

Reinterpretation of *Parasite* through the Triangle of Desire by René Girard*

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Abstract

This paper utilizes the framework of ‘triangular desire’ to analyze the film, *Parasite*, directed by Joon-ho Bong. The basis of Girard’s idea is that a desire for an object is not the result of direct and autonomous attachment, but rather as a form of mimicry of a subject of desire, also referred to as a mediator. Min-hyeok acts as a mediator when Ki-woo falls in love with Da-hye, the daughter of Mr. Park. What is notable about such mimetic desire is that it is contagious. From Da-hye’s perspective, it was ironically the existence of Ki-jung, whom she mistook as Ki-woo’s girlfriend, that led her to feel so attracted to Ki-woo. For Da-hye, Ki-jung acts as the mediator for her desire for Ki-woo. Ki-taek and Geun-se also form a frame of triangular desire through their mutual mediation around Mr. Park. We witness this when Ki-taek later adopts the ritual that Geun-se practiced in the underground bunker when expressing his respect for Mr. Park. Similarly, Chung-sook and Moon-gwang form another triangle of desire revolving around Yeon-kyo, observable when Choong-sook later adopts the pretentious manners previously embodied by Moon-gwang. In a sense, Geun-se and Moon-gwang respectively indulge the mimetic desires of Ki-taek and Choong-sook. The frame of triangular desire becomes even more visible when we group individual characters into families. It can be observed that the mediation of Moon-gwang and Geun-se leads to the Kims perceiving the Parks as a target of desire. Eventually, conflict arising from mimetic competition is escalated to a point where difference is obliterated, and everything falls apart. This paper underlines how well the film *Parasite* fits into Girard’s concept of desire, as if it were a case study for mimetic desire.

이 논문은 르네 지라르의 ‘욕망의 삼각형’이라는 개념 틀로 봉준호 감독의 <기생충>을 분석한 것이다. 지라르의 전제는 욕망의 주체는 대상을 직접적이고 자발적으로 욕망하는 것이 아니라 반드시 중개자(仲介者)를 통해서 모방한다는 것이다. 극중 기우가 박사장의 딸 다혜를 사랑하게 된 것은 민혁이란 중개자를 통해서였다. 그런데 이 모방욕망은 전염성을 가지고 있다. 다혜의 입장에서 볼 때, 그녀가 기우에게 적극적일 수 있었던 것은 아이러니컬하게도 기정의 존재 때문인데, 이는 다혜가 기정을 기우의 여자친구로 오인하는 데서 분명하게 드러난다. 다혜에게는 기정이 욕망의 중개자로 등장한 셈이다. 기택과 근세도

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동익을 둘러싸고 결국 상호 중개를 통한 ‘욕망의 삼각형’을 형성하게 되는데, 지하병커에 살면서 박사장에게 존경을 표하던 근세의 행동을 기택이 나중에 그대로 모방하게 되는 것이다. 충숙과 문광도 연교를 둘러싸고 역시 상호 중개를 통한 ‘욕망의 삼각형’을 형성하게 되는데, 사모님처럼 보였던 문광의 행보를 나중에 충숙이 그대로 모방하게 되는 것이다. 이처럼 근세와 문광은 욕망의 중개자로 각각 기택과 충숙의 모방욕망을 부추겼던 것이다. 가족 구성원 개개인을 집단으로 확대하면 ‘욕망의 삼각형’은 보다 분명한 형태로 드러난다. 즉 기택 네 가족은 문광과 근세 부부의 중개를 통해서 박사장 가족을 욕망의 대상으로 삼게 된 것인데, 모방적 경쟁으로 인한 갈등이 증폭되고 결국 양자 간의 차이가 소멸되면서 파국을 맞게 된다. <기생충>은 모방욕망의 실현 장이라도 되는 것처럼 지라르의 욕망이론에 잘 부합하는 텍스트라는 것이 이 글의 핵심논제이다.

Key words

René Girard's concept of desire, triangular desire, *Parasite*, Joon-ho Bong, mediator, internal mediation, external mediation, obliteration of difference

Introduction

Joon-ho Bong's critically acclaimed *Parasite* was awarded the Palme D'or at Cannes in May, 2019, followed by awards in four categories at the Academy Awards in February, 2020. In keeping with this popular interest, publications relating to *Parasite* already number at least 20 in less than a year. Current research eschews character analysis to examine critiques of class and capitalism through spatial metaphors.¹ Jin-hoo Park and Dae-gun Lim have described Ki-taek Kim's basement dwelling and Dong-ik Park's expensive villa as the pinnacle of Neo-feudalism (Park and Lim 2020). In this premise, rather than the standard conflict between good and evil, researchers take a chronotopic approach to examining capitalist class system revealed by the film. However, while this analysis defines the two classes as distinguished by above ground and underground dwellings, it doesn't go on to explore the other crucial spatial metaphor of the film, the distinction between the half-basement dwelling and the underground bunker.

