

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Building Tension through Emotional Involvement	1
Building Tension through Conflict.....	2
The Use of Dramatic Irony in a Plot	3
Playing with Time	4
Character Complexities	5
Conclusion.....	7
References	7

Introduction

The elements of drama in fiction are exceptionally vital; due to the fact that such elements help in the building up of onscreen tension. The protagonist's eventual happiness, possibly even his entire life, is dependent on the result of those actions. If the event that such elements in the story are lacking, it is likely that tension will be fragile. These elements are generally associated with inner confusion, as the protagonist often has to decide whether the aspects at stake are really worth it. In situations such as this, the story line compels the protagonist to reassess his personal beliefs as well as values. In the case of 'Whiplash', 'Boyhood' and 'The Departed', there are numerous factors that come into play regarding the screenplay strategies used to create tension throughout the movies, much to the delight of the viewing audiences (Carroll 2013).

Building Tension through Emotional Involvement

The concluding scenes of *Whiplash* provide what has been considered as one among the most captivating movie scenes of the year. Focused on a moving musical enactment given by the movie's protagonist Andrew (played by Miles Teller), these scenes are captured and offered as a victory, even if it is to be a pricey one. In what can be considered as a strong step by director and writer Damien Chazelle, the screenplay centers around Andrew, who is a budding drummer put through elite jazz-training torture by oppressive tutor Fletcher (played by J.K. Simmons) over a span of 100 minutes. By the time the film reaches its culmination, Fletcher evidently feels that Andrew's success is to be attributed to his strategy of emotional wreckage. He is, in all likelihood, expected to exit at the end and applaud himself for doing his job in the correct manner. However, in what can be considered as a disturbing aspect for several viewers, Fletcher might even be correct in the assessment of his behaviour. This indicates the power of the tension that the writers are successful in building up through the screenplay. Not only does it keep the viewers engrossed in the story, but it also renders them powerless against making judgements about the behaviour of the protagonist (Steimbregger 2017).

Dramatic tension is essentially the manner in which a movie ensures that the audience is kept glued to the plot of the film. It revolves around the creation and sustenance of an audience's participation in the

entire plot of the film. Having said that, tension in a film can be achieved in a variety of ways, using diverse techniques. One of the primary ways of building up tension is through the process of placing questions strategically in the “mind” of the viewers. Immediately after the film commences, audiences begin to have questions concerning the matters that they want answered by the filmmaker. These questions revolve around where the plot of the story is going, the ulterior motives of certain characters and so on (Fernandez 2015).

As far as pure information is concerned, film tension/interest can easily be built up. For instance, restricting information has often been used as a device for building up such interest. Research indicates that new writers, who are often keen to divulge excessive amounts of information at the start of a film, sometimes feel like doing so might provide their audiences with a detailed comprehension of the course and intent of the plotline. Such excessive loading of information, in most cases, proves to be counter-productive since viewers are generally not able to absorb it (Ovali & Genel n.d.). Having said that, restricting information can be as vital as disclosing information, when it comes to usage as a filmmaking technique as it builds up a different question in the viewer’s mind, which is that viewers have more of a possibility of staying with a certain story since the filmmakers have built up a puzzle that requires seeking out an answer. The place and time to disclose the sought after information is thus an integral aspect of the layout and arrangement of the film (Greenwood 2010).

However, studies highlight the need, as a filmmaker, to comprehend the depth of the questions that have been placed in the viewer’s mind and ensure that they are dealt with adequately and applicably in the script. Inference can yet be understood as an effective method of providing information and simultaneously building up the necessary interest or tension. Inferring, in place of mentioning the required information in an evident manner, means that the viewers need to make their own deductions, which might or might not be accurate. Thus, analysts have pointed out, that they are likely to be keen on finding out if their deductions are correct (Kim & Hong 2013).

