

Exploring Modern Masculinity Through Cinema: A Study of Benoit Blanc and DCP Raghavan

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Abstract: *Cinema often becomes a quiet classroom where ideas of manhood are tested, questioned, and reshaped. This paper examines the portrayals of DCP Raghavan in Vettaiyadu Vilaiyaadu and Benoit Blanc in Knives Out to understand how contemporary films present emotionally layered and ethically grounded versions of masculinity. Rather than celebrating aggression or dominance, these characters reveal strength through restraint, empathy, and moral clarity. Raghavan embodies a form of traditional masculinity marked by discipline and grief, yet softened by emotional honesty and respect toward women. Blanc, by contrast, demonstrates intellectual confidence combined with humility and care, challenging the image of the loud and self-centered detective. Through close reading of key scenes and character interactions, the discussion highlights how both figures resist toxic patterns often associated with male identity. Their journeys suggest that vulnerability, patience, and ethical responsibility are not signs of weakness but central traits of mature manhood. The analysis argues that such cinematic representations provide young men with alternative models for self-reflection and growth, presenting masculinity as dynamic, humane, and shaped by lived experience rather than rigid expectation.*

Keywords: Masculinity in cinema, emotional resilience, ethical manhood, character study, young men and identity, Family drama, Self-actualization

1. Introduction

Cinema eternally acts as a powerful mirror to society, reflecting and influencing our perspectives of self, identity, and culture. When young men are considered in isolation, cinema becomes a distinct foundation to explore and present varied dimensions of masculinity. As young men evade through their landscape of the drudgery of daily life, at one point everyone asks themselves, 'where do I stand as a man in my life now?' Cinema being the most popular medium and also a factor which is evolving as a separate medium comes with an answer to them, through the form of indulgent male characters like Rust Cohle from True Detective, Maigret from Maigret TV Series and the like. Focusing on all such characters will be cumbersome. When filtered, three different characters from different walks of life have something to tell to our boys. Benoit Blanc from Knives Out and DCP Raghavan from Vettaiyadu Vilaiyaadu. The aforementioned men are different from the mob, who act and struggle individually during the course of life. They too are not for the crowds; they are more into their work table or chair where they pursue their raw life. They are also not in the context of having coffee in a friend's gang or having a comical conversation with their coworker. They open up in their professional and personal life. They follow trends, but with their own principles and sticking on to their own standards. They too have their own flaws, but with their life experience, they navigate somehow through the turmoil of life. Let us break the entire conversation into three, starting with the senior, DCP Raghavan.

DCP Raghavan

Breaking open the gate with blue denims and shirts, director Gautham Vasudev Menon positions Raghavan in the minds of the viewers as an original man devoid of comics of daily life or mass elements to glorify such a character. Raghavan says, 'Now I am not in my uniform, I came here as a single man, how is it?' In the title song which follows, the lyrics by Thamarai say that 'when bravery and honesty go hand in

hand, the dictionary would call it Raghavan' and 'he held high respects for his profession and hearing that even the sky would want to shake hands with him'. These lines are good enough to portray Raghavan. Raghavan also was a family man who always put his family first even after his wife died. When Raghavan follows the mystery of the trail of murders of his beloved ones due to the diligence in his job and finally lands up in New York where he meets Aradhana his would-be better half during a suicide attempt of the latter. Raghavan obstructs the said try by a hunch, an instinct he felt while initially having a glance upon her. The aforesaid obstruction was by him breaking open the apartment door of Aradhana, the act which he justifies himself later to her over a glass of orange juice and Indian breakfast where they go along not by inviting each other but coincidentally. Aradhana found Raghavan as a considerate human being to vent her sorrow. Raghavan did not want her feelings to pile up again so he told her that there was no need for her to tell him her problems to which he replies that she spontaneously thought to vent on him which marks Raghavan as Gautham Vasudev Menon's Gentleman. Raghavan teaches young men how to be gentle and respectful with women, especially their loved ones. There are high chances of men not having open conversations with the women they love which leads to many other problems. There are also chances of men not respecting the space and time of a woman when they actually need it. Here the focus goes to young men treading through the phase of self-actualization period. Men having a brought up of varied dimensions, some having a good childhood, but not a good socialising opportunities. Some socialize well, but have many childhood traumas, a few only having both good. Here, Raghavan's childhood is not discussed. We cannot assure he had such and such background. But to the persons connected to him, he is very genuine and considerate. For some men being labelled as toxic, Raghavan serves as a guide to understand the root cause of their toxicity that is not being able to peacefully communicate with their women, whoever it may be, friend or partner. DCP Raghavan from *Vettaiyadu Vilaiyaadu* represents a more traditional, yet emotionally

