

Contrasting *The Young Pope*'s Homilies Using the Language of Filmmaking

Lenny Belardo, Pope Pius XIII, His Holiness (Jude Law) delivers two 'first' homilies over the course of *The Young Pope*'s first two episodes. The first homily takes place in Lenny's dream, at the beginning of "Episode 1." Lenny begins his homily by warming an already-welcoming crowd with a message about how they have forgotten to play. His speech eventually digresses, becoming more dream-like as he pushes his message of embracing freedom to a heretical extreme by telling the faithful to masturbate and divorce, priests to marry, and even nuns to say mass. Lenny is abruptly told by Cardinal Voiello (Silvio Orlando) that he is no longer pope, and Lenny wakes up. In Lenny's second 'first' homily—the one that occurs in the show's reality, near the end of "Episode 2"—he disappoints the faithful and shocks the cardinals with a stern speech-turned-rant accusing the faithful of having forgotten God. After a crowd-member shines a laser-pointer at Lenny, he leaves the balcony, mumbling to himself about how the faithful are not worthy of him. Analyzing the cinematography, *mise-en-scène*, and sounds of the two versions of Pope Pius XIII's first homily demonstrate how opposite messages can be similarly alienating.

Both homily scenes are primarily comprised of short low-angle shots of Pope Pius XIII (of varying distances), interspersed with short reactionary shots from the crowd, the media, and the cardinals. Despite changes in lighting and in the distance in shots, Lenny is consistently framed nearly alone in the center of the screen (see Figures 1 and 2). Additionally, Lenny is shot from a low angle, emphasizing his place as a leader in comparison to the faithful, who are shot *en masse* from high angles (Figure 3), as well as to the cardinals, who are shot level to the camera in groups (Figure 4). Both scenes have minimal camera movement, except that each

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scene has a single dramatized zoom-in on Lenny. In the “Episode 1” homily this zoom occurs quickly, between the “We have forgotten to play” section of Lenny’s speech and his more hieratical, radical, confusing “We have forgotten to masturbate” portion. The zoom indicates a jarring break from the norm. In the homily in “Episode 2,” the zoom is slower, indicating Lenny’s gradual progression from telling the faithful they have lost touch with God to telling them that all he can do for “those who have even the slightest doubt about God” is to “remind them of [his] scorn and their wretchedness.” Reaction shots are critical to determining the audience’s reaction to the homilies. In the first homily, medium shots and close-ups of the crowd show confusion spreading across their faces. Nuns and cardinals show more shock than commoners. A medium shot of three cardinals fainting in synchrony hints to the viewer that what they are watching is not reality. In the second homily, the crowd’s reaction is one of growing discontent. Close-ups on their faces show not only confusion, but estrangement. The cinematography of Lenny’s two homilies emphasizes the distance both an ultra-liberal and ultra-conservative pope would cultivate among his listeners.

In both homilies, dialogue and music allow for the television program’s audience to react alongside the pope’s audience. Dialogue is dominated by the pope’s speech, which echoes throughout the square. Looks are shared between cardinals, nuns, and the faithful, but never words. The only dialogue that comes from the crowd is, ironically, a follower begging that Pope Pius XIII allows people a better look at his face. Moreover, while the pope’s speech dominates the sounds of the scene, it is still strictly diegetic. The speech is quieter when we hear it from a distance, and muffled slightly when we hear it from the point of view of those standing in the room behind Lenny. When a former friend watches Lenny through a TV, we too hear Lenny

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through filter of his TV. Music is infrequent, light bits of piano and drum, always serving to emphasize the shock and suspense felt by the audience.

While the cinematography and sound of these scenes demonstrates the control Lenny Belardo has over his followers, the *mise-en-scène* (literally, the things “put into the scene”) demonstrates the control he has over the world. The most obvious difference between Lenny’s first and second homilies is the lighting; namely, sunny natural light fills St. Peter’s Square in the first homily, indicating that it is daytime, while the second scene’s darkness indicates it is set at night. The lighting also informs us about Lenny’s attitude. The brightly lit first scene shows that Lenny is open about his beliefs as well as open to making the church more progressive. In the second scene, Lenny is literally hidden by the darkness, refusing to reveal himself to his crowd (Figure 2). He, like his church, is closed off. Another impact of the dark lighting is that without being able to see Lenny’s face, one is forced to focus on the words of his stern, bitter speech. An unusual source of light that penetrates his cloak of darkness, the aforementioned laser-pointer, is an important prop because it shows both the audience’s discontent with his homily and also their desire for both literal and symbolic illumination. Another important part of the *mise-en-scène* is the weather. It is raining when Lenny begins his dream homily, but after opening his arms to the sky (and God) as in Figure 1, the clouds clear (Figure 5). Natural light fills the scene and the faithful put away their rain gear. The implication is that Lenny has a close connection (and possible control over) God, which he uses to benefit his followers. In contrast, the weather is clear throughout Lenny’s actual homily, at least until he “storms off” and lightning strikes (Figure 6), forcing both the faithful (and the audience) to ask whether the lightning is a manifestation of Lenny’s condemnation of them, or if it is God’s condemnation of Lenny. Neither case is particularly appealing to the faithful.

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The homilies work both as compliments and as duals. Their shot compositions are very similarly patterned as shots of Lenny followed by reaction shots followed by returning to Lenny. Both scenes take place in the same location, St. Peter's Square, with the same characters who are wearing the same consumes. However, one scene is in a dream, while one is in reality. One occurs at the start of the episode, one at the end. One during the day, one at night. One with a pleasant weather shift at the start, one with a negative shift at the end. In contrasting these homilies, *The Young Pope* demonstrates that both the messages of "God does not leave anyone behind" (with the emphasis on *everyone*) as well as the message of "You have forgotten God" (with an emphasis on *you*) are intimidating and alienating.

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#### Works Cited

*The Young Pope*, episode “Episode 1,” season 1 (2016). Directed by Paolo Sorrentino; written by Paolo Sorrentino.

*The Young Pope*, episode “Episode 2,” season 1 (2016). Directed by Paolo Sorrentino; written by Paolo Sorrentino.

#### For Reference

“Episode 1”’s Homily: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WcKHqDGjBiA>

“Episode 2”’s Homily: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kxANpgCAGhc>



Figure 1. A wide shot of Pope Pius XIII greeting the faithful ("Episode 1").



Figure 2. A medium shot of Pope Pius XIII greeting the faithful ("Episode 2").



Figure 3. A very wide establishing shot of the faithful in St. Peter's Square ("Episode 1").



Figure 4. A close-up on a group of cardinals ("Episode 2").



Figure 5. A wide establishing shot after Lenny clears the sky ("Episode 1").



Figure 6. A long shot of lightning after Lenny storms off ("Episode 2").