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Liam Kinney
University of Vermont

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HOW BONG JOON-HO USES GENRE

*Subverting Expectations in Memories of Murder, The
Host, and Parasite*

Liam Kinney

The concept of genre, especially in how it pertains to categorizing and grouping films and stories, is an essential part of how critics and film theorists identify and label films that they review. But genre is not just a tool for film critics. Genre plays a large role in how we as a society consume media. Genre often plays a deciding factor in whether or not we're going to commit to watching a movie or a television show. One is far more likely to watch a detective film if they have interacted with and enjoyed other films in the genre before. Genres create common rules and structures for a variety of stories that audiences become familiar with and associate with said genre. But what is a genre, and by extension, a 'genre film'? A working definition of genre and the genre film for the purposes of this thesis is as follows: a film genre is a familiar category that exists as a way to classify and identify different movies based on recognizable iconography, tone, and thematic content. A genre film engages with the elements of a genre but necessitates a contract with the audience that presupposes a historical knowledge of the said genre and willful ignorance of this knowledge so the film can be fully enjoyed. In this thesis, I will explore how a Korean filmmaker, Bong Joon-ho, is able to use Western or American genres in a way that circumvents the traditional norms and established rules of film genre in his movies to create an effective story that reinvents what a genre film can contain.

Bong's films often feature imagery and iconography that are reminiscent of classic genre films, yet the tone, *mise en scène*, characters, and/or the plot of the film suggest otherwise. Bong is able to create a blend of genres in his films that create mystifying, yet completely engrossing films that connect with an international audience. The spectator, familiar with traditional genre films, enters the film experience under the impression that they will be engaging with a detective/crime film, a monster movie, or a dramatic comedy. As the film progresses, the recognizable imagery and structure of the genre can be observed, but the story doesn't follow the

genre-specific formula. For example, in *The Host*, a gripping monster film centered around the disappearance and endangerment of an innocent child, there are moments of wacky slapstick comedy as oafish characters blunder their way through a dangerous landscape. In *Memories of Murder*, a procedural detective film becomes incredibly bleak and aimless after the halfway point. Like a hyperactive child, Bong's films refuse to sit still and be characterized in definitively one way. The stories are difficult to categorize because they refuse categorization, combining different themes or iconic images associated with specific genres into something entirely new and unique. *Memories of Murder* is still a detective story, just not a traditional one. Bong's films interact with the audience, relying on their expectations to lead them astray. By breaking the unspoken social contract of genre, Bong can move audiences, regardless of any language barrier.

From Aristotle to the Russian formalists, the uses and details of genre theory have been examined since the dawn of the narrative itself. Explaining the relationship between literary or narrative genres and the concept of film genres is essential for the discussion of film genres within this thesis. In Jerome Bruner's essay "Life as Narrative", he states that literary genres are essentially a "type" from which stories are born and ruled (697). Bruner points out that genre, in the literary sense, "commits" the writer to use "language in a certain way" and adhere to the boundaries laid out by previous works in the same vein (697). While the overall stories films follow are similar to genre-specific narratives in literature, how film genres connect with an audience creates the key difference between film genres and their literary counterparts. The first difference can be found simply in the medium. The written word is received much differently than action on screen. How the audience understands and interprets the content of a story relies on how the said story is being presented to them. The other difference is how genre builds upon itself. While Bruner cites language and point of view as some of the defining features of a

literary genre, film genres are defined by imagery or cinematography, the way actors deliver lines, the setting in which a story takes place, and much more, all delivered to the audience through this visual medium. The film genre relies heavily on the images it directly shows the audience, while literary genres often rely on images they can suggest to an audience. Film genres no doubt owe their origin to the literary genre, as many of the classic film genres were born from the types of stories committed to paper. These origins make it important to point out that genre theory has been around for as long as the narrative has. However, film genre theory differs in how these genres interact with and present themselves to the audience.

On a basic level, film genres are how individual films are categorized and identified. Rick Altman, who is the first film genre theory author I'll be considering, established a history and understanding of the subject in his book *Film/Genre*. The categories that became what we now consider genres were created by the film industry, which sorted different types of movies into specific groups to market and distribute them. By establishing these categories, the movie genres themselves emerge out of "general public recognition" with familiar tropes, imagery, and themes being presented until a 'type' of film is recognizable and identifiable (Altman, 15). Examples of film genres include comedy, horror, western, gangster, musical, science fiction, and melodrama. Each genre has a different plot structure, iconography, and thematic content that allows it to be recognized as an individual genre. For example, a film that identifies with the western genre often focuses on a lone gunslinger traversing the American West in the mid to late 19th century, finding conflict with the law, nature, or other gunmen. Imagery such as Colt revolvers, standoffs in dusty corrals, swinging saloon doors, and ten-gallon hats, all suggest the identification of the western genre. A classic example of the western genre can be identified in the standoff scene from *The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly* (1966). The scene consists of three men facing each

other down in the moments of calm before their inevitable duel. The setting is in the midst of a dusty cemetery, the sun beaming. Each man is dressed accordingly to the time period, two with bandoliers and ‘cowboy’ hats. The camera shots focus heavily on the men’s hands, their guns, and their eyes. Some camera shots are shot from hip level, with a gun in the foreground and an opponent in the background. Dramatic music plays, slowly building tension before the first gunshots are fired. The costumes, shot choices, music, and setting all contribute heavily to the iconic, recognizable imagery from the western genre.

While the imagery in a film help to categorize it into a genre, film genre stands out from literary genres in its interaction with its audience, which is best illustrated through the example of the genre film. Genre films present audiences with an expected, somewhat formulaic experience that is simple to process and understand, especially if one is familiar with the genre they are engaging with. The genre film “uses the same material over and over again” often dealing with the same structural conflict, while the exact details are what is changed (Altman, 25). Even if the audience understands and acknowledges that the film belongs to a genre and therefore the overall plot of the movie can be predicted from the start, a willful ignorance of this genre-specific knowledge has to be implemented into the viewing experience. Altman remarks on this willful ignorance, stating: “Genre film suspense is thus almost always false suspense: in order to participate in the film’s strong emotions, we must provisionally pretend we don’t know that the heroine will be rescued, the hero freed, and the couple reunited” (25). Even though the outcome of the film is predetermined, the audience must remain ignorant of their knowledge of the genre. Paradoxically, the success of a genre film hinges upon its recognizability and this very same knowledge: “If spectators are to experience films in terms of their genre, films must leave no doubt to their generic identity; instant recognizability must be assumed” (Altman, 18).

Audiences are simultaneously required to recognize genre as a framing device to comprehend a story yet ignore specific genre rules and tropes to enjoy the film. Film genres and genre films themselves base their existence and identification on a relationship with the audience. Altman describes this relationship as a “contract,” where the audience agrees that the film they’re seeing belongs to a general classification of film, and yet engages with the film as if they’re unaware of the elements and beats of that genre in order to enjoy it properly (14).

In his essay “Genre”, Andrew Tudor expands upon the concept of genre viewed through the lens of the people. Tudor writes that “genre notions”, things that make up a genre’s characteristics and recognizable traits, are “sets of cultural conventions” (Tudor, 7). Conventions in film come from the repeated use of imagery, themes, and plot structure. The repetition of these elements in film makes them conventional; an audience expects to see these items within the stories they watch on the screen. The word cultural that Tudor uses as a qualifier comes from a genre’s interaction with a public. Genre, and by extension genre films, are collectively decided by an audience’s engagement with them. An audience’s expectations for a genre film are predetermined by what the audience understands the genre to contain. To continue with the western example, many audiences will have an idea of what will be in the western film based on their past interactions with the genre and its position within our culture. Viewings of movies that contain familiar elements that are recognized as belonging to the western genre and marketing or advertisements for a film as a ‘western’ create a mutual feeling of classification. There’s a sense that we will “know a western when we see one, though the edges may be rather blurred” (Tudor, 6). An audience has a historical knowledge of a genre derived from the genre’s existence within a culture. This existence in culture allows for a genre to be defined, used to categorize films, and create expectations for these types of movies. Genre is an interaction within our larger society to

categorize and construct films based on a list of identifiers. Tudor remarks that “Genre is what we collectively believe it to be” (7). The public is what determines what a genre contains and is defined as.

However, film genres don’t just spring up overnight. There needs to be a body of work in order for the public to identify a genre in the zeitgeist. In *Film Genre: Hollywood and Beyond* by Barry Langford, he points out how genre films are “collective rather than singular objects” (18). Genre films, and the genre they represent, rely on other, similar pieces of art to establish the genre as a concept accepted by audiences. If a single film featuring cowboys in the American west exists, one cannot claim the existence of a western genre. There needs to be a solid collection or roster of films that exhibit the distinctive traits found in a genre film. Langford also expands upon the idea of how iconography is one of the defining features of a genre; the “visual conventions” (literally what is seen on screen) present in a film, that function as not only “formal markers of a given genre” but also as “important vehicles for explicating its core thematic material” (13). While the concept of iconography doesn’t typically deal with narrative or story pieces that connect different films within a genre, the images presented on the screen play a significant role in establishing what becomes recognizable about a certain type of film. An audience seeing and comprehending images on screen is the fundamental interaction that occurs in a cinematic experience; if images are similar between different films, comparisons and connections are guaranteed to be drawn. The themes and motifs present in iconography are what allow it to function as a component of genre. The setting, character archetypes, or costumes all can help to connote what a film is attempting to communicate. The “common-sense” connection between two different films that have similar imagery also applies to their narrative content as well (Langford, 14). Films about two characters going through hardship only to end up together

romantically are likely to be grouped due to their content. Films collectively function together to create a genre, and when a film is made with a specific genre in mind, a genre film is the result.