Sungwoo Son's work takes a Lacanian psychoanalytical approach, noting the mirroring between Ki-taek's family and Moon-gwang's family as they compete for space (Son 2019). In this analysis, the place of desire inspires a desire for the object of the Other's desire or results in rivalry and conflict, while in contrast the place of fantasy is a space that is unique to the subject and must not be intruded on. This approach is brilliant in revealing the *Parasite* as an allegory of neo-capitalist conflict and increasing social polarization, in which not only are economic inequities critiqued but the path to fantasy is offered as a condition of the symbiosis between different social groups. However, it

does not satisfactorily explore why the two families become a mirror stage for one another, nor why this becomes a condition for symbiosis.

At first glance, *Parasite* appears to be a tale of class warfare between three distinct classes. Many critics have interpreted it in this way, and international critics have also focused on the theme of class relations. In truth, the portrayal of the Parks' light-filled garden and home, the Kims' half basement apartment and the underground bunker in which Moon-gwang and her husband hide make this comparison unavoidable. The three settings in which *Parasite* takes place has been described as a visual metaphor for the social order.

The issue with reducing *Parasite* to a critique of these class hierarchy is that depending on the dramatic moment the critical lens of the director is driven by his narrative instinct. In other words, the director's protection of any given social group can be argued as evidence of his progressive or his conservative tendencies. The issue of partiality also needs to be raised. The fact that we view the Parks and Moon-gwang and her husband from the perspective of the Kims would suggest that the director is most sympathetic to this middle class. However, the dramatic development of the plot doesn't suggest that Ki-taek and his family pre-meditated their takeover of the Park's home. There is nothing to suggest that this was their initial motivation. On the contrary, the premise begins with the goal of living in symbiosis with a well-meaning wealthy family, even if it is through deception. The narrative reads conservatively in that it isn't necessarily the class difference that triggers the conflict between the classes.

If this is true, *Parasite* would simply be a shallow text, without any further room for interpretation. Let's look at a few examples.

Parasite critiques the polarization of Korean society as represented by Neo-liberal issues (that money has become the greatest value in Neo-liberal Korean society) through the tragicomedy of three families. At the very least, *Parasite* forces us to contemplate the defeat and humiliation that exists in inequitable class structures and the lengths that the working class must go to for survival. But despite this, *Parasite's* ideological position is not clear (Shin 2020, 544-545)

This reproaches Joon-ho Bong with observing and narrating class struggles without making his own position clear. On one hand, the critic Dongjin Lee leads by noting that class is a key word for *Parasite* and describes the ensuing class struggles as developing in the following way.

Geun-se is not Ki-taek's family. He is in fact at one point, Ki-taek's greatest threat and seeming nemesis. When Ki-taek wields Geun-se's knife as an act of vengeance, his actions become a

strike for class solidarity. Ki-taek is able to empathize with Geun-se because of his smell, and this is because to him, that smell is representative of class. In truth, Ki-taek and Geun-se do not smell the same. However, the smell of life downstairs and the smell of death that seem to represent Ki-taek and Geun-se clearly link them as the same class. Ki-taek's family and Geun-se's family are both working class and it is at this point that the film transitions from a focus on the conflict between the two families to the explosive confrontation with their social superiors, the Parks (Lee 2020, 30).

This critique, supported by a fairly faithful textual analysis, invests the two lower class characters, Ki-taek and Geun-se with a sudden motivation to confront the upper-class Parks in a fit of class anxiety, a motivation which I question. It is too great a leap to imagine the Ki-taek who passively watched his own daughter get stabbed by Geun-se to suddenly feel roused by a sense of class injustice. Further, it is hard to believe that this sort of class solidarity could rouse such an explosive reaction for such a short period of time. On the contrary, this sort of solidarity builds up slowly over time. The argument that Ki-taek and Geun-se do not smell the same is a similarly arbitrary interpretation. To Dong-ik Park, their smell is identical.

It is in this context that I posit a critical analysis of *Parasite* from a different perspective. I intend to take René Girard's triangular desire as a way to understand the three families, their mimetic desire and the consequent collapse and make my case with an in-depth screen by screen analysis. Girard's argument is that mimetic desire breeds competition, mimetic competition breeds violent conflict, and the solution for violent conflict is to find a scapegoat (Jinshik Kim 2018, 4). So what is the appropriate solution for violent conflict that threatens society itself? According to Girard, violence which occurs internally within an organization must be met with another kind of violence, the mechanism for disguising this violence is the concept of scapegoating (Jinshik Kim 2018, 95).

René Girard's theories are not often applied to film studies. The following two papers are representative of the body of Girardian film studies. Yong-hee Kim's "Ritualistic Contradictions and Intrusions in *The Bacchus Lady*" takes Girard's classical world-view of violence and the sacred to analyze the text. This scholarship re-examines the critique of *The Bacchus Lady* as a conservative work about motherhood and instead reads it as a narrative of overcoming motherhood by eroding the boundaries between good and evil, reason and emotion (Yonghee Kim 2018, 43).

