
Virtues of a Gangster: Rhetoric and Villainy in the Films of Martin Scorsese

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Rhetoric is charm constructed by language. This paper unpicks the rhetorical techniques at play in two Martin Scorsese pictures, *Gangs of New York* (2002), and *The Departed* (2006). The films' chief antagonists, 'Bill 'The Butcher' Cutting,' and 'Frank Costello,' respectively, are simultaneously deplorable and enjoyable. The antithesis is achieved through rhetoric employed by Scorsese, to depict humanity in villains by revealing their inherent virtue.

A rhetorical analysis of the scripts' linguistic composition, coupled with observed themes transmitted by Scorsese, will build an understanding of how far rhetoric can foster empathy for seemingly evil characters. An exploration into how the director uses enthymeme will reveal a core premise consistent across both films, on which he hangs further contextual stratagems of persuasion. It will also be observed how the characters in question exhibit their own enthymemes that underpin the vital components of their respective character arcs.

Aristotelian approaches on the 'special topics' and 'appeals' will be employed as tools for discerning the rhetorical contentions put forth in the characters' interactions and how their arguments build faith with the audience. Classical Roman interpretations of style in rhetoric will show how the delivery of argument is essential to its persuasive efficacy. Rhetorical schemes and tropes will be identified throughout to the extent that they enhance the persuasive narrative. These approaches will conflate to form a composite understanding of how cinematic character-charm is contrived to make an audience believe that villains are virtuous.