

**Inescapable Class Warfare: Broad View of Bong Joon-ho's
Masterpiece *Parasite***

Dissertation submitted to the University of Kerala in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in English Language and
Literature



2019- 2021

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2019- 2021

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation titled *Inescapable Class Warfare: Broad View of Bong Joon-ho's Masterpiece Parasite* is a bonafide record of the studies and research carried out by Ms Tineesha at the Department of English, All Saints' College, Thiruvananthapuram, under the guidance of Dr. Kavitha N, Assistant Professor, Department of English, All Saints' College, Thiruvananthapuram and submitted to the University of Kerala in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in English Language and Literature.



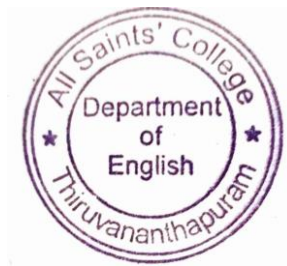
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DECLARATION

I, Tineesha , do hereby declare that this dissertation titled *Inescapable Class Warfare: Broad View of Bong Joon-ho's Masterpiece Parasite* is a record of studies and research conducted by me under the guidance of Dr. Kavitha N at All Saints' College and submitted to the University of Kerala in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in English Language and Literature. No part of this dissertation has been submitted before for the award of any other degrees, diplomas, title or recognition.

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PREFACE

As the rich become richer and the poor become poorer, the year 2019 gave us the best movies that discuss class warfare and the pain it brings. With the spike in movements like the labour party and democratic socialism really taking place so heavily in the early 21st century, its not surprising that we've also seen a dramatic uptick in class-conscious films about warfare or at the very least struggle between the rich and the poor. With income inequality at an all-time high, it really makes a ton of sense that so many films would feature the topic whether that's in an over-the-top manner, or in a really subconscious kind of way. The project titled "Inescapable Class Warfare: Broad View of Bong Joon-ho's *Parasite*" analyses how the concept of class warfare is depicted in the movie *Parasite*.

The dissertation is divided in to five chapters. The first chapter talks about the class warfare in general and the movies of 2019 which shares the theme of class warfare. The second chapter analyses the reality of capitalism and cultural hegemony that depicted through the movie.

Third chapter highlights the symbols, themes and motifs in the movie. Third chapter discusses the interdependence of rich and poor in the movie. The last concluding chapter discusses the acknowledgment that the movie received from the world.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Film is one of the major art forms of twentieth century. The development of the film has close association with the art of photography. A film can be considered as a cultural artefact, which represents the culture and tradition to which it belongs. Once it enters the cultural fabric of a society, it in turn influences the culture also. It can be considered as a performing art. “Cinema is a matter of what is in the frame and what is out” (Martin Scorsese). It has achieved the status of sophisticated art, probably the most prominent art form of the present century which can politically and psychologically influence the spectators. A film maintains its hybridity in its themes and subject also. History, culture, mythology, religion, folklore, politics, literature, are some of the subjects discussed in films.

Class conflict, also known as class struggle or class warfare, is the political and economic antagonism that occurs in society as a result of socio-economic rivalry between social groups or between the wealthy and the poor. Direct violence, such as wars for wealth and cheap labour, assassinations, or revolution; indirect violence, such as deaths from hunger and malnutrition, disease, and poor working conditions; and economic repression, such as the threat of unemployment or the withdrawal of investment capital; or politically, through political literature are some of the ways of class conflict. Lobbying, both legal and illegal, and bribery of politicians are both political manifestations of class warfare.

The social-class conflict can be direct, as in a labour- management dispute, such as an employer's industrial lockout of their employees in order to undermine the bargaining power of the corresponding trade union; or indirect, as in a workers' slowdown of output in protest of unjust labour practices. "In the political and economic philosophies of Karl Marx and Mikhail Bakunin, class struggle is a central tenet and a practical means for effecting radical social and political changes for the social majority."(Bullock and Trombley, *The New Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought*)

Rousseau outlined the class struggle that existed in his day between masters and their workmen with bitter sarcasm: "You have need of me, because I am rich and you are poor. We will therefore come to an agreement. I will permit you to have the honour of serving me, on condition that you bestow on me the little you have left, in return for the pains I shall take to command you".

Rousseau argued that the most important task of any government is to fight in class warfare on the side of workmen against their masters, who he said engage in exploitation under the presence of serving society. Specifically, he believed that governments should actively intervene in the economy to abolish poverty and prevent the accrual of too much wealth in the hands of too few men.

In his *Considerations on Representative Government*, John Stuart Mill observed the complete marginalisation of workmen's voices in parliament, rhetorically asking whether its members ever empathise with the position of workmen, instead of siding entirely with their masters, on issues such as the right to go on strike. Later in the book, he argues that an important function of

truly representative government is to provide a relatively equal balance of power between workmen and masters, in order to prevent threats to the good of the whole of society.

During Mill's discussion of the merits of progressive taxation in his essay *Utilitarianism*, he notes as an aside the power of the rich as independent of state support:

People feel obliged to argue that the State does more for the rich than for the poor, as a justification for its taking more (in taxation) from them: though this is in reality not true, for the rich would be far better able to protect themselves, in the absence of law or government, than the poor, and indeed would probably be successful in converting the poor into their slaves.(Mill, *Utilitarianism*)

The most common example of class conflict is that which exists within capitalism. This class struggle is seen as mainly occurring between the bourgeoisie which the proletariat, and manifests itself in disputes over working hours, wage value, benefit division, cost of consumer products, workplace culture, power over parliament or bureaucracy, and economic disparity.

Parasite is a 2019 Korean black comedy thriller film directed by Bong Joon-ho, who co-wrote the screenplay with Han Jin-won. The film, starring Song Kang-ho, Lee Sun-kyun, Cho Yeo-jeong, Choi Woo-sik, Park So-dam, Jang Hye-jin, Lee Jung-eun, follows a poor family who scheme to become employed by a wealthy family and infiltrate their household by posing as unrelated, highly qualified individuals.

Parasite premiered at the 2019 Cannes Film Festival on 21 May 2019, where it became the first South Korean film to win the Palme d'Or. It was then released in South Korea by CJ Entertainment on 30 May 2019. The film was considered by many critics to be the best film of 2019 as well as one of the best films of the 21st century, and is the 46th highest-rated film of all-time on Metacritic. It grossed over \$258 million worldwide on a production budget of about \$15 million.

Among its numerous accolades, *Parasite* won a leading four awards at the 92nd Academy Awards : Best Picture, Best Director, Best Original Screenplay, and Best International Feature Film, becoming the first non-English language film to win the Academy Award for Best Picture.

Parasite is the first South Korean film to receive Academy Award recognition and one of three films to win both the Palme d'Or and the Academy Award for Best Picture. It won the Golden Globe Award for Best Foreign Language Film and the BAFTA Award for Best Film Not in the English Language, and became the first non-English language film to win the Screen Actors Guild Award for Outstanding Performance by a Cast in a Motion Picture. At the 56th Grand Bell Awards and the 40th Blue Dragon Awards, *Parasite* had eleven nominations with five wins. At the 56th Baeksang Arts Awards, it had twelve nominations with three wins.

If it's true that art reflects current culture and society, then film represents a powerful microscope that allows us to really dig in deep and expose all the small, occasionally icky details. In years of film, themes rise to the top as the priorities of certain demographics yet highlighted. 2019 was no exception to this rule, and it appears that one strong theme of the year was

shining a harsh light on class warfare and wealth inequity. What makes 2019 and its focus on class warfare particularly interesting is that the theme's prevalence was not limited to certain circles. Criticisms of the wealthy were flourishing at many levels of cinema, indicating discussion that is resonating with different kinds of audience.

With the spike in movement like the labour party and democratic socialism really taking place so heavily in the early 21st century, its not surprising that we've also seen a dramatic uptick in class-conscious films about warfare or at the very least struggle between the rich and the poor. With income inequality at an all-time high, it really makes a ton of sense that so many films would feature the topic whether that's in an over-the-top manner, or in a really subconscious kind of way.