In Bong Joon-ho's acceptance speech for the Academy Award for Best Director for the film *Parasite* in 2020, he began by thanking and honoring Martin Scorsese, who was also nominated that year. Bong elicited a standing ovation for the famous director and acknowledged Scorsese for many of the films Bong grew up adoring. Bong paid great respect to Scorsese for giving him films to study and be inspired by. Throughout this thesis, it is important to recognize that I will primarily be discussing American film genres and the American film industry when talking about a South Korean director. However, as stated by Bong himself, he takes great inspiration and insight from the western genres and films that he grew up interacting with. Examining how Bong Joon-ho utilizes different western genres' conventions and standards is essential to understanding how he crafts and creates effective films. Bong's interaction with American popular culture and filmic history is detailed in Christina Klein's essay, "The AFKN nexus: US military broadcasting and New Korean Cinema". As a child, Bong was able to see a host of American films due to the presence of the Armed Forces Korea Network (AFKN), which was a television network run through the US Department of Defense for the servicemen stationed in Korea during the United States' occupation of the country (Klein, 21). Through AFKN, Bong was able to receive a robust film education, seeing films that were banned everywhere else due to Korea's strict media censorship laws at the time (Klein, 27). The reason that Bong plays with the genre-specific rules of American films is that the movies he consumed while he was growing up were American-made and catered to the American audience in the area. Bong was part of a "shadow audience" of Korean locals who would tune into the AFKN programming (Klein, 24). It is important to note that Bong's films aren't just blatant copies or derivatives of the American

genre films that he was able to consume as a child. In an interview cited by Klein, Bong remarks that he wasn't able to "fully understand" the English dialogue in the films on AFKN due to the language barrier, but instead, would stick to the images and "create my own narrative" (28). Bong's experience with AFKN genre films reinforces Langford's concept of the recognizability of genre iconography, being understandable even through the barrier of language. Stripping the genre back to a purely visual experience means the importance of imagery becomes amplified. Although he couldn't understand the exact words and lines of the characters onscreen, Bong remarks that Hollywood genre films almost became a "part of myself and my consciousness", while he was absorbing them as a boy, becoming thoroughly versed in the visual styles of Western films. Bong's creativity and imagination would fill the gaps left by the language barrier, creating his own story out of a conglomeration of images and sounds. This process that he trained himself in as a child was practice for his future ventures in writing and directing, where he takes a variety of known generic iconography and is able to mesh it together to create a new story.

Klein remarks that many of the filmic "lessons" that Bong learned during this time were versed in genre (22). Through his interaction with AFKN, Bong was able to observe the norms and rules of certain genres, but also how "genre works as a generalizable film language" (Klein, 22). According to Klein, the way Bong can twist and deviate from traditional genre conventions to create a unique storytelling experience is due to the influence of AFKN in his early childhood. Being taught that genre is a "flexible logic" that is able to be "hybridi[zed]" and changed into something new was incredibly important to Bong, as it appears in his entire filmography (Klein, 22). Two detectives brutally beat a suspect in an interrogation, only to stop and watch a television sitcom with the same suspect moments later, slapstick physical comedy that one might

see in a Marx Brothers film paired with graphic depictions of innocent civilians being eaten by a giant fish monster, or a charismatic wisecracking father figure turned into a refugee from the law after killing his employer are all examples of Bong's style of genre combination. Klein states that there is "nothing like spending your youth watching hundreds of genre films on TV to teach you how genre works: the deep structure of repetition and variation; the composition of films out of familiar bits and pieces put together in new ways" (31). Due to his deep knowledge of genre, Bong can use different aspects of genre norms and classic conventions to convince the audience that he is honoring the unspoken genre contract that the public is used to; that he will be following the definition of the genre created and given by the audience. However, throughout the film's runtime, that contract will splinter and crack, giving way to his creative and unique narratives. Bong has developed what he calls a "schizophrenic style", where he can combine "bits and pieces from many different genres" to craft his films (Klein, 31). Bong appears to have "absorbed the language of genre as a vehicle for telling his own stories", enabling him to "work with genres without being confined by them" (Klein, 31).

Throughout this thesis, I'll be examining how Bong Joon-ho can use genre fluidly to make effective films, but also how he uses genre-specific conventions to inject important social commentary into his films that elevate them past the status of a genre film. To do this, I will examine three of his films and how they interact with genre. *Memories of Murder*, Bong's second film, and first critical success will be compared to classic detective stories and the rules of the genre laid out by Tzvetan Todorov and Franco Moretti. The killer in *Memories of Murder* refuses to be caught, but his existence also refuses the canon of the iconic detective genre. Bong's monster movie, *The Host (Gwoemul)*, is an interesting take on the traditional man vs. monster type of story. Informed by the work of Brian Murphy and Christina Klein, examining

the interpersonal conflict as well as the conflict between the humans and the monstrosity will show how *The Host* is not just another creature feature. *Parasite* is an incredibly difficult film to categorize, but it is precisely that difficulty that makes it such an interesting work of art. Each of the genres present in *Parasite*: comedy, heist, and horror will be explored, along with how that film, in particular, is a perfect example of Bong's unique style. Lastly, I will discuss what makes Bong's style so effective, why his films can find international success, and what his utilization of genre means for the future of cinema.

Before we start to dissect Bong's films specifically, let us revisit my definition of genre and the genre film to inform the following section: a film genre is a familiar category that exists as a way to classify and identify different movies based on recognizable iconography, structure, and thematic content. A genre film engages with the elements of a genre but necessitates a contract with the audience that presupposes a historical knowledge of the said genre and willful ignorance of this knowledge in order to be enjoyed fully.

Memories of Murder (2003) is Bong Joon-ho's sophomore film. It is labeled as a "crime drama" film but also functions as an entry into the classic detective genre. The film follows two detectives as they try and fail to apprehend a serial killer plaguing a small town. The story is based on a series of real murders that happened between 1986 and 1991 in the town of Hwaseong. The film's two main characters fit the bill for a cliché set of police partners: Park Doo-Man is the small-town cop who trusts his intuition, while Seo Tae-Yoon is the recent transfer from the big city who relies on hard evidence, claiming the "documents never lie". The tone of the film starts rather flippant, but as the story continues, the film begins to feel melancholy and hopeless.

Memories of Murder is not supposed to be a pleasant viewing experience, the events taking place are quite horrible. There's a sense of unfamiliarity, as the film slowly drops most of its connections to the detective genre, and the story progresses into unknown territory. In his paper "Memories of Memories: Historicity, Nostalgia, and Archive in Bong Joon-ho's *Memories of Murder*", Joseph Jonghyun Jeon details the way the film "apathetically abandons generic conventions" (81). The film begins with recognizable iconography and themes observable in the genre: Jeon cites the "harsh interrogation room scenes, the police chief haranguing the detectives for their screwups... police bantering as they survey the site for clues" (82). As the film continues though, a sense of dread that the detectives will never actually stop the killings starts to creep over the viewer. The styles and cliches introduced to the audience at the beginning of the film begin to be subverted or forgotten. The film starts to "lose interest in its own generic commitments" and instead dedicates its time to chronicling the hopeless journey of the two detectives (Jeon, 81). The audience, detached from the known and familiar, starts to feel as if they were "wandering around aimlessly... in one of the large fields that the film's cinematography frequently captures in its steady, wide-angle gazes" (Jeon, 82). Bong's abandonment of the familiar genre tropes is a way to disconcert the audience and break the social contract of the genre. While at first lured in by what they know and are used to, midway through the film, the audience is as lost as the two detectives they're watching on screen. The film uses these tropes of the genre to lure the audience into a false sense of security, before slowly flipping the switch to the unknown. By leaving the genre-specific contract unfulfilled, Bong questions the idea of a genre "propelled by a drive towards truth" (Jeon, 83). The detective genre must always end with closure, with the detectives catching the criminal, but Bong refuses to give the audience closure, leaving the audience feeling unsatisfied.

Before we can talk about the different tropes and conventions that the film incorporates into its story, we must establish a list of said tropes and conventions of the detective genre. One of the most seminal works on literary theory is Tzvetan Todorov's *Poetics of Prose*. In the book, Todorov dissects the art of writing, with chapters focusing on writing techniques or popular genres. The third chapter is dedicated to "Detective Fiction", and it is here where Todorov establishes the rules of the detective genre. According to Todorov, to be included in the detective genre, the killer in the story must "have a certain importance" or in other words "must be one of the main characters" (Todorov, 49). Right away, *Memories of Murder* rejects one of the established rules of the genre, as the identity of the killer in the film is never revealed. This detail mirrors the real-life case, since in 2003 when the movie was released, the killer had never been apprehended by the authorities (the killer was found and convicted in 2019). Even if the killer was actually a character in the film, the audience would be unaware. The absence of the killer's identity leaves the audience confused and unfulfilled, as no satisfaction lies in having the case unsolved by the end of the narrative. The detectives spend the entire movie attempting to solve their case, yet we end the film essentially in the same place we began. Since the killer's identity is never exposed to the viewer, the film is unable to abide by one of Todorov's first rules.

Another one of Todorov's rules that are ignored in *Memories of Murder* is that the criminal cannot be a "professional" and they must kill for "personal reasons" (49). Here, the killer's mystery identity once again leads to an evasion of a genre-specific rule since the murderer's motives are never discovered. The other rule is also disobeyed, since the murders depicted in the film all seem very calculated and methodical, with one detective even remarking that this killer must be "a professional." While this claim is never substantiated, the killer's systematic and precise method of murder does bring an air of cold professionalism, which

contrasts sharply with the detectives' unprofessionalism. The killer is always ten steps ahead of the detectives, purposefully leaving them clues and continuing to evade them. In this sense, the killer is far more competent and skilled than the detectives, who are bumbling idiots in comparison. This contrast between the detectives and the killer once again differentiates the murderer in *Memories of Murder* from the criminals described by Todorov.