It is a text that implies both violence and the sacred. Park Sungjoon and Park Chiwan's "The Mechanism of Violence in *District: A Girardian Look at Scapegoats, Violence and the Sacred*" accurately posits the aliens, the "prawns" as a scapegoat. Prawns fit the concept of a scapegoat

as being available for sacrifice without fear of vengeance and the director utilizes this to depict before and after apartheid in the Republic of South Africa (Park and Park 2016, 560).

Both papers are helpful in understanding Girard's mechanism of violence and concept of the scapegoat. However, this study intends to take Girard's triangular desire, as he first described it in his early work *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*. As mimetic rivalry speeds to its climax, their confrontation and subsequent mirroring of desires produces violence, and it is to prevent that violence that a scapegoat is necessary. This paper proposes that the characters in *Parasite* represent the violent destruction that occurs when differences are removed between rivals.

Reading *Parasite's* characters through Girard's triangular desire

In novels, the relationship between the subject and the object is a direct one, in which the object who inspires desire and the subject experiences desire. However, this is simply a romantic deceit. Girard rebuts this with his concept of the Romanesque truth.² Using Don Quixote, he reveals the third party that exists between the subject and the object, who reveals their true state, who he names the mediator of desire (Girard 1994, 11-12). Girard begins by reading Don Quixote's desire for Dulcinea Del Toboso as an imitation of the legendary knight Amadis. So how are we to understand mimetic desire? Here, it is important to acknowledge that desire is not a literal victory over the rival. It is not the object itself that is the goal of the subject.

According to Girard, human desire does not occur organically or naturally. For this reason, desire must always be interpreted through its relationship with a third party. For the lay person, desire is described as the relationship between a subject and its object. The source of desire can and must be found internally within the subject who desires. However, the other side of this argument is Girard's assertion that a subject with free will and naturally occurring desire is a fantasy (Kim 2008, 34). Therefore, Girard explains:

When the object is viewed by the subject, the feelings of eternal longing are evoked by the mediator, regardless of whether those feelings are true or not. This act of mediation produces a second desire in the mediator, which is exactly the same as the mediator's desire. The result is that they who desire will always experience two rival desires (Girard 1994, 18).

In short, the mediator must play the role of an obstacle or at least seem to be playing the role of an obstacle in order to also play the role of a model. According to Girard, "I do not own desire. When I say I desire an object, it is not an emotion which occurs naturally

within myself, but a reaction to an external stimulant, an emotion that I have borrowed from another.” In this way, Girard defines desire as a relationship that requires a third party, the mediator between the subject and object (Kim 2008, 36). To Girard, the novels can largely be categorized in two categories, that of external mediation and internal mediation. “The former is the distance between the mediator and the subject, occupied by two possibilities where even the slightest overlap must be excluded. On the other hand, the latter refers to when the two areas are so constricted as to allow deep penetration” (Girard 1994, 19). The mediator Amadis and the subject who desires, Don Quixote are representative of external mediation. In *The Red and the Black*, Julian Sorel uses Madame de Farvaque as an internal mediator in his pursuit of Mathilde, the object of his desire.

It follows that in *Parasite*, Ki-woo would desire his friend, Min-hyeok’s girlfriend in a typical example of internal mediation. Ki-woo knows better than anyone else that his friend Min-hyeok has laid claim to Da-hye’s affections. Despite this, Ki-woo is attracted to Da-hye, in mimetic desire. For Ki-woo, Min-hyeok serves as a role model, and the term role model might as well be synonymous with mimicry. In Girard’s terms, Ki-woo, the subject, desires Da-hye, the object, because he is mimicking the desire of his role model Min-hyeok, the mediator. Ki-woo looks up to Min-hyeok as a role model because Min-hyeok enjoys a more privileged position.

The subject who desires, who experiences the mimetic desire of his role model, who he believes occupies a superior station, wishes to absorb his role model’s existence, and demonstrates interest in everything that the role model is interested in. As a follower, he believes in both the superiority of the role model and in his own theft of those same superior qualities. The consequence of this is the subject refusing to accept his present reality and preferring instead a fantastical version of the future. As long as the mediator doesn’t directly disrupt the subject’s pursuit of his desires, there is nothing that can shake the subject’s belief in his role model (Kim 2008, 78).

Ki-woo takes Min-hyeok as his role model, and then displaces him in Da-hye’s affections, and then attempts to take over Mr. Park’s home. Yet, when obstacles appear in his pursuit of this rosy dream, he continues to hark back to Min-hyeok, wondering what would Min-hyeok do in this situation and discovering himself through this exercise. To Ki-woo, Min-hyeok is as sacred as the Sansugyeongsuk (miniature landscape rock) that Min-hyeok gifts to him.