To talk about class warfare in 2019 film is to look mainly at the sliding scale of three of the years best film's *Joker* directed by Todd Philips, *Knives Out* directed by Rian Johnson, and Tyler Gillet and Matt Bettinelli-Olpin's *Ready Or Not*. This antagonism has existed in society for the longest time, sprouting from the clear separation between the rich and the poor. It was 2019, however, that brought this conflict closer to the surface in the film world, resulting in big box office numbers and plenty of well-earned accolades.

The aforementioned movies may have very different structures and aesthetics, but they still reached their goal of acquiring a taste for the rich. Scratch beneath the surface of genre, though and you'll find that these films share a common preoccupation. In different ways each tackles issues of economic disparity, exploring the gulf between society's haves and have-nots that has widened dramatically since the 2008 financial crisis. While steering

clear of overt partisan politics, their depiction of individuals, families and entire societies buffeted and warped by the impacts of wealth inequality or wouldn't be out of place in a stump speech on the 2020 presidential campaign trail.

The Thrombeys, the family that makes up the majority of the characters in Rian Johnson's film *Knives Out*, reflect a wide range of horribleness. Linda uses every opportunity to bolster her image as a self-made businesswoman, never mentioning the substantial start-up loan she received. Husband Richard, seems to be just along for the ride, at least until the affair he's been having is revealed. Walt, Linda's brother, resentfully spent his life on their popular novelist father's payroll, while their wellness-obsessed sister-in-law Joni, refuses to work at all, using the family fortune to subsidise her lifestyle. Jacob is a budding alt-right troll among the younger generation, while Meg is a student whose activism is just superficial, and Ransom is a typical privileged Scion. They're people whose lives have been stifled by their access to money, and the only thing they have in common is a determination to stay that way.

Knives Out is a classic murder mystery. It has an odd victim, a moody setting, and a genius detective. However, the film has a thread of class anger running through that feels very 2019. The story's villain isn't simply the perpetrator, but there is one, as there is in every murder mystery. The Thrombeys as a whole are the villains here, who, regardless of whether they've killed someone or not, have a certain bloodlust for what they thought would be their inheritance. When it becomes clear that Harlan's fortune may not be theirs, the greedy relatives engage in a pitiless game of belonging and

privilege that expose their long-standing relationship with those who are less well-off. Whatever they can pretend to believe about the world as a whole, they believe that wealth is owed to them and that no one else is as worthy as they are. Deep pockets aren't just a means to a happy life; they're also the product of "winning" in a system that forces the vast majority of us to lose.

Class warfare isn't just a theme in *Knives Out*; it is a theme that runs through a lot of 2019s films, from *Joker* to *Hustlers* to *Parasite*, a Korean import that has done extremely well in the united states. Finally, on the big screen, class rage reflects the unique despair and anger that characterises our real-world present, in which the gap between stability and fear is widening. However, these representations are splintered in a way that exposes the schism in our wealth discussions. The rich are the easy-to-hate villains in some of this year's films while others aim for the bigger, more nebulous goal of the mechanism that enables and empowers them.

The Thrombeys are the former, obviously and deliciously so, a celebrity-heavy posse of the wealthy and morally bankrupt who go to war with *Knives Out's* conscientious heroine Harlan's immigrant nurse, Marta Cabrera, only to find themselves outmatched because she has a sense of right and wrong they hadn't expected. It's billed as a fight between good and evil, with a horror film adaptation in *Ready or Not*, in which the well-off Le Domas family battles a would- be newcomer to their name. Grace had no idea she was marrying into a dynasty that may owes its riches to a bargain with the Devil, with members who carry out their ritualised human sacrifice obligations as though they could die if they weren't wealthy. A family mansion is packed with passages and secrets in both films, but in *Ready or Not* , the class warfare

is more literal and carried out with antique weapons, with the servants being the first to become fodder.

Ready or Not wasn't the only horror film this year about members of the financial elite attempting the most dangerous game, but it was the only one with a wide release. After two mass shootings and, even more importantly, presidential focus on what seemed to be a film of rich liberals seeking to kill "deplorables", *The Hunt* was pulled from theatres before it even opened. There is no way of knowing whether it's accurate but the message from the whole ordeal seemed to be that brutal class warfare is good as long as it's not explicitly political. And if that sound fundamentally contradictory, consider *Joker*, a purposely unparsable ideology film that culminates in anti-fascist rioters flooding the streets of Gotham and being the perpetrators of one of the most often re-enacted murders in comic-book adaptations. Whatever the legitimate causes of the rioters rage, they're essentially an outward manifestation of the main character's inner turmoil in the film-suckers who mistook his acts for a greater protest and hailed him as an icon when what he really wants is anarchy, not reform.

People are easier to target than the institutions that sustain them, which is one of the reasons Lorene Scafaria's *Hustlers* is so beautifully complex, with its gang of strippers who, struggling after the 2008 financial crash, devise a way to make money and seize power in an industry that has tended to regard them as replaceable commodities, devise a way to make money and seize power in an industry that has tended to regard them as replaceable commodities. It's the men who are depicted as interchangeable when they start attacking their finance-bro regulars, drugging them, and then running up big

bills at the club in their names in return for a share of the profit.

Ramona, played by Jennifer Lopez, justifies her acts by pointing out what bankers have gotten away with, claiming, “ The game is rigged, and it doesn’t reward people who play by the rules.” (Scafaria, *Hustlers*) She’s not wrong, as evidenced by the subprime-mortgage crisis and the subsequent bank bailout that underscores the development of their scam. Anyone who saw the film as a rubber-stamping of the character’s deeds, on the other hand, underestimated how much it was about the divide between railing against social injustice and punishing specific people. The more Destiny sees their victims as individuals, the more difficulty she has thinking about what they’re doing as victimless.

If films like *Knives Out* and *Ready or Not* have the most straightforward catharses, with the rich receiving their due at the hands of scrappy, likeable outsiders, the *Parasite* is on the other end of the spectrum. It doesn’t offer the characters or the viewer a clear outlet for the rage building up inside them, so it seems to come as a shock to those who feel it. The Parks, the affluent clan in which the other characters in the thriller orbit, aren’t monsters, as Bong Joon-ho’s work has always dealt with the structural.

This is crucial to comprehend because they live such despicable, enviable lives as modern aristocrats, ensconced behind the luxurious walls of their glass-and-concrete fortress where they are cared for by a group of employees with whom they converse but only sometimes want to converse. It wouldn’t take much to turn them into absolute villains, but if they were monsters, *Parasite* would be a film about their avenging, not something darker and more profound.

The Kim's; who sneak onto the Parks payroll by pretending they don't know each other while working as tutors, housekeepers, and drivers, declares the Parks to be 'good' with an asterisk- "They're rich but still nice,"(Joon-ho and Jin-won, *Parasite*) while the wealthier characters are out of town, Kim patriarch Ki-Taek declares as his family, who usually lives in a cramped basement apartment where drunkers prefer to pee outside, uses the Parks home. Ki-Taek has justification to feel magnanimous after getting drunk in his employer's designer living room without his knowledge, while mom, Chung-sook, resorts, "They're sweet because they are rich."(Joon-ho and Jin-won, *Parasite*) Each of them has a valid argument. South Korea's wealth gap is expanding, and the Kim's see the Parks from the other side of it; the Parks, on the other hand, have no idea how the Kim's work.

Since they have so much more than they want, the Parks have the luxury of being good. They have no idea what desperation can lead to, let alone the kind of poverty that defines the Kim family's life and has driven it's members to lie and commit sabotage to ensure their own survival. Around the same time, the Parks aren't quite as bad as they should get away with, and the threshold for the upper class is low enough that this is a good attribute. They don't do something that is crucial. They just commit unintentional ones, the kind that come from not realising how often they're still being accommodated, the kind that come from never having to build empathy for people outside their urban compound walls.

The thing about such inadvertent slights is that they still hurt, and they add up as proof of the immense disparity between the two families landscapes. The difference in elevation between their homes is depicted in the film, with

the Park residence perched behind walls on top of a hill and the Kim apartment below ground level, vulnerable to everything from exterminators to the weather. Members of the Kim family wind their way down steps and hills and through tunnel in the pouring rain, as if they weren't going home but were instead being thrown out of heaven, the one time we see people make trips from one home to another. The Parks, like the Kim's, are product of their circumstances, but that doesn't make the rage that simmers underneath so much of *Parasite* any less legitimate. You don't have to mean harm to profit from a scheme that allows others to harm themselves.

