

Film Analysis: The Metaphors in the Movie *Parasite*

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Abstract. *Parasite* is a South Korean movie that was released in 2019. The film was critically acclaimed and went on to win several awards internationally upon its release, including an Academy Award for Best Picture, making it the first Asian film to do so. The film director, Bong Joon-ho, adds a unique charm to the film through his skillful use of metaphorical techniques, which help to unravel the movie's more profound meaning and theme: the class divide between the rich and the poor in South Korea. This paper will focus on analyzing the camera work and the metaphorical meaning of key scenes and symbols. Specifically, the cinematography in the movie will be discussed in regard to the camera angles and movements. The analysis will focus on two spatial scenes of "Semi-basement" and "Villa," as well as the scene of "Ladder", which will be assessed regarding their significance as symbols and metaphors.

Keywords: cinematography, metaphor analysis, cinematic symbols, class difference, rich-poor gap

1. Introduction

Parasite is a renowned South Korean film directed by Bong Joon-ho, which revolves around the Kim family, who gradually depend on the rich Park family through a series of schemes to survive and make money, leading to many unforeseen events. Upon its release, the film won many international awards, including the Academy Award for Best Picture, and attracted global attention for its unique narrative art and profound story theme. Notably, when making movies, film directors usually seek to imply a relationship, comparison, or fact through the elements they set up and call or prompt the audience to think [1]. In the film *Parasite*, Bong Joon-ho employs many metaphorical techniques to highlight the film's profound theme of class divide and conflicts. Metaphors in film carry a heuristic value, and like linguistic metaphors, they are able to connect the different elements to elicit a profound meaning [1]. Therefore, this paper seeks to analyze how *Parasite* uses metaphors for the deeper realities of society through symbolism and metaphors of class divide.

2. How the Camera Language Makes Metaphors

2.1. Camera Shooting Angles

According to Daseler, in order for a film to have good cinematography, it ought to have meaning in all its images. Camera language is both representational and combinatorial and plays a crucial role in films [2]. In *Parasite*, the different camera angles and movements play a key role in character development, creation of the film's atmosphere, and construction of the metaphors. Starting with the camera angles, the director uses different shooting angles when portraying different characters to allude to the state and status of the characters. For example, in the scene of the Kim family in the semi-basement at the beginning of the film, all four members of the Kim family are depicted from a high angle shot. This use of high angle shot makes the characters of the four members of the Kim family appear even smaller, capturing their discomfiture of living in the small semi-basement. Also, the Kim family cannot break through the limitations of the "semi-basement" on their activity space, they can only be squeezed into the closed space. Additionally, this high angle shot portrays the Kim family as poor people at the bottom of the social class as well, leeching on others above them, as seen by the hunt for free Wi-Fi and disinfectant. Contrarily, when filming the wealthy Park family, the director employs a low-angle shot, making them appear grander, which implies that they are from a wealthier class and have a higher social status compared to the Kim family. The difference in classes between the two families is amplified when there is a simultaneous scene whereby members of the Kim family communicate with members of the Park family. In this scene, Kim Ki-woo introduces an art teacher to Mrs. Park, the shooting of this scene is different from the traditional shot reverse shot. While

Mrs. Park is shot from a low angle, Kim Ki-woo is shot from a high angle, showing that the employer-employee relationship between Mrs. Park and Kim Ki-woo is not equal and that Mrs. Park, as the employer, is superior to Kim Ki-woo, the employee. Besides, it points to the fact that Kim Ki-woo and Mrs. Park hail from different social classes and that Mrs. Park's position in the upper class is unattainable by Kim Ki-woo, who is in the lower class [3].

2.2. Camera Movement

Furthermore, in terms of camera movement, a key function of the moving camera is usually to offer volume and density to the scene through the kinetic depth effect, a perceptual exploration of space produced only by the camera's movement. In addition, the moving camera has the function of creating a continuous presence of the present, creating an omnipresence of time through a long-duration shot. By allowing plot time to develop uninterruptedly, the viewer is able to witness the complete causal interaction between characters and objects [4]. While most of the shots in *Parasite* are fixed, the few moving shots seek to drive the plot forward and allow the audience to perceive the space and causal interactions between the characters and the scenes of the movie. This conveys to the audience the profound meanings embedded in the film. Returning to the scene in the semi-basement, the director employs a dynamic camera to lead the audience to see the living environment of the Kim Family wholesomely. The director begins with a close-up of a window and slowly pans the camera down. While lowering the camera, the director brings the audience into the cramped and depressing space in which the four members of the Kim Family live. As the camera continues its slow descent, the audience sees the worn-out furniture and filth of the interior, as well as the grey street outside the window. This kind of camera movement not only vividly and frankly shows the audience the environment that the Kim family lives in as the lower class without the need to say it with lines, but also alludes to the difference in social class and the fact that it is difficult for the Kim family to cross over the social class through the visual oppression brought about by the camera movement. Meanwhile, in the case of the Park family coming back home on a rainy day, the Kim family that had stayed in their household hides under the sofa in panic. While Mr. Park and Mrs. Park relax on the sofa, the camera slowly moves down to the Kim family, showing a completely different feeling that the Kim family is terrified in their hideout. The Kim family looks embarrassed as they huddle under the grey, cramped sofa, not daring to make a sound, lest their ploy of getting employed in the Kim household be unhatched. The camera movement portrays the two families in diametrically opposite states at the same time and in the same scene, and clearly captures the huge social gap between them.

