

Parasite (2019) Boong Joon-Ho

P Michell, 2022

Synopsis

Meet the Park Family: the picture of aspirational wealth. And the Kim Family, rich in street smarts but not much else. Be it chance or fate, these two houses are brought together and the Kims sense a golden opportunity. Masterminded by college-aged Ki-woo, the Kim children expediently install themselves as tutor and art therapist, to the Parks. Soon, a symbiotic relationship forms between the two families. The Kims provide "indispensable" luxury services while the Parks obliviously bankroll their entire household. When a parasitic interloper threatens the Kims' newfound comfort, a savage, underhanded battle for dominance breaks out, threatening to destroy the fragile ecosystem between the Kims and the Parks. [Neon]

(ex Metacritic.com)

Multi award winning film from South Korea. Squid Game, also from South Korea, topped Netflix viewing for quite some time. At one stage three of the top ten Netflix TV shows were from South Korea!

Creative Talent

Boong Joon Ho – Director, Writer, Producer (17 credits)

Noted for Snowpiercer (2013) - a post-apocalyptic train with 'recused' humanity - travels through a snow bound landscape.

In today's capitalistic society there are ranks and castes that are invisible to the eye. We keep them disguised and out of sight and superficially look down on class hierarchies as a relic of the past, but the reality is that there are class lines that cannot be crossed. I think that this film (Parasite, 2019) depicts the inevitable cracks that appear when two classes brush up against each other in today's increasingly polarized society.

I just hope that Parasite gives audiences a lot to think about. It is in parts funny, frightening and sad, and if it makes viewers feel like sharing a drink and talking over all the ideas they had while watching it, I'll wish for nothing more.

Favourite films [on Truffaut's The 400 Blows (1959)]: *The most beautiful feature film debut in the history of cinema.*

Wes Anderson's films are delightfully strange and endearing.

As many of the creative people are unknown – **Selected Trivia** gives more info.

The Parks' house, said in the film to be designed by a fictional architect named Namgoong Hyeonja, was a set completely built from scratch.

Stairs and vertical structures are a motif that runs through the entire film, which highlights the social divide between Parks and Kims. In fact, the director Bong Joon-ho called the project a "staircase movie" while filming it

Ki-woo's job, at-home tutor, was chosen because director [Bong Joon Ho](#) realized that sadly the job is the only way that families from two extreme ends of the class spectrum in modern-day South Korea can cross their paths convincingly in the story arc.

[Bong Joon Ho](#) was particularly happy with the Best Editing and Best Production Design Oscar nominations for the film as he felt the great technicians and masters working in the Korean film industry were getting recognized for the first time. However, these were the only Oscar categories that the film was nominated for but didn't win.

Won the Palme d'Or at the 2019 Cannes Film Festival, the first Korean film to ever do so.

The third film to win both the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival and the Academy Award for Best Picture, after [The Lost Weekend](#) (1945) and [Marty](#) (1955). Of the three films, only this and the latter won unanimously at Cannes.

According to editor [Jinmo Yang](#), he edited the film in Final Cut Pro 7 - an editing program that Apple stopped supporting in 2011, on a computer that hasn't had a software update since 2014. He received an Oscar nomination for his work.

The film makes several nods to [Alfred Hitchcock](#) throughout. Stairs are used as a motif, voyeurism is used as characters watch scenes through windows 14 times, and (most obviously) there is a brief glimpse of an out of place Alfred Hitchcock collection in the Parks' home.

Real trees are expensive, so half of the ones seen encircling the Parks' back yard are created via CG composites.

Two major New York Times film critics were so profoundly impressed with the actresses' performances in this film that in their December 2019 article asserting who the 2020 Oscar nominees "Should Be," one of them, [Manohla Dargis](#) opined for "Best Supporting Actress," 4 of the 5 nominees should be ALL four female performers from "Parasite." The other critic, [A.O. Scott](#) thought 3 of the "Parasite" actresses should be so nominated (excluding [Jang Hye-jin](#)).