Perhaps this is why, in a season dedicated to serious and non-serious explorations of injustice, *Parasite* stands out. It serves as both a darkly witty allegory about class and an intimate tragedy about two families on the verge of colliding. The Kim's are characters, not icons, but their striving and tendency to see themselves as just another iteration of the Park who hasn't yet achieved success is emblematic.

As the kid, Ki-Woo puts it, the qualification he lied about to get his tutoring job aren't lies because he's determined to go to college and get his diploma as soon as possible. *Knives Out's* main character, Marta, is praised for being hardworking and successful at her job, and it's this kind of confidence that the film subtly reinforces. In *Parasite*, however, it's housekeeper Moon-Gwang and her secret partner, Geun-Sae, who ended up being the twisted reflections the Kim's don't want to see, living not in a basement apartment but in an actual underground bunker and feeling servile gratitude for their employers rather than grateful love.

Since they're not the kind of people who can afford to be sweet, the

Kim's and their subterranean doubles set out to kill each other right away. It's the most heinous indignity the *Parasite* has to offer : people who kill for the chance to be around people who don't see their humanity, who find them a little absurd, and who don't like the way they smell. Ki-Taek and Geun-Sae have the same odour, which the former only recognises when its too late to do anything except lash out at the scheme they're both a part of. The Parks aren't monsters like the Thrombeys, but the hope they reflect-that their dreams can be realised with enough research and hard work-is illusory. They may not have deserved the abuse they are subjected to, but they have never challenged whether or not they deserved the life of comfort that came before it.

CHAPTER 2

DARK REALITY OF CAPITALISM AND CULTURAL

HEGEMONY IN *PARASITE*

The tour-de-force black comedy thriller *Parasite*, directed by Bong Joon-ho, is a careful study of contemporary society's rising class tensions. Bong Joon-ho shows his mastery of oral and visual storytelling in this film. The sleek transitions, irony-laced dialogue, and morally ambiguous characters combine to make one of the decades most riveting films.

At first glance, the title *Parasite* reflects how these members of the lower classes take advantage of the Park family's good nature and generosity. But, as Bong Joon-ho explains in the film, the Parks are also taking advantage of the lower classes by living comfortably off their labour. The film asks us a terrifying yet crucial question at this point: Who are the parasites of late capitalist society? Two principles borrowed from the school of cultural studies may clarify the complexity of answering this question: cool capitalism and cultural hegemony. "Neoliberal capitalism has constructed popular legitimacy of such a resilient kind that it goes beyond management ideology and propaganda into the texture and common sense of everyday life." (Mc Guigan, *Coolness of Capitalism*) To bolster his argument he uses the example of Apple, whose sleek and gleaming goods have become so ingrained in western culture that we have become oblivious to the company's very real exploitation of their outsourced workers. Mc Guigan refers to this disaffection among consumers with regard to the extreme poverty and exploitation of others as "Cool Capitalism." Take a look at a scene from the second act to see how cool capitalism works in *Parasite*.

Yeon-Kyo: Honey, do you want some ram- don? .

Dong-Ik: Da-Song doesn't want it ?

Yeon -Kyo: No.

Dong-Ik: No, I'm tired . I'm going to bed.

(In the basement)

Geun-Sae: (looking at Ki-Taek) why are you staring?. Mr. Park , you feed me and house me(bang his head to the switch and shouts).RESPECT (Joon-ho and Jin-won, *Parasite*,1:19:52-1:20:08)

Here, the former housekeeper's husband, who has been hiding in the bunker for years, keeps his sanity by turning on the lights to illuminate Mr. Park's route as he steps up the stairs at night. Mr. Park is led to believe that these motion-activated lights are a marvel of modern technology, despite the fact that he is unaware of the bunker underneath his home. This scene epitomises Jim McGuigans conviction that Mr. Park is blissfully unaware that the luxuries he enjoys in his everyday life are compensated for by the labour of those beneath him. The fact that the housekeeper's husband lives physically under the Parks is no coincidence. This obliviousness towards the suffering and labour of others at times borders on indifference which is exhibited most clearly in the Park's relationships with the poor family .

For example, as Ki-Taek drives Mrs. Park home from grocery shopping, she exclaims over the phone to a friend that the storm the night before was a blessing in disguise, totally oblivious to the fact that thousands of people in the city, including Ki-Taek, were displaced as a result. Another example of this ignorance is how the Park clan displays their physical aversion

to the smell of the poor family . This theme becomes increasingly prevalent throughout the film as their reaction to smell become more exaggerated.

In *Purity and Danger*, Mary Douglas suggest that cleanliness and hygiene are social constructs. She states, “ There is no such thing as absolute dirt: it exists in the eye of the beholder.”(Douglass, *Purity and Danger*) In *Parasite* we see how the Parks’ revulsion to the smell of people like Ki-Taek is actually a revulsion to people they perceive as lesser than themselves. Their palpable desire to escape these smells like when Mr. Park plugs his nose as he flees from the mayhem of his garden party signals to the viewer that those who benefit from capitalism distanced themselves from the have-nots both metaphorically and physically.

But what they really want, and this is something Mr. Park says in the film, is they draw a line over their sophisticated world and they don’t let anyone cross it. They’re not interested in the outside world, the subway and people who might perhaps smell. They want to push everyone outside of that line and they want to remain safe behind it.(Joon-ho, *GQ*)

Much like how consumers of Apple do not need to think about the exploitation of Foxconn because its workers live on the other side of the world , the Parks do not have to worry themselves about the poor because they are physically isolated from the nearby slums. The smell of poverty is an ugly reminder to the Parks that suffering is actually nearby. While the Parks present as well-intentioned and kind-hearted people, they chose to be ignorant to the extreme poverty that surrounds them because they are comfortable with the lifestyle afforded to them at the expense of the impoverished. They recoil from

the smell for fear of being confronted with the reality outside of their privileged bubble.

Late capitalism and the ever increasing division between rich and poor is able to persist in our contemporary world through what Antonio Gramsci calls cultural hegemony. For Gramsci cultural hegemony is achieved through , inducing the consent of the majority of subaltern or subordinate groups to a given socio-political constellation.

Throughout the film Mr. Park speaks often about a line he draws between himself and his employees. This line of course connotes a level of professionalism that Mr. Park expects of his employees, but what is also represents as a division he has established to maintain his status as a superior. Mr. Park expresses his satisfaction with the former housekeeper because she never oversteps her boundaries, but Ki-Taek on the other hand is always teetering on the edge of this line. In this sense the former housekeeper consents to her status as a subordinate whereas Ki-Taek , who eventually revolts against this subjugation by killing Mr. Park, becomes increasingly conscious of his class and the hegemonic social order that keeps them there. The poor characters have deep feelings of admiration and reverence towards the Park family. For example in a scene , each member of the poor family in spite of themselves goes around discussing what they like about the Parks . This admiration runs even deeper with the housekeepers husband whose masochistic head-banging is his version of paying respect to the man who he believes has saved him .

Cultural hegemony which favours the ideology of the ruling classes teaches anyone who falls outside the dominant worldview that the dominant

culture is something to aspire to. This can take place in many forms. The prevailing standard of Eurocentric beauty has compelled women around the world to alter their appearances in an effort to achieve this conception of normality. Democracy has become such a dominant standard for a fair and just society. The countries are now ranked on an index based on how democratic they are. And the list goes on.

With the case of late capitalism, the ruling class is the wealthy and in *Parasite* Ki-Woo and his family alter their appearances in overall dispositions to fit into the mold of higher status individuals their reverence for the people they are using reflects an innate yearning to become them both economically and socially. Bong tricks the viewer into thinking there will be a happy ending as we watch Ki-Taek, who has been hiding in the bunker after killing Mr. Park, reunite with his family who have now made enough money to buy the Parks' house. However this momentary happiness is dissolved as it's revealed that the scene is only an aspiration written by Ki-Woo in a letter to his father.