Throughout the film, the audience witnesses around 6 individual murders. The detectives are eventually able to piece together that the murders always happen to women who are wearing red, on nights that it is raining, and while a certain song plays on the radio. However, except for this extremely limited information, nothing else is known about the killer throughout the entire film. Instead, his victims often become the source of discussion for the detectives, as their bodies exist as hard evidence to examine. It is here where once again *Memories of Murder* deviates from the traditional detective fiction. The details surrounding the relationship between the killer and their victim in the detective genre are laid out in "Clues", a chapter written by Franco Moretti in his book *Signs Taken for Wonders: Essays in the Sociology of Literary Forms*. Traditionally, the victims of a killer in a classic detective narrative would be involved in the underworld of society, having "trespassed the boundaries of normality", and therefore singled themselves out (Moretti, 136). Because the victim is expressing individuality by separating themselves from the society in the world they occupy, it makes them vulnerable to the killer. The victims must be a part of something that distinguishes them, that creates a personal uniqueness to them that makes them deserve murder in the killer's eyes. Additionally, the victim often encounters the killer in a secluded area, further separating themselves from the rest of society. Moretti calls this area a "locked room" where the victim seeks "refuge in a private sphere" and is killed (136). Moretti distinguishes between the locked room and the general "social collective"

that exists outside of the locked room (136). If the victim remained a part of the social collective, their death could have been avoided. In *Memories of Murder*, all of Moretti's rules about the relationship between the criminal and the victim are defied. The criminal engages with his victims in the open, often in vast fields or next to busy roads. This feels especially chilling because it is illustrated that in this small town, the fields are the locations where many of the locals work and where their children play during the day. The violation of this social space further works against the locked room concept, as the act of murder is being integrated into this shared space. The killings take place within the public space, and therefore too close to the social collective from which the victims are supposed to be separate. Since there is no defined separation between the public space and the locked room, the victims' deaths do not correlate to Moretti's ideas surrounding space and the killer/victim relationship. The victims are also all innocent, and not involved in any shady businesses or back-alleyway dealings. One of the victims in the film is a young child, who could be considered the epitome of innocence. The killer's violent attacks on innocent victims in the open defy the conventional rules of how the detective genre operates.

It is important to compare *Memories of Murder* to the work of Todorov and Moretti since their work establishes the founding principles and rules surrounding the detective genre. However, *Memories of Murder's* portrayal of its detectives also work against the rules of contemporary cop shows or films, often called 'police procedurals'. In the film, there's a small-town detective, Park Doo-Man, who knows the town and trusts his instincts, paired with a transfer from the big city, Seo Tan-Yoon, who is a stickler for the rules. In a traditional buddy cop movie like *Tango and Cash* (1989) or *Lethal Weapon* (1987), these two would initially butt heads over their different ways of thinking but after an action-filled adventure, end up becoming

friends. However, in *Memories of Murder*, the two don't recognize the merits of the other, nor do they become friends. The audience isn't even given closure on Detective Seo's character arc, as what happens to him after the climax of the film is left ambiguous. This ambiguity is antithetical to a contemporary police procedural show. The trends and plot structure of a police procedural are described by Fitria Akhmerti Primasita and Heddy Shri Ahimsa-Putra in their paper "An Introduction to the Police Procedural: A Subgenre of the Detective Genre". One of the distinctive things that separate *Memories of Murder* from the contemporary police procedural are that there is almost no procedure. There's a sequence early on in the film where Detective Park shows up at a crime scene in a rice paddy, where pedestrians and their children happily walk through the field, chatting and laughing. Men from the forensics team slip and fall down the slope into the paddy in a classic Bong Joon-ho comic moment, and no one has control or authority over what's happening. Even as Detective Park is trying to reign in some of the chaos, a tractor drives over a footprint, destroying the only real evidence from the murder. This scene, played for laughs, disobeys Primasita and Ahimsa-Putra's rule that within a police procedural, the "police detectives follow specific departmental procedures in finding a solution to the mysterious crime," therefore earning the show the title "procedural" (35). The lack of any sort of system or operation strategy highlights the departure from the police procedural. There is also the need in the police procedural for the detectives to be seen as a beacon of "authority", often represented by the presence of a badge and a revolver (Primasita, Ahimsa-Putra, 36). This authority allows the detective to take control of a crime scene and begin the procedure of investigation with professionalism and competency. However, this sort of authority cannot be observed in the detectives of *Memories of Murder*. The images of the revolver and the badge are invoked in the

film, as both detectives use these objects, but the authority and proficiency that traditionally comes with those symbols are nowhere to be found.

Over the course of the film, we see both detectives engage in a variety of investigative tactics, determined to solve their case and return their town to normalcy. Both detectives have their ways of cracking cases, but in the film, these methods align with some common tropes in the detective genre, but in the end, contradict the very same conventions. Detective Park's character has a lot of faith in what he calls his 'shaman eyes', which supposedly can assess and judge a person, telling Park whether or not they're guilty. Other contemporary pieces of media, such as *Sherlock Holmes* (2009), feature a detective with powers of deduction, often being able to solve crimes in his head completely on his own. However, towards the end of *Memories of Murder*, Detective Park attempts to use this method to determine whether or not their prime suspect, Hyeon-Gyu, is guilty. However, he is unable to come to a conclusion. His powerful 'shaman eyes' that he claims allows him to survive as a detective, aren't able to provide him with an answer, to help bring the killer to justice. Detective Park is just a man, and his failure to solve the crime illustrates this point. On the other hand, Detective Seo's method of crime-solving involves analysis and complete trust in the evidence given for a case, often repeating the mantra that the 'documents never lie'. His trust in the system is exemplary of other sticklers for rules or authority in popular cop shows like *CSI* (2000-2015) or *Criminal Minds* (2005-2020). However, throughout the film, the puzzling nature of the case breaks Detective Seo, making him doubt his beliefs about police work. His mantra about documents is rejected by this case at every turn, with misinformation, conflicting reports, and an overall lack of evidence frustrating the detective throughout the story. Detective Seo even takes matters into his own hands at the end of the film, physically lashing out at the suspect as a way to provide a version of justice. Even when

documents arrive that don't confirm the suspect's guilt, Detective Seo refuses to consider them and tries to kill Hyeon-Gyu. The gradual abandonment and degradation of one's beliefs and morals that are present in Detective Seo's character could not be observed anywhere else in contemporary procedural narratives. Both Detective Park and Detective Seo's methods of solving crimes prove to be ineffective, even though their methods are stereotypically successful within the genre. Bong decides to give the detectives these methods as tools but refuses to let them actually be of use in his story. This failure further cements the detectives' roles as incompetent in *Memories of Murder*.

Expanding upon the role that detectives are supposed to play in a traditional genre film or show, the detective is expected to "dispel the entropy" caused by the crime and re-establish the links between the "signifiers and signified" (Moretti, 146). Everything must come to a solid conclusion, correcting the natural order of the world. The detective is supposed to solve the crime at the end of the film, creating a feeling of closure and accomplishment in the viewer. The criminal is apprehended or killed, saving society from their radical individuality, the police chief gives the detectives a gruff compliment about their work, and the detectives go home to their happy families. However, taking inspiration from the real story of the serial killings, *Memories of Murder* abandons that ending. The disturbance caused by the killer's violent crimes is not resolved by the end of the film, which creates all the more ambiguity. Characters have changed, in some cases quite drastically from who they were when they were first introduced, going against the rule that they have to adhere to stereotypes (Moretti, 135). To express individuality is to identify with the killer, and yet the characters in *Memories of Murder* are all individual characters with agency and flaws that separate them from the society that they are supposed to protect (Moretti, 138). At the end of the film, however, Detective Park has changed careers; he is

now a salesman. Detective Park changing careers shows that he has given up and joined the homogenous society instead of trying to remain an individually identified subject. Adding to the ambiguity of the ending, the final scene of the film shows Park revisiting the spot where he found the first body related to the case. A local girl tells him that she saw another man doing the same thing as Park earlier. Park presumes that this man could be the killer and asks the girl to describe the man. However, the girl disappoints by reporting that the suspect looked “plain” and “ordinary”. For a moment, Park felt a little hope about this long-closed case, that maybe he could return to his career as a detective and solve the case that stumped him. However, this happy ending eludes him, and by extension, eludes the audience as well. The film ends with a shot of Park looking into the camera, directly at the audience. This puzzling end to the story, with Park breaking the fourth wall, was purposely designed to make the audience feel uncomfortable and dissatisfied. Bong Joon-ho has been quoted as wanting to unsettle viewers with this shot as if Park was looking directly at the killer somewhere in the audience.

All of these deviations from the rules of the detective genre work in Bong Joon-ho’s favor. Bong is aiming to create a feeling of dissatisfaction or uneasiness in the viewer of the film. There is a certain specificity to this film in particular that places it in a different category than the other two films I’ll be examining in this thesis. The fact that this movie is based on a real string of murders, a case that was unsolved at the time of production, makes this a purely Korean story. However, the way that Bong chooses to communicate this story is by using bits and pieces of one of the most classic Hollywood genres: the detective fiction. Bong’s process of considering genre while making his films is detailed in Christina Klein’s “Why American Studies Need to Think about Korean Cinema”. Bong himself says that when he is making a genre film, he’ll “follow the genre conventions for a while, then I want to break out and turn them upside-down. That’s where

the very Korean elements come in” (Klein, 880). This is extremely evident in *Memories of Murder*, as many of the genre elements that are introduced are forgotten by the end of the film. The genre conventions do not allow Bong to tell the full story in the way he wants to tell it, but by subverting or ignoring these normative rules, Bong can make space for “Korean reality” (Klein, 880). In a way, Bong is continuing the practice he engaged in as a child watching AFKN broadcasts; he is using the Hollywood language of genre to understand part of the story, then injecting his style and flair into the narrative to create something unique.