From a wider perspective, the Parks are an object of envy for Ki-taek’s family. Coincidentally, both are families of four. But the idea of supplanting the Parks is not one that occurs to the Kims. Their con-

flict is not a conflict between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. The Kims are merely satisfied with a pretense of ownership in the absence of the Parks. It is, arguably, a way of seeking symbiosis.

As is later revealed, a mediator for the Kims does exist. Moon-gwang's existence is that of mediator. The removal of Moon-gwang is the dramatic climax of the Kim family's ambitions, growing from their modest hopes Ki-woo's employment to installing Ki-jung and Ki-taek in the same family. The following conversation between the Kims in the scene #30 directly illustrate Moon-gwang's status.

Ki-jung: She looks so roly-poly, but on the inside she is very deep. Sometimes she even has acts like the lady of house. If you can believe it.

Ki-woo: She does! And of all the people in that house she's lived there the longest. Who was it that lived there before, that architect, Namgoong Hyunja. She was his housekeeper first and then just ended up staying with the house when it got sold to Da-hye's family. When Namgoong Hyunja left, he recommended her to them, to the Parks. He told them that she was the best at maintaining the house and that they should definitely employ her.

Ki-jung: Oh, so they changed owners but kept the housekeeper. If we want to be rid of her, we'll have to think hard.

The removal of the chauffeur Yoon may have simply been an effort to find employment for Ki-taek, but the efforts to remove Moon-gwang, who in many ways identifies as belonging in that home reveals a desire to become the owner, and to reach a more privileged position. The condescending Moon-gwang elicits respect while also situating her as a rival. In short, she becomes a mediator of desire.

The follower of the internal mediator believes in the superiority of their role model while at the same time believing in their own ability to compete against them. Respect for the role model and feelings of rivalry coexist. Despite knowing that the object of their rivalry can be challenged, mimetic desire can only be experienced when the mediator occupies a position of envy, which sometimes requires that the subject imagine fantastical qualities and ascribe them to the mediator. These contradictory feelings about another person who seems to be both equal to me and yet occupying an elevated position produce intense feelings of rivalry and conflict (Kim 2008, 76).

Although their employment is gained under false pretenses, Ki-woo is a talented tutor, Ki-jung is an art teacher with insight into the child psyche, and Ki-taek is a veteran chauffeur who is able to navigate the

streets of Seoul without a GPS. Choong-sook is a cook who is able to perfectly produce a dish that she's never even heard of before. In truth, their existence is not harmful to the Parks in any way. A harmonious coexistence under one roof is possible for the two families.

However, this harmony is destined for destruction. Throughout the movie, Mr. Park keeps referring to "crossing the line" and according to Girard, this is the moment in which their differences begin to collapse. Girard's main points are as follows.

Cultural protocols are a system devised to maintain differences, order and peace all come from these cultural differences. Conflicts arise not from our differences but from the erasure of our differences. The absence of difference does not create a more equitable society. On the contrary, the erasure of differences could result in the death of meaning itself (Jinshik Kim 2018, 49).

According to Girard, the erasure of difference between our self and our opponent produces great violence. Through the process of the role model becoming an obstacle and the obstacle becoming a role model, the imitation brings the subject and the mediator so close together that all differences disappear. And the absence of differences causes great violence. Differences are the product of natural and cultural order and regulations. Rivalries become intense and prolonged the fewer differences there are between the rivals (Kim 2008, 126). In other words, when the subject and the mediator both desire the same object, they imitate one another's desire until they become rivals.

The most important point about mimetic desire and its ripple effects is the contagious nature of desire. Mimetic desire moves unpredictably from one person to another. In some ways, this is the obvious outcome. If our desire is inherently imitative the result is naturally that the differences between the subject and the model become erased (Kim 2008, 108). With this in mind, let us examine the text. In the next chapter we will examine coexistence as made possible by differences, and the eruption of violence as produced by the erasure of those differences.

An Girardian Analysis of *Parasite*, scene by scene

This chapter examines the process in which the Kims, as a group, fall into a triangular desire, through a close analysis of each scene. An audit of the movies scenes shows that there are 130 scenes in total, and this chapter will deal exclusively with those relating directly to triangular desire. Here is the scene #3 in which Ki-woo sees the Sansoogyongseok for the first time.

Min-hyeok rides in on his motorbike. He is carrying a wooden box which holds the Sansoogyongseok. Ki-taek lifts up the rock and observes, “Oh, so this is a sansoogyongseok... or should we look at it more abstractly?” Min-hyeok answers “They say that this stone is particularly lucky for wealth and success.” To which Ki-woo studies the rock before joining in with the portentous words “Min-hyeok! This feels very symbolic.” (Scene #3. Ki-taek’s house, evening)

As this scene illustrates, Ki-woo often uses the word “symbolic” and the first time he brings it out is in this scene. The movie subtitles uses the word “metaphorical” instead of the word “symbolic.” Throughout the movie, this rock follows Ki-woo around, at one point even floating on water. In the last sequence, Ki-woo is hit in the head with this rock but miraculously survives. What is this rock’s true identity? If we consider metaphor as a rhetorical device, the rock provides many avenues of interpretation. But the crucially, what’s key here is that all of Ki-woo’s action are in imitation of Min-hyeok. In the next scene, we see Ki-woo’s reaction to his first glimpse of Da-hye’s picture.

