The Godfather and His God-Forsaken Son: A Scene Analysis of The Godfather Part II

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In *The Godfather Part II* Michael Corleone is faced with the nearly impossible task of reconciling the dichotomies of his identity. With the ghost of his father figuratively looming in the Don's chair, and Vito's narrative cinematically interwoven with his own, Michael must try to balance the reshaping of his business and family while trying to live up to the expectations that his father had for him. While Coppola explores this theme throughout the entirety of the first six and a half hours of *The Godfather Trilogy,* this father-son dichotomy is most strikingly highlighted two hours into the sequel by the intermission and the scenes that bookend it.

While Vito's motives for murdering Don Fanucci during the San Rocco parade certainly aren't objectively pure, they are framed in a nostalgic, and at times, heroic light, with the intention of emphasizing the importance of family and heritage at the inception of the Corleone crime family. The film cuts to an overhead shot of the parade and follows the movements of a Christ effigy whose torso is laden with American dollar bills, which contrasts the more traditional Italian ornamentation of the cranial region, featuring olive skin, dark hair, and a halo. The effigy is carried past vendor awnings and the moneyed portion is obscured, a cut to Vito on the rooftops following shortly after. Right at the scene's introduction, we already see Vito being visually equated with the moneyless, Italian portion of the Christ effigy, and while he is not objectively a Christ figure, this association serves to reinforce his role as the protagonist in this scene as well as his identity as a Sicilian. Contrarily, the camera depicts the corrupt Fanucci obligatorily pinning his donation to the statue and later blowing a kiss towards it, his eyes clearly lingering on the money, not the halo. As he climbs the steps to Fanucci's apartment, Vito is framed by a brightly lit window, giving him a nearly angelic quality, again reinforcing our allegiance to him and his

allegiance to traditional Italian heritage. When Vito fires his first bullet into Fanucci's torso, fireworks from the parade below echo the shot, almost in an applause, and the second shot to cheek is greeted with the same triumphant explosions from outside.

Something changes, however, when Vito fires the third shot into Fanucci's mouth; the viewer is forced to question Vito's maliciousness because, realistically, Fanucci has been a very mild villain compared to the others in the films. The viewer must recall Vito's only other relationship with a Mafia leader thus far depicted: Don Cicci in Sicily, the murderer of his entire family. *The Godfather Part II* has already defined Fanucci as an American stand in for Cicci by portraying him holding the knife to Genco's love interest, much like Vito's mother does to Cicci before being shot by his men. We understand that Vito's motives are surely not pure since they are rooted in revenge, but the film excuses his motives since they were for the sake of his family. This notion is only reiterated when Vito returns to the street and begins walking to his family. He is once more strongly backlit, this time by blinding and triumphant fireworks, before sitting on the stoop and cradling young Michael. Vito speaks for the first time as the scene concludes, speaking in Italian backed by a traditional Italian guitar serenade: "Michael, your father loves you very much, very much." Throughout the scene as we see Vito initiate his ascension to Don status, his actions are portrayed as not objectively pure or good, but as devoted to a traditional Sicilian sense of identity, one that is largely defined by familial identity. Vito's inception of the Corleone dynasty is finalized by the camera's fade to black followed by an intermission.

The intermission serves to temporally and emotionally distance Michael from Vito and redefine the state and motives of the Corleone family, making the stark difference between the bookending scenes all the more potent. When the camera fades out of the

intermission we see Michael being driven into his gated and locked estate, now barren and covered in snow, a dismally appropriate greeting after finding out that he lost his son to an alleged miscarriage. Even the score is entirely silent until Michael mournfully gazes down on the child's play car when a solemn iteration of *The Godfather*'s theme begins. The camera provides a close up of Michael's face, which turns to the offscreen window of his study. Thus far, the scene has been entirely contrary to the San Rocco parade. The colors are all of a cold, snowy hue rather than the warm firework induced sepia tone of the parade. The music is sparse and mournful compared to the lively and fully orchestrated parade tunes. The film cuts to a shot from the interior of the house, peering through the window onto Michael who is visually framed by the empty child's car and the vacant Don's chair, which is barely lit at all - the most potent shot of the scene. Everything about the physical depiction of Michael emphasizes his dichotomous, fragmented interpretation of himself and his tenuous conception of his dynasty and family. We see Michael through the window of his study, which is ornately designed with imperfections and fragmentations of panes, very literally dividing his image into multiple irregularly shaped pieces. He is framed by vacancies, entirely alone in the shot. He no longer has his father for guidance and stability and he is no longer an expecting father. This shot mourns the fact that Michael cannot fill either one of the vacancies. He is no longer a child that can rely on a familial hierarchy for support, nor is he the successful, well organized Don that his father's chair necessitates. The car and chair are essentially useless to him because he is stuck in between them, unable to define himself, which is visually accentuated by the snow covering the car and the extremely minimal lighting on the chair.

The camera continues to track Michael past the bandshell, no longer bustling with

partygoers, and follows him into his empty home. One might expect him to be greeted after a long business trip by his two children and wife, but instead he is met the remnants of the family's last meal at a table set for only three. The dining table, once an epitomization of the Corleone family, no longer has any accommodation for Michael and he is depicted as utterly separate and alone. He continues into the house, peering into the empty bedroom and then finds his way to his office where, exactly like a quintessential American businessman, he removes his hat and deposits his briefcase on his desk from the viewer's side; he doesn't even physically attempt to assume the position of the Don. In addition, this highlights the fundamentally different approach that Michael takes to leading a Mafia family. While Vito deposits his dismantled gun in clever hiding places, Michael deposits a stark, rigid briefcase on a desk that can barely be called his own. At long last in his silent foray into his own home, Michael finds Kay at her sewing machine. The crucial difference between Michael and Vito in this scene is that where Vito cradled his child and verbally expressed his love upon reuniting with his family, Michael fails to even alert Kay of his presence and silently turns his back on her, punctuated by the conspicuous lack of any sound other than the sewing machine. The scene concludes with an auditory fade into the courtroom in which Michael will be put on trial.

These two scenes and the intermission upon which they hinge serve as one of the most intense comparisons between Michael and Vito, and they illustrate the extreme differences between the two men and how they view the balance between business and family. Despite the fact that Vito commits an unsavory act, he is depicted as justified in the view of the film because it is for the sake of his family. He is initiating his family's ascent to power which will later facilitate both his revenge on Don Cicci for his family's demise as

well as the opportunity for his children to leave the Italian slum and become powerful in their own right. Ultimately we see that Vito's business is inextricably tied from family as family is his underlying motive for conducting business. Michael's business model also necessitates the inextricability of family and business, but it is in the opposing direction. Since family and business are tied, Michael is forced to grapple with his conception of family when they interfere with his business, which ultimately results in his complete lonesomeness, punctuated by the powerful and pensive conclusion of the film. Michael is constantly faced with the impossible task of reconciling his desires to live up to his family name, particularly his father's, while trying to become a fully integrated and legitimate American businessman. In the process of this constant self reevaluation Michael ultimately finds himself alone and disconnected, the CEO of a powerful Mafia company, without anyone to share it with.