Architects in Asia utilize Feng shui in their designs. The first few minutes of the film are devoted to showing how the Kim family lives in a T junction, a road formation that can lead to extreme poverty or extreme wealth.

Reviews

Parasite

[Tweekums](#) 26 October 2020

exIMDB.com

This Oscar winning Korean film is centred on the Kim family; they live in a distinctly downmarket neighbourhood and struggle to earn enough money. One day a friend of Ki-woo, the son, tells him of a job opportunity; the wealthy Park family need an English tutor for their teenaged daughter. Equipped with forged qualifications he gets the job, not only that he

suggests that his sister, Ki-jung, who he introduces as a cousin of a friend would be the ideal art tutor for their son. It isn't long before Father, Ki-taek, and mother, Chung-sook, are also employed as driver and housekeeper... all this is done in a way that doesn't give away that they know each other. Things are looking up for the Kims as they enjoy their new situation; then the old house keeper, who they got fired, returns and their new success is threatened in a surprising way.

This film is hard to pigeon-hole; it is a comedy that provides plenty of laughs; it is a social commentary of the vast difference in wealth in Korean society; it toys with horror tropes; there is some romance; and has violent moments. It could have turned out to be a real mess but the elements blend together almost perfectly. The cast does a really fine job making the characters believable even when the situation is far-fetched. For the most part it is set within the Park's large, modern house; the only other location of note is the contrastingly small basement flat the Kim's call home... the comparison emphasises how different the families' circumstances are. The story provides some twists, which I won't spoil here; these often lead to a shift in tone... even when things turn darker in tone there are still laughs to be had. Director Bong Joon-ho, who also co-wrote the story, does a great job as the film treads the fine line between brilliance and silliness... always keeping on just the right side. Overall I'd definitely recommend this to anybody looking for something a little different.

Parasite review – a gasp-inducing masterpiece

In Bong Joon-ho's flawless tragicomedy, a poor yet united family bluff their way into the lives of a wealthy Seoul household

Mark Kermode, *Observer film critic*

@KermodeMovie

The Guardian, Tue 11 Feb 2020

The ideal way to experience South Korean auteur Bong Joon-ho's awards-garlanded, international box-office smash is with as little prior knowledge as possible. So if you're reading this before seeing the film, and you've managed to avoid the whirlwind of publicity it has attracted since winning the Palme d'Or last May, it may be simpler to just stop and head straight to the cinema. Because, at the risk of adding to the hype, Parasite really is the kind of remarkable experience that makes modern movie-going such a joy. I saw it for the fourth time last week and I'm now desperate to view the black-and-white version that Bong recently unveiled at the Rotterdam film festival.

Described by its creator as “a comedy without clowns, a tragedy without villains”, Parasite is more Shakespearean than Hitchcockian – a tale of two families from opposite ends of the socioeconomic spectrum, told with the trademark genre-fluidity that has seen Bong's back catalogue slip seamlessly from murder mystery, via monster movie, to dystopian future-fantasy and beyond. We first meet the Kim family, headed by father Ki-taek (Song Kang-ho) and mother Chung-sook (Chang Hye-jin), in their lowly semi-basement home, hunting for stray wifi coverage and leaving their windows open to benefit from bug-killing street fumigation. They have nothing but one another and a shared sense of hard-scrabble entrepreneurship. So when son Ki-woo (Choi Woo-shik) is faced with an unexpected

opportunity to home-tutor a rich schoolgirl, he gets his gifted artist sister, Ki-jung (Park So-dam), to forge a college certificate, bluffing his way into the job and into the home of the Park family.