Min-hyeok and Ki-woo drink beers in front of their local grocery store. Min-hyeok shows Ki-woo a picture of a girl on his phone with a casual “She’s cute, right?” She’s a sophomore and her name is Park Da-hye. Can you tutor her instead of me? She needs English lessons. When Ki-woo asks “What are you talking about” Min-hyeok explains, “When she starts college in a couple of years we are going to officially start dating. So, until then, can you take care of her? With you I can feel reassured that I’m leaving her in good hands.” (Scene #4. Local grocery store, night)

When examining this scene as a triangle of desire, Min-hyeok attempts to use Ki-woo as a mediator in order to protect his love interest. But for Ki-woo this request is the catalyst for mimetic desire.

Ki-woo, who has entered the Parks’ home through Min-hyeok’s recommendation, begins to strategize ways to bring the rest of his family in. Ki-woo introduces Ki-jung as his friend Jessica, who studied art at Illinois State university before returning to Korea, piquing Yeon-kyo’s interest. (Scene #13-1, The Park family home, in the garden, at twilight) After Ki-jung successfully establishes her position with Yeon-kyo, she plots with Ki-woo to bring her father in as chauffeur. She introduces him as “My uncle’s old chauffeur. He was so gentle and kind that when I was little I used to call him uncle too.” (Scene #26, The Park family home, front door) In turn, Ki-taek gets straight to work by giving Mr. Park a card that purports to be for “an exclusive domestic service agency, who only deal with VIP clients and have a roster of veteran domestic staff.” Furthermore, Ki-taek’s deceptions are subtle enough to include suggesting to Yeon-kyo that Mr. Park discovered this agency

on his own, causing her to immediately call the number on the card and hire Choong-sook as her new housekeeper. (Scene #44 Dong-ik's car, night)

The scenes described above in #13-1, #26, and #44, can also be described as the Yeon-kyo's belt of faith, in which her trust is unshakeable. Yeon-kyo is being deceived it is true, but she is also now bound by the belt of trust between the Kims. This belt is able to exist because their individual differences are clearly distinct and guaranteed. Ki-woo and Kevin, Ki-jung and Jessica, Ki-taek and Chauffer Kim, Choong-sook and Sister are these differences. While these differences are maintained there are no conflicts between the two families. However, a crack appears in this seeming harmony.

Ki-taek and Choong-sook bring in groceries and begin unloading them in the kitchen. The youngest Park, Da-song sniffs first one and then the other, exclaiming, "Wow! You smell the same!" When his embarrassed father, Mr. Park admonishes him with a "That's enough!" Da-song repeats, "It's the same smell! You both smell the same!" When Yeon-kyo attempts to intervene by saying, "Come on now, Jessica is waiting for you." Da-song doubles down and says "Jessica smells the same too." (Scene #49. The Park's home, Second floor hallway and living room, at twilight).

Da-song has identified smell as an identifying factor between two groups of people that Mr. and Mrs. Park firmly believe to belong to different classes. Smell appears throughout the movie as a motive, functioning as a metaphor to distinguish social class, and also, when considered from the Girardian perspective of this paper, as the crucial agent in erasing differences between rivals. Da-song's single observation "You smell the same!" is enough to create tension in the Kim family. Later, dressed casually and grilling meat in their own kitchen, the Kims discuss the crisis.

Ki-taek sniffs his own undershirt and asks, "Well, does that mean we all have to use different soap?" which is followed by Ki-woo wondering "Should we use different laundry detergent too? And fabric softener?" At this, "Choong-sook sighs "Are we going to run the washing machine separately for everyone? Dear me!" To this, Ki-jung explains "No, that's not what the smell is. It's the smell of this semi-basement apartment" and gestures upwards with the scissors she was using to cut meat. She then continues to accurately diagnose the issue, "To get rid of the smell we have to leave this apartment." Choong-sook then smells her own clothes. (Scene #50-1. The Kim's semi-basement home, night)

As aforementioned in scene #49, the young Da-song has perceived the identical smell of all the Kim family members. It is the moment in which a commonality is revealed between four seemingly separate identities. The adults in this situation don't pay her any attention. Ki-woo alone is spared Da-song's attention because he has had little reason to be in his proximity. To the Kims, this awakening is fateful. In scene #50-1, Ki-jung understands that the semi-basement apartment is the source of their shared smell. Furthermore, the darker depths of the underground bunker await them.

