

The Godfather: The Rise and Fall of the Corleone Family

The genre of crime movies is not as popular today as it once was. However, there was a time when crime movies were popular among the audience, and it was at this time that *The Godfather* was released. Most crime movies revolve around the activities of criminals who operate outside the bounds of the law. This genre can be subdivided into subgenres of detective films, crime-comedy films, gangster films, and *The Godfather* falls into the latter category. The film follows Don Vito Corleone and his youngest son Michael as Don Vito hands over his power to his son after an accident that almost ends Vito's life. As the story progresses, the once-powerful Don Vito slowly loses his power, while the once innocent Michael becomes corrupted. As such, the film perfectly falls into the category of a crime film, as it features that the life of a crime lord is materialistic or self-destructive and depicts a tale of morality.

The Godfather falls under the crime or gangster genre because it depicts the life of a crime lord. According to FilmSite, crime films “glorify the rise and fall of a particular criminal(s), gang, bank robber, murderer or lawbreakers in personal power struggles or conflict with law and order figures, an underling or competitive colleague, or a rival gang” (FilmSite). This definition falls true for the film as its story revolves around the fall of Don Vito and the rise of his son Michael. The plot depicts Don Vito as a powerful crime lord, which is apparent in the film's opening scenes where Bonasera asks Vito to kill the boys who abused Bonasera's daughter. Bonasera specifically says, “For justice, we must go to Don Corleone” (IMDb). This incident shows that the Don holds considerable power, and Bonasera's demand for murder shows that he believed that the Don would be willing to commit heinous crimes. Although Don Vito refuses to kill the boys, it is shown that he is still willing to commit crimes as he promises to take

care of the matter. Similarly, when the horse of Jack Woltz is killed, and the film shows a transition to the face of Don Corleone, it depicts the lengths he is willing to go to get what he wants.

Furthermore, the conflict with law enforcement agencies and rival gangs is also present in the story. According to Christophe Sigar, “*The Godfather* contains a lot of conflicts, and most of them are related to the greed for power. The major characters are in conflict with each other because of their greed for power” (Sigar). This aspect is depicted in many ways, but its most prominent example is when the rival gang members shoot Don Vito in the marketplace for refusing to back their budding business in narcotics. Later on, this leads to a conflict with law enforcement agencies as well because Captain McCluskey sides with the rival gang. Ultimately, Michael ends up killing Sollozo, a man backed by the rival gang and the police captain. The story ends with Michael ordering the murder of the heads of the five Italian mafia families, which depicts an end to the conflict among the crime lords. Thus, it is clear that the film fulfills the criteria for this particular characteristic of the crime genre.

Secondly, the film *The Godfather* is a crime film as its characters can most certainly be defined as materialistic or self-destructive. FilmSite states that the people depicted in gangster films, in particular, are “materialistic, street-smart, immoral, megalomaniacal, and self-destructive” (FilmSite). These are the traits that are found among a variety of characters in this film. For instance, it can most certainly be stated that the entirety of the Corleone family is materialistic, which is evident in the scenes from the wedding of Connie, Don Vito’s daughter. The wedding is a lavish affair with hundreds of guests present at the gathering. The wedding also includes a stage where the guests can dance and a mic used by Carmela Corleone to sing. Don Vito’s son Sonny can be seen as a character who is both immoral and a megalomaniac, as his

reign as Don proves to be bloody and destructive. His immorality is also proven by his actions as Sonny has the son of the rival Tattaglia family killed after Don Corleone is shot. His brash actions ultimately lead to his death, which also proves that the character had been self-destructive.

Another self-destructive character in the story is Michael Corleone, who starts out as an innocent man wanting to do some good in the world. This aspect of his character is apparent when he tells Kay the story behind Johnny's first contract and says, "That's [violence] my family Kay, that's not me" (IMDb). However, this mindset does not last long, and Michael soon starts becoming as corrupt as the rest of his family. John Reich from Milne Publishing states that "Stories in the crime genre are often about people seeking power" (Reich), and this is most certainly true in the case of Michael, who tries to seek more power as the story progresses. At first, he only participates in crime to save his family, but he quickly takes over the family business after his brother Sonny's death. Airlangga states that Michael "takes control of the family and wants to make the Corleone family stronger, more feared and become unbeatable. This is a story about absolute power, money, and the man that controls everything behind the scene like a puppet master" (Airlangga). However, this struggle for power transforms Michael into a ruthless as is apparent by the murders he orders at the end of the film. As such, the film shows the destruction of Michael's character.

Lastly, despite the numerous crimes committed throughout the film, *The Godfather* is a tale of morality, making it a part of the crime genre. FilmSite states, "Gangster films are often morality tales: Horatio Alger or 'pursuit of the American Dream' success stories turned upside down in which criminals live in an inverted dream world of success and wealth" (FilmSite). Success and wealth are two factors that are prominently present in *The Godfather*. The

abundance of wealth and success is apparent from the house in which the Corleone family lives. It is a villa that can accommodate an entire wedding party. The clothing worn by the characters in the film is also a depiction of wealth as most of the time, the characters are found wearing expensive suits. The factor of morality is further explained by FilmSite as, "Often from poor immigrant families, gangster characters often fall prey to crime in the pursuit of wealth, status, and material possessions (clothes and cars), because all other 'normal' avenues to the top are unavailable to them." (FilmSite). The film depicts the Corleone family as an Italian family, which gives them the status of being immigrants, and as such, this theory can be applied to them as well.

Additionally, morality is relevant as the characters of the film do depict certain moral conduct, despite the crimes they commit. Don Vito refuses to kill the boys who abused Bonsera's daughter and says, "Give this job to Clemenza. I want reliable people, people who aren't going to be carried away. I mean, we're not murderers, in spite of what this undertaker thinks..." (IMDb). As such, this makes it clear that there are certain lines that even Don would not cross. He shows his sense of morality again when he decides to end the feud between the five mafia families and forgoes taking revenge for the murder of his son, Sonny, by stating that vengeance would not bring his son back. Thus, in this manner he prevents further bloodshed from occurring between the warring factions. He also agrees to back the Tattaglia family's idea of investing in narcotics despite previously saying that he would lose his political connections if he made such a move. Yet again, this shows a great moral character. It signifies that Don cares more about ending a blood feud than he does about keeping his political connections even though his political connections keep him in power.

In conclusion, it can be stated that *The Godfather* is ultimately a crime film as it encompasses the three main characteristics of a crime film. Firstly, the film revolves around the rise and fall of a crime lord in the shape of Vito Corleone and the conflicts his family has with law enforcement agencies and rival groups of power. Secondly, the self-destructive and power-hungry nature of the film's characters is also presented via the entire Corleone family but most particularly with Don's sons, Sonny and Michael. However, despite these characters' nature, the film does depict a sense of morality with the characters living in wealth and success. Morality is a factor presented via the character of Don Vito, who shows moral conduct in multiple instances. Thus, the depiction of these characteristics in the film cements its place in the crime genre.

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