Klein refers to the pieces of genre elements that Bong plays with as “Lego pieces” that he can rearrange, discard, and add onto to inject his specific social commentary into the film (880). Within *Memories of Murder*, there are critical observations of the police force as an institution during this time period and the role of police officers in a community. To help illustrate these observations, I’m going to borrow a concept from Klein, which is the idea of the “surface crime” and the “deep crime” within *Memories of Murder* (881). To Klein, the surface crime is a deviant act performed by an individual, i.e., the murders in the film. But the surface crime only exists to cover up the existence of the deep crime, which tends to be “structural and based on some entrenched imbalance of power...” (Klein, 882). The deep crime within the film exists in the police brutality and the violence the police force exhibits on the members of the society they are duty-bound to protect. For example, another detective on the force is known to put a shower cap on his boot to not dirty it when he beats his suspects. Detective Park himself is seen planting evidence, and both Detective Park and Detective Seo beat their suspects to the point where they’ll force a confession because the suspect just wants the violence to stop. There’s even a street riot shown in the film, which is actively suppressed by the police, and the audience observes an officer stomping on a civilian protester. These incidents slowly build up throughout

the film to reveal the deep crimes of “corruption and abuse of police power” and “the casual disregard of human rights” (Klein, 882). This deep crime is impossible to portray without the national context of South Korea’s past military dictatorship which had a history of suppressing and snuffing out forces that opposed their will. Bong stages this deep crime in a film that utilizes the genre conventions of a detective story to easily relay the story to a broader audience. By making the main characters the very abusers of power in the context of the deep crime, Bong forces the audience to be confronted with their unethical behavior. The nonchalant manner in which suspects are beaten and mistreated creates confusion and resentment in the viewer. By subverting expectations in having the detectives fail to solve the crime, Bong illustrates the ineptitude and incompetence of the police force in late 1980s Korea.

The deep crime of the police force’s failure to protect its own citizens is highlighted in a specific scene about halfway through the film. The detectives discover that a murder will happen that very night and try to request extra forces to be sent to Hwaseong to apprehend the murderer. However, the garrison cannot spare a single soldier because they are all preoccupied with suppressing a democratic demonstration in a neighboring town. Here, the “surface crime and the deep crime intersect” (Klein, 883). The refusal to send troops to Hwaseong shows that the “government is so busy repressing the democratic aspirations of its own people that it can not protect them from a serial killer” (Klein, 883). The serial killings seem less significant in the face of this deeper crime. The government is supposed to care for and protect its people, yet it abandons them in favor of the continuation of their totalitarian power. Bong can frame this deep crime as merely an annoyance for the detectives, and something that prevents them from being able to stop the killer. By placing this deep crime within the narrative as a story beat, Bong

subtly illustrates the incompetence and irresponsibility of the South Korean authorities during that time.

Bong's work with genre conventions emphasizes the deep crime present in *Memories of Murder*, which speaks to his ability as a director to convey specific Korean stories under a wider umbrella of a genre film. By flipping the authoritative position that detectives usually hold in their narratives to make his detectives cruel and incompetent, Bong highlights the ineffectiveness of the police force in a military dictatorship. Bong also withholds closure from both the detectives in the film and the audience, mirroring the original case, but also as a way to punish the detectives. Their brutality and failure to consider the safety of their community doesn't allow them to deserve the satisfaction of solving the crime. Both the surface crime and the deep crime are left unresolved by the end of this film, which is the exact opposite of what is normative to expect in a detective story. Bong's refusal to honor the genre-specific contract with the audience causes discomfort and dissatisfaction with *Memories of Murder*.

Moving away from the rice fields and rural landscapes of *Memories of Murder*, Bong's next film is set in the more urban location of Seoul, Korea's capital city. The *Host (Gwoemul)* is Bong Joon-ho's third film, released in 2006. Upon debut, it quickly set a new box office record in South Korea, selling 13 million tickets, making it the highest-grossing South Korean film at the time. *The Host* was also released to great critical success as well, garnering several awards, such as Best Film at the Asian Movie Awards, and sweeping Korea's Blue Dragon Awards, receiving five accolades. The film centers around the Han River, and more specifically, a monster that bursts out of it one day, terrorizing and feasting upon the local population. One family, in particular, is faced with the abduction of their youngest family member, Park Hyun-Seo, by this monster. Her father, Park Gang-du, must enlist the help of his siblings and his father

to track down the monster and rescue Hyun-Seo from certain death at the hands of the creature. The Korean government offers no help to this family and impedes their progress by quarantining them, claiming that the creature is a host to a deadly virus. Gang-du, after receiving a call from his daughter before her phone dies, decides he and his family must break out of the hospital and track down Hyun-Seo. Much like in his previous film, Bong Joon-ho uses the traditional genre conventions at first, this time of classic Hollywood monster movies. However, after a certain point, Bong decides to drop or disobey the rules associated with the genre. It is in these spaces of subverted expectations that Bong can communicate a form of effective social commentary, enriching the film experience while staying appealing to a broad audience.

When considering a classic monster movie, I immediately think of the subset of ‘creature feature’ films born in the 50’s era of American Hollywood, though *The Host* contains images and themes of some post-classical monster movies as well. Brian Murphy delves into the history and the rules of the genre in his article “Monster Movies: They Came from Beneath the Fifties”. In these films, the monsters always represent “the horror of what we have done...” rather than “fear itself” (Murphy, 38). Rather than relying on the simple threat of an otherworldly being out to cause harm, monsters in traditional monster movies often represent a failure or an oversight on humanity’s part. Monsters embody the consequences of development and are a direct result of human creation, such as the creatures in *Frankenstein* (1931), *The Fly* (1986), and *Jurassic Park* (1993). Monsters in these movies are representative of a more collective fear that is shared by the audience. Many monsters in the creature features of the ’50s were created from radiation, a reflection of the anxiety surrounding nuclear power during the time. Monsters show the audience “what we have to fear,” and can reflect national worries or dread (Murphy, 38). It is this founding principle of the monster movie that Bong embraces in *The Host* and uses to create

space for social commentary. The monster is born from negligence and laziness, brought about by an American mortician who orders a Korean assistant to pour formaldehyde down the drain. The assistant protests, seeing as how the drain leads to the Han River, but the American waves him off, telling him to do it anyways. The Korean assistant meekly complies, and the monster emerges shortly thereafter. In this scene, there is no mad scientist scheming to purposefully create the monster, or explanation pointing to the monster being from outer space. The creation of the monster is due to a Korean person's subservient behavior to American authority. This scene is actually based on a real event that occurred in 2000. Ironically, the mortician responsible avoided and ignored court summons for five years since the South Korean government could not reach an agreement with the United States over which national authority had jurisdiction over the case. According to Korea JoongAng Daily, a Korean newspaper, the mortician eventually was given a two-year suspended sentence in 2005. It's notable that the South Korean government had a difficult time prosecuting a member of the American military on their own soil even after substantial and condemning proof was collected. Their difficulties nod to the trend of Korean subservience to American authority, which suggests that the depiction of the relations between countries in the film mirrors the actual relationship of the nations.

This origin story for the monster is representative of Murphy's ideas. Seeing Korean characters submissively carry out the wishes of aggressive and contemptuous American characters, even though those wishes will hurt other Korean citizens, is disturbing and scary, as much as or even more than the scenes involving the monster. Later in the film, a cross-eyed American scientist orders a team of Korean doctors to drill into Gang-du's brain to find the virus associated with the creature. They too, grimly carry out their duties even after it is revealed that the virus is not a legitimate threat. The blind subservience to American authority is what creates

the monster and therefore what the monster represents. *The Host* shows a Korean audience that the submission to an external power is what should inspire horror in the viewer.

While the monster is the primary antagonist of the film, both the South Korean and American governments impede and inflict violence on the Park family throughout the movie as well. Whether it's holding the family in quarantine and not believing their story or capturing Gang-du and subjecting him to physical torture, the role of scientists and the government within the world of *The Host* does not hold the traditional place that it does within monster movies. The Korean authority figures in *The Host* are clumsy, ineffective, or apathetic, while the American authorities are villainous, deceptive, and selfish. Murphy establishes that the heroes of these monster movies are almost always part of or reliant on the military or a group of scientists. Both representations of national authority are not congruent with their usual depiction in monster movies: "...in all monster movies, we turn to scientists and soldiers" (Murphy, 41). These figures are the shining beacon of light within the movie, working in tandem to save the innocent citizen from a monstrous threat. However, in *The Host*, these figures actively inflict violence upon the very citizens they are bound by genre-specific rules to protect. The climax of the film contains powerful political imagery of the police and military holding back a mob of protesters, incited by the public imprisonment of Gang-du. Hovering over the crowd is a capsule of "Agent Yellow" (a thinly veiled comparison to the Agent Orange weapon used by the United States in the Vietnam War) which the government plans on utilizing to kill the creature. When the monster bursts out of the river, the military wastes no time dropping the gas, even as dozens of civilians are still present. Several of these civilians seem to suffer greatly or even die from exposure to the chemicals. The failure to consider the lives and health of the innocent population present at the

river is a prime example of the authority in *The Host* flouting the usual role of the military or scientist in the monster movie.

