

Visual Rhetorical Analysis

The film *The Godfather* is a timeless masterpiece that can be watched time and time again. It is a famous piece of art due to many factors such as its plotline, characters, genre, etc., but the one factor that sets it apart from any other movie is the themes it explores. There are multiple themes that can be considered in the context of this film, but the most powerful theme is by far the play of power in the movie. The plot itself revolves around this theme, and the characters are similarly altered by the give and take of power. The drama genre of the film ensures that the element of pathos is ever-present in the movie. *The Godfather* uses the theme of power to evoke the emotions of its audience, by artistic utilization of dialogues, visuals, and lighting.

First of all, it is important to consider the dialogues of the film when it comes to the play of power in the movie. One of the most famous dialogues of the film comes from the Don himself when he says “I’m gonna make him an offer he can’t refuse” (Coppola). This dialogue is the ultimate show of power from the Don, and this is proven later on in the film when Kay inquires about the bandleader letting Johnny go. Michael explains what his father’s offer was: “Luca Brasi held a gun to his head, and my father assured him that either his brains or his signature would be on the contract..... That’s a true story” (Coppola). Thus, this dialogue showcases the power held by the Don and at the same time, manages to evoke the feeling of fear in the minds of the audience. The violence of the offer ensures that spectators are unable to forget this scene, and thus the fear of the Don is engrained in the minds of the spectators. A similar thing is done when Michael confronts Carlo as the scene has much dialogue about Carlo begging while Michael replies with a simple “Sit down” (Coppola).

Secondly, the visuals of the film do well to depict the power play in the movie, particularly the loss of power. This is evident with the character of Vito, particularly in the scene where he is shown to be playing with his grandson; a scene that includes many symbolic images. These symbolic images are highly significant in this scene, such as the use of a water gun. This is extremely ironic because the gun itself is a symbol of power, particularly among the mafia (Scoggins and Two). Thus the water gun shows the potential for power but does this in a light manner. This clearly points to the loss of Vito's own power which has been transferred to Michael at this point. Thus, when Vito collapses in this scene, the audience feels sympathy and pity for the once-powerful man. Power also comes into play in another scene in the same location. Vito speaks with his son Michael and expresses his guilt over passing the baton to his son. This transfer of power is also depicted with Vito's grandson as it is the former Don that passes the water gun to his grandson, thereby symbolizing a transfer of power. This, along with Vito's overall fatigued appearance, fills the audience with a sense of dread as it can be seen that the Don has now become weak.

Lastly, the lighting effects in the film is stunning and does well to portray the dynamics of power. For instance, when Don is at the wedding of his daughter at the beginning of the film, the scene is set outdoor and depicts much lighting. When the film shows Don greeting his guests in a regal manner, the lighting ensures that the scene has no aspect that seems threatening, and the dynamics of power are barely present. However, when Don goes into a separate room to conduct his businesses, the lighting over here is dimmed in comparison, which gives a mysterious aspect to the scene. This contrast in lighting also ensures that the audience feels uncomfortable and slightly threatened by the presence of the Don (Lu). Similarly, when Vito discusses his plans for the family business with Michael, they are both sitting in a shadowed

garden, away from the sun; the sun is known as a symbol of glory. When Don discusses his plans for Michael, Don's face is only partially in the sun but halfway covered in shadow, which shows that he does have some power left, after all. But the focus of the lighting is on Michael which shows the spectators whom the next Don is going to be, hence, foreshadowing a transfer of power.

In conclusion, the theme of power is clearly depicted to evoke the emotions of the spectators in *The Godfather*. This is done via the use of dialogues which depict the amount of power held by Don and later Michael and makes the audience feel emotions such as fear. The visuals of the film also work to portray the play of power, particularly with the use of symbolic effects such as that of the water gun. Here the audience feels sorrow and pity for a man who was once extremely powerful but now is only a shadow of what he used to be. Lastly, the lighting of the movie also portrays power play exceptionally, which is evident in the various scenes of the movie. Thus, the feelings of fear, threat, sympathy, and pity are evoked in the audience.

Works Cited

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