In scene #66 (the underground bunker in the Park's home, at night) is important as the turning point from the comedy of the first half of the movie. The Parks have left on their camping trip, and the appearance of Moon-gwang in front of the Kims as they revel in their pretend ownership foreshadows the tragedy to come. Moon-gwang, who has entered the home with Choong-sook's permission, begs to be allowed to go downstairs into the underground bunker. As Moon-gwang pushes aside the steel door, the narrow stairway leading underground appear. The sight of Moon-gwang hurrying down with her bag and the childlike Geun-se, sucking milk from a bottle, shocks Choong-sook. The darkness of the underground bunker makes a deep impression on her.

At this moment, Geun-se realizes Choong-sook's presence. Moon-gwang reassures him that she isn't a danger to him. Choong-sook exclaims "What is all this!" with a surprise that borders fury. Moon-gwang attempts to conciliate her by saying "I would feel surprised too. But can you try to understand? From working woman to working woman, Choong-sook?" The shocked Choong-sook, enlightened as to Geun-se's existence shrieks that she will report him to the police. At this, Moon-gwang rushes over to her to kneel in front of her and beg, "Please, don't do this. Don't do this to a fellow woman in need." The repulsed Choong-sook answers "I am not a woman in need!" Moon-gwang piteously insists "but I am, I am in need. I am homeless and penniless." (Scene #66. The underground bunker in the Park's home, night).

At this moment, Ki-taek, who has been watching the scene from the top of the stairs, trips. As he falls he pushes Ki-jung and Ki-woo in front of him. They all fall together. After recovering from her surprise, Moon-gwang suddenly recognizes Ki-jung and says "Oh my gosh, Jessica!" Moon-gwang then recognizes Ki-taek and then takes out her phone to begin recording them. When Ki-woo, alarmed by his father's fall, calls Ki-taek "Father!" the secret is well and truly out. Scene #66 is a crucial scene where most of the secrets are revealed. The revelation that a person has been secretly living in the underground bunker is so pivotal to the plot that Bong Joon-ho takes great pains to completely hide this fact in the first half of the movie. Moon-gwang begs

for empathy from a fellow working-class woman. Choong-sook rejects this appeal because she feels that their class is in fact, separate. To her, her family's situation in their semi-basement apartment is one that is lower middle class and one that occupies a superior position to that of Moon-gwang and Geun-se in the underground bunker. She is emphasizing their difference. But through Ki-taek's clumsy mistake, his family's true identities become exposed and that difference becomes erased. This is how the mimetic rivalry begins. The scene continues in the following way:

Moon-gwang gestures at the Kims while still holding up her phone, and says "I knew it. I thought something was strange when they let Chauffeur Yoon go!" demonstrating her understanding of the situation. She then moves to attack, by challenging them, "So are you all a family of con artists?" Choong-sook then attempts to recover the situation by calling Moon-gwang "little sister" but it's now Moon-gwang's turn to reject her, instead of threatening "Get out of here with little sister. Shut your mouth. You bitch! This video I've recorded I'm going to send it to Mrs Park! What do you think of that?" On her phone is a recording of Ki-jung, Ki-woo, and Ki-taek all in pain on the floor.

This scene is significant in that it eloquently illustrates the process with which the defensive Moon-gwang seizes the opportunity to go on the offensive. From a Girardian perspective, Moon-gwang and Geun-se realize their position role models for the Kims. "The consequence of contagious desire is clear. The neighbors who have come face to face, imitate one another's desire becoming a role model and mediator for each other. At this point, both parties assert the primacy of their desire. Their claim is that they each desired the object first, and therefore have the prior claim" (Kim 2008, 109). This is how the conflict between the two families is ignited. From Moon-gwang and Geun-se's point of view, their earlier residence in the house makes it feel impossible that they should surrender to a family who are here under false pretenses. The following scenes #74-2 and #74-5 clearly demonstrate the mirroring that is happening between the two families.

The situation is reversed again and Moon-gwang and Geun-se are overpowered by the Kims and are at their mercy. Geun-se is tied to a pipe with tape. Ki-taek looks at Geun-se with pity, but Geun-se looks at a magazine cutting on the wall and bellows "What are you looking at? I'm embarrassed! Mr. Park, thank you for another day of food and shelter. Respect!" Ki-taek scolds him "Do you always behave like this?" but Geun-se responds "Sometimes I send Mr. Park my gratitude by morse code." (Scene #74-2. the Park family underground bunker, night)

Ki-taek asks “How can you live like this, in a place like this?” and Geun-se explains “Don’t you know how many people live underground? If you count people who live in semi-basement housing, there’s even more.” When Ki-taek asks him what his future plans are, Geun-se says, “This is the most comfortable place for me.” He continues “It’s almost like I was born here, and married here. It’s not like I’m eligible for a national pension. You survive old age through your relationships. Speaking of which, please just let me continue to live here.” (Scene #75-5, the Park family underground bunker, night)

The scenes above show Ki-taek’s surprise that Geun-se still wants to express respect for Mr. Park after 4 years of life in his underground bunker, but by the end of the movie, Ki-taek mimics Geun-se’s actions. To Ki-taek and Geun-se, Mr. Park is not an object of class resentment, but instead an object of respect and an ideal. “Through this process, the two place their object of desire between them, causing them to mimic each other and therefore erasing the differences between them. Furthermore, when a subset of people fall into mimetic behavior, all the other people in that set also become drawn into a mimetic mechanism producing the erasure of differences and creating a crisis” (Kim 2008, 112). That which first served as a model becomes an obstacle, and the obstacle becomes the model, erasing the differences between the rivals. But even at this point, the Kims are unable to recognize their parity with Moon-gwang and Geun-se.