In an interview, Bong reveals that it would take five hundred and sixty four years for Ki-Woo to save enough money to buy the house. This directly contradicts the mantra of contemporary capitalism, which has attempted to convince people that with a little hard work and determination anyone can achieve higher economic status. The reality is that through cultural hegemony, the rich are able to stay rich by manufacturing the consent of the masses while creating the illusion of social mobility. Ironically the poor daughter, Ki-Jung is regarded as the only member of the family who fit into the wealthy environment.

Ki-Woo: Hey , when I went up before, And you were in the

bath.

Ki-Jung: what about it?

Ki-Woo: How to put it? You fit in here. This rich house suits you. Not like us.

Ki-Jung: Fuck off.

Ki-Woo: I'm serious! Dad before, she was lying back in the tub, watching TV. Like, she's lived here for years. Speaking of which, If this become our house, if we lived here, which room would you want? What room in this master work by the great Namgoong ?

Ki-Jung: Fuck, I don't know. Get me the house first. Then I'll think about it.(Joon-ho and Jin-won, *Parasite*, 1:00:51-1:01:32)

But she is also the only member of the family to be killed. When all is said and done the rich family is able to escape the horror of their situation. While the poor family is trapped in it. Neoliberal capitalism takes economic responsibility away from the government and places it into the hands of free-market institutions and private individuals. In this type of society, your value as a person is weighed upon your ability to sell your labour for a wage. What it boils down to is a massive disparity in wealth. That regards the wealthy as winners and the poor as losers in the free-market game.

This is where we see things like hostile architecture, that prioritizes the needs and aesthetics of corporate enterprises over the needs of the hungry and homeless. These defensive strategies become mechanisms for hiding the indigent out of sight, for fear of disrupting the wealthy social order. The great fallacy of this system is that every individual starts off with equal access to

opportunity and can therefore compete on an equal playing field, which is simply not the truth.

And when we look at the poor characters in Parasite fighting amongst themselves, vying to maintain their subordinate positions, we see that there is no attempt or even ability to overthrow the prevailing system of domination but rather it's a competition between the poor of who can be the least destitute.

Moon-Gwang: please take this.

Song-chook: What's that?

Moon-Gwang: Its not much, just a modest sum. But we'll send it to you every month. In return just once every two days please leave him some food. No just once a week. There's a refrigerator here. Just once a week.

Song-chook: You've got some nerve! I'm calling the police.

Moon-Gwang: Sis! (Ki-Taek, Ki-Woo and Ki-Jung who were hiding falls down the bunker)

Geun-Sae: Who's that? (Moon-Gwang starts recording Ki-Woo, Ki-Taek and Ki-Jung)

Ki-Woo: Dad, my foot.

Ki-Taek: Don't call me Dad!

Moon-Gwang: I thought it was weird when the driver was fired.

Ki-Woo: hey, lets talk things over.

Moon-Gwang: What the hell? Are you some family of charlatans?

Song-chook: so, sis.....

Moon-Gwang: Don't fucking call me sis, you filthy bitch! I'm going to send this video to madam, how about that?

Ki-Taek: No reception in the basement, right.

Ki-Jung: The phone works fine.

Ki-Taek: Fuck.

Ki-Woo: Ma'am to be honest the job we have here....

Moon-Gwang: shut up! It's too late now! Let's all go to jail! We're fucking going down!

Ki-Taek: Lady are you crazy? If they see that video, Mr. Park and his wife will be so shocked! What did those nice people ever do wrong? Why do this to them?

Moon-Gwang: Stop right there! Or I'll push the 'send' button.

Follow me.(Joon-ho and Jin-won, *Parasite*, 1:10:13-1:12:02)

In a capitalist society the prevailing conservative argument is that social democracy, higher taxes, and budget deficits only serve to extract from the hard-earned pockets of the rich and put this money into the hands of the lazy and deceitful poor.

But what *Parasite* absolutely points out is that the relationship between the rich and poor is largely parasitic in the opposite direction. The poor are often poor because capitalistic enterprises are unwilling to compensate fairly for their labour in order to maximize a profit. While the jobs occupied by Ki-Woo's family offer them proximity to wealth at the end of the day their wages do not provide them enough means to escape destitution. Rather the degrading and emotional labour they provide for the Parks only truly benefits the Parks.

At the end of the film, with Ki-Taek left to an uncertain fate in the

bunker and Ki-Woo relegated to his basement, we're left with the bleak reality that the current capitalistic order is unyielding and unforgiving what's more, this cruel system can be easily normalized. After all, the greatest trick late capitalism ever pulled was to convince the world it doesn't exist. This is the harsh reality of the world we now live in and that this is why Parasite should terrify us all.

CHAPTER 3

SYMBOLS, THEMES AND MOTIFS IN *PARASITE*

A symbol is simply A thing that represents or stands for something else, especially a material object representing something abstract. And as John Truby points out, this simple representation can have a powerful impact on an audience, “Symbols.....gives you a hidden language that emotionally sways the audience. Just as matter is highly concentrated energy, a symbol is highly concentrated meaning.”(Truby, *The Anatomy of Story*)

There are many symbols in Parasite, but two in particular stand out. The smell and the viewing stone. The viewing stone appears early in the film, shortly after the Kim family is Introduced. From the very first scene, it is clear that they are living a life of poverty. However, Ki-Woo, the son, believes they will work their way out of poverty and into the upper class. When Ki-Woo’s wealthy friend Min pays the family a visit, he brings them a gift, a viewing stone.

Ki-Woo: we could’ve met outside, why come here?

Min: Because of this. It’s for you, but it’s so heavy.

Ki-Taek: Really? Put it down here.

Ki-Jung: wow, what is that?

Min: when I said I was meeting Ki-Woo, my grandfather insisted I bring this to you.

Ki-Taek: Is this a landscape type? Or you can see it as an abstract type.

Min: wow, you know these! My grandpa has collected scholar’s rock, since his cadet days. Now the annex, the study,

every room in the house is filled with these things. But these stone here is said to bring material wealth to families.....

Ki-Woo: Min! This is so metaphorical.

Ki-Taek: For sure. Its a very opportune gift.

Min: Of course.

Ki-Taek: please relay our deepest thanks to your grandpa.(

Joon-ho and Jin-won, *Parasite*, 7:15-8:08)

Here the viewing stone is a symbol. As Bong Joon-Ho says,

That rock is assigned this very unique position. It's a kind of obsession for the young son. Throughout the film, he is trying to imitate Min, his rich friend who initiated him into this world.

Min disappears in this film after giving him the rock, but the rock is sort of the remnant of his character. (Joon-ho, *The Atlantic*)

Ki-Woo's desire for riches is symbolised by the viewing stone. The viewing stone reflects Ki-Woo's conviction that, like his friend Min, he is destined for a brighter future. The first symbol is Introduced on page nine of the script, but the second symbol isn't Introduced until page fifty seven. The entire Kim family has infiltrated the Parks home at this point in the movie, posing as stranger in different domestic roles. Bong Joon-ho says,“ the job that these characters take tutoring, housekeeping and driving, future 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 kind of the perfect device in the story.”(Joon-ho, *Art of Class Warfare*)

Da-song suddenly starts sniffing the air. Da-song darts over to Ki-Taek

and shoves his nose in his pant leg. He runs over to Chung-sook and shoves his nose in her belly, startling her greatly.

Yeon-Kyo: Da-song! What's wrong with you?

Da-song: Same smell. They same exactly the same!"(Joon-ho and Jin-won, *Parasite*)

When the young son of the Park family discovers that all of the Kim's smell the same, he unwittingly threatens to expose their true identities. However, smell is used as a symbol in addition to fulfilling a plot role. It represents the poverty that the Kim's, and particularly Ki-Taek can't escape. "it's the basement smell. The smell won't go away unless we leave this place." (Joon-ho and Jin-won, *Parasite*)

A Symbol, on the other hand, can be replicated and even manipulated over time, rather than only being introduced and used once. " A symbol creates a resonance, like ripples in a pond, every time it appears. As you repeat the symbol, the ripples expand and reverberate in the minds of the audience often without their being consciously aware of it."(Truby, *The Anatomy of Story*)

A motif is formed when symbols are repeated. There are many meanings for the term motif. As a result, the Introduction of the viewing stone as a sign of Ki-Woo's desire for wealth generates a symbol in *Parasite*. However, as the film returns to the viewing stone frequently, it becomes a theme. So, what makes repeating a symbol to construct a motif so special?. Let's look at how and when *Parasite* brings back the viewing stone to examine this.