Building Tension through Conflict

Conflict, can also be considered as a commonly used method of creating and sustaining dramatic tension. Conflict could be either exterior or interior – between the multiple characters in a story or taking place within a single character. Building up conflict is generally done by generating obstructions for the characters to overcome. It is thus associated with the character’s evolving arc in the plot as it is an aspect that averts or slows down a character from fulfilling his/her plot goals. In the event that the character is the “hero” or a pivotal personality in the story, it is most common to expect them to be prosperous and successful in the intent of their dramatic voyage, which is why the viewers are likely to be around till the time that the character succeeds (Leipzig et al. 2015). As a result of this, stirring up audience responsiveness for a certain character is another vital way of sustaining dramatic tension. Viewers delve deep into characters and into their circumstances, which means that they relate and make investments on an emotional level in their intense conclusions. They possess a remote “stake” in the plot with the use of this prognosis tool. Ensuring that the characters are kept meaningful for the viewers to invest their time in is thus a vital part of the screenwriter’s job. The question then is if the filmmaker does not care about the details of his/her characters, there need be no reason for the audience to do so (Malandrakis et al. 2011).

The Use of Dramatic Irony in a Plot

Dramatic irony is also successful as a means of building up tension. Dramatic irony takes place when the viewers know more about the characters on stage than the characters themselves. This is comparatively old, but is a device that Shakespeare commonly used. Having said that, it still is extensively utilised by conventional writers. For instance, viewers might be aware that a boyfriend has been unfaithful to his girlfriend, despite the fact that the girlfriend is not aware of the situation. At the time when the character is expressing his resolute love to his girlfriend on film, the viewers are left fuming due to his hypocrisy. In most cases, audiences desire that their characters discover the truth about their situations through the development of a play and are keen to witness the character's discovery of the truth (Sklar 2012).

In the case of *Whiplash*, tension is built up by the sustained emphasis on the jazz drummer Andrew, who must tolerate a brutal, repeated attacks of bullying and violence, which is mental, emotional and physical. This treatment is meted out to him by Fletcher, the person in charge of the highly illustrious studio band. He gradually caves in under the harsh pressure and, after being compelled by his father, incognito gets Fletcher dismissed on the grounds of abuse. In the concluding scene, Andrew reaches Carnegie Hall to fill in for the band. It what can be considered as a strategy to stir up the disgust of the audience, Fletcher resolves to demean Andrew in front of the crowd by prompting him to execute the incorrect music, thus invoking strong negative emotions from the audience (Lindebaum & Courpasson 2017).

The suspense is heightened further by Andrew shifting the scene in his favour. He guides Fletcher's band to a commendable rendition of the very song that he had planned on playing. In what can be described as a dominant moment, despite the extremely harsh actions on the viewers (as well as Andrew) that have taken place throughout the movie. However, the screenplay does not fail to highlight the fact that even though the audience sees Andrew's triumph in his music, there is deep disappointment and crushing defeat emotionally. The plot then creates further tension by depicting just how the humanity of a young person is sacrificed at the altar of his musical expertise. At the starting of the movie, Andrew is portrayed as being obsessive and reclusive, further highlighted by his reluctant start of a relationship with a girl he has a crush on. However, the plot is deepened when Fletcher starts to drain his self-confidence and peace of mind, causing Andrew to pull back even more, causing his relationship to crumble and his behaviour to be more erratic till an eventual nervous breakdown, stirring up the emotions of the audience to the point where they find it impossible to pull away from the story (Bong 2014).

Fletcher can be seen as a disturbing, authoritative figure all through the film. In what can be considered as a technique to accentuate his character, Simmons is continually seen in a form-fitting black t-shirt to highlight his build. Techniques such as this help to make the characteristics of the person more apparent to the audience. When the audience sees him leading the studio band, he lifts his hand up and the camera swings to his mood (Begley & Writer 2015).