The climax of the movie, which was foreshadowed in the aforementioned scene #49, is in scene #81-1. Forced to return home by inclement weather, the Parks are persuaded by Da-song to camp out in their living room instead. The Kims, unable to escape are forced to hide under a table. Mr. Park suddenly observes “Wait a minute! What’s that smell?” and begins to look around. Yeon-kyo places a pillow on his arm and as she sits down on the sofa, asks “What smell?” Mr. Park replies, “Chauffeur Kim” before expanding “You know what I’m talking about. It’s a faint smell that seems to fill any space it’s in.” As he ponders how to describe it, Yeon-kyo answers “You mean his old man smell?” Mr. Park rejoins with further examples “Oh, maybe old dried radishes? No, the after smell you get when you wash dish-cloths? Like that.”

Under the table, Ki-taek surreptitiously brings his clothes to his nose for another sniff. Mr. Park continues “Anyway, that guy. So many times it feels like he’s just about to cross the line, but then he never actually does. That’s good. I like that.” But then he rants “That smell though, that crosses the line. I can even smell it in the back of the car. For fuck’s sake.” Mr. Park has finally announced that Ki-taek’s smell has crossed an invisible line. Under the table, Ki-taek hears this announcement which plunges him in despair. He realizes that he has

been judged and found wanting. In scene #105, the reason for Ki-taek's pale face at Da-song's party can be traced to this scene.

The Park family garden. (Scene #105, The Park family home, the garden, day) This scene is the most tragic scene in the movie. Mr. Park and Ki-taek both wearing an Indian costume are hiding behind a small tree together. Ki-taek wears an Indian hat and a disgruntled expression, to which Mr. Park laughing lightly says "Dear me, look at us, and our age too. How embarrassing. I'm so sorry about all this, Chauffeur Kim! I have been properly coerced into this by my wife. But it's all very simple really. In a moment, Jessica will appear with the cake and as she parades across the garden we will pretend to surprise her with these axes. When Ki-taek continues to look disgruntled, Mr. Park explains that he has made sure to include proper overtime for everything, making their relationship clear. Soon after, the climactic violence erupts.

Geun-se stabs Ki-jung as she appears with the cake. As Ki-taek attempts to assuage his daughter's wounds, his own hands become covered in blood. As the traumatized Da-song faints, Mr. Park urgently yells at Ki-taek to throw him the car key. Ki-taek takes the car key out of his pocket and tosses it to Mr. Park, but the key falls by the wrestling Choong-sook and Geun-se instead. Choong-sook barely evades a stab from Geun-se and then stabs him in his ribs. As Geun-se falls, he falls on the key. Mr. Park rushes to him and attempts to push him out of the way to retrieve the key, but as Geun-se turns over he looks up at Mr. Park and says "Hello? Mr. Park! Respect!" Mr. Park ignores him and continues with his attempts to find his key, but the terrible smell from Geun-se causes him to grab his nose. At this, Ki-taek's expression darkens. As Mr. Park holds his nose and finally finds his key and stands up, Ki-taek grabs the fallen kitchen knife and stabs him in the chest. Everyone reacts in horror, and Mr. Park falls to the ground. At this point, Ki-taek who has been staring down at the fallen Mr. Park, looks up and sees first Choong-sook, then Ki-jung, and then Yeon-kyo. Yeon-kyo loses consciousness and also falls to the ground. Ki-taek closes his eyes briefly as though dizzy, before hastily escaping from the garden. (#Scene 108-3. The Park family home and the garden, day).

The Ki-taek who was able to keep his calm while attending to his dying daughter is provoked into stabbing Mr. Park when Mr. Park reacts to Geun-se's smell. Ultimately, Ki-taek's feelings towards Geun-se is one of sympathy for his experience in surviving the bunker for 4 years. However, Mr. Park's dangerous gesture erases the differences between Ki-taek and Geun-se. This is how the tragedy unfolds. The detonator set in scene #81-1 has finally been triggered.

This is the point at which we can see Girard's scapegoat mechanism in action. Ki-jung meets her death out of nowhere at this Indian birthday party, and this needs to be explained. Scapegoats are those separate from others, marked as different or independent in some way and that is why they are selected. In these two situations, the ideal scapegoat is one who is a part of a group but at the same time doesn't belong, in other words, who is both internal and external to the group, one who exists on the border of the group (Kim 2008, 207).

