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Intro to Film

Final Project

Camera Angles and Lighting on Distinguishing Characters in Film



In many different films regardless of genre, camera angles and lighting play a huge role in how successful a film would be. Many filmmakers use different angles and certain lighting in their films to make subtle differences between characters. Instead of telling us in the narration of the film, about which character is the protagonist and villain, there will be distinct differences in the angles cameras use when each character is on scene, as well as change lighting. These elements in a film really help push the main storyline along and also help with the continuity of the film itself.

Camera Angles

There are many different camera angles that are used in a certain film. There are three main factors to discuss when talking about camera angles, the framing or shot length, the angle of the shot and if there is any movement during the shot. All three of these factors also play a role in how characters are viewed by the audience in the film.

In the film *The Godfather* the director does a great job at using different camera angles to make the distinction between who is considered a “good” character and who would be considered a “bad” character. Francis Coppola makes use of extreme close ups together with low angles to demonstrate the power and subtly intrigues a sense of fear in the viewer. For example, one of the opening scenes of the Don, there was an extreme close up of only his chin, mouth, and drink in hand, and using that combined with the low angle you really got a sense of power and fear without having the character say anything or even move. Another example from this film that goes in hand with creating this sense in the viewers would be the use of high angles. Coupled with the extreme close up and the low angle, the High angle can also mold the judgement from the audience. Also in the film *The Godfather*, there was a scene when the Don was discussing favors with people that would come to him during his daughter’s wedding. During these scenes whenever the camera would show the person talking to the Don, asking for favors they Coppola would use high angles to demonstrate a sense of weakness in the people coming to Don but at the same time there was a sense of dominance and power that viewers felt when looking at the Don.

In the same Film, The Godfather, there is also use of camera angles to make characters look un-assuming or “Friendly”. The strategic use of medium shots and close up shots along with Eye level angles really help portray this. In one scene where Michael first comes home from War and shows up to his sister’s wedding, they give Michael a medium shot of him smiling in his army suite alongside of his girlfriend. This really gives viewers a sense that Michael is an honest hardworking man who does not want any part of the family business of racketeering. Another example would be close up shot of Michael when he is at the Hospital visiting his father, Don Corleone. In this scene Coppola uses the close up shot of Michael coupled with a High angle when looking at the Don. This makes viewers look at Michael with a sense of power mixed with a sense of good nature. The close up of Michael in this scene is really significant, because it simply just shows Michaels face and with that you are really able to feel his pain when looking at his father lying in the hospital bed. The angles used in this film really help push the storyline along while doing so; the viewer is able to subconsciously distinguish the change in power as well as the change in character persona. The example of strategic angles we see in the film *Witness* is the murder scene. In this scene we see that the cinematographer uses a low perspective angle during the murder and while looking at Danny Glovers character. He uses this angle to create a sense of innocence and at the same time it creates a sense of helplessness, because we are seeing Danny Glover as someone bigger and more ominous by having the camera low.

Lighting

 Lighting in film goes hand in hand with the camera angles that are used. The Angle of the shot has to match the lighting to give the audience a sense of continuity. Lighting is also a major way that directors are able to mold the viewers mind subtly during the film. Lighting is used in a plethora of ways, but when accompanied with the right camera angle you are able to really distinguish character roles.

The film *Witness* does a good job at differentiating characters using lighting. In this film both natural lighting and artificial lighting are used effectively. The use of artificial lighting was more prevalent in the early scenes where they were located in the city of Philadelphia; I believe the director did this really to put the hustle and bustle of the big city to the fore front. While using the artificial lighting the use of back lighting as well as side lighting was used on Danny Glover’s character during the murder scene to really create a sense of fear and mystery in the viewers. Natural Lighting came into play while the setting changed onto the farm of the Amish. Director Peter Weir does this to make the distinction between city and rural areas, making the Farm of the Amish more natural and simple. With the use of natural lighting there are still ways that Weir was able to under lighting and side lighting to make the distinction between “good” and “bad”. The scene where Book and the officer Schaeffer were in a standoff and the Schaeffer had Rachel hostage with the gun pointed to her, the director tries his best to keep Schaeffer’s face darker while making sure that Book is in the light. This helps viewers really look at these two characters as polar opposites even though there are both working for the same department.

With the combination with both Lighting and angles you are able to make subconscious decisions as to who to really pull for in a film and who to look negatively at despite narration or actions. *The Godfather* does an amazing job at this, the same opening scene where the Don is in his office and taking favors from people who ask. There is an extreme close-up of his face accompanied with that extreme close is the use of under-lighting. Along with the angle itself, the lighting enhances the emotion of the viewers, making them feel a huge sense of power along with fear. Also in the film *Witness* the mixture of camera angles and lighting really helps pull emotion from viewers in a subtle way. In the standoff scene Schaeffer face was mostly in darkness while book was mostly in light, the camera angle also accompanied the lighting. Whenever Book was shown is was more of a close-up on his face, to show raw emotion helping the audience view Book as a person who truly cares about the well-being of Rachel. On the other hand whenever Schaeffer was shown it was more of a medium shot to show how Schaeffer was really not in control of the situation even though he thought he was.

*Witness* Murder Scene: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J215p0P-ieA> (angles)

*The Godfather*; Don Offer scene: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fmX2VzsB25s> (Lighting)

*The Godfather*; Michael becoming Don: 3:30 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ig6XntgHMe>

*The Godfather*; Michael at wedding: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HCu9vOpwMp0> (Comparison Lighting)

Works Cited

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