Director Chazelle further builds up tension in the shoots of Andrew, portraying him as being an inaccessible figure encircled by negative space, which further stresses upon his forced solitude, however Fletcher is portrayed as being comparatively dynamic. The interesting part here is that even though the audience knows Simmons to be the one destroying Andrew's self-confidence, they are glued to every move he makes to do so. This is further highlighted by the portrayal of a scene later on in which Simmons elaborates upon his belief to Andrew, wherein he endorses the notion that great musicians are only capable of being forged in a cauldron of fear and anguish, which is meant to justify his actions towards Andrew, whom he believes to be an excellent musician (Begley & Writer 2015). The strategies used by the

filmmakers ensure that tension is built up to the point where the audience is left with a gripping story that compels them to watch with great interest till the very end.

Playing with Time

Linklater, in his Movie 'Boyhood' bridges the divide that exists between comparatively art-oriented films and modern narrative films. The strategy employed here is the provision of an invitation to an innovative sense of comprehending time as they can be viewers to see it unfurl. This causes the audiences to be deeply involved in the life of the protagonist as they see his life go through torrid twists and turns through the course of this film. One of the highlights of the movie is the manner in which it uses the transcending of time as a device to strengthen the plot of the film. The initial half of the film gets the audience to a point where they relate to the protagonist and are interested to know what takes place in his life. However, it is the second half of the movie where the audience is provided with a gripping account of how the life of a boy is transformed over time. The primary strategy employed here is ensuring the involvement of the audience in the life of the protagonist. This is done by ensuring that his life story is relatable and yet gripping (Carnochan 2015).

There exist two primary and distinctive methods that are used here to witness the advancement of time. The first strategy is by drawing attention to aspects such as a sunset, a tree shedding its foliage, a puppy's growth into a dog, and the reappearance of an old friend who hasn't been seen in years and who is now appearing to be a new person completely. Through the heavy symbolism depicted in the play, the audience is kept gripped to the storyline and therefore tension is built up till the eventual unravelling of events. The second way in which time is dealt with is often through the reading of a novel, watching a film, or paying attention to the same friend narrating a story of the happenings in her life since 1997. The first type can be considered as immediate, occurs in real time, and often possesses zero intrinsic meaning (Pecchenino 2014). The next kind is facilitated, shortens or extends time, and, due to the fact that it is plotted and moulded in numerous ways, strives to provide meaning to the ephemeral aspect of time. The second needs temporal logic, however it eventually moves ahead of it to incorporate the grammar of the plot. The first, by comparison, is merely the raw understanding of time. Thus, one of the primary concepts here is that even though a narrative requires time, it is time which has no requirement of a narrative (Takhirov et al. 2012).

Boyhood is thus able to combine both these elements, however it is vital to analyse what the word "combines" can be understood as in such a context. Additionally, it can be said that narrative already and essentially is inclusive of time as a factor. Linklater's blend is inclusive of not only a fictional narrative regarding the passage of time but also a hugely unmediated recording of time passing. Having said that, it is not difficult to visualise the same scenario produced in the form of animation, or transferred into a precise and clever scripting into a novel. Both the aspects would portray the exact twelve years that the film is representative of, and they are likely to have a few of the aspects of the film, however they would each distinctly lack an element that is vital for the movie's power. Viewing such a film requires a consistent meta-consideration from the viewer's point of perspective. Also, the viewers are continually attempting to extract the understanding of the fact that all of the characters are moving on in age not only on-screen but also in reality. The audience gets an unusual spectacle in watching not just the fictional Mason Jr. age but also the actual Ellar Coltrane advance in age (Neher 2014).

This can be seen as the mechanism that provides power to the film. However, what must be resolved is how exactly power manifests itself, due to the fact that the viewers' experience of power in the film is spontaneously self-evident and tough to express. This is evident in Dargis' statement of "I haven't fully figured out why it has maintained such a hold on me." It is felt by analysts that the solution can be discovered by delving on the manner in which Linklater's exceptional blend brings about the creation of a reciprocally reinforcing effectiveness (Shary 2017). *Boyhood* is successful in making maximum possible use of the stronghold of realism and genuineness, due to the fact that it can be considered as not only realistic but also real. It also means that the film is successful in ensuring that every one of the key moments and emotions in the film hits the viewers harder just at the time that they are wrapped up with the previous one. To start off with, Linklater tastefully describes a complete boyhood, thereby building a fictional account infused with the type of depth that filmmakers create with the help of varied aspects such as lighting, background score, soundtrack, and editing (Sheth et al. 2017).