Returning to the beginning of the film, after Ki-Woo receives the

stone, he begins to take bold measures in order to achieve his goal of wealth and status. He gets a tutoring job for the parks with Min's recommendation and after forging a college degree. So, just as the Kim family appears to be on the rise, the script reintroduces the emblem of the viewing stone.

In the corner, a small, barely standing drunk man is urinating. Ki-Woo leaps to his feet. He moves towards the entrance, grabbing the viewing stone from the table. Seeing the viewing stone symbol again reminds us of its original significance, which was Ki-Woo's desire for wealth and status. But, though Ki-woo had no chances when we first saw it, he and his family are now well on their way to achieving their dream. Ki-Woo's ambitions will be jeopardised the next time we see the rock. The Kim's return to their semi-basement apartment to find it completely flooded after the park family nearly discovers their true identities. In the water, something brushes against his foot. He knelt and reaches into the murky waters, finally discovering the viewing stone that Min-hyuk had given the family as a present. As he hugs the rock, Ki-Woo pant heavily. It's as if he's discovered a priceless gem.

We recall what it once meant once more. The desire for wealth and prestige came first, followed by what seemed to be progress towards that goal. Now, as Ki-Woo clutches it to his chest, we can see how tightly he is clinging to this slipping away target.

“Ki-Taek: why are you hugging that thing?

Ki-Woo: it wants to be with me.”(Joon-ho and Jin-won,
Parasite)

Ki-Woo's inner feelings about wealth and status have become a motif as a result of this recurrence. The scent sign is also used as a motif. After

being introduced as a symbol of Ki-Taek's inability to escape hardship, the notion is repeatedly reinforced.

Dong-ik: Hold on. (Sniffs) I know that smell.

Yeon-Kyo: what?

Dong-ik: This is Mr. Kim's smell.

(Ki-Taek become nervous. He smells his t-shirt.)

Dong-ik: It's hard to explain. I smell it when i ride the subway sometimes.

Yeon-Kyo: I haven't ridden the subway in forever.

Dong-ik: I mean i like his driving. And the man never crosses the line. But that smell it definitely crosses the line .

(Ki-Taek, Ki-Woo and Ki-Jung can do nothing but silently take hit after hit)(Joon-ho and Jin-won, *Parasite*, 1:27:34-1:28:17)

The film uses the theme of smell to examine Kim family's relationship with poverty and the invisible line that separates them.

We've seen how a story can imbue something like a stone with significance to create a symbol, and then repeat, comment on, and exploit the symbol to create a theme. However, there is one more step in the process.

In *Parasite*, the two motifs together expresses the story's theme. So what is theme?

Theme is a lesson that you could take away from a story that is textually supported by the story. So it has to be something that you can point to.....this is in there, and this is in there, and this is in there. All of these things are related to this large question

about life, or humankind, or the universe.(Aurand, *Beyond the Screenplay*)

But then how is theme different from motif. In *In the Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, H. Porter Abbott describes the difference between motif and theme. As technical terms, they often uses interchangeably, though 'motif' is especially varied in its meanings. But for the discussion of narrative, a theme is abstract and motif is concrete.

A motif is essentially something that can be found in a film's text. The viewing stone appears on screen, and the smell is mentioned in the dialogue of the characters. Theme, on the other hand is the essence conveyed by these motifs. As the story progresses to its conclusion in *Parasite*, following their narrow escape and the flooding of their house, audience see a sense of despondency setting in Ki-Taek. "Do you want to know how you make a fool proof plan? Don't plan at all. Have no plan."(Joon-ho and Jin-won, *Parasite*)

The motif of smell reappears repeatedly, reminding Ki-Taek of his lower- class status and pushing him to a breaking point. Meanwhile, Ki-Woo is on the verge of realising his ambition of wealth and power. "They're all so gorgeous. Even though they had to come at the last minute. So cool. Laid back. Do I look like I belong here?"(Joon-ho and Jin-won, *Parasite*)

But there's a snag. Ki-Woo's true identity is known to the previous housekeeper and her husband, who are tied up in the basement and could ruin everything. As he grabs the symbol to use as a shield against those who challenge his dream, the motif of the viewing stone reappears. Though Ki-Woo hopes to use the stone to liberate himself from once and for all, it instead becomes a sign of his demise. And it's at this point in the film's violent climax

that the smell theme reappears for the final time. When Ki-Taek realises that the smell of poverty is inextricably linked to his identity, he eventually snaps.

Symbols are introduced and given meaning which is then repeated and changed to form motifs, which express one of the story's central themes. People in poverty, regardless of their ambitions, seldom have the means to reach the wealthy. The movie *Parasite* is a brilliant example of how to use the age-old literary devices of symbols and motifs to elevate a great concept. They have the ability to create stories that transcend language and culture, resonating with people all over the world. In the case of *Parasite*, the result is a pitch-perfect social satire that speaks directly to our times and leaves us with a film that has become a symbol in its own right.

Another interesting symbol is Light. In comparison to the first time we see the Parks house, where the camera moves upward into full view of the sun, the first shot of the film looks out of Kim's semi-basement window with a glimpse of natural sunlight streaming through, and the camera pans downward. Bong uses the contrast of light and darkness, natural vs urban environments, and a character's vertical position to communicate their economic or moral standing, with any fluctuation being reflected in the blocking or the camera movement. "You're still half over ground, so there is this hope and this sense that you still have access to sunlight and you haven't completely fallen to the basement yet. It is this weird mixture of hope and this fear that you can fall even lower." (Joon-ho, AD)

The Kims' begin at the bottom, beneath the trash and their own toilet, and work their way up to wealth and prosperity in the form of free Wi-fi. When they're working and making money, we see them for the first time

above ground in the light. Of course, it's a low-paying job, and they soon find themselves back underground. When a drunk pissing and puking in the alley, right outside their window, serves as a reminder of their place, they do their best to celebrate this small victory. Until Min shows up as a literal beacon of light, a metaphorical beacon of hope; who takes a stand when the Kim's won't. As a gift to the family, he brings a scholar stone, a sign of wealth and physical manifestation of Ki-Woo's dream of climbing out of poverty.

In the scene after Min offers Ki-Woo the tutoring job, we see a path leading up towards the light behind him. And each shot in the sequence after that follows his upward trajectory, leaving behind the sights and sounds of the low-income community at the bottom, all the way to paradise. He works his way to the upper-most level of the house the peak of the mountain, and successfully completes his infiltration of the Park family. As we follow him out the door, the camera swings down before cutting to a reverse shot just as he says his sister's name. The parasite will infect it's host after it has passed through the barrier between their secluded paradise and the outside world, travelling downward away from the sun.

Ki-Jung's infiltration follows the same visual patterns as Da-song's, ascending towards the sun, rising to the top, and finding her host. And then going down into the darkness to bring in the next parasite. Both Ki-Taek and Chung-sook make their way in, using more manipulation and downward movement before they hit the highest point. And their celebration is cut short once more by a drunk pissing in the street, but this time Ki-Woo responds with the zeal of a college student, bringing some water to wash away the filth. They've made it to the top; all four Kim's have hit the pinnacle. For a brief

moment, they will relax and enjoy the warmth of the sun. Until the bunker is revealed, and we sink to the lowest point on the planet, totally underground with no light and no hope. We've hit the absolute bottom, and we get a glimpse of what life is like at the very bottom, with no natural light, crowded grey halls, and little food. It's more like a jail than a house, but it's better than death.