Revisiting the lobotomy scene, we can see more of the personal violence inflicted upon Gang-du's body by the authority figures that are supposed to protect and aid him. As Gang-du is prepared for various testing and procedures, an American scientist arrives with a translator in tow. Gang-du, who is in the middle of a tissue extraction, is howling in pain, restrained by multiple Korean doctors. The American scientist quickly calls for the procedure to stop and clears the room. Leaning down in front of Gang-du, the American starts to ask him questions, and seems very sympathetic to his plight. However, the scene takes a sinister turn when the American proclaims that Gang-du is showing symptoms of dementia, and therefore the doctors must drill into his frontal lobe to find the supposed virus. This scene is a great example of expectation subversion; the viewer thinks that this American authority is arriving to put a stop to the violence, but he instead compounds it. The scientist, the trusted figure of authority in a monster film, is actually the harbinger of intense pain and suffering for Gang-du. While Gang-du survives the lobotomy, this act of violence against an innocent human being is representative of a working-class citizen being used as an instrument for the authority figures of the film. The American scientist needs Gang-du to prove the existence of a virus but does not consider his humanity in the process. Gang-du is considered nothing but an object to be utilized in the political posturing going on in an attempt to manage the monster crisis. In Gang-du's conversation with the American scientist, the translator begins to translate before Gang-du is finished speaking. Sobbing, Gang-du interrupts the translator, stating "Please don't cut me off. My words are words too. Why won't you listen to my words?" Gang-du protests being treated as an experiment and attempts to claim his humanity by communicating, but this claim is not

acknowledged by his oppressors. Gang-du's worries about his daughter, his objection to being treated like a specimen, and his status as a human being are all disregarded in favor of being a tool in assisting the ruling class's needs. The refusal to see Gang-du as a human being places the scientists and soldiers of the film firmly in antagonistic and evil roles, which differs from their usual positions in the monster movie genre.

Besides the role of the government, another genre convention of the monster movie that Bong Joon-ho works with is the character of the monster itself within the film and the role it plays in the main character's storyline. *The Host* features an impressive monster, and the CGI in the film was pretty groundbreaking at the time. The monster's appearance is genuinely creepy and unsettling, which makes up for its lack of size. In similar, special effect-heavy monster films such as *Kong: Skull Island* (2017) or *Cloverfield* (2008), the monsters are huge, towering over the main characters and wreaking havoc with a simple step. This trend in monster films follows what Joshua Schulze talks about in his essay "The Sacred Engine and the Rice Paddy: Globalization, Genre, and Local Space in the Films of Bong Joon-ho", which is that in Hollywood monster movies or Japanese kaiju films there's a reliance on "the huge production scales, the emphasis on spectacle and special effects, [and] the reliance on the iconography of the monsters for advertising and marketing..." (24). While *The Host*'s monster is large, its size is never the focus of the film. This is because while the damage it does is widespread, its damage is not intended to inspire awe in the viewer or cause them to ogle at the destruction of property the monster is causing. Instead, the damage is often graphic, gritty, and solely exercised on the body. A few cars get crushed here and there, but the violence caused by the monster in *The Host* is focused on the human interaction with the monster, as it kills, eats, or fights with people. By making the monster smaller, Bong Joon-ho makes the overall story more intimate and focused on

the human characters in the film. The danger to the Park family feels personal rather than focusing on the creation of a spectacle. The monster's lack of size is made up for the intense and grotesque violence it can deliver, causing pain and suffering to many people throughout the film.

In *The Host*'s opening moments, the monster leaps from the water of the river and immediately starts devouring innocent civilians who are enjoying a day outside. The violence is brutal and gut-wrenching, the monster fully visible as it mows through victims. There's a slightly comical moment as an American tourist decides to fight the creature and "save" the local population from this terror. However, he is immediately killed by the monster, subverting the white savior trope that many horror or monster movies contain. This avoidance of the white savior, as well as the rest of the bold opening scene, is representative of another monster movie genre subversion. In other movies of the genre, such as *Jaws* (1975), the monster would remain shrouded in mystery until the climax. The audience is never able to observe the true monstrous form of the beast until a final confrontation with the heroes at the end of the movie. The audience feels suspense because the monster is still unknown to them, leaving them desiring that final, climactic shot of the monster in all its glory. However, *The Host* features a full-body view of the monster right away as it leaps into action, killing dozens within the first few minutes of the film's runtime. Nikki J.Y. Lee comments on this particular genre subversion in her review of the film, writing that there is a lack of an "intense sense of suspense" surrounding the monster's identity (350). Additionally, Lee says that the reason why there are no questions about the monster's shape and size is that the story has a different focus (350). This genre subversion that Bong engages in permits the viewer to jump right into the story alongside the Park family. There is no mystery surrounding the appearance of the monster, its capability for violence, or its methods because the audience sees all of those things right away. The lack of mystery or

suspense in the monster's form allows Bong to focus on the human moments in the film. Rather than filling the runtime with tense encounters with the monster, like the velociraptor kitchen scene in *Jurassic Park* (1993), *The Host* can show a dysfunctional family dynamic and how that impacts the family and the society they occupy. The lack of suspense surrounding the monster allows for slower, more character-driven moments in the film, such as the family dinner scene or the family's initial reaction to Hyun-Seo's capture.

The final confrontation between the monster and the family subverts more conventions of the monster movie and also exemplifies Bong's signature breaking of the genre-specific contract with the audience. In her essay "American Studies Need to Think About Korean Cinema", Christina Klein details the conclusion of the film, and how it both aligns and deviates from the classic tropes of a monster movie. As the family finally kills the monster in a fiery explosion, it feels like a "standard" victory, brought on by a "coordinated assault" (Klein, 887). However, when Gang-du arrives at the slain corpse of the monster and desperately pulls his daughter out of its maw, it's revealed that he is too late, and that Hyun-Seo is dead. This sort of ending is "unthinkable" for a Hollywood counterpart, as the monster movie must always end with the beast vanquished and the family or group reunited (Klein, 887). Seeing the monster killed in a fantastic way followed by the seeming rescue of Hyun-Seo is familiar to audiences, as the genre promises this conclusion in its stories. However, Bong purposely fails to deliver on a traditional ending for a monster film to disrupt audiences. The traumatic loss of a child is antithetical to the typically hopeful endings of these movies. The youngest child, whose recovery is the driving force behind the entire plot, does not survive, and the family has lost both her and her grandfather throughout the film. The film even acknowledges the genre trope of resurrection by showing a closeup of Hyun-seo's face as music swells. Everything about contemporary films at

this point would be telling the audience that the character was about to open their eyes and be saved. But Hyun-seo's eyes stay shut and her hand falls limply to the ground. The genre-specific contract with monster movies tells viewers that there will be a "reconstitution of the family" and a happy ending for our main characters (Lee, 351). However, this does not come to pass in *The Host*. The film's dramatic conclusion is a sharp divestment from the conventions of the American genre.

Throughout this section, I have several times referenced the social commentary present in *The Host*. It's impossible to discuss the film without being aware of and commenting on the political and socially striking imagery that exists within the film. This social commentary is directly tied to Bong Joon-ho's usage of film genre's rules. In an *Atlantic* interview written by David Sims, Bong states that the social commentary and genre elements within his films are "difficult to separate". It is precisely this entanglement between these two components that makes Bong's films so engaging and interesting. Bong can use genre conventions and/or their subversion as a vehicle for the social commentary the audience is forced to engage with. Klein suggests that Bong specifically uses "global Hollywood's language of the genre to tell uniquely Korean stories" (874). By using the formulaic pieces of a genre, Bong is able to instantly create an understandable and familiar form of storytelling, while the story itself remains local (Klein, 873). Without the correct historical context or local knowledge, the events, imagery, or concepts shown in foreign films can be difficult to fully comprehend or appreciate, but by framing them through a genre film's lens, Bong makes these features accessible to a global audience.

As a case study, *The Host* is rife with examples of Bong using genre as a medium to tell specific stories. *The Host* fits with the overall premise of a monster movie, especially in what the monster represents to the characters. However, besides this, many other conventions of the

monster movie are subverted or ignored, creating a fresh and exciting story to be examined. The monster's size and appearance in the film defy the audience's expectations of the genre but allow for the monster's role to be minimized so that the human characters are allowed to take focus instead. The family themselves are relatable to many Korean people and fit into paradigms that were (and are still) ingrained into popular culture and the national consciousness. Gang-du is a dim-witted, forgetful father whose lack of intelligence often lands him in trouble. Park Nam-il, Hyun-seo's uncle, is a former student protestor who, when unable to find a job out of college, turned to drinking instead. His sister, Park Nam-Joo, is a competitive archer who has a bad habit of freezing up at important moments. Due to their role as the heroes that the audience watches throughout the film, these characters are presented as a "legitimate embodiment of Koreanness" (Klein, 887). Although they are not your traditional monster movie heroes, their confrontation with the monster allows them to be realized as crucial and valuable members of their society. By minimizing the importance of the monster, Bong allows the audience to see the human characters' frustrations and passions, allowing us to relate to them and identify with them. As characters, they are uniquely Korean, and the position they occupy within the space of the film allows them to come across as heroic and significant.

I've extensively covered how authority figures within *The Host* do not adhere to the rules that come with monster movies. They deliver almost as much physical violence to the innocent citizens of Seoul as the monster does, and do not show any care or concern for the well-being of their civilians. Bong disrupts the genre's traditional roles by making the scientists and the bureaucrats of the film secondary antagonists. With these figures functioning as antagonists, Bong can make commentary on Korea's relationship with the United States and insert some explicit iconography in the protest scene towards the end of the film. The protest scene is

immediately recognizable to anyone familiar with the anti-government protests of the 1980s, and the later, larger protests in 2016-2017. The image of hordes of citizens holding signs pushing against police officers with riot shields as tear gas (or Agent Yellow) swirls around them is a striking one. After Agent Yellow is dropped, there are also slow-motion shots of protestors bleeding from their ears, crying, or limp due to the inhalation of the gas. All of this imagery is deeply linked with specific Korean history of revolt against a corrupt government and the punishment that faces Korean people due to that revolt. Nam-il also uses Molotov cocktails to fight the creature, which is symbolic of the weapon of choice used by student protestors in the 1980s. By staging a protest in a monster movie, Bong can insert these images that invoke emotion and recognition from a local audience, while creating an exciting set piece for an international audience.