An architectural wonder perched high above the slums of Seoul, with views not of urinating drunks but of luxurious lawns and starlit skies, this wealthy house is everything the Kims' pokey dwelling is not: elegant, angular and weirdly isolated. While aloof businessman Mr Park (Lee Sun-kyun) is at work, his anxious, uptight wife, Yeon-kyo (Cho Yeo-jeong), tends to their coquettish daughter and hyperactive young son. It's a lifestyle that relies upon hired help: tutors, a chauffeur and, most importantly, a devoted housekeeper Moon-gwang (Lee Jung-eun), who stayed with the building after its original architect owner moved out. Spying an opening, Ki-woo (newly dubbed "Kevin") realises that his own family could easily fill such roles, and hatches a plan that will inveigle the Kims into the privileged lives and home of the Parks.

Beyond the deliberate ambiguity of the title (which, like Jordan Peele's oddly comparable *Us*, cuts both ways), Bong once again foregrounds a distrust of wealth and authority that has been a recurrent feature of his work since his 2003 breakout *Memories of Murder*, continuing through films as diverse as *The Host*, *Mother*, *Okja* and, of course, *Snowpiercer*, to which *Parasite* contains several knowing nods.

The Kim family may live in sewage-flooded squalor, but they are clearly every bit as smart as, and a lot more united than, the Parks, who turn their noses up at the smell of "people who ride the subway". Similarly, while the smug Mr Park is habitually depicted ascending the stairs of his ultra-modern home, and the Kims are pictured scampering *down* city steps to their own underworld apartment, it's clear who holds the dramatic high ground.

When it comes to deception, too, those on the upper rungs of the societal ladder are as practised as those upon whom they look down. In a world of vertical non-integration, *Parasite* finds gasp-inducing depths lurking beneath even the most apparently placid surfaces. Yet Bong is careful to keep his opposing forces keenly balanced, creating the cinematic equivalent of a Rorschach inkblot test in which the audience is invited to decide for themselves the precise meaning of these strangely symmetrical apparitions.

Perfectly accompanying the film's tonal shifts is Jung Jae-il's magnificently modulated music, which moves from the sombre piano patterns of the curtain-raiser, through the mini symphony of *The Belt of Faith* to the cracked craziness of cues in which choric vocals do battle with a musical saw. Just as the action can segue from slapstick to horror and back – sometimes within the space of a single scene – so Jung plays things straight even as madness beckons, ensuring that the underlying elements of pathos are amplified rather than undercut by pastiche.

For me, *Parasite* is best described as a melancholy ghost story, albeit one disguised beneath umpteen layers of superbly designed (and impeccably photographed) generic mutations. Thrillingly played by a flawless ensemble cast who hit every note and harmonic resonance of Bong and co-writer Han Jin-won's multitonal script, it's a tragicomic masterclass that will get under your skin and eat away at your cinematic soul.

Bong Joon-ho's *Parasite* Is an Acid-Black Comedy That Eats at the Mind

MOVIE REVIEW OCT. 11, 2019 (ex Vulture.com)

Twice in Bong Joon-ho's acid black comedy *Parasite* (which won the Palme d'Or at this year's Cannes Film Festival), characters exclaim "That's a metaphor!" about something they're looking at — which I took to be Bong poking fun at himself, as if Wes Anderson's characters were to announce that they live in a big dollhouse or Quentin Tarantino's that their existence is a masturbatory farrago of trash-movie tropes. The South Korean director thinks in metaphor. It's his *métier*. Consider the first shot of *Parasite* (the title itself is a metaphor): what looks to be an empty birdcage draped with socks in front of a window that's partially below street level. In this apartment, all dreams of flight have been extinguished (the socks reinforce the connection to the dirt), while the low vantage signals exclusion — a mocking one when the residents, the miserably destitute Kim family, have their view blocked by a drunken yuppie pissing against a wall. Stuck underground, the Kims — father, mother, teenage son, and 20-ish daughter — writhe over the depths to which they've sunk, over their lack of connection. (They press against the ceiling to try to get a Wi-Fi signal.) They desperately need to attach themselves to something high off the ground. They long for airier metaphors.

