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GENDER AND CLASS IN *PARASITE*

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Year 2019–20 was the time of the film *Parasite*. The film was invited to major international film festivals and won a record number of top awards both internationally and domestically, including the Palme d'Or at the Cannes and the Best Picture and the Best Director at the Oscars. The film set new records for both the South Korean (hereafter Korean) film industry and the film's director, Bong Joon-Ho. As he mentioned in an award acceptance speech, garnering such unprecedented awards and praises as a Korean filmmaker whose country was celebrating a century of native cinema marked a poignant moment. How was *Parasite* able to captivate and enthrall global audiences when it is such a local story, full of visual, linguistic details and intonations that only the local audiences might notice? The film's genre is also hard to identify, and yet it delivers the satisfying pleasures of genre cinema. It begins as a comedy, turns into a horror film with a woman's reappearance half way through its running time, becomes a thriller and then ends as a tragic fantasy. Audiences know more than some characters, and because of this dramatic irony, the violence that unfolds at the end of the narrative is particularly provocative.

One might find the answer to the question of the world audiences' enthusiastic response to the film in the fact that *Parasite* is an intricately built text whose socially critical details emerge as more meaningful and sometimes sinister as the narrative unfolds, and also upon repeated viewing. Even though the film undoubtedly tells a Korean story, it is also about two universal themes of class and gender. This chapter will focus on the questions of class and gender in contemporary Korea that *Parasite* presents to audiences. It will explore the ways in which the film's social criticism, combined with what one might call its universal cinematic genre storytelling and local details, creates a narrative whose affective impact lingers, leading to more disturbing questions after the film ends. The film's diegetic world is a man's world, and the women in the film, as in Korea's reality

beyond the film screen, are caretakers and affective laborers who do their job as live-in housekeepers, mothers and a therapist, whose limited power is only derivative of that of the men in their lives. *Parasite* seems to conclude that contemporary Korea's neoliberal social reality is such that the haves and the have-nots are fundamentally different, and that the latter cannot cross the chasm between their two worlds no matter how well one seems to fit into the world of the haves. However, female characters' experience does not always fold so neatly into such binary notions of class difference the film presents.

The stratified spaces: up, down and in-between

This section specifically discusses the characters' central feature, their socioeconomic positions, by illustrating how the film represents the extremely stratified society of today's Korea through the different physical spaces the film's characters occupy. The fact that beyond the big screen, more and more people realize and reluctantly accept that a socioeconomic upward mobility is closer to a myth than reality indicates a systematic, rather than individual, failure. Meanwhile, *Parasite* all but flips the audience sympathy through a pivotal scene about a working-class man's smell, which is comical, tragic and visceral, all at once.

Parasite is a film about three families. The Kims, who live in a semi-basement home, receive a gift and a job opportunity which they exploit, to comic effect, to secure positions for each family member, the parents Gi-Taek and Chung-Suk, and children, Gi-Woo and Gi-Jeong. The wealthy Parks who hire them live in a spectacular mansion on a hill, and trustingly invite the Kims as domestic staff to run their home and lives. The third family, the Ohs, Geun-Sae and Mun-Gwang, exist on the very edge of the margins; so much so that Geun-Sae lives in the Parks' basement unbeknownst to them, and is mistaken for a ghost. The film opens with a tilt down and ends in the same way, pointing to a space underground, beneath where people's eyes would usually rest, hinting at the lives lived under the surface that the audiences may not know about, or are interested in looking. The film's opening scenes situate the Kims for the audiences in a semi-basement home. Through their window located, unfortunately, at their eye level, the family can see people urinating in front of their place. The shabby house swarms with stinkbugs and street noise. Since none of the Kims has an income, their home is turned into a makeshift factory, in which they fold pizza boxes as a last resort. When the fumigation gas from the streets seeps through the open windows, Gi-Taek, the father, wants to take advantage of it to kill vermin. Though the tone is comic in these opening scenes, there is a sobering hint that the family is like the bugs they are trying to exterminate, all of them existing as surplus to the system in dark, dank corners of a ruthless city that is Seoul.