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layered, version of manhood. A character states that ‘he’s a little old school, but nice’. Albeit being externally tough, what lies behind it is a very common emotionally vulnerable Raghavan who lies for some time with his wife's corpse. Throughout the film, Raghavan’s personal life is in turmoil, and his struggle with grief and emotional trauma adds a significant layer of intricacy to his character. This emotional depth sets him apart from the typical action-hero archetype, showing that masculinity can also be defined by the ability to confront one’s own pain and vulnerabilities.

For young men, Raghavan offers an important lesson in emotional resilience. His character suggests that true strength is not just about facing the world outright, but also about acknowledging and dealing with one’s inner struggles. Raghavan demonstrates that masculinity can coexist with emotional depth and vulnerability. Rather than shying away from difficult feelings, he faces them with honesty, which ultimately makes him stronger, both as an individual and as a professional. His journey shows that embracing one’s emotions is not a weakness, but rather a critical part of achieving true personal growth and emotional strength.

Benoit Blanc

With his basic charm and impeccable intellect, Benoit Blanc, as portrayed by Daniel Craig in *Knives Out*, is positioned as a detective who emanates a prowess for observation and deduction. The film opens with Blanc entering the Thrombey mansion, dressed in his sharp suit, a visual tool that reflects that he is both an outsider and not a man who needs to be flaunted to command attention and attraction. Blanc’s underemphasized entry, with his smooth drawl and calm demeanor, spontaneously sets him distinct from the usual brash, arrogant detectives of cinema. His quiet nature and innate confidence speaks substantial volumes about his character- one who doesn't need to boast or elaborate his genius through trivial conversations along the day

Blanc’s dialogue, filled with wit and humility, reflects us glimpses into his well-refined and sophisticated mind, while his actions are revelations of the deeds of men of down-to-earth and human nature. His calm interrogating style, such as asking questions in a non-threatening, conversational manner, is in contrast to the usual, dominant and intense confrontational strategy of interrogation. He operates from a platform carved out of respect, seeing to himself that the truth and associated facts unfolds naturally and spontaneously, rather than ferreting it out through aggression, intimidation, or overpowering. Blanc, gently sits behind the co-investigators and airs relevant queries without even intruding on the formers’ little space and time. It's only when a character asks that his visual image is clear for the introduction. It is also stated that he is not with the police department and is not directly involved in the investigation but as a consultant who does his role very relevantly. While in his dialogue, "I do declare, this is a fine mess," Blanc subtly invites the viewer into the mystery, suggesting that the process of unraveling the crime should not be hurried, but savored, pursued and cherished

Blanc, albeit a man of extraordinary talent, also showcases an earnestness and prudence with regard to his work and the impact it has on those around him. He is not driven by ego or

the desire to outshine his peers. He takes pride in solving cases, not for the glory or for a meteoric rise, but for the satisfaction of bringing justice. Dissimilar to many classic detectives, Blanc doesn't seek to enhance himself through his success or mettle. He is even more raw and original than Agatha Christie’s Hercule Poirot who is also distinct from the mob. Blanc simultaneously handles the mystery as an intricate puzzle and as a discourse, one that requires time, patience, and a holistic understanding and comprehension—traits that are rare in a world quick to seek answers whether it is authentic or not

The relationship he shares with Marta Cabrera, the nurse who becomes entangled in the Thrombey family drama, is crucial and a pivotal point in the film. Blanc shows not only keen and sharp investigative instincts but also genuine kindness and empathy. When Marta is caught in a web of moral dilemma and trauma, Blanc doesn't merely view her as a suspect to be interrogated, but as someone to be protected with reference to the role she aptly played in the Thrombey family. His interactions with Marta, particularly when he guides her through the unraveling of the Thrombey family’s intricate history, exemplify the magnitude of respect and care he believes is essential in human connection.