As for Korea's relationship with the United States in the film, Klein describes the epilogue of the film as a form of closure and rejection of American dominance. The film ends with Gang-du and a young boy that Hyun-seo had protected throughout the film, and who survived the confrontation with the monster. They sit down to eat dinner, with the table piled high with Korean food, as an American broadcast detailing the "Korean virus crisis" plays on a television set in the background (Klein, 890). The little boy states that there is "nothing good on [television]" and that they should turn it off. Gang-du obliges and leans over to shut the TV off with his foot. Klein states that in this move, Gang-du and the boy are "assert[ing] the primacy of things Korean and claim the power to shut out things American" (890). By rejecting what the American authority figures had to say about the crisis they lived through, Gang-du and the boy are inverting the relationship that the audience had observed throughout the film: Korean subservience to American authority. Shutting out the authority's means of communication with

them, “they refuse to assume a subservient position” (Klein, 890). This inversion allows Gang-du to establish himself as a Korean individual separate from the trauma of American authority that he had to suffer through. This epilogue allows Bong Joon-ho to show the completion of Gang-du’s character arc and liberation from American control. However, it also delivers on the potential continuation of the monster threat that is tradition for monster movies to end on. While there is not a ‘The End’ title card that “dissolves into a question mark,” Gang-du monitoring the riverbank with a rifle functions just as well (Murphy, 44). Bong delivers a traditional, vague monster movie epilogue that adheres to the rules of the genre by insinuating that the monster may still be out there, yet also shows the rejection of American dominance in a film full of it. The epilogue of the film is a prime example of the entanglement of genre convention with social commentary that Bong Joon-ho excels at.

The use of genre to convey social commentary in *The Host*, whether concerning the authority figures in the film, the monster itself, or the human characters, works to show Bong’s unique use of the rules that genre enforces upon its participants. Klein remarks that Bong can “subvert genre conventions even as he invokes them”, as Bong shows a familiarity with the genre yet sometimes actively works against that knowledge to create a more interesting film (Klein, 886). Bong’s use of genre, whether it be subverting familiar rules or playing along with the established genre-specific knowledge, allows him to insert specific Korean stories into internationally appealing films. These stories are often not well reported on or known about on the world stage, which makes Bong’s insistence on their inclusion in his more marketable films incredibly important. His inversion of genre conventions in *The Host* also allows for audiences to examine social issues that Bong introduces and questions in his movies. His ability to switch

between genres and adhere to conventions in one sequence while ignoring them in the next is what makes him an exciting and avant-garde auteur in the filmmaking world.

While *The Host* and *Memories of Murder* focus more on the subversion of established genre-specific rules, Bong Joon-ho also often engages with the combination of multiple genres within his films. Due to his self-proclaimed ‘schizophrenic style’, Bong’s films often involve a collision of a variety of genres and tones, which is best exemplified in Bong’s magnum opus: *Parasite* (2019). *Parasite* brought great international success for the director, garnering Best International Feature, Best Screenplay, Best Director, and Best Picture at the 2020 Academy Awards, as well as the Palme D’or at the 2019 Cannes Film Festival. Considering all of its success, *Parasite* is a difficult film to pin down, genre-wise. There are sequences in the film that invoke genre tropes and imagery from comedy films, heist films, and even horror films. This film also is one of the best examples of Bong Joon-ho’s ‘genre flip’, with the two halves of the movie almost feeling like different films altogether. *Parasite* is a perfect example of Bong Joon-ho’s ability to use different genre elements to build a compelling storyline and effective film. In this section, we’ll look at how the film uses different genre-specific imagery to break the mold of the genre film. *Parasite* follows the trajectory and the intertwining of two families, the impoverished, down on their luck Kim family, and the wealthy, affluent Park family. Throughout the film, a variety of imagery associated with certain genres is present, creating an interesting blend of iconography and tone.

If someone had heard that the film ends with three visceral murders, they would be surprised to hear that several sequences in *Parasite* borrow strategies and techniques from contemporary comedy films. The Kim family is first presented to the audience through a comedic lens. In the opening scene of the movie, the Kim family's father, Ki-taek advises that

Ki-woo, his son, leaves the window open when the city officials are spraying the neighborhood with pesticides since they'll get a "free extermination". This results in their semi-basement home being filled with poisonous gas, which causes the family to begin violently coughing. This scenario utilizes a comedic strategy discussed by Jeroen Vandaele called "incongruity" in his essay titled "Humor Mechanisms in Film Comedy: Incongruity and Superiority". Vandaele defines incongruity as "a conflict between what is expected and what actually occurs in the joke" (223). Incongruity, essentially, is a juxtaposition of expectations (something that Bong Joon-ho excels at) that can be construed as a comedic idea. In the previous example, the expectation would be for the Kim family to close the window to not inhale poisonous gas, but this expectation is turned on its head when Ki-taek instructs his son to instead leave the window open. Ironically, Vandaele later describes incongruity as a "parasitic notion" that relies on the construction of "expectations... that people entertain as a result of certain stimuli" (227). The incongruity can only be seen as incongruous when compared to the "cognitive scheme" or expectation that a viewer will create (227). In other movies, including comedy films, the father of the family is seen to hold the well-being of his family above all else. Films such as *The Incredibles* (2004) or even Bong's very own *The Host*, center around a father whose prime concern is making sure his family is safe. The concept of getting free extermination of pests in the home is seen as more valuable than the Kim family's health and wellbeing; a radical departure from what a patriarch of the family usually is shown to value in a story.

Another scene that utilizes comedic incongruity is Kim Ki-jung's infiltration onto the Park family payroll. Ki-jung markets herself as an "art therapist," manipulating Mrs. Park into believing that Park Da-song needs extensive sessions with her for him to thrive. The incongruity can be seen in Ki-jung's ridiculous claims that she makes to Mrs. Park to fool her. She tells Mrs.

Park “The lower right region of a painting is called the ‘schizophrenia zone’. Psychotic symptoms often reveal themselves here.” The camera then pans down to the painting she’s referring to, which looks like the scribbling of an eight-year-old. Ki-jung makes Mrs. Park think something is wrong with her son by using big, fancy-sounding words in an authoritative tone. The audience knows that she is not an ‘art therapist’ and that she is lying. Later, it is revealed that Ki-jung simply “googled art therapy and ad-libbed the rest” to fool Mrs. Park. Her lies are an incongruity since she is not being truthful with her employer. Lying in a job interview is seen as a departure from normative behavior, but in the film, it works, creating a contradiction with the norm.

Comedic incongruity in *Parasite* is often paired with slapstick comedy, something that is familiar territory for Bong Joon-ho, as it is regularly integrated into his other films. Slapstick comedy is reliant on the medium of the body to convey the comedic action. Films by Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton are examples of slapstick. Violence to the body, done to the body by another character or by the environment, is essential to the slapstick method. Chaplin’s adventure through the gears and cogs of factory machinery in *Modern Times* (1936) is physically impossible, as most of the stunts that take place throughout the film would result in mutilation or death. However, slapstick allows a character to experience harm without having to deal with any of the consequences. In *Parasite*, slapstick is often utilized to undercut more dramatic moments. Near the midpoint in the movie, the former housekeeper Moon-gwang and her husband Geun-sae threaten to expose the Kim family for lying their way onto the Park’s payroll. While Moon-gwang and Geun-sae reminisce about happier times in the house within a flashback, diegetic classical music begins to play. However, the Kim family, taking advantage of the distraction, attacks the pair in an attempt to delete an incriminating video off of Moon-gwang’s phone.

Moon-gwang and Geun-sae are rudely jolted out of their flashback by the physical violence of the Kim family. As the fight goes on, the music continues to play, though now non-diegetically.

The violence quickly escalates, with Moon-gwang slamming a bottle into Ki-woo and Ki-jung's heads. Ki-jung responds by using a peach (which Moon-gwang is deathly allergic to) to incapacitate her. In this scene, both incongruity and slapstick lend their hand to create a comedic sequence. The incongruity comes from how the scene is scored. The music within the scene is jazzy and upbeat, calling to mind a peaceful or relaxing scene. This is juxtaposed by the violent fight unfolding onscreen as the two families struggle for control. Usually, a fight scene like this would be scored by intense, suspenseful music as the two parties battled it out. The relaxing classical music undercuts the excitement that a fight scene usually invokes, creating a conflict in the audience's expectations versus what they're seeing. The slapstick elements can be drawn from the physical fighting, which is extremely violent. However, the music and the character's reactions to being hit undercut the severity of the violence, making the fight more comical. The violence, at first, contains no real consequence, even when it looks like it should. Even the use of the peaches in an attempt to stop Moon-gwang is played more as a joke, as she sputters and protests. The comedic tone of the fight, however, contrasts sharply with how the scene ends. Moon-gwang, as she attempts to warn the Parks of the Kim family's deception, is kicked down a flight of stairs and mortally wounded. This ending contains a dark tone switch between comedic slapstick fighting and more graphic violence that has deadly consequences. The switch serves to underscore the importance of the Kim family's economic survival, and what they will do to secure it.