While the vastly different homes of the characters deliver a universal visual message to the audiences about the haves and the have-nots, the film crucially brings up the local social issue – that of the contempt for the Other openly and callously expressed with the suffix “*chung*” or insect. Various groups – from the

old and the infirm, the poor, the migrant workers, mothers with noisy children, feminists or sexist men – *chung* has been added to their identity to show the speaker's contempt for them. The reality of Korea, unfortunately, is that citizens self-deprecatingly refer to themselves and others as insects. A few years ago, the so-called “*Hell Joseon*” discourse became popular. It demonstrated, only half-jokingly, that the upward mobility in contemporary Korea is just as impossible to achieve for the average people as it was for the non-aristocrats back in *Joseon* dynasty when people inherited their class position at birth, with little hope of changing it. Today, Koreans use the term *chung* to mock themselves rather than spend any energy criticizing the system (D. Lee 2019: 286). *Parasite* reflects neo-liberal Korea's reality, in which the individual becomes solely responsible for one's wellbeing and welfare by focusing on the private space of the characters' homes while hiding the systematic contradictions (Ibid.: 298).

Semi-basement homes first appeared in 1984 in Korea, and since then have been the metaphor of poverty (D. Lee 2019: 288). The Kims are the precariat excluded from the network of living wages and the security of a full-time employment, symbolized in the film by the stolen Wi-Fi that they could lose any moment. Their precarious living also manifests as bugs and drunkards who may appear any moment to either metaphorically or literally invade what should be their sanctuary, their home (Ibid.: 289). The fact that the house lacks a Wi-Fi connection truly, comically drives the family's desperate predicament, given the specific context of Korea, the most connected nation in the world. Another local detail is the Kims' educational background one might guess from the dialogue. The family seems to represent the particularly Korean situation of an overeducated population that exists in every class, including the poor. One can see and hear glimpses of the family's past in which Chung-Suk, the mother, was a promising young athlete and the family also had its own businesses, a Taiwan Cake franchise and a fried chicken restaurant, both of which failed. Those business failures, which routinely happen to middle-class families, led to their current situation; the parents are unemployed and the children, who want to attend college, cannot gain entrance because they cannot afford to attend the most popular means of gaining such entry in the first place, private academy. In other words, their poverty is not due to their bad choices or laziness but a result of a system failure. The patriarch Gi-Taek's words – the best plan is no plan at all because it will not lead to a failure – perhaps indicate how he is conditioned not to strive anymore, as efforts to make a good living failed over the years. The aforementioned Taiwan Cake failed almost completely for many who bought a franchise, and became synonymous with a bad franchise business model that is bound to fail (Y. Lee 2019: 241).

The system that created the situation for characters like the Kims and Geun-Sae (who also had a failed Taiwan Cake business) is nearly invisible. The film only shows individuals and not the nation nor the state. By the same token, there is no show of force by the state or the police. The police in fact briefly show up to Mirandize Gi-Woo in the hospital at the end of the film and quickly disappear

afterward; it is a world in which the system, the law and the state are not visible (Jeong 2020: 22–27). As such, the state seems unable or unwilling to help those who are not upwardly mobile or even have basic welfare. Instead, the film depicts that the individuals who share the same fate, as the unemployed or precariously employed, turn on each other as their proximity and affinity breed hostility and competition rather than empathy. Meanwhile, the haves and the have-nots typically only cross paths with each other through hierarchical networks of labor relations as employee and employer. This is the sole reason why Mr. Park must reckon with his driver's smell, which he describes to his wife as the "subway smell," emanating from a space that people of all walks of life pass through, and is also home to the homeless population. Mr. Park, the CEO of a globally recognized company, cannot imagine where and how his driver lives, so he explains the offending smell, the one thing about his driver that "crosses the line" and upsets him, in those terms. But his wife does not know the smell because it has been too long since she took the subway.

Mr. Park's struggle to describe the working class Other's odor, invoking the familiar images of drying radish, boiling rags and, finally, the subway, reverses the direction of the audience empathy and identification that might have been building up to this point in the narrative. The Kims' plotting to install themselves as the Parks' domestic staff seems callous and manipulative, and the audiences may feel more sympathy for the rich Parks. But at this moment, when the local audiences realize that Mr. Park is talking contemptuously not only about Gi-Taek's smell but their own (as most Koreans routinely take the subway), they suddenly face an interesting dilemma of switching their emotional alliance and siding with the Kims, mere moments after watching what might be their murder of Mun-Gwang, the original housekeeper they drove out. Interestingly, Gi-Jeong immediately recognizes the smell that her parents wonder about, after Da-Song, Mr. Park's young son, innocently points out in an earlier scene that the family members all smell alike. She defines it as none other than the semi-basement smell and declares that it will not go away until they move out of their home.