Despite their appeals as fellow members of the poor, the Kim's status is jeopardised by their presence, and after unintentionally killing Moon-Gwang, the Kim's embark on their largest descent yet, using water to wash away the filth. With waste water flooding their home and their neighbours trying to save their possessions, the situation quickly devolves into chaos. Again the plea of fellow members of the needy going unanswered. Ki-Woo's dream of success returns to him in the darkness, surrounded by confusion and devastation. Before the water washed them down to the bottom, the Kim's had a taste of paradise, living in the rich house as though it were their own. It's difficult to blame Ki-Woo for clinging to his dream. And it's hard to blame Ki-Woo for clinging to his dream, when we see two very different realities in the aftermath of the hurricane. You either wake up in front of a vanity mirror or in a packed gym while everyone else is waiting for breakfast, choosing the right outfit from a well-lit wardrobe or just pulling whatever suits from the same pole as everyone else. The storm is unavoidable in and of itself. It's entirely based on your situation how much harm the storm does. Raincoats and tents are available to the wealthy, as are dry towels at the door and large storm drains to absorb any runoff. But what about poor? All they have to do now is wait out the worst of it. Money serves as a shield, isolating you from the

outside world to the point that you're unsure what reality is.

The Parks are cut off from the rest of the world, totally surrounded by trees and with a locked gate at the bottom; they're cut off from the rest of the world. They have someone to drive them around, clean their home, cook their food, and raise their children; they don't have to do it on their own. It is simply outsourced to someone beneath them, on top of getting a normal job or going to school. And it's at this point that the identity of the titular parasite becomes hazy. The Parks rely on the Kim's almost as much as the Kim's rely on the Parks. The poor are supposed to do twice as much as the wealthy for less than half the income, and they are still looked down upon simply because they began with less. This system creates inherently toxic relationships because you can't have the wealthy few living like Gods while the rest live like insects. Those at the top will always look down on anyone below them, ready to believe the worst of someone they suspect of taking advantage of them, and will always be willing to replace you if you ever cross the line. And those at the bottom would eventually fall into the 'Us vs. them' mindset, and we all know how most people react when pushed to their limits. That's what desperation does; all of the characters want is to provide a better life for their loved ones but the inherent competition of life in the lower class will still pit people against one another, bringing out the worst in them.

One of the important points made in the film is that the Kims' are completely capable and intelligent individuals. They put in long hours and take advantage of every chance to improve their status. Both Da-hye and Ki-Woo have academic potential, and Da-song and Ki-Jung have creative potential, but unlike the Parks, who can afford college prep tutors and special

therapeutic art teachers, the Kims' cannot afford to send their children to kindergarten, so they are left with all of this untapped potential. Chung-sook and Dong-ik's accomplishments are also comparable. They aren't unskilled employees or lazy ; they just don't have the same resources as those above them, which means they are hit even harder when the storm hits.

If light reflects hope, we can see how the wealthy have hope that can withstand any glooms, while for the poor, the same hope may be the very thing that keeps you imprisoned. And if the rain reflects struggle, the storm that we must all face, we can see how the rich can remain dry while the rest of us get soaked. Being forced to deal with situations that a family like the Parks will never comprehend.

“Ki-Woo: I've been wondering. What would Min do in this situation?

(Ki-Jung shouting at Ki-Woo)

Ki-Jung: Min wouldn't be in this situation!”(Joon-ho and Jin-won, *Parasite*)

Min serves as a link between the two worlds, bringing with him a gift that promises a better future for the Kim family. He's willing to lower himself to their level, but it's obvious that he comes from a very different place. All about their clothes and hairstyles is used to denote their status as a lower-class family; even their smell reveals their status. Since a wolf in sheep's clothing still smells like a wolf, and changing that is everything Ki-Woo has ever wanted. Something's however never alter and the dream that once lifted you up can return to haunt you.

The climax scene is a chaotic explosion inside what we thought was

paradise, but we now see that no one is protected from the bloodshed. We all bleed the same, rich or poor. What's the point of it all? The poor eating the poor, the poor eating the rich, it doesn't matter, all it does is create more trauma, and more ghosts with Ki-Taek now assuming the role previously held by Geun-Sae left to grieve the loss of his daughter alone, and feel the weight of his guilt. The Park weren't evil; they were just out of touch with reality. All they ever wanted was for their families to be happy and healthy, just like the Kim's. But he's an easy scapegoat because of his contempt towards those beneath him, despite the fact that he's just a symptom of the greater social issue that leads to these parasitic relationships. And there will be others after he's gone. A new host family, with new parasites, and the cycle continues.

Ki-Woo still clings to his dream of wealth to buy the house and set his father free. Where this time to ascend you don't have to lie or cheat your way to the top, "all you have to do is walk up the stairs"(Joon-ho and Jin-won,*Parasite*). And that's how the film ends, with a dream a lingering hope.

CHAPTER 4

WHO IS THE REAL PARASITE IN THE MOVIE?

Bong Joon-ho said that *Parasite* is his stairway movie. A genre exemplified by British period pieces like the 1970s show *Upstairs and Downstairs* and in more recent years *Gosford Park* and *Downton Abbey*. *Parasite* uses vertical space symbolically to visualize class divides. This practice follows in the tradition of a number of iconic stories like Fritz Lang's 1927 classic *Metropolis* where the titans of industry rule the city from atop their high rises their kids frolicking around the Eden like eternal gardens while the labouring masses are stuck underneath the city sweating with the machines.

2015's dystopian *High-Rise* based on the JG Ballard novel features class warfare between the higher ups and lower floors in a building that's presented as a microcosm of society. HG Wells 1895 novel *The Time Machine* imagines a future where the classes have presumably evolved into two separate species. Most recently Jordan Peels *Us* warned that the subterranean underclass is coming to exact its revenge.

Parasite poignantly captures the insurmountable gulf between the higher and lower worlds. Mr. Park comments that he likes employees who know not to cross the line. Even if he acts friendly they must always know their place and remember they're not his equals. Yet this is a rule that only goes one way and only to benefit the parks. Their family crosses the line by imposing on the Kim's whenever they feel like it.

Yeon-Kyo: Are you free for lunch today? We're having a

birthday party impromptu for Da-song.

Ki-Jung: A birthday party?"(Joon-ho and Jin-won, *Parasite*)

They call when they're just minutes away and expect their housekeeper the Kim's mother Jung-sook to have a specific dinner ready when they walk in. According to the director what they really want is they draw a line over there sophisticated world and they don't let anyone cross it. They want to push everyone outside of that line and they want to remain safe behind it. The trauma that Ki-Jung unearths through her fake art therapy is that Da-song once saw a ghost who was actually the poor man living in his family's basement. The deeper meaning here is that elites like the parks expect the poor to be invisible ghosts and find it upsetting to confront that they exist. But while Da-song's trauma is played as a joke it also gets at how our pathologically unequal society is a genuinely disturbing impossible to justify thing to pass down to future generations. The deeper implication of this line Mr. Park draws is that anyone on the wrong side of that line doesn't count.

This idea features strongly in HBO's *Succession*. Even at the beginning of *Parasite* Ki-Woo's friend only recommend him as his replacement tutor for Da-hye because he doesn't see his less fortunate friend as a threat.

Min-hyuk: Park Da-hye . High school sophomore. You take over as her English tutor.

Ki-Woo: what do you mean?

Min-hyuk: Tutor a rich kid. It plays well. She's a nice girl. Look after her while I'm studying abroad.

Ki-Woo: what about your university friends. Why ask a loser like me.

Min- hyuk: why do you think? Just the thought makes me sick.

Those disgusting frat boys slavering over Da-hye.(Joon-ho and

Jin-won, *Parasite*, 9:03-9:30)

Ki-Woo then does start a romantic affair with Da-hye perhaps on some level to prove that he shouldn't have been so quickly discounted deep down. Though he knows that he can never truly pass as one of these above-ground people.

The parks observed that the Kim's have a certain smell in common. The Kim's assumed that their smell is a giveaway that they are related all sharing a household . But Ki-Jung correctly pinpoints that the smell isn't specific to their family. It's the odour of poverty. And after a flood engulfs everything they own in sewage water the idea that they could ever wash themselves clean of this aroma the parks find so offensive is killed for good. For all the Kim's striving that distance between their semi-basement and the parks house is too great to cross.

