

Tracing the Dynamics of Narratology in the Movie *Parasite*: A Study of Nuances in Visual Media

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ABSTARCT

The art of motion picture has stretched to the level where one could see and feel only the reality from the imitation. The growth of various techniques to portray and express the abstract of the mind of the writer plays a brilliant role in the success of a movie. Details of every tiniest item could bring universal success to movies and one such movie is *Parasite* directed by Bong Joon-Ho. The simple yet elegant story of class structure is vividly shown by means of the subtleties of narratology. For a story to be bewitching a good character, behaviour suspense and tension, conflict and controversy are the basic plot twisters in visual storytelling. With a deeper analysis on the framing, composition, position and shots our paper attempts to prove the narrative elements which makes it a masterpiece.

Keywords: Narratology, Characters, Setting, Camera movements, Shots.

Introduction

“Wildly entertaining, the kind of smart, generous, aesthetically energized movie that obliterates the tired distinctions between art films and popcorn movies”. A black comedy thriller *Parasite* directed by the South Korean director Bong Joon-Ho symbolically reveals the dividing lines between the rich and the poor. There has been many movies regarding the theme rich-poor but Joon-Ho’s *Parasite* stands out mainly because of the simple plot that anyone could relate and, the depth and awareness of the character. The movie has been nominated and awarded for Best Picture, Director, Original Screenplay, and also won the best International Feature Film. The list of accolades received by the movie are 197 out of 330 nominations. The title of the movie itself propose the nature how dependent and opportunist are humans. The word “parasite” means an organism existing on another organism and stemming on the aids of the host organism. Similarly the movie shows three family – Park family, Kim family and the family living in an unknown bunker beneath the house of Park family – surviving by stemming on the aids of one family or the other. Kim family and the family in the basement leech

of the wealthy Park family and tries to make a comfortable living, whereas Park family leech of the unhealthy circumstances of the other families. Due to the trusting and gullible temperaments of the Parks, Kim family are able to excellently deceive their way into earning service jobs in the household.

Tzvetan Todorov's Theory of Equilibrium

The expository scene of the movie brilliantly portrays the living condition of the Kims family. Their utmost desire to escape from their poor unhealthy environment forces them to choose any possible means that could uplift their present status. The Kims soon enter the Parks family and take the roles of different service jobs in the house of Parks family act as the rising scene. Their attempts to become rich and enjoy luxury fails. The turning point or the greatest suspense arrives when the Kims find out the secret underground basement. Here the Kims identity is also at stake as they are about to get caught by the Parks. The climax scene happen at the night and everything goes upside down unexpectedly. Falling action occurs when the Kims and the family under the basement goes emotional. Their main motive was survival but as they become emotional and loses the control of mind. The events following the rising action is the harsh brutal killing of each member of the family. The movie ends with the resolution of Kim's son Ki-woo to end the endless suffering of his father who is trapped in the basement and to own the Park's family house.

Applying Tzvetan Todorov's Equilibrium theory we can clarify the distinction of rich and the poor and the disruption in the plot. The film begins with a distinction of impoverishment and luxury on the two plateaus of screen. The scene experiences disruption when Ki-woo forges document to fake a college degree so that he can be qualified as a tutor to the daughter of rich Park household. This disruption caused in plot also brings forth a change in frequency of effect as they have never delved into any crimes. Through their mischievous endeavours they post themselves to lively secured jobs in Parks household. As the scene progresses we analyse the disequilibrium in plot as the poor take over the rich household. By discovering the motives of Kim's, the previous housemaid who worked for Park's try to threaten their exposure. This is the real recognition of disequilibrium as they find Kim's as the real disruption to the Park's. The Kim's later fight with housemaid as they try to lock her up in basement to cover their disruption. Later Geun-se overpowers everyone by killing the daughter of Kim family. A true repair of disruption comes at the end of plot as Nathan Park is killed by the father of Kim's. After a year gap they return to normality but with their surroundings to worsen. This question of disruption or disequilibrium is poignant it calls to question the toxicity of social class system. The rich will do whatever in their power to repair while the poor remains poor.