Blanc’s stoic, almost mystical nature is contrary to the chaos and dysfunction of the Thrombey family. While they bicker, lie, and conceal secrets, Blanc operates steadily with confidence, his presence grounded in his sense of justice. He represents not just a brilliant mind, but the idea that true understanding requires patience, respect, and insight into the humanity of those around him.

Through Blanc, director Rian Johnson depicts an alternative view of masculinity. Blanc is an embodiment of intellectual and emotional maturity, someone who doesn’t have to resort to brute force, aggressive tactics, or conversational strategy to prove his worth. His respect for others, especially women like Marta, who he perceives as a victim of circumstance, is a transforming and refreshing shift from the traditional macho detective. He teaches that men can be strong and capable while also being humble, compassionate, polite and discreet.

Blanc's approach is especially significant for younger men treading their self-actualization journey. Highly comparable to Raghavan in *Vettaiyaadu Vilaiyaadu*, Blanc stands as a figure who challenges the toxic masculinity that often associates power and strength with aggression and dominance. Instead, Blanc shows that true strength lies in emotional intelligence, in being able to understand, respect, and support those who are around you.

Though Benoit Blanc's backstory is not as broadly explored in the film, his deep understanding of human nature and his ability and affinity for empathy hint at a life full of experiences that have shaped his frame of reference. It’s not about where he comes from but about how he chooses to engage with the world around him. He is neither emotionally detached nor overbearing but a man who strikes a delicate and distinct balance between intellect and compassion. This makes him, in varied dimensions, a rare kind of hero in a world full of intricate individuals who often struggle to find a place and opportunities for their vulnerabilities.

For some men labeled as emotionally distant or toxically masculine, Benoit Blanc's character serves as a guide, a reminder that one doesn't have to compromise intelligence for kindness, nor strength for humility. Blanc's role in the film teaches that listening, understanding, and respecting others, especially when faced with difficult and harsh truths and facts—are the marks of true leadership and character. In Blanc's second phase, that is *The Glass Onion*, viewers were able to perceive Benoit Blanc as he is as he perceives those around him empathetically. Blanc's reserved nature teaches that vulnerability, introspection, and empathy are equally valuable qualities that contribute to one's sense of self and masculinity. His character provides young men the opportunity to see that it's possible to thrive in the world by trusting one's mind, remaining emotionally aware, and embracing individuality. In an age where stereotypes of masculinity can often feel limiting, Benoit Blanc offers a reminder that the most profound form of strength may be one that comes from within—the ability to stay true to who you are without needing to transform and adheres to extrinsic pressures.

Films like *Knives Out*, *Vettaiyadu Vilaiyadu*, and *Mumbai Police* offer complex and diverse representations of masculinity. Characters like Benoit Blanc, DCP Raghavan, and Antony Moses provide insightful depictions of manhood, each reflecting a varied approach to life's challenges and self-identity. These characters exemplify how masculinity is not a versatile concept, and through their stories, young men are offered valuable lessons in emotional depth, intellect, and growth.

2. Conclusion

Cinema provides a powerful and concrete space for young men to reflect on their own lives and understand the complexities and intricacies of masculinity or more clearly humanity. Through characters like Benoit Blanc and DCP Raghavan, films offer a nuanced and multifaceted perspective of what it means to be a real and common man. These characters not only reflect a diversity of lifestyles and approaches to life's challenges, but also serve as important tools and methods for self-exploration. By engaging with these films, young men can better understand that masculinity is not a fixed concept, but rather something fluid, evolving, and shaped by individual experiences. In the end, cinema invites young men to break free from limiting stereotypes, embrace their own authenticity, and create their own definitions of masculinity that are honest, complex, and true to themselves.

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