted by a friend of hers, and wouldn’t talk down about herself even when she’s the only one there to listen.

Batman Returns is a super hero movie that can be watched and only thought of as an action movie. However, when analyzing the movie with the themes in Bordo and Tannens’ essays it is apparent that there is more beneath the superhero layer. Bordo and Tannen’s essays both suggest that the pressures, or the “markings”, that are set on women is responsible for the snapping of Selina Kyle. Burton also agrees with Tannen and Bordo because of the build-up to the transformation. Burton portrays the “markings” women endure by including the phone call from her mother and her man friend, and shows the negative impacts of the pressures by having Selina snap, just like Bordo says happens to people when they aren’t meeting societal expectations either. One can infer that Burton would agree with Tannen and Bordo, that societal pressures and expectations exist for women, and it can cause women to have negative impacts physically and mentally. Selina Kyle is just another woman brought down by societal pressures and markings, which is why Catwoman’s role is to protect women. Much like Batman is the hero Gotham deserves, Catwoman is the hero women deserve because she preaches to woman to be themselves, and to be comfortable with who they are. She is a role model that shows that it’s ok to go against social norms and be yourself regardless of how society expects you to be.
Works Cited


New York, New York, 1993. PDF.