3. How the Film Symbols Make Metaphors

3.1. The "Semi-Basement" and the "Villa" as Scenes Symbols

In addition to the cinematography, the film employs symbolism, which is an effective way to imply the meaning of the film, and also determines the uniqueness of the movie [5]. In *Parasite*, Bong Joon-ho flexibly sets the scene as a symbol to present the class barrier visually, and the living scene shown in the movie can be regarded as an excellent semiotic symbol. The poor are represented by the Kim family, who live in a dilapidated, dirty, and narrow semi-basement, and cannot even afford to pay for disinfectant, as they open their window to let in the disinfectant from outside. This kind of living situation conveys to the audience the poverty and depressing situation of the Kim family [6]. The semi-basement is so ramshackle that it is flooded by a downpour, symbolizing the precariousness and fragility of the Kim family's life. Meanwhile, the windows in the semi-basement are the only way that the four members of the Kim family can connect with the outside world and their view is of a cluttered and dilapidated outdoor street, which further emphasizes the underclass environment they live in. On the other hand, the rich, represented by the Park family, live in a villa designed by a famous designer, and is magnificent, cozy, and spacious. Additionally, the villa has several floor-to-ceiling windows that give the Park family a good view of the beautiful meadow outside. It symbolizes their high status, allowing them to enjoy life's finer things. Therefore, the semi-basement and the villa are two different scenes that symbolize the different social classes of the Kim and Park families. Moreover, the dissimilarity between the windows in the semi-basement and the villa further represent the difference in the living situation of the Kim family and the Park family. This stark contrast in the size of windows, whereby the Park family have floor-to-ceiling windows and good aeration, while the Kim family have a small foggy window, captures the insurmountable gap between the Kim family and the Park family, and the harsh reality of the gap between the rich and the poor in South Korean society.

3.2. The "Ladders" as a Scene Symbol

According to Bakony, symbols in films are created when a semiotic is surrounded by complex associations, both conscious and unconscious [7]. In *Parasite*, the ladder is a significant imagery symbol, and Bong Joon-ho uses it to symbolize the barriers and insurmountable gaps between social classes. The ladder represents the Kim family's efforts and struggles in society, and it implies that they are trying to cross over to the other side, but never succeed. During Kim Ki-woo's route to the interview at the Park family's house, he walks up several stairs, leading up, hinting at how far Kim Ki-woo is from truly joining the upper class. In the scene when Kim Ki-woo is about to enter Da-Hye's room, the daughter of the Park family, the director intentionally films him

from the side as he walks up the stairs one by one to enter the room, implying that Kim Ki-woo is trying to make a class leap. Sadly, the class leap that the Ki-woo and the other members of the Kim family attempted was not successful. When heavy rain pours amidst the return of the Park family, the Kim family is forced to run back into the semi-basement where they live. On their way home, the Kim family keeps going down and passes through three long ladders, symbolizing the class leap that is hard for them to attain as members of the lower class. The long process of going down the stairs to walk back to the water-logged semi-basement that belongs to them is a harsh reminder of their reality. The Kim family got to enjoy a short splendid time at the Parks' palatial home, but soon had to leave through the direst circumstances. The ladder symbolizes the helplessness and plight of the Kim family, and other members of the lower social class. No matter how hard they try, the class barrier seems insurmountable, and the Kim family remains trapped at the bottom of the social class. This visual symbolism further emphasizes the inequality of social classes and the gap between the rich and the poor.

4. Conclusion

Parasite employs cinematography and symbolism as metaphors to explore the deeper theme of the class divide between the wealthy and the poor in South Korea. Regarding cinematography, both the camera angles and the dynamic movements of the camera are meaningful, as they add to the visual effect of the film and underpin the unbridgeable gap between the different social classes of the Park and the Kim families. When it comes to symbolism, the contrasting spaces of the semi-basement and the villa, as well as the ladder scene, all serve as metaphors, and they also expose the reality of the wide gap between the rich and the poor and the solidification of class in Korean society. The camera work and symbols compel the audience to reflect on the reality of the contemporary society, that is, no matter how much the Kim family contrives and forge their identities, they remain trapped at the bottom of the social ladder. The Kim family never achieve the class leap, and even after they enjoy the trappings of wealth at the Parks' palatial home, they are forced back to the semi-basement dwelling under flooding conditions. The lower class people cannot maintain their looseness and decency as the people in the upper class do; they are like parasites that may be overthrown at any time or remain in the underground with incredible difficulty.

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