Since the Kims are introduced as comedic characters, they do not get a lot of chances to shine in the film, as their plight is usually played for laughs. However, a specific montage early

on draws inspiration from the heist film genre and allows the Kims to appear competent. A subset of the gangster/crime genre, the heist genre boasts such films as *Oceans 11* (2001) or *Inception* (2010) that involve a team of thieves who commit a “complicated theft through precisely coordinated actions and skillful collaboration” (Hanich, 305). In his essay titled “On Pros and Cons and Bills and Gates: The Heist Film as Pleasure”, Julian Hanich explores the rules and conventions surrounding this subgenre. While the Kim family isn’t stealing gems or robbing a casino, the montage where the Kims sabotage and torment the former housekeeper, Moon-gwang, out of a job calls to mind the tropes and conventions of the heist genre. The montage is narrated by Ki-taek and Ki-woo, as they work their way through a script that Ki-taek is supposed to recite for Mrs. Park to convince her that Moon-gwang is unfit to serve. The sequence follows the Kim family as they execute their plan, each family member playing an important role that leads to their overall success. However, this tightly choreographed and perfected plan does not at all match the Kim family that we’ve been introduced to. The slapstick characters that we know are replaced, seemingly for just this one scene, by skilled professionals, conning their way into another family’s home and onto their payroll. The Kims move with purpose, and everything falls into place perfectly, which fits into the expectation that “...heist protagonists do not stumble, fall, and stupidly break things by accident...” (Hanich, 306). Slapstick can be considered the opposite of a heist film since the characters in a heist film move with such precision and grace (Hanich 306). This scene, which is beautifully paced and edited, shows the Kims at their best and most effective. The utilization of their characters in this new light is synonymous with what shows up in a heist genre film.

Another connection this montage has to the heist genre is the motivation for theft or the plan. In a heist film, the protagonists steal because they desire financial gain but also to show off

their expertise. "...team members have sunk or otherwise gravitated to employment that does not utilize their talents or which avoids the recognition of their true vocation... Their skills and expertise only shine during the heist..." (Hanich, 307). The Kims are unemployed and do not get a chance to use or show their actual talents. Ki-jung is shown to be creative and tech-savvy, while Ki-woo is a great businessman. The mother, Chung-sook, is tough and crafty, and the father, Ki-taek has a ton of experience in different business ventures. However, since they are poor, they are unable to fulfill their potential, and instead must do menial labor to survive. The heist scene is the only place where they can fully realize their talents to succeed together. The fulfillment of their strengths through this heist montage works to put the characters further into the traditional roles secured by the heist genre.

The last genre that *Parasite* manages to emulate is the horror genre. While there are only a few scenes that invoke terror, tropes and fragments of the horror genre are present in the film. *Parasite* is a good example of what Isabel Pinedo calls the "postmodern horror film" in her essay "Postmodern Elements of the Contemporary Horror Film". Pinedo gives five criteria for the contemporary horror film, all of which fit the plot and themes represented in *Parasite*. Almost all of the criteria fit into the film when considering Geun-sae, who is the horrific character in the film. Geun-sae is Moon-gwang's husband who lives in an underground bunker beneath the Park's house to hide out from loan sharks. While not an other-worldly monster or crazed serial killer, his violence, irrationality, and very existence in the film create strong linkages to the horror genre. Pinedo's first and most important criterion is that "Horror constitutes a violent disruption of the everyday world" (Pinedo, 90). The film ends with Geun-sae emerging from the bunker to kill the Kim family as revenge for killing his wife. This scene is full of violence, and it interrupts a child's birthday party during broad daylight. The act of violence in this setting

creates a startling contradiction in the everyday world. The killings of Ki-jung, Geun-sae, and Mr. Park are all graphic and explicit, which sharply contrasts with the slapstick violence seen earlier in the film. This scene comes as a surprise to the viewer since nothing leading up to this point in the film suggested such a brutal ending. The harsh daylight and party atmosphere add to the feeling of unease, as nothing about the location suggests such horrific violence.

Another criterion of the horror film that *Parasite* fulfills is that “Horror transgresses and violates boundaries” (Pinedo, 90). Geun-sae living in the basement bunker violates the boundaries and normative guidelines that structure our everyday lives. Having another person living within the home of a family without their knowledge is a terrifying concept. The hair-raising shot where Geun-sae’s bunker is revealed works to unsettle the viewer, to show that not all is right in this pristine and modern house. The discomfort that Geun-sae’s presence creates in the house can be observed in the scene where Da-song sees Geun-sae emerging from the basement, slowly rising over the stairs like a ghost. The frightening image of Geun-sae’s wide eyes piercing through the darkness while Da-song sits, helpless, is objectively terrifying. Da-song even suffers a seizure shortly after seeing Geun-sae, cementing the trauma that the man’s presence in the house invokes with a physical reaction.

Geun-sae’s erratic and irrational behavior can be chalked up to spending years in a semi-imprisoned state underneath the Park family. However, this behavior also conveniently aligns him with Pinedo’s third rule for a horror film: “Horror throws into question the value of rationality” (Pinedo, 91). Geun-sae has an irrational obsession with Mr. Park, who he credits with housing and feeding him. Geun-sae even has a small shrine erected in honor of Mr. Park, and he assists Mr. Park by lighting the stairs the patriarch climbs when he gets home from work every night. The Parks believe that the stair lights operate on motion sensors, but in actuality, it’s

Geun-sae beneath them, using switches to turn the lights on and off. Geun-sae's worship of Mr. Park can be observed as irrational behavior since he has never met Mr. Park, who is not even aware of Geun-sae's existence. Geun-sae's rituals and reverence for Mr. Park highlight the irrationality his character represents since Mr. Park's occupation of the house above actually prevents Geun-sae from living in the mansion. Geun-sae wants to stay in the basement, which is representative of a lower social status. He would rather scrounge for scraps from the wealthy Park family and continue to "honor" them than ascend the stairs to a higher standard of living. This way of thinking is irrational, as he does not aspire to live more comfortably, only to fulfill a limited role that he's created for himself in the basement.

The climactic scene at the end of the film is followed by a dream-like sequence that represents Ki-woo's hopes and aspirations for the future, but the audience is never given definitive closure on whether or not this dream ever came true. This ambiguous ending aligns *Parasite* with another component of the contemporary horror film, which is the "repudiat[ion] of narrative closure" (Pinedo, 91). The audience is left in the dark on whether or not the Kim family is ever able to be reunited. The viewer's fears or predictions remain unconfirmed, as the end of the film does not give any answers. This sort of non-ending falls into what Pinedo calls an "uncertain" ending, where the potential for the "continuation of the threat" is implicit (Pinedo, 100). The possibility of the continuation of the Kim's problems is hinted at by the final shot of the film, where Ki-woo looks directly at the camera, which creates an uneasy feeling of pessimism in the viewer. It is unlikely, based on the luck of the Kim family observed throughout the movie, that they will make enough money to buy the house and release Ki-taek from the basement. However, the end of the film confirms nothing, giving a feeling of ambiguity and uncertainty.

The last piece of criteria that Pinedo lays out is less based on plot structure or content, and more based on the audience's reaction to the film. Horror films manage to create a “bounded experience of fear” in the viewer, where the spectator is unsettled and frightened by the imagery or story created by the film. *Parasite*'s connection to this point lies in anecdotal evidence, but most people that I've talked to about the film reacted with fear or discomfort to the scene of Geun-sae rising the stairs or the violent showdown at Da-song's birthday party. However, even though the audience reacts to segments of the film with fear, the fear acts as an intriguing addition to the film rather than a negative experience for the viewer.

Taking all of this genre-specific imagery, criteria, and tropes within the film into account, we are left with a question: What film genre does *Parasite* fit into? While it has pieces of a heist film, a horror movie, and a comedy film, it cannot fully fit into any of those genres. An average comedy film does not usually contain a climactic ending scene where some of its main characters are stabbed to death. So how does one label *Parasite*? It is widely hailed as a “thriller” across a wide net of online film critiquing websites such as Rotten Tomatoes and IMDb. But this label doesn't fit. While *Parasite* is most definitely thrilling, the word “thriller” refers more to the feeling that it gives the audience while watching the movie and is too vague to function as a defined genre, rather more of a way, as Barry Grant puts it, to “describe tone” (503).

Parasite is a perfect example of a Bong Joon-Ho movie not fitting into any one genre yet remaining an engaging and exciting experience. The use of genre-specific imagery and sequences work to remind audiences of the established and the familiar, all while pushing the plot forward and figuratively thickening the narrative. The audience is lured into sympathizing with the Kim family due to their comedic incongruities, they're seen as endearing and likable characters. However, as the film progresses, the audience recognizes that the Kim family are not

moral people, nor can they be categorized as the classic ‘good guys’ that other films may star. The Kim family swindles hard-working people out of their jobs and takes advantage of the Park family to get what they want. They’re also willing to kill others to keep what they’ve been gaining, as seen with Chung-sook’s murder of Moon-gwang when she kicks her down the stairs. These once comedic characters who coughed their way through a “free extermination” in their semi-basement home are now also accessories to murder. Ki-taek’s change is the most marked. Gone is the happy-go-lucky father that gave his children advice on how to effectively steal free wi-fi. Instead, Ki-taek is furious at the injustice his family must endure in opposition to the Park’s lavish lifestyle. His anger comes to the surface in an act of violence against Mr. Park, who functions as his opposite, the alternate patriarch in the film. Ki-taek committing murder is the last thing that one would suspect to happen to the character observed at the start of the film. The audience’s perception of these characters changes throughout the movie based on our expectations of genre characters. The “incongruity” between our expectations and what we are shown creates more complex characters to follow.