The climactic sequence following Mun-Gwang's sudden reappearance deserves a closer look, as it is a key turning point in the narrative. It is also a moment when the director's manipulation and hybridization of film genres point to the central conflicts involving the three families. The film that begins as a breezy comedy suddenly becomes a suspense thriller involving a woman, an unwanted visitor, from the past. Mun-Gwang arrives, sodden and disheveled, on a dark, rainy night, just as the Kims are celebrating the taste of the good life in the homeowners' absence. The stately home's usually sun-drenched living room is now painted in dark colors, and the color palette not only gets darker but also dirty, as Mun-Gwang leads stunned Chung-Suk down to the basement which she did not know existed. There lies Geun-Sae, who has been helplessly waiting for his wife and food. The physical struggle with and the captivity of the Ohs that follow, shot in a stark chiaroscuro fashion and low angles, turn up the tension.

By this point, the film's visual and narrative tone has changed to a different genre from what the audiences first expected and experienced.

The interesting twist in all this is the introduction of the new character Geun-Sae and the hidden space of the basement, whose existence no one other than the Ohs knew about. This promises new possibilities of the plot's direction for the second half of the film, as well as giving new hints of the theme, parasite. Upon discovering the "parasite" living in the basement, Geun-Sae, one might wonder if the protagonist, Ki-Taek, may also become one. By the end of the narrative, this turns into reality as he seemingly vanishes into thin air after killing Mr. Park, by going into hiding in the home's basement just as Geun-Sae did before him. As for the character Geun-Sae who fled his debtors into the self-imposed exile four years ago, and the visual design of the basement, they are both grotesque and pathetic. The space has used condom wrappers and photographs of his heroes, including one of Mr. Park, whom he worships as his provider. All this is mixing in the windowless apartment with the paraphernalia indicating that he tried to study for the bar exam. At some point, he has given up on leaving the basement, and now pleads with Ki-Taek to let him live on in the space.

In this stratified world where the rich and the poor have parallel lives whose details are unfathomable to each other, connection is everything, and it is no doubt a resource whose access is also unequal for everyone. It is Ki-Woo's connection to a rich friend Min that allows him to step inside the Parks' family home. Once Ki-Woo gets a job as the daughter's tutor, the family plots together to become the younger child Da-Song's art therapist and teacher, and the family's driver and housekeeper. In order to do so, they not only forge official documents but also manipulate to get the existing driver and housekeeper fired. The Kim family unity, which allows them to move as one, and their refusal to blame each other for their poverty, is crucial to the narrative. In each case, the three families in the film look out for each other, but only for each other, which may be the unfortunate but true reflection of Korea's familism.

The deaths of working-class women and a son's fantasy

This section further examines the intersection of class and gender in *Parasite* and argues that the class difference manifests as nothing less than a difference of meaning itself for the film's characters. In other words, same material reality takes on vastly different meanings for the rich and the poor. The most significant such narrative moments reside in how characters, who belong in diverse classes, enact or use assumptions about gender, which the film's female characters illustrate particularly well. Importantly, this section will argue that *Parasite* is a film that reveals the unpretty truth of women's worth in the twenty-first century Korea.

The Kims are unusual because the family utterly lacks any hierarchy. The parents are also proud of their children's ability to defraud others rather than feel alarmed by it, and they do not seem to mind at all when their children use

expletives in front of them, either. In fact, most characters in the film seem to lack any sense of guilt or empathy; Mr. Park sees his son's tutor Gi-Jeong getting stabbed by Geun-Sae but demands the car keys from Gi-Taek, to take his son to the hospital because the child fainted after seeing the stabbing and the "ghost" again; Mun-Gwang and her husband first plead with, then attack the Kims when they realize the other party's deception of the Parks; and the Kims lie and fake their way into the Parks' home and feel quite proud of their achievement rather than guilt. The film's move to turn the Kims' manipulation of the Parks into comedy is perhaps a social commentary on the fact that the playing field is uneven, and that the audiences might be loath to condemn their actions because of the family's desperate situation.