2018 OECD study found that since the 1990s quote social mobility has stalled, meaning that fewer people at the bottom have moved up while the richest have largely kept their fortunes. The study also found that it could take at least five generations or a hundred and fifty years for the child of a poor family to reach the average income. Lead actor Choi Woo-Shik told *Vulture* it would take five hundred and sixty four years for Ki-Woo to actually save up the money in order to buy that house.“ There is a song that plays during the credits, and director Bong actually wrote the lyrics. The song is about how Ki-Woo spent his days trying to earn money to purchase that house. It would take 564 years for Ki-Woo to actually save up the money in order to buy that

house.”(Woo-shik, *Vulture*)

Unobvious pattern in the high low class warfare films renamed is the conflict between rich and poor. But from the very start *Parasite* makes us aware that society actually has many tiers. It's not so black and white as purely up or down. There are endless shades of class. It's highly symbolic that the Kim family's home is a semi basement. As Bong says: “The meaning of that structure is it's half over ground , half underground. They still have access to the over ground, but they never know when they can fall even further below”.

So this in-between existence means living in an exhausting state of both aspiration and anxiety. What Bong does to truly revolutionize this stairway genre is to add another vertical floor below the Kim's as Bong says They finally encounter a couple that actually lives in a complete basement without windows.

The former housekeeper they ousted Moon-Gwang and her husband Geun-Sae who's been living in the parks secret underground bunker. The revelation of this third class below our underdog heroes exposes that the real fight going on every day in our society isn't between rich and poor. It's between poor and poorer between the have-nots and have nothings, the broke and the broken between the semi-basement and the deep dark basement without windows.

E M. Forster's 1910 novel *Howards End* puts a name to this fate that lower classes have to fear the abyss. The narrator writes of a financially struggling character.

He was not in the abyss,

But he could see it,
And at times people whom he know had dropped in,
And counted no more” (Forster, *Howards End*)

Confronted couple who suffered as a result of their rise. The Kim’s have to face not only guilt but also their own terror of sinking and becoming those worse off people in the abyss. And that’s exactly what happens when Ki-Taek ends up replacing the crazed man in the basement. The life-changing deluge that swallows all the Kim’s worldly possessions overnight exposes how when you don’t have money it only takes one big tough break to wipe out all of your progress. Meanwhile, the same storm is merely a minor inconvenience for the parks. The have to call off a camping trip even though in their eyes this is a huge suffering.

Why does Ki-Jung end up being the character who dies?. At Da-songs birthday party Geun-Sae emerges from the basement grabs a knife and in a disorganized attempt to avenge his wife who’s died of a head injury after Chung-sook kicked her down the stairs but ends up stabbing Ki-Jung. But the real reason the movie gives her this tragic death is probably because she’s the Kim who’s most at home in this rich environment. The one who effortlessly fits in. She’s immediately convincing to Mrs. Park. Even though she’s making up total BS as a fake art therapist. She’s genuinely able to tame the parks wild creative son by just following her instincts.

In fact, the reason she’s attacked is that she’s at the centre of the birthday ceremony holding a cake that celebrates her pupils progress began. In some ways she’s the family member with the most potential. So ultimately by killing Ki-Jung the movie sends the message that it’s not enough to fit in or to

have the merit to succeed. It's as if the story punishes her for coming too close to belonging.

During the flood Ki-Taek rescues his wife's medal reminding us once again that where this family has ended up is in no way a reflection of their value. After all with their street smarts resourcefulness and creative ingenuity they strike us as far more impressive than the gullible, judgemental, spoiled and naive members of the upper-class park family. They're underground simply because in our society you don't get to move. The other reason that Ki-Jung gets attacked is that she's standing right in front of Da-song so the blocking makes it look as if she's inadvertently shielding the rich boy and this is symbolic to: In this world it's always people like Kim's who are hit heaviest by real tragedy while the parks feel only tiny echoes of those traumas.

As Ki-Taek helplessly watches his daughter die while Mr. Park orders him to drive the shocked Da-song to the emergency room. He turns on his boss implying that Mr. Park the top of this toxic social hierarchy is truly the one to blame for Ki-Jung's death. To fully answer the question of why he kills Mr. Park is it helps to look closer at the movie's title who is the true parasite that the movie is referring to. The obvious surface meaning of the title is that our protagonist Ki-Woo and his family are the parasites in the story. When they're enjoying the parks house while the family is away Chung-sook explicitly compares her husband to a cockroach. That's literally what happens not long after Chung-sook makes this comparison.

As the film introduces more parasite. A picture emerges of a society composed of many hangers-on competing for the minuscule leftovers and garbage of people like the parks. Overtime though we start to feel as Ki-Taek

does that this narrative is all wrong. What if the real bloodsucker is in any of these lower-class characters but the successful Mr. Park. After all a parasite is defined: As an organism that benefits by deriving nutrients at the others expense or in a more figurative usage a person who habitually relies on or exploits others and gives nothing in return.

While all these people are supposedly leeching off of park they take only what he has more of than he needs. Some food and money representing a tiny fraction of what he has. Meanwhile the parks take their workers lifeblood their time and their dignity. The great lie that the upper classes have pulled off is to position themselves as generous benefactors sharing their bounty with the less fortunate. When in fact they are the ones taking from the poor.

The movie uses Da-songs obsession with Native Americans as a tongue-in-cheek metaphor for the way that the Kim family colonizes a house that already has people living there. The play Mr. Park plots out even involves the fake Indians attacking Jessica and that's exactly what the oppressed native person of the house Geun-Sae does for real. But the parks the true oppressors flippantly make sport of the Native Americans tragic history for their spoiled child. Just as they turned their social inferior pain into a farce. Near the end of the party when Ki-Taek seems less than enthusiastic about the offensive Indian play and says something a little too intimate for his boss's line.

Mr. Park: Silly, isn't it?

Ki-Taek: I guess your wife likes events and surprises.

Mr. Park: Yeah, she does. But she's particularly into this party.

Ki-Taek: You're trying your best too. Well, you love her, after all.

Mr. Park: Mr. Kim. You're getting paid extra. Think of this as a part of your work, okay?(Ki-Taek remains silent.)(Joon-ho and Jin-won, *Parasite*, 1:47:49-1:48:23)

Mr. Park bluntly puts him in his place. Ki-Taek comes to realize that this money his boss expects him to be grateful for will never truly be enough to change anything. Thus Ki-Taek chooses to attack this toxic hierarchy by going for it's head. But there are endless other rich families like the parks to take over their house next. Though the players change the play remains the same.

There is another parasite in this film too. *Vultures* Alex Jung writes that the emotional parasite of the film is hope: The thing that keeps us going, but sucks our marrow dry.

The scholar stone which the Kim's receive as a gift near the beginning setting this whole story in motion. It's supposed to bring them material wealth. This symbol of better fortune comes via Ki-Woo's wealthier friend who offers him the opportunity to tutor the rich girl. According to Bong the stone essentially represents Ki-Woo's desire for more. His ambition near the end of *Parasite* when Ki-Woo is deciding what to do about the couple in the basement. He's clutching the stone but he says the stone is clinging to him.

Ki-Taek: why are you hugging that stone?

Ki-Woo: This? It keeps clinging to me.

Ki-Taek: I think you need some sleep.

Ki-Woo: I'm serious. It keeps following me.(Joon-ho and Jin-won, *Parasite*, 1:41:03-1:41:30)

It's his terrible cutthroat ambition, his determination to protect his new

rise in station which leads him down to the basement with the intention to do something terrible. But then the stone betrays him falling out of his hands and he ends up getting beaten with it. Almost dying and sustaining a brain injury. So he is truly the victim of his hope.

As the rock becomes a bloody weapon it also emphasizes that moving up from the bottom often means to replace someone else in this zero-sum game. While the stone does bring the Kim's the good material fortune of promises. Ultimately this fortune curses them. At the start the Kim family have a moving closeness. Their families communication, mutual respect and tight bond are lacking in the parks who are isolated from each other in their big house with so much space between them and distanced too by their lack of understanding and awareness of reality.

The cost for the Kim's new wealth is all the much greater human treasures they had in the beginning. Ki-Jung's life, Ki-Taek's freedom, Ki-Woo's mental health and most of all their togetherness. In the end though Ki-Woo's hope still isn't beaten out of him. And we're left to imagine that he'll continue to torture himself with futile dreams. When you have no money you have no power to decide your future. So to plan or the hope is to be disappointed. The only logical response Ki-Taek slowly comes to realize is to stop caring.

