

CHAPTER IV

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Intrinsic Aspects

In literary and cinematic studies, intrinsic elements refer to the internal components that construct a narrative's meaning, structure, and aesthetic. These elements such as character and characterization, setting, and conflict serve as the foundational building blocks through which a story communicates its deeper messages and emotional impact.

4.1.1. Character and Characterization

4.1.1.1. Frank Sheeran

Frank Sheeran, played by Robert De Niro, is a complex and morally ambiguous character. He is a World War II veteran who becomes a truck driver and eventually works his way up as a hitman for the Bufalino crime family. Sheeran's character is defined by his loyalty, cold pragmatism, and ability to detach himself emotionally from the violent tasks he is asked to perform.

Frank starts as a man trying to make ends meet for his family but is soon drawn into the world of organized crime, where he proves to be efficient, emotionless, and reliable. Throughout the film, Frank is portrayed as reserved and stoic, often silently reflecting on his actions rather than expressing emotion. His character grapples with the toll of his violent life in his later years, particularly as he faces loneliness and the alienation of his family.



Picture 4.1.2.1.1 Frank meets Russell and Angelo. (*The Irishman*, 2019, 00:35:35-00:35:40)



Picture 4.1.2.1.2 Frank meets Russell and Angelo. (*The Irishman*, 2019, 00:35:35-00:35:40)

Picture 4.1.2.1.1 portrays the scene where Frank Sheeran meets Russell Bufalino and Angelo Bruno, Frank's characterization is established as pragmatic, reserved, and loyal, but also morally flexible. He does not question their authority and is willing to follow orders, showcasing his adaptability to the criminal world. His character appears grounded in a sense of loyalty to the people who can help him rise, reflecting his journey deeper into organized crime. This scene is taken in straight-on angle with medium shot.

Picture 4.1.2.1.2 portrays Frank as a man who is open to doing whatever is necessary for survival and advancement. When interacting with these powerful mob figures, Frank comes across as calm and respectful, aware of their influence and power. This scene is taken in low angle with medium close-up shot.

4.1.1.2. Russell Bufalino

Russell Bufalino, played by Joe Pesci, is a calm, measured, and highly respected leader within the mafia. As the head of the Bufalino crime family, Russell is the embodiment of quiet power and control. Unlike many other mob bosses

depicted in film, Russell is not flashy or overtly violent. Instead, he exercises his influence through subtle gestures, restrained speech, and quiet authority.

Frank: “Jimmy’s pissed off of Fitz.”

Russell: “Fitz is okay. We like Fitz but there’s a problem. Jimmy’s got that ball-busting Dorfman holding up loans that Fitz already okay. I hate that Dorfman. He such a pain-in-the-ass fucking Jew.”

Frank: “So what do you want me to do?”

Russell: “No, not that. Not that.”

Russell: “What you gotta do is put a firecracker up into Dorfman’s ass. Fitz will get the message. I mean you can’t do it Fitz, if you do that to the lush, he’ll run to the Feds and screw up everything. But Dorfman, you gotta do it to Dorfman.”

Dialogue 4.1.2.2.1 Russell tells Frank what to do. (*The Irishman*, 2019, 01:33:28-01:34:14)

Based on the dialogue, although Russell is a composed, almost fatherly figure who prefers diplomacy and strategic thinking over brute force. He is willing to do what is necessary for the good of the Mob or simply just keep everyone in line. He is deeply pragmatic and values loyalty, which is why he takes a special interest in Frank Sheeran. Russell becomes Frank's mentor and introduces him to the world of organized crime, guiding him through the ranks.

4.1.1.3. Jimmy Hoffa

Jimmy Hoffa, played by Al Pacino, is a larger-than-life, charismatic, and passionate labour union leader. Hoffa is portrayed as a man driven by his fierce commitment to the Teamsters union, his fiery temper, and his unwillingness to compromise on his beliefs.



Picture 4.1.2.3.1 Hoffa calls Frank.
(*The Irishman*, 2019, 00:46:55-
00:47:02)



Picture 4.1.2.3.2 Hoffa speech at the Union.
(*The Irishman*, 2019, 01:12:50-01:12:56)

Picture 4.1.2.3.1 portrays the scene where Jimmy Hoffa calls Frank for the first time. Immediately charm Frank with his charisma and status. He aware that Frank “paint houses”, a slang for hitman. He asks Frank to be his ‘enforcer’ in the Union; thus, solidify his ties with the Mob. This scene is taken in eye-level angle with close-up shot.

Picture 4.1.2.3.2 portrays the scene where Jimmy Hoffa delivers a speech at the Teamsters Union gathering. Hoffa gives a speech to the Teamsters in *The Irishman*, his characterization is that of a passionate, charismatic, and fiery leader. This scene is taken in high angle with full shot.

4.1.2. Conflict

Martin Scorsese’s *The Irishman* (2019) is a masterful meditation on loyalty, power, and regret, and its narrative is driven by layered and escalating conflict. Rather than centring on fast-paced external action, the film builds its dramatic tension through psychological and relational struggles, particularly within the inner world of Frank Sheeran and his fraught relationships with Russell Bufalino and

Jimmy Hoffa. These conflicts illuminate the moral consequences of loyalty within a corrupt world and the price of survival in organized crime.

4.1.2.1 Internal Conflict

One of the most devastating conflicts in *The Irishman* (2019) is Frank's internal struggle with guilt and emotional repression. While Frank appears stoic and obedient throughout the film, his narration and later scenes reveal a man haunted by the choices he made—especially the killing of Jimmy Hoffa.



Picture 4.1.2.1.1 Frank calls Russell. (*The Irishman*, 2019, 02:52:35-02:52:41)



Picture 4.1.2.1.2 Frank knows about Jimmy's death. (*The Irishman*, 2019, 02:50:14-02:51:00)

4.1.2.2 Interpersonal Conflict

Another central conflict is between Frank and Jimmy Hoffa, which builds subtly over time. Initially allies, the two grow distant as Hoffa's defiance against the mafia leadership—including Russell—endangers not only himself but the criminal order that Frank is part of.



Picture 4.1.2.2.1 Frank tells Jimmy to ease up. (*The Irishman*, 2019, 02:03:10-02:05:15)



Picture 4.1.2.2.1 Frank tells Jimmy the decision's final. (*The Irishman*, 2019, 02:21:11-02:22:13)

4.1.3. Setting and Locations

4.1.3.1. 1960's Political Turmoil

The 1960's Political Turmoil is captured mainly through references to the Kennedys, especially the tension between Jimmy Hoffa and Robert F. Kennedy. In picture 4.1.5.1.1, scenes feature Robert Kennedy questions Hoffa and Hoffa's resistance to the government's crackdown on corruption and the union. The scene is taken in straight-on angle with medium shot.



Picture 4.1.5.1.1 Robert Kennedy questions Jimmy Hoffa. (*The Irishman*, 2019, 00:59:53- 01:00:07)



Picture 4.1.5.1.2 RFK vs. Hoffa hearing. (*The Irishman*, 2019, 00:59:45-00:59:51