Among diverse aspects, *Boyhood* compels us to be appreciative of, almost in a certain general manner, the implications of the aging stage, of going through so many years. Undeniably, even though there are several dozens of films on the theme of adolescence and growing up, *Boyhood* can be considered as one among the first movies to define adolescence in its wholeness. In the rest of the conventional films, there is a compulsive attempt to limit their own selves to a considerably restricted span of time, like in the case of an entire summer, which can be comprehended as a defining moment in the life course of the main character. In some cases, the filmmaker might choose to make a chronological leap or a few leaps, but this would necessitate the casting of a second and often a third person to play the role of the character aging. However, despite this, a considerable amount of time is likely to be ignored. In such cases, such conventional methods drastically understate, and in some sense misrepresent, the slow, consistent aspect of growing up. Therefore, the primary organisation of Linklater's narrative grabs hold of a basic truth about the transformation of a boy to an adult man. The opportunity for change can actually be considered as mind-boggling, for not only the protagonist but even for the viewing audience of the film. This can be considered as a strategy for building tension in the plot as it ensures that the viewers are kept caught up in the complexities of the protagonist's character and in his maturing process (Rich 2014).

Having said that, this dynamic truth is not likely to have been accessed by Linklater unless he built upon his narrative over a span of twelve years. Therefore, all through the film Linklater is highlighting the truth of time really passing as the film advances. He essentially points out that he has condensed those twelve years in such a manner that they can be viewed in a span of just about three hours (Greenberg 2014). In this respect, being an audience for *Boyhood* triggers the very same magical emotion that a person experiences when they see a flower blossom and fade away all in under twenty seconds. This fictional movie has an even stronger impact on the audience as they involuntarily deduce a direct relation between the time depicted and the time of the depiction. Thus, it brings about an illusion for the audience wherein they consider the movie as being both three hours in length and twelve years in length too (Theron et al. 2007).

Character Complexities

Similar is the case of *The Departed* in which the filmmakers ensure that the plot details of both the key characters are categorically clustered together in order to ensure that the structure is kept tight. It is important to note the reluctance in Billy as far as going undercover is concerned. He is portrayed as "rejecting" the Call to Adventure, from a mental perspective even if is not from a physical viewpoint, which

is the ideal way for things to be. This is effectively used as a strategy to create suspense and tension in the film, thus keeping the audience captivated by the story. Also, the movie could be considered as an apt illustration of the Inciting Event turning into the turning point when half of the first act has been portrayed (in place of the initial scene, as certain viewers often erroneously judge it to be). Till this stage, the audience is left unaware and completely clueless regarding the course of events taking place or the manner in which the unfolding events will build up a story. Then, all of a sudden, the Inciting Event takes place, and it suddenly becomes obvious (Krauss et al. 2008).

Later in the movie, after the arrest of Colin, Billy is murdered when Colin's associate shoots him (who was also, without Colin knowing, a spy for Frank). Soon after, tension is built up further when Colin kills his companion, which leaves only him as a witness for the events that have taken place. The tension in the script is further accentuated by the presence of two Climactic Moments in the plot, for both of the main characters (Fitzsimmons n.d.). However, due to the fact that Billy is the actual protagonist of the story, and due to the fact that the clashes that take place between him and Colin eventually culminates with his demise, this moment is the focal point where the plot's tension bursts forth. This can be considered as a highly effective strategy used by the filmmakers wherein the tension is built up through multiple climax moments till the point where it suddenly explodes and the viewers get to heave a sigh of relief (Takhirov et al. 2012).