In this vein, *Parasite* shows that depending on one's socioeconomic position, same things can mean tremendously different things, such as the torrential rain, the Scholar's Stone and even the notion of an open space. The stone from Min is a rare and expensive gift to the Kims, but it is only an object taking up space in his house. This is symbolic of the two young men's enormously different circumstances in life. And while the Parks use their beautifully landscaped yard as an extension of their living room, holding parties and letting young Da-Song enjoy sleeping in (safe, manicured) nature in a tent, the space outside of the Kims' house is dirty and noisy. Also, the torrential rain that was a temporary inconvenience for the Parks that ruined a camping trip means an existential threat to the Kims, whose low-lying neighborhood gets submerged in overflowing sewage water. Back in their own reality, having fled the Parks' home leaving the Ohs bound and gagged in the basement, they struggle to grab what they can of their belongings in the neck-deep filthy water, and then get dressed in donated clothing in the temporary shelter. They go back to work the next day, to take care of Da-Song's impromptu birthday party, meant to make up for the rained-out camping trip. The camera captures the dramatically different emotions on the faces of Mrs. Park and Gi-Taek in this sequence; Mrs. Park chirps to a friend on the phone that the rain was a godsend because it brought out such clear skies while Gi-Taek stands next to her, exhausted from lack of sleep, dressed in donated clothing. It is telling that even in the midst of the flooding and the ensuing chaos Gi-Woo holds onto his lucky stone like a talisman, saying that it is sticking to him, while Gi-Jeong swiftly realizes that nothing can be saved from the flooded home and chooses to smoke her last cigarette. As usual, she seems the quickest in assessing reality, while Gi-Woo's lingering attachment to the lucky stone foreshadows the film's fantastic ending and his impossible plan.

Gi-Woo's "plan" at the end is to make money and simply buy the Parks' house, so that all Gi-Taek needs to do is just walk up the stairs from his hiding place in the basement. The stairs that prominently feature in the narrative symbolize the difference between classes. The Kims, the Parks and the Ohs are divided by sets of stairs. The stairs leading to the second floor in the Parks' home are also a backdrop to important scenes, including one in which Mrs. Park witnesses her housekeeper's coughing fit brought on by tuberculosis (or so she is led to believe).

It is also here that several characters hide and eavesdrop on others, furthering the plot, as one often sees in melodrama and thriller genre films. But also significantly, it is through a series of stairs that the Kims return to their semi-basement home, moments after enjoying a party as though they were the owners of the Parks' beautiful home during the family's absence. Through the camera movement one can see them walk down innumerable sets of stairs, through a tunnel, and still continue to go down, downward. These tracking shots visualize the seemingly unbridgeable gap between the Kims and the Parks that seems both physical and experiential. And indeed, as the filmmaker said in an interview, barring some miracle, it would take Gi-Woo about 547 years of saving his entire salary to buy the Parks' house (CBS 2019). Even so, the Ohs are located further below than the Kims.

In their delirious enjoyment of having the Parks' house to themselves for a brief moment, the Kims imitate their lifestyle. In the film it seems that the one who imitates or repeats what others said previously is lower in the power hierarchy. Gi-Woo imitates his friend Min and yells at the urinating man, but he does not wield the same kind of authority. He also repeats Min's words when he tells his family that he will formally begin dating Da-Hye (the daughter of the wealthy Parks) after she enters college and he is even thinking of marrying her. Meanwhile, Mrs. Park is awed by the insight and expertise of Gi-Jeong pretending to be "Jessica from Illinois," who uncannily guesses that something traumatic happened to Da-Song a year earlier, and soon, she is echoing "–phrenia" when Gi-Jeong speaks of a "schizophrenia zone" in Da-Song's painting. Such moments reveal how this clever young woman is in charge, while Mrs. Park seems comparatively naïve and innocent. The difference between the two is that one is poor and cannot afford to be innocent in worldly matters such as potential job opportunities, while the other may be encouraged to remain innocent. Well aware of such difference, Gi-Jeong shows utter contempt for Mrs. Park's naiveté.

However, Gi-Taek does not seem to think of class difference as something fundamental. Mr. Park bristles when Gi-Taek "crosses the line" by commenting about his private life and position as a husband and father. For Gi-Taek, who tries to make a human connection – or a man-to-man connection – these thwarted attempts are revealing moments when he sees that Mr. Park does not consider him as his equal on any level. On the fateful rainy night when the Parks unexpectedly return home from their camping trip, the family has to scurry under the coffee table to hide like cockroaches just as Chung-Suk jokingly predicted. Gi-Taek, while hiding from the Parks under the table with his children, not only overhears the Parks' having sex but also Mr. Park contemptuously commenting on his smell. Thus, a feeling of rage and humiliation builds in him, leading to his eventual murder, an act of class vengeance. Gi-Taek's mistake was making the assumption that at least as a father and husband, he could be equal with Mr. Park, a notion that would not occur to his employer.