Tonally, the film undergoes great change as well. Sequences like the heist-montage call for a certain wonderment, an awe at the tightly choreographed events unfolding on screen. Seeing the Kim family enjoy the spoils of their efforts feels earned and filled with satisfaction at a job completed. However, once the film hits that classic Bong Joon-ho midpoint, the movie darkens. The wild descent into the chaotic mystery that lies underneath the house is paired perfectly with the uncut slow camera movement that brings the viewer into the bunker. The tonal switch allows for the movie to darken its themes and imagery, as this latter half of the movie is where the horror film imagery begins to seep in. The film’s use of differing tones is another way to seduce the audience into a false sense of security; we think we know what’s happening in the

film, but this midpoint switch shows us how little we know. Recognizing familiar genre imagery throughout creates a feeling of stability. The switch removes that stability and disconnects the audience from the familiarity they had become attached to throughout the film and are surprised by the graphic and bloody ending. By disconnecting from the usual genre familiarity, the film keeps the audience engaged in the mystery.

As for the social commentary communicated through the usage of genre in the film, *Parasite* contains obvious critiques of economic class inequality. Bong is no stranger to this topic, as his 2013 film *Snowpiercer* was staged on a train that represented the distinction between economic classes. In *Parasite*, physical staging once more functions as a way to represent two distinct worlds: one mired in poverty and one bursting with excess. The Kim family lives in a semi-basement apartment, surrounded by clutter. The scenes in their apartment are accompanied by a dull color palette, emphasizing the drab nature of their circumstances. The Kims are given this living condition because it spatially puts them below the Parks, who live on a hill in a grand, modern mansion full of color and chic style choices. The difference between the two families is clear throughout the film, but a scene that strongly represents this difference comes towards the end of the movie where both families are shown reacting to the torrential rain the previous night. The Kims wake up that morning in a gymnasium, their apartment destroyed due to the rain overflowing from the storm drains and spilling down into their neighborhood, flooding it. The Parks, however, wake up happy to throw Da-song an extravagant “impromptu” birthday party. The scene contains comedic elements through the juxtaposition of the two families in response to the rain as well. While Mrs. Park picks out an outfit from her gigantic closet, Ki-taek searches through a pile of donated clothes in the gymnasium. As her driver, Ki-taek takes Mrs. Park to several stores to buy party supplies, and she remarks on the phone to a friend that “...that rain

was such a blessing” because it has made the weather favorable for Da-song’s party. Ki-taek drives with a stunned expression, attempting to come to terms with the fact that the rain has taken almost everything from him. The difference between the Kims’ and the Parks’ responses to the flood is so vastly different that the viewer can’t help but laugh from discomfort. Mrs. Park’s ignorance of the Kim’s plight is so naively insensitive, yet the Kims must keep up the act to keep their employment. This example of dark comedy in the film shows Bong’s ability to combine intensely dramatic moments with levity, and this is far from the only example in *Parasite*.

Around the time of the heist montage in the film, the Kim family has almost completely invaded the Park household, replacing the workers around the residence. However, the Park family sees workers like them as replaceable, switching out their driver, housekeeper, and tutors without much thought. The Park’s willingness to exchange their workers shows how they view these positions through the lens of human commodification. Their workers are only valuable to them because of the services that they can provide. Da-hye even uses Ki-woo to replace her previous boyfriend (who was also her tutor), showing that she considers the members of the lower class that occupy the position of lover or tutor interchangeable. However, through Bong’s use of the heist genre, the Kim family transcends their position as human commodities in the Park household. Throughout the heist montage, the Kims can function at their full capacity as competent human subjects and use the abilities that they’ve had to suppress up to this point. By depicting the Kim’s final act of invasion into the Parks’ lives through a heist montage, Bong gives them space to fulfill a position of capable characters. In the other sequences of the film, the Kim family isn’t permitted to fully inhabit a proficient position due to their commodification, but for this one scene, their commodified form is forgotten. Without Bong’s combination of genres in the film, he would not be able to give the Kims this liberating moment. His eclectic style of

filmmaking allows for the characters in his films to fully realize their potential, and *Parasite* is just the most recent example.

In the film, the Kim family infiltrates the Park's home by securing employment from the rich family. However, this action itself is contradictory, for the Kims are competing with other members of the lower class to win the right to be subservient to the upper class. The Kims want the employment to the Parks that they've gained throughout the film, Moon-gwang wants her old job as housekeeper back, and Geun-sae wants to remain in the basement to continue to "honor" Mr. Park. The Kims engage in graphic violence against Moon-gwang and Geun-sae to keep their jobs, but the reasoning behind this violence is only the opportunity to serve the Parks and perform often embarrassing or degrading jobs for a rich family that takes them for granted. Since the Parks view their workers as interchangeable commodities, the scene where the Kims fight Moon-gwang and Geun-sae to the death is darkly comedic, as the 'prize' for winning represents an incongruity. The death that results from their violence cannot, however, be seen as comedic, and inspires horror in the viewer. A dying Geun-sae (the horrific character) covered in blood and cake frosting, shouting "Respect!" to a terrified Mr. Park is certainly a frightening image. However, his death, along with the death of Ki-jung, is representative of the cost of the lower class fighting over the right to subservience to the upper class. While the lower class dies, the upper class remains unaffected by and unaware of their plight. Mr. Park only suffers harm because Ki-taek decides to "cross the line" and inflict violence upon the upper class. However, Ki-taek is then unable to return to society, effectively punished for this transgression against the upper class. Meanwhile, Chung-sook, who has killed Geun-sae and Moon-gwang, doesn't face any sort of societal punishment for her murders, since the victims were a part of the lower class. Bong's use of comedic and horrific elements in the violent final scene allows for these critical

observations of class struggle to come to light. The audience can find a sort of dark humor in the lower-class characters fighting for an incongruous victory, but the consequences of the violence reflect the horrifying reality of this class warfare.

Bong Joon-ho's use of genre in *Parasite* is a great example of his "schizophrenic" style of film directing and writing. *Parasite* is impossible to define due to the influences he decides to rely on and the way he breaks free of the mold. In an interview with *Filmed in Ether*, Director Bong himself describes much of his work as "genre films" but also says he never intentionally mixes genres, he instead tries to capture the "emotions of everyday life" (Heinz). Intentional or not, the films that result, such as *Parasite* cause publications such as *Indiewire* to claim that "Bong Joon-ho has become a genre unto himself" (Ehrlich). His "dexterous control" over how genre is utilized in his stories, paired with his immaculate attention to detail creates powerful films that are commercially and critically successful (Heinz). *Parasite* is just the most recent example of a film that subverts and breaks the mold of what a self-proclaimed "genre film" can contain.

Bong Joon-ho's style of filmmaking is certainly unique, and the influence he's had on the Korean and Western film industries is marked. The accolades from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts along with recognition from famous directors such as Quentin Tarantino stand to represent the influence and respect that Bong's films have garnered for him. Bong's ability to use genre in a way not many other directors can make his films stand out. The interweaving of biting social commentary and character arc fulfillment and the recognizable iconography of genre allows for incredibly relevant stories that can be appreciated by nearly every audience. The use of recognizable Hollywood genre conventions makes parts of Bong's films easy to consume, but his subversion of those same conventions, or the breaking of the genre-specific social contract,

makes the audience put effort into really dissecting what's happening. This break from the expected creates an innovative film experience. Bong's consideration of "Korean realities" in his films makes a space to tell specific Korean stories while using Hollywood genre conventions. This means that stories that were previously inaccessible to those who lacked local knowledge can be, in a way, "translated" for a broader market. Those who see *Memories of Murder* may decide to look into the real-life case that the film was based on and discover the difference between the surface crime and the deep crime that Klein discussed. Audiences of *The Host* could be affected by the political imagery present in the film and research the historical protests that inspired such imagery. Regardless, even if the films don't inspire the viewer to take a deeper look into Korean history, Bong's films offer Korean media that is widely acknowledged and recognized as works of value. Bong's commercial success leads to more exposure and consumption of his filmography. *Parasite* winning Best Picture greatly increases the chance that more people will see it, meaning more audiences will engage with work that inspires conversation about economic differences between groups of people in a capitalistic society. While *Parasite*'s social commentary is more universal, the undeniably Korean signifiers in the film, such as the imagery of the semi-basement home or the "scholar rock" that Ki-woo becomes obsessed with are ingrained in the film's DNA. Audiences must engage with the specific Korean otherness in order to experience the film, meaning they must confront the Korean reality that Bong creates space for in his films by using genre as a vehicle.

The success of *Parasite* also points towards a shift in what the traditional genre film can contain. Bong calls all of his work "genre films" in the Heinz interview, stating that he just attempts to reflect everyday life in his films. In the interview, Bong states that people aren't guided by a single emotion throughout their day, but rather a collision of a variety of different

experiences and emotions (Heinz). This collision, when translated into a film form, creates the genre-bending and impactful films that Bong is always able to produce. Bong's overall impact on the future of the film industry and the genre film has yet to be seen, but it's possible that other directors could follow in his footsteps and create films that aren't as reliant on the use of only one genre. Directors from different countries could take a similar route to Bong and tell specific stories from their cultures by using easily read genre conventions. Bong's success clears the path for a more diverse generation of filmmakers to have a larger role on the international stage. The year following Bong's wins for *Parasite*, Chloé Zhao became the first Asian woman to win Best Director at the 2021 Academy Awards. In fact, both the 2021 and 2022 Academy Awards have seen an increase in foreign films nominated for a variety of categories. While the credit for this increase cannot go entirely to Bong, it is worth mentioning that *Parasite* was the first "foreign language film" to really make a big cultural impact on the traditionally Western-centric award show. Bong's ability to create effective and engrossing films by subverting genre-specific expectations opens the door for more creativity and inclusivity in film as a medium. Bong has long been a champion for Western audiences exploring the broader world of film, saying during his acceptance speech for a Golden Globe for *Parasite*: "Once you overcome the 1-inch-tall barrier of subtitles, you will be introduced to so many more amazing films." Bong's encouragement to engage with foreign films is an inspiring reminder to look for films that are out of one's comfort zone.

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