Notably Geun-sae down in the full basement has no aspirations to change his situations. He worships unknowing benefactor Mr. Park like a god. As of this social order is exactly how things ought to be exciting. When Ki-Taek stabs Mr. Park it's a last rebellion against his total powerlessness to change this hierarchy. But when he takes his place in the underground bunker

we can only assume that the total lack of sunlight will eventually break him and like his predecessor he will give up all hope.

The pain of this film is captured in it's opening and closing scenes of that aspirational semi-basement. Ki-Woo feels like everything to hold on to that window to keeps striving. Yet in the end it's this striving that breaks his family because the cruellest lie in our society is that if you just work hard enough you'll get to walk up the stairs. In reality if change does come you could just as easily be descending them.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The huge success of Bong Joon-ho's cinematic masterpiece reflects global anxieties about capitalism in an increasingly unequal world. Many commentators believe that the fact that *Parasite* is the first non-English language film to win the Screen Actors Guild ensemble cast award is a good indication that it will win Best Picture at the Oscars, the most coveted award in the global film industry. However, due to the film industry's Pro-American bias, no non-English film has ever won this award. Mexican art film *Roma* was relegated to Best Foreign Language Film, despite being the critical frontrunner for Best Picture. Bong has used his award run to challenge this language bias, telling the audience at the Golden Globes, "Once you overcome the one-inch barrier of subtitles, you will be Introduced to so many more amazing films."(Joon-ho, *Golden Globes*)

The critical acclaim for *Parasite* confirms Bong's reputation as one of the most important film directors working today, as well as a global endorsement of the new wave of Korean Cinema over the past two decades, South Korea has created a slew of outstanding crime thrillers and horror films that tackle social ills with a candour that Hollywood mostly avoids.

Bong's fiction, in particular, is rooted in themes of social injustice and features sympathetic, marginalised protagonists facing the state's and capital's brutalities, with tragicomic consequences. This theme runs through his work, as seen in *The Host* (2006), a monster/family saga, and *Snowpiercer* (2013), a post-apocalyptic action film.

Parasite, like Bong's previous films, is influenced by South Korea's

turbulent political past and widening wealth gap. Behind the gaudy mask of k-pop and high-tech electronics, the film depicts the Squalid truth of poverty and shattered dreams. The film's theories, on the other hand, are meant to be universal. As Bong described it in an interview: I tried to express a sentiment specific to Korean culture,(but) all the responses from different audiences were pretty much the same. Essentially, we all live in the same country, called capitalism.

Through the use of architecture and living spaces, the film makes global class distinctions tangible. It depicts the poor living in gloomy, claustrophobic basements and underground tunnels. The Parks, on the other hand, live in a bright, glass house with a lush garden. The picture of a staircase is used repeatedly to demonstrate how the wealthy's control expands vertically as they rule over everything from on top. Interestingly, the image of the staircase is also present throughout *Joker*.

The vertical theme is fundamental to the tradition of high and low-class dramas, which contrast the lifestyles of various social classes dramatically. Fritz Lang's German expressionist masterpiece *Metropolis* (1927) is the most prominent original portrayal of this subgenre. The poor toil in the depths underneath the boot of a fascist state while the idle wealthy frolic in rooftop pleasure gardens in a vast futuristic city of towering skyscrapers. Adolf Hitler and Joseph Goebbels famously asked Lang to run the Nazi film propaganda apparatus, despite the anti-fascist subtext of his work. Lang made the wise decision to leave Germany.

The ideas of *Metropolis* continue to echo in cinema in the aftermath of the global financial crisis of 2008. It was used as inspiration for a story about a

populist revolt within the Batman universe in Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight Rises*, released in 2012. Despite its optimistic premise, the movie promotes a conservative viewpoint on the risks of social change. Although it recognises oligarchy and injustice as social ills, it portrays revolution as being indistinguishable from terrorism, with Batman and the cops battling to uphold the status quo.

Thankfully, several other dystopian films take more extreme and fascinating political positions. *Snowpiercer*, directed by Bong Joon-ho is a sympathetic depiction of a rebellion in a giant train carrying the last survivors of a global catastrophe. The film is rife with scepticism about capitalism. Its conclusion implies that greed and corruption have irreversibly tainted civilization, and that the only option is to wipe it clean and start over.

Many important issues have been brought to the attention of Hollywood's elite by *Parasite*. Its popularity is due in large part to the cast and crews talent. However, it also demonstrates how the film industry cannot neglect global wealth and income disparities. Bong didn't need to conjure up a fantastical dystopia. Instead, he captured the harsh reality of the world we now live on.

The international acclaim for *Parasite* which also won the prestigious Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival last May, highlights South Korea's emergence as a global cultural power, a reflection of decades of focus on building world-class industries in one of the most vibrant democracies in Asia. But it also hints at an uncomfortable truth: While the national successes have been spectacular — from Samsung's rise as a global economic powerhouse to the explosion of K-pop in Asia and beyond —

many South Koreans recognize that there's been a dark side to that rise. Only a few years ago, Bong himself was blacklisted by the government, and the characters in his film reflect a society where many feel intense hopelessness.

South Korea's rapid emergence from the devastation of the 1950-53 Korean War also saw a bloody transition from dictatorship to democracy. Its association with neat smartphones and cars came amid a constant threat from nuclear North Korea. For every international success, there's also widespread worry that South Korea will forever be overshadowed by regional giants Russia, China and Japan.

But *Parasites* main characters portray South Koreans who have been left behind by the country's dramatic changes. It's a biting commentary on deepening inequality and other problems that have many young and poor people describing their lives as a hellish nightmare. South Korea has one of the largest gaps between rich and poor among developed nations and is struggling mightily to deal with decaying job markets, rocketing house prices and a record-low birth rate as couples put off having babies while struggling with low pay and harsh work conditions.

Although fully Korean in language, humour and tone, Bong's dark tale of poverty and class struggle resonates across borders because Western democracies are also experiencing similar social and economic problems, albeit not as 'extreme' as in South Korea. While Bong is uniquely talented as a director, it was only a matter of time before South Korean movies and other pop cultural products gained increasing acceptance in the West, considering South Korea's dynamic cultural scene, which has matured along

with its democracy.

Perhaps more than any other genre, South Korean films has aggressively tested artistic boundaries, often with stunning visuals and violence meant to expose the underside of the country's economic success story. Not everyone was happy about how Bong portrayed the characters in *Parasite*, which tells the story of how an unemployed family of four living in a slum basement apartment comically con their way into the lives one of Seoul's wealthiest families before things begin to unravel darkly.

This sometimes creates political consequences for the artists. Bong was one of thousands of artists who were blacklisted and denied government funds under the rule of conservative former President Park Geun-hye for their allegedly critical views of her administration. Following protests by millions, Park was ousted from office in March 2017 and is now serving a decades-long prison term for corruption. Not everyone was happy about how Bong portrayed the characters in *Parasite*, which tells the story of how an unemployed family of four living in a slum basement apartment comically con their way into the lives one of Seoul's wealthiest families before things begin to unravel darkly.

Critic Kim Gyu-hang accused Bong of objectifying poor people and treating their lives like a "sightseeing attraction," saying that the film makes no real attempt at explaining how the system locked the characters in a desperately hopeless situation. "*Parasite* provides no deep insight into humans, their anger and how they are a by product of the social system that surrounds them."(Kim, *Parasite*)

Parasite's Oscar success follows years of struggles by South Korean

directors to break through in Hollywood. Park Chan-wook, who won the Grand Prix at the 2004 Cannes Film Festival with his thriller *Oldboy*, received mixed reviews for his 2013 work *Stoker* an English-language thriller starring Nicole Kidman. Bong enjoyed both commercial and critical success with his 2013 sci-fi film *Snowpiercer*, which starred Chris Evans and Tilda Swinton along with “Parasite” actor Song Kang-ho. But nothing that's come before has been remotely as successful as this South Korean film shot in the Korean language.

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