The premise of *Parasite* is that the Kims, with guile and wiles, manage to insinuate themselves into the household of the wealthy Park family. The deception begins when a pal of the teenage son, Ki-woo (Choi Woo-shik), heads abroad and prevails on him to take over as tutor for the Parks' daughter, Da-hye (Jung Ji-so). Though Ki-woo isn't even in college, the subterfuge is easy; the pampered Parks are exquisitely gullible. When the younger Park boy, who suffers from a version of PTSD that turns out to have a strong metaphorical component, requires a therapist to work with him on art projects, Ki-woo puts the family in touch with his sister, Ki-jung (Park So-dam), though, to allay suspicions, he doesn't identify her *as such*. In short order, Ki-jung frames the Park chauffeur to get him fired, after which Ki-woo suggests their father, Ki-taek (Song Kang-ho), as a replacement, though he doesn't identify him *as such*; and soon they hoodwink the Parks into jettisoning their longtime housekeeper and hiring the Kim matriarch, Chung-sook (Jang Hye-jin), though she's not identified *as such*. In the gated Park manse — above the street, surrounded by trees, serenaded by birds — the incognito Kims feel affluent. When the Parks go on a camping trip, the Kims move in and savor the luxury and peace. They think they're a natural fit.

The first half of *Parasite* goes down easily — maybe too easily. The Kims' successes are too pat for suspense (is Ki-jung really that sensitive an art therapist out of the gate?), and Bong's frames are over-controlled. It seems like a one-joke movie. But then the bottom falls out of the joke (metaphorically and literally), and the tragedy of this jury-rigged society manifests itself in rage and blood.

It turns out — this could be construed as a spoiler, but it cracks the movie open and needs to be reckoned with — that there are people even lower than the Kims, people whose existence is entirely subterranean, who stink worse of mildew and excrement, whom the Kims must now keep down the way others have kept them down. By then, Bong has left social realism far behind and moved into horror-movie territory, into haunted houses, buried secrets, pop-up skeletons. As the tension builds, he veers into farce; the film's centerpiece is a marvel of split-second timing in which every prop — an illuminated tent on the lawn, a walkie-talkie, a

flickering lightbulb — resonates like mad. The masterstroke? The sequence ends in melancholy, as Kim Sr. realizes (while hiding under a sofa, inches from discovery) that he was never as omnipotent as he thought. The Parks have been nice to him, his wife, and his children, but they can afford to be.

You could never call Bong subtle. After a symbolic rain causes the symbolic sewers to overflow and symbolically flood the Kims' symbolic basement apartment, Kim Sr. is forced to perform at the Parks' fancy house party in a symbolic Native American headdress. The climax, though surprising in its splatter quotient, is telegraphed.

What keeps you rapt in *Parasite* is the visual wit — every shot distills the movie's themes — and the richness of the characters and performances: Song's stricken expression as Kim Sr. is driven to murder by class resentment, Lee Jeong-eun's swift transformation from a calmly efficient housekeeper to a keening madwoman, and Choi's eloquent helplessness as his teenage protagonist watches this new world order gorily combust. Bong has a gift for creating believably interdependent families, each its own ecosystem. The temptation must have been strong to make the wealthy Parks cartoons of privilege, but they're actually likable. Jo Yeon-jeong's mother is a wispy, fragile beauty who's in over her head amid the opulence, while Lee Sun-kyun's Park Sr. is the perfect capitalist cover boy, trim and focused in all things. He does not have peripheral vision, but he doesn't need it to thrive in his world. You could say he functions better without it.

At the heart of *Parasite* is the most gnawing evolutionary fear of all, the inability to protect one's family. Parents work to save their children but lose them, as children lose their parents and wives their husbands. The bonds are firm but can withstand only so much pressure before they fracture. Who are the real parasites? The poor who attach themselves to the rich or the rich who suck the marrow of the poor? Or is the system itself the parasite, drawing its energy from the turbulent interaction between rich and poor? As in Jordan Peele's even more outlandish *Us*, the central metaphor eats into the mind. We are feeding on each other. Comeuppance comes up from below.