Colin suggests Billy be named for a posthumous Medal of Merit. This is further deepened when Colin's girlfriend (also being Billy's psychologist) repudiates him, after she is told the truth by Billy. She is assumed to have opened a letter that Billy left for her, in which there are steps that she must carry out post his demise. Colin then travels to his apartment, only to discover Sergeant Dignam standing there in wait of him. Dignam is then shown to be his killer followed by the scene where he leaves soon after the act. The strategy used here by the filmmakers is effective handling of all the major unfinished parts of the story (Fitzsimmons n.d.).

The Departed can thus be considered as a profound piece of storytelling. Everything about the film is rock solid. The plot of this movie revolves around the clashes between the police and the notorious guys. All of the group is conscious of the presence of a 'rat' in the group, along with the aggravation of the tension that is already rising in the movie due to the endeavours to discover who the person is. Costello appears to be impenetrable to impromptu raids due to the fact that he is given a cue by Sgt. Sullivan who generally is responsible for carrying out such raids. Also, the plot is thickened by describing the complicated procedure of the raids in which they are triggered by the data given to the police by disguised Costigan. On the other hand, The Departed is also saturated with suspense since the audience comes close to seeing each one of the rats inch their way to exposure, after which they are able to alter the direction of the growing suspicion on them, thereby keeping the viewers glued to the movie. In what can be considered as a screen play strategy to boost audience involvement, they are not able to completely grasp the depth of the information in Costello's mind. He is shown to be backed by loyal thugs who are willing to carry out any of the filthy activities that ensure he is kept in business. Also, the movie has no slow spot, along with the usage of background music and intense street scene cinematography in order to heighten the build-up of tension in the movie (McKee 2014).

Yet another means of building up tension in The Departed has been the impressive screenplay that does not let the audience categorise characters as being either good or bad. Throughout the movie, the audience is left struggling with characters changing traits from bad to good and good to bad. Also, those characters which are bad are often portrayed as being not so bad as well. All in all, the tension in this

movie is derived from its complexity of characterisation, which can be considered as an effective strategy in its screenplay. The Departed provides the audience with a clever dosage of strong emotions such as deception, betrayal, suspense, and paranoia, in just the right amount that keeps them wanting to find out how the action of the film unfolds in the end. The filmmaker, through Damon's character provides the viewers with the cover of civility and the sincere-cop pretence in just the correct proportions that are required to appease the higher ranking officials, even though the character simultaneously looks down upon their endeavours. Thus, one of the primary premises for The Departed being a cinematic success is the fact that the filmmakers made a highly conscious effort to smoothly build up stress and tension in the plot through effectively handling the emotions of the audience (Malandrakis et al. 2011).

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be seen, through the examples of 'Whiplash', 'Boyhood' and 'The Departed', that building tension is vitally important when it comes to keeping the audience engaged in the film till the very end. It is important to note that the building up of tension in all of the three movies was done with the primary purpose of keeping the audience engaged in the story, so that they not only watch it till the end, but also that the movies have a lasting impact on them. (Carroll 2013) In all of these movies, the filmmakers have made optimum use of strategies such as, in the case of Whiplash, where the audience is compelled to empathise with the protagonist and the harsh treatment meted out to him, despite them getting to know that this was for his own good. Similarly, Boyhood uses the effective demonstration of time passage, wherein the viewers are left fascinated with the actual maturing process of the boy right before their eyes, all in a span of three hours. Lastly, in the case of The Departed, the audience is provided with such an extensive and intriguing plot that they are left wondering about whether the characters in the film are actually good or bad. It is through the complex character details that the filmmakers here are able to build up tension and ensure the involvement of the audience (Till et al. 2011).