Rick Altman's Concept of Genre Theory

Visual Architecture in the Movie

The movie narrates the story of two houses. The Park family home, Kim family semi-basement home and the whole neighbourhood that surrounds Kim's family was constructed for the movie. Delicate but effective great design and the reliance on natural light keeps aside the feeling of artificiality. The realistic nature of the set and its portrayal act as a mediator in conveying the film's theme in a calmer fashion. The windows play a crucial role in the movie, it is the screen through which the audience gets to view these two houses. Kim family window looks out the street level and Park family window over a manicured turf. Kim's window exposes the horrible condition in which they are awfully trying to endure.

After a thorough analysis of the architecture of each house and its positions we can see that each house faces each other keeping a distance that one could observe only later in the film as the Kim's escape from being caught by the Park's. Kim's house could probably be on the left side facing the Park's house on the right side. The sun rises in the side of Park's family house and sets in the side of the Kim's family house. This kind of visual intentions are evident in some of the previous works of Director Bong, and one such example is the movie "Snow Piercer". In order to exemplify the class structure and its benefits or advantages, Director Bong uses various eye-catching visuals. The Kim's house is usually half lit which also indicate the living condition of working-class people, whereas the big mansion of the Park's is provided with high intensity fluorescent light setting. The two houses facing each other have an upright relation. Kim's family has to ascend from their semi-basement home to the outside world. Whether it is to step outside of their home or to reach to their streets they have to hike flight of stairs. From the early scenes of the movie each member of the Kim's family are trying to help each of them to hike the steps so that their family could hike from the subway smell and accomplish respect and wealth in the society. Other than Min, the wealthy friend of Kim's son, no other characters reach out to the Kim's for their status is negligible in the society. It is only their fake identity that is approved, and it is that uniqueness which assist them to see the outdoor world of wealth and power. On the other hand, Park's family never ascends down. They are always shown in the backdrop of elevating from the ground level. It is the elevation that draws borders between the two classes and the movie wonderfully portrays the consequences and disadvantages of the borders being caught.

We do get to see the distance between the two houses only when the Kim's plan goes amiss. Their journey from Park's house to their own neighbourhood grows from dark to dim followed by the storm. They go down and

down each scene as they ran away from the Park's. This scene is quite important because it visual shows us the elevation between the two classes.

The hidden shelter of the man beneath the Park's house communicate the concept of visual design. The never lit area exemplifies the darkness of the life of many men under the wealth and power of aristocrats. The brilliance of the visual imitation of the movie creates a perfect space for its success.

Shots in the Movie

Director Bong makes use of only 960 shots which includes slow pacing and movements that are incorporated throughout the movie. In the Park's house the shots are wider and unshackled indicating the freedom of movement in rich households, while in Kim's household shots are more packed. This applauds to the excellent virtual architecture that was implemented to indicate the sociological division of the rich and the poor.

Bong Jong-ho, the director, remarks "For a rich house, the strange events that occur are very much tied to the actual space of the house. So, the basic structure of the house was set as I wrote the script because otherwise it wouldn't have been possible to propel the narrative forward."

Bong designed the framing with the perfect wide shot. The wide contrast of the scene outside the window of two houses is made visible through still and wide shots. With a perfect 12.6-inch window for the Parks, their lawn is always filled with light and beautiful scenery. For the Kims, it is only a small opening through which the tacky roads and the lives of common people are visible. Sun is often produced as a focused symbol throughout the film. For the Kims semi basement house light is only a dim medium without much sunlight to penetrate. But for the Parks characters their window is transfixed to have the natural light with characters often being a part of it.

The camera slowly moves towards the subject especially with the Kims family, but as they spend a night in the luxurious apartment of the Parks the movement is nullified and shifts to a still shot. This also adds to their lifestyle and their change of setting which have submerged with the Parks family.

The close up which is presented when Yeon-kyo resides from the stairs with an awe struck expression after realising her maid is allergic to peaches. The final shot in the backyard of the Parks is when the camera focuses on Kim ki-taek as he puts on an apprehensive face to the surprising scenes. This allows the audience to realise the scene and its circumstances by being one with the characters.