While poor characters arguably live off the wealthy Parks in a parasitic way, especially in Geun-Sae's case since he does not provide anything in return such

as his labor, it might be argued that the rich also live off the poor by demanding affective labor on top of the service that they pay for. Mrs. Park, for instance, calls her housekeepers *eonni* (older sister), which is not typical. Chung-Suk, who replaces the live-in housekeeper Mun-Gwang, is the new “older sister” to Mrs. Park, who seems to want a conversation companion, as well as domestic help. It is interesting to note that Mun-Gwang also calls Chung-Suk older sister when she pleads with her to help her and Geun-Sae, which shows that the seemingly friendly, familial term actually indicates one’s desire to get something out of the other. Though it is never verbalized, one of the most important conditions for employment for the domestic staff is the affective labor to prioritize the employer’s needs before their own. One can see this in the Parks’ blithe assumption that it is perfectly fine for the staff to give up their day off to work on their son’s birthday party because they are getting paid for it. This demand by the rich for the poor to always create an environment so that they can feel comfortable and content provides the context of the climactic pandemonium at Da-Song’s birthday party, in which murders occur.

In order to cater to their son’s fetishistic tastes, the Parks ask Gi-Jeong, the child’s favorite, to carry out the cake and play the fair maiden who is going to be attacked by Mr. Park and Gi-Taek, the “Indians” wearing authentic Native American headdresses. Da-Song will be the hero who saves Gi-Jeong. This is a not-so-subtle reference to the ways in which people around the world consume typical images of Americana, via the stereotypical gender role and material objects, such as teepees, tomahawks, arrows and feather headdresses. This scenario, tailor-made for Mr. Park’s privileged child, has symbolic meanings that alert the audiences to the identity of the real parasites in the narrative, and perhaps in the life beyond the big screen, which includes the wealthy, and also settler colonizers and imperial forces that the United States represent. That both the villains and the hero in this little drama are Native Americans points to Korea’s position vis-à-vis the United States.

Furthermore, the elite older generation, such as Gi-Woo’s friend Min’s grandfather, the collector of the Scholar’s Stone who attended the prestigious Korean Military Academy and Namgung, the original owner and architect of the Parks’ art piece of a house, invokes images of the Korean War generation and even of the native elite during the colonial period. There is a glimpse at the complex connection between 2019, a historical moment of this film which is described as “post” everything, -colonial, -Cold War, -modern and -democratization, and the earlier periods of struggle and strife that cast a long shadow into the present. But the intertwined relationship between these disparate historical periods does not get much spotlight. The film’s two thematic threads of class and gender make such connection more visible, as the dominant powers that be, patriarchy and the socioeconomic elite, have not changed despite the progresses made and encapsulated in the conditions that the present moment supposedly has overcome, e.g. colonialism, Cold War, modernity, and the struggle for equality or democratization. Min’s character seems to be the natural heir to the position occupied by

the likes of Namgung, the famous architect. Min probably asked Gi-Woo to take over his tutoring position because unlike his social peers in college, Gi-Woo, an aspiring university student from a poor family, is unlikely to seduce Da-Hye. He was wrong. For Min, Da-Hye is an investment he wants to protect in his absence, while she is a stepping-stone in the upward socioeconomic mobility for Gi-Woo. Either way, she is symbolically important.

When Gi-Taek comments that the Parks are incredibly gullible, and despite the fact that they are rich, they are so nice, Chung-Suk replies that it is because they are rich that they are so nice. She aptly points out that the moneyed class has little to be upset about, since all the little wrinkles in the everyday life are “ironed out” by money. Domestic workers and their (ideally) invisible efforts behind the scene smooth the way for the elites such as the Parks to enjoy their clean, orderly and catered lifestyle. Mr. Park seems aware of this, which is why Chung-Suk was hired so quickly after his wife let go of Mun-Gwang. Mrs. Park’s innocence, as Chung-Suk implies, is not something that the (potential) employees can afford: Gi-Jeong, Chung-Suk and Mun-Gwang, for instance, cannot be innocent or unknowing because their knowledge of the higher class Other can provide them their livelihood. In an ironic moment in the film, Gi-Jeong as Jessica wryly smiles to herself when Mrs. Park calls her too innocent. Gi-Jeong, as the audiences know by this point in the narrative, is a central player in her family’s plot to make a living off the Parks’ naiveté and trust. Such moments when the audiences sympathize with the rich (and nice) characters like Mrs. Park, rather than with Gi-Jeong and her family, bring up an uncomfortable question, left unanswered in the film, whether poverty destroys one’s sense of right and wrong. The audiences are left to wonder, disconcertingly, if money not only means purchase power, but also is a requirement to protect one’s integrity and morality in today’s neoliberal Korea.