However, Ki-jung does not fit this scapegoat ideal perfectly. In truth, the real object of Geun-se's wrath is Choong-sook. This is because Choong-sook is the one who murdered Moon-gwang by pushing her down the stairs to the underground bunker. Geun-se's objective was to avenge himself on Choong-sook but as he searched for her, he happened upon the luckless Ki-jung instead. Ki-jung's death is sacrificial in the sense that she takes her mother's place, but it is tragic and not cathartic because it is a symptom rather than a cure for the violence produced by the mimetic rivalry.

Conclusion

This study is an analysis of Bong Joon-ho's *Parasite* using Girard's triangular desire. The premise of this is that the subject who desires the object does not experience a naturally occurring desire but merely imitating desire through a mediator. Ki-woo's attraction for Da-hye is in imitation of Min-hyeok, his mediator. But mimetic desire is contagious. Ironically, Da-hye's attraction to Ki-woo is because of Ki-jung's existence, and this is made clear when she mistakes Ki-jung as Ki-woo's girlfriend. Ki-jung is the mediator for Da-hye's desires.

Ki-taek and Geun-se also form a triangle of desire with Mr. Park. Ki-taek ultimately imitates the behavior of Geun-se, the 4 year resident of an underground bunker. Scene #120-1 in which after committing murder, Ki-taek retreats down to the bunker in imitation of Geun-se, and writes letters to his son in morse code is the clearest example of this.

Choong-sook and Moon-gwang also form a triangle of desire with Mrs. Park, Yeon-kyo. Choong-sook later mimics Moon-gwang's patronizing airs. In this way, Geun-se and Moon-gwang both act as mediators and increase mimetic desire in Ki-taek and Choong-sook. We observe Choong-sook and Moon-gwang heaping abuse on one another in scene scene #66, and this is because Moon-gwang feels she is entitled to assert her privilege as the earlier resident, while Choong-sook feels that it would be unbearable to lose the position that she has managed to capture at great cost. It is their similarities that made it impossible for them to coexist.

If we take the family members as a group, the triangle of desire becomes an even clearer framework. As we examined, the Kims desire the Parks, through the mediation of Moon-gwang and Geun-se, and their mimetic rivalry is intensified and ultimately erases any differences between them, resulting in tragedy. Seen in this way, *Parasite* is the enactment of mimetic desire, and especially suited for reading through a Girardian lens.

Given this, one could pose the following question. Why Girard's theory of desire? In the introduction, I touched on some of the gaps in scholarship that I felt was worth exploring. Girard emphasizes the importance of differences, especially for harmonious coexistence, and when these differences are erased violence occurs. This challenges the idea that it is differences which cause conflict. Bong Joon-ho's previous work *Snowpiercer* also takes the coexistence of differences as a theme. As we examined in the textual analysis, Bong Joon-ho takes smell as a unique motif throughout the movie, and critics are generally in agreement that smell is an indicator of class. The perfume of the upper class and the smell of the lower class are at odds. Some have even pointed out the difference between semi-basement dwellings and underground bunkers.

Smell is in fact, a difficult thing to express through film. It can't be visualized or expressed as a sound. It is utterly dependent on facial expressions. And yet, Bong Joon-ho's emphasis on smell is evident throughout the movie and reveals parity between that of a semi-basement dwelling with that of an underground bunker. We conclude from our analysis that the auteur's intention is to show that while characters may appear different visually, in an olfactory sense they exhibit identical qualities. Whether scent or stink, smell is indiscriminate, and this erasure of differences result in tragedy for all three families in *Parasite*.

Notes

1. Jinhoo Park and Daegeun Lim, "The Possibility of 'Bong Joon-ho Genre': Chronotope Narrative Strategy of Film *Parasite*," *Film Studies* 84 edition, Korean Cinema Association, 2020. Ilgwon Sung, "The Anxiety of Destruction of the Middle-class and the Mundanity of Hate, and the Violence of Symbolism: Pierre Bourdieu's Structures of Relations in *Parasite*," *L'Association Culturelle Franco-Coreanne Journal* 2019 2nd ed., L'Association Culturelle Franco-Coreanne, 2019. Sungwoo Son, "The Position of Desire and Fantasy Ethics of a Film," *Film Studies* 81 ed., Korean Cinema Association, 2019. Dawoon Lee, "A Study On The Film, *Parasite*: Impossibility of Coexistence Between Classes Reenacted by Tragic Comedy," *The Research Society of Language and Literature Journal* vol. 101, The Research Society of Language and Literature, 2019. Songhee Han, "The politics of poverty representation : Based on the *Parasite*," *Media Society Journal* vol 28th 1st ed., Media Society, 2020. Manseob Heo, "The film *Parasite* from the Prism of Cultural Capital – Discovery of the Modern Habitus Class," *The Journal of Image and Cultural Contents* vol. 19. 19th ed., The Journal of Image and Cultural Contents, 2020.

2. Girard describes narratives without mediators as romantic and narratives with mediators as romanesque (Girard 1994, 27).

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