Nicholas Burner

Institution

Course

Instructor

Date

**Semiotic Analysis of Riesman’s Reading**

Semiotics can take the form of signs, objects, and interpretations. Semiotics highlights how a specific idea or an object defines out a communication. The description of the 1940s and 1950s era of buoyancy and postwar consensus is an example of how Riesman uses semiotics to construct his argument (Riesman). In the reading "What We Talk about When We Talk about Batman and Superman," Riesman uses figurative language and historical perspectives to help us understand and compare the current world with the past and why we needed superheroes. Riesman is looking beyond the surface-value qualities of the characters and uses historical context to explain why the characters are the way they are. He writes about how Superman's optimistic heroism connotes the patriotic, post-war optimism seen in the 1940s and 1950s and how Batman's cynicism connotes the American social disorder of the 1970s (Riesman). In this paper, my focus is to highlight Riesman's semiotic methods in his book and talk about the relationship he exposes between Batman and Superman.

During the early 1940s, the United States needed all of the encouragement and superheroes they could get. The country required a "godlike" person to do good things to people and even make people feel good (Riesman). While fighting in World War Three until 1945, it seems after reading Riesman's reasoning that Superman was created to possibly reduce the tension and stress of being at war, as many people's dads had been drafted into the war, Superman acted as a figure of hope. Later on, in the 1970s, Batman was created in the era of urban decay to use cynicism as the best method of restoring sanity in society. In Riesman's reading, it is evident that every society and nation requires mythological heroes and beliefs that protect them from bad people and the dark powers. Superman and Batman were created in comical imageries as heroes fighting for human rights and saving the world from exploitation. Both of these characters possess powers and have enough strength to save the world and serving justice. Besides, Riesman explains that both superheroes are not enemies and have critical similarities.

When talking about the superheroes, Riesman explores the relationship between Batman and Superman and how they perceived each other long ago. Even though they are not enemies, it is essential to understand some aspects of their relationships. He incorporates The Dark Knight Returns film to explain how the two mythical superheroes lived as enemies in the dystopian future. Riesman presents Batman as a symbol of pessimism whose childhood experiences modeled him into thinking that the only way to reform the world is by scaring the criminals or those individuals who do bad things. However, Superman is modeled as a symbol of hope and optimism, who believes that the world can only be good through leading by example and inspiring the criminals to change their ways. Such differences crop in because of the different backgrounds and life experiences of each individual. Today, we can see that backgrounds and early childhood experiences model us into what we become. These experiences play a crucial role in influencing how people enter and maintain relationships with each other. Besides, our backgrounds and the environment instill personality traits such as leadership, humility, self-esteem, and assertiveness into individuals.

Riesman's presentation of the fights between the two superheroes was figurative. The entire reading helps us see the role of superheroes in real life. In modern American society, we can see many people using the lessons learned from the two characters to identify and solve issues existing in their surroundings. Riesman does this by crediting Superman and Batman's activities to solve the crime together within the society. Even if we have our differences, such as separated by political lines, Americans should stand for each other. Riesman succeeds in portraying that it is crucial to work together for a common goal in times of difficulties, even if we have our differences. For instance, in the Covid-19 pandemic, we were required to be together as a nation to conquer the unseen enemy. Leaders, especially from the democratic divide, rose to the occasion to urge all Americans to stay together and pray for each other. They gave each of us hope and inspiration that we shall overcome.

Sometimes we never know our potential until a problem arises, and we combine effort to provide a solution. We are surprised to note that we are perfect and can do a lot by working together. I agree with the conclusion that currently, things have changed, and we are no longer in a dark time. New challenges have erupted, such as climate change, and need to be dealt with first. The issues pose a threat to our future, and immediate solutions should be established and implemented immediately.

In conclusion, I feel that Riesman is successful in his semiotic analysis of the subjects in the reading. Historically, Riesman does a beautiful job of highlighting the critical thoughts of what comes into our minds when we hear about Batman and Superman. I agree with Riesman's views that Superman and Batman are friends and not rivals. Again, Riesman represents these characters with heroism as they fight against the harmful vices within society. These two characters are friends who are fighting for truth, justice, and the American way. Riesman's claims, examples, and conclusions are compelling and reflect the fluctuating American attitudes. As we previously saw, Americans rely on these fictions to be courageous and fight for equal rights and American Justice. In the previous year, we have seen efforts of some American citizens rising to fight for "no racism" through the black lives matter organization. Besides, individuals are now more willing to face problems and stand up and fight against the destruction of our society.

**Works Cited**

Riesman, Abraham. "What We Talk About When We Talk About Batman And Superman". *Vulture*, 2016, <https://www.vulture.com/2016/03/batman-v-superman-c-v-r.html>.