References

1. Begley, R. and Writer, I., 2015. The Symbolic Clash of Whiplash. *Reason Papers*, 37(1), pp.179-181.
2. Bong, S.F., 2014. Whiplash.
3. Carnochan, P.G., 2015. Boyhood Written and Directed by Richard Linklater IFC Films, 2014; 165 min. *Fort Da*, 21(1), pp.111-118.
4. Carroll, N., 2013. The paradox of suspense. In *Suspense* (pp. 81-102). Routledge.
5. Fernandez, I., 2015. To Strive for Purpose. *tarboard*, p.99.
6. Fitzsimmons, P., Existential Viewing in the Cinematic Escape: The Language of Hope and Hopelessness in the 'The Departed'.
7. Greenberg, H.R., 2014. Boyhood. *Psychiatric Times*, 31(9), pp.28-28.
8. Greenwood, D., 2010. Of sad men and dark comedies: Mood and gender effects on entertainment media preferences. *Mass communication and Society*, 13(3), pp.232-249.
9. Kim, J.H. and Hong, J.Y., 2013. Analysis of trans-media storytelling strategies. *International Journal of Multimedia and Ubiquitous Engineering*, 8(3), pp.1-10.
10. Krauss, J., Nann, S., Simon, D., Gloor, P.A. and Fischbach, K., 2008, June. Predicting Movie Success and Academy Awards through Sentiment and Social Network Analysis. In *ECIS* (pp. 2026-2037).
11. Leipzig, A., Weiss, B.S. and Goldman, M., 2015. *Filmmaking in Action: Your Guide to the Skills and Craft*. Macmillan Higher Education.

12. Lindebaum, D. and Courpasson, D., 2017. Becoming the next Charlie Parker: Rewriting the role of passions in bureaucracies with whiplash. *Academy of Management Review*, pp.amr-2017.
13. Malandrakis, N., Potamianos, A., Evangelopoulos, G. and Zlatintsi, A., 2011, May. A supervised approach to movie emotion tracking. In *Acoustics, Speech and Signal Processing (ICASSP), 2011 IEEE International Conference on* (pp. 2376-2379). IEEE.
14. McKee, N., 2014. Giving voice to violence and void: an analysis of Martin Scorsese's treatment of food in *The Departed* as a means of depicting Irish-American masculine identity.
15. Neher, E., 2014. Richard Linklater's Sculpture in Time. *The Hudson Review*, 67(3), pp.470-476.
16. Ovali, Z. and Genel, B., Power Usage in the Frame of Ethical Leadership: The Case of "Whiplash".
17. Pecchenino, D., 2014. Somewhere Like Real Life: On Richard Linklater's Boyhood.
18. Rich, B.R., 2014. The Right Time and Place: Richard Linklater's Instant Epic. *FILM QUART*, 68(1), pp.42-47.
19. Shary, T., 2017. *Boyhood: A Young Life on Screen*. Routledge.
20. Sheth, A., Perera, S., Wijeratne, S. and Thirunarayan, K., 2017. Knowledge will propel machine understanding of content: Extrapolating from current examples. *arXiv preprint arXiv:1707.05308*.
21. Sklar, R., 2012. *Movie-made America: A cultural history of American movies*. Vintage.
22. Steimbregger, L., 2017. Authority and contempt in teaching. About the whiplash movie.
23. Takhirov, N., Duchateau, F. and Aalberg, T., 2012, November. An evidence-based verification approach to extract entities and relations for knowledge base population. In *International Semantic Web Conference* (pp. 575-590). Springer, Berlin, Heidelberg.
24. Theron, R., Santamaria, R., Garcia, J., Gomez, D. and Paz-Madrid, V., 2007. Overlapper: movie analyzer. *Infovis Conference Compendium*, pp.140-141.
25. Till, B., Niederkrotenthaler, T., Herberth, A., Voracek, M., Sonneck, G. and Vitouch, P., 2011. Coping and film reception: A study on the impact of film dramas and the mediating effects of emotional modes of film reception and coping strategies. *Journal of Media Psychology: Theories, Methods, and Applications*, 23(3), p.149.