The film exposes the grim truth of women’s worth, as either something entirely fabricated (Jessica/Gi-Jeong), voluntarily, selflessly given as a quasi-mother/wife to an infantilized husband (Mun-Gwang), reluctantly participating as a domestic worker (Chung-Suk), or blithely enjoying the derivative power of one’s husband and father (Mrs. Park and her daughter Da-Hye). Mun-Gwang’s relationship to her husband Geun-Sae, whom she bottle-feeds and cares for in such a way that infantilizes him, perversely highlights women’s role as caretakers. Mun-Gwang’s character shows how women can sacrifice their labor in order to maintain a heteronormative relationship. Male audiences and critics might view her as a traditional good wife, rather than consider how one-sided and bizarre the relationship has become. Mun-Gwang is certainly loyal and resourceful, and also takes control of making a living and providing for her husband, but like Gi-Jeong who also claims agency for herself and the narrative control, she gets killed.

Mrs. Park is at the top of the socioeconomic totem pole but she is still desperately afraid of displeasing her husband, of being caught making the mistake of allowing a tuberculosis-ridden housekeeper into her home and endangering her family. If her husband finds out, she says to Gi-Taek, she will be “hanged

and quartered,” and swears him to secrecy about the real reason she is suddenly letting go of Mun-Gwang. This scene reveals that it is a man’s world after all, and women can, at best, enjoy the derivative power and authority of the men in their lives. Mr. Park has the power and authority as the patriarch and a globally respected CEO. As such, the powers of capital and patriarchy are concentrated on him. The narrative shows that even though he works in a progressive industry, innovatively creating world-class digital products, and is a cool, young CEO, he is still very much the patriarch who is dominant in his home, even with the three family dogs.

As for the Parks’ daughter Da-Hye, she seems unsure of her position in the family. She is fully aware that her parents’ attention is focused on her little brother. She gets angry, therefore, when no one asks her if she wants the *ram-don* snack that her brother, Da-Song, rejects. This incident is indicative of her position in the family as an afterthought, unlike her younger brother whose every whim is catered. She also seems insecure of Gi-Woo’s affection for her. But she is in fact tremendously valuable to the Kims, who dream of eventually becoming the Parks’ in-laws, hoping that their son Gi-Woo will marry Da-Hye, to have a permanent access to her family’s wealth and social position. In other words, this high school girl is valuable as a social, economic token of exchange, as an anthropological perspective has recognized women’s position in various societies and cultures (Lévi-Strauss 1969).

Conclusion

Since his 2009 film *Mother*, Bong’s films *Snow Piercer* (2013) and *Okja* (2017) imagined subversion and revolution, and especially in *Okja*, the director seemed to indicate a revolutionary possibility through the figure of a girl. But such a tendency disappears in *Parasite*: In fact, Bong’s latest film shows that history is a male-centric narrative and any criticism of the system ends up being a story of a filial son (H. Son 2019: 61). Seen in this light, it is significant that the film kills off Gi-Jeong, a self-possessed young woman in control of the narrative who momentarily claims the agency to direct the film’s plot, while Gi-Woo is spared to live on, fantasizing that one day he will own the beautiful house and that his father could simply walk up from the basement to join him and his mother in its front lawn.

Parasite provides a trenchant social critique through a hybrid of genres and rich details. It also leads one to ask fundamental yet troubling questions about the nature of the larger structures in which individuals live, about class and patriarchy. Will the pervasive and amorphous nature of the line, indeed a wall, between different classes in contemporary Korea (and other neoliberal societies) ever dissolve? And are individuals forever trapped in the power structure that maintains and normalizes the patriarchal order? The deaths of two female characters, Gi-Jeong and Mun-Gwang, whose actions shape and pivot the film’s plot and meaning, are especially revealing in light of these questions that remain unanswered.

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