Costumes

To create excitement and vibrant mood to scenes choosing correct palettes are necessary. To induce camaraderie in the frame light hues with bright vibrant lighting are produced to induce the same mood to the audience. To create a distinctive frame and setting as displayed in the movie *Parasite*, the grim appearance of semi-basement house is noticeable as for the elites the rich colours of architect and lustrous lawn with tropical surrounding create a distinctive framework in terms of colours. Colours are characterised as associative and transitional colours. Associative colours are referred to as conjoined with a character, emotion or theme. The saturation defines as intensity and the value stands as distinctive proponents in the movie. Throughout the movie the Kim family is seen as wearing a Spanish grey outfit indicating a sadder and dull atmosphere. Along with the Park family, translucent colours are used indicating the scintillating and vibrant nature of their background and set up. Adding to this sophisticated look is the look propagated by rich class, from pearl white crotch tops worn by the character Yeon-Kyo or the mustard pink dress worn by the maid everything stands as complimentary to the mood.

Symbols

The living condition of both the families are sketched in contrast. The raining episode of the movie depicts the condition of the rich and poor universally. The Park family could feel the wonderful aroma of the rain and arranges party in their garden area, whereas the Kim family feels worst because they become homeless after the downpour. They could not feel the petrichor as the rich could feel. Joon-Ho beautifully brings out the symbolic role of the weather through rain and sunlight. The Park family house experiences most of the sun and their lifestyle or livelihood is always fresh and brightened. On the other hand, the Kim family house suffers a petty portion of the sunlight and their livelihood is barely touched with hope. The family living in the basement of the Park family rarely catches any sunlight and are miserable. One could also interpret the scene as the rich benefit from everything the universe provides whereas the poor have to limit their lives and try living with the limited.

The way *Parasite* uses symbols, cleverly narrate the theme and transcends beyond culture and language. The viewing stone or the scholar's stone is introduced to the Kim's family and to audience by Ki-Woo's wealthy friend Min. He gifts the Kim's the stone which immediately becomes the symbol of the family's desire for wealth and social status. Ki-Woo becomes totally under the influence of the stone and starts taking bold actions to pursue his ambition to be like the VIPs of the society. It seems that after having the scholar's stone they are the masters of their lives, but fate proves otherwise. When the Kims are on the verge of getting caught for

forging the Parks, Ki-Woo notices the scholar stone get trapped in the flood and slipping away from them. From then on nothing remains under the influence of the Kims.

Mary Douglas in her work *Purity and Danger* states that, “There is no such thing as absolute dirt: it exists in the eye of the beholder”. Hygiene and sanitations are communal paradigms. “The jobs that these characters take—tutoring, housekeeping, and driving—feature a rare moment where the rich and poor are together in a very private space and so close to one another that they can smell each other. It was a kind of the perfect device in the story.” For the Parks it is a kind of horror to smell something different from the sophistication of their lifestyle. They try to remain safe behind the line that they have shaped out of class consciousness. Exaggeration of the smell of paucity results in creating frustration, contemptibility, shame and pitiful. The symbol of smell becomes more evident towards the median of the movie and it plays a momentous role at the climax of the movie.

Conclusion

Parasite vigilantly scrutinise the class consciousness of contemporary civilisation. Wealth and Power act as a fence, isolating one from the outside world and what reality is more. The Park’s family are literally sectioned off from everything, completely disconnected from everyday life. Through its production design, direction, cinematography, make-up and costuming, as well as the blocking of the actors, we can observe the mastery of verbal and pictorial storytelling. Every shots of the movie delivers us with a disparity of brightness and darkness, up and down, and repetitive perception of self to signal the position of each character. The cinematic language of the movie enables everyone to entrée the mind and feeling of the Director. With him and his creation it moved the consciousness of a class structure from one level to the other. It is not the story alone but the smooth switches, irony-laced dialogues and ethically abstruse characters that are composed in such a way that it could provide us with the most spellbinding and thought-provoking movies that the epoch has witnessed. The structure of the film is masterful but what puts it above the rest of the movies is that no other well-paced thriller in recent memory has quite captured the zeitgeist like *Parasite* to quote the movie is so metaphorical in itself. “An urgent, brilliantly layered look at timely social themes, *Parasite* finds writer-director Bong Joon Ho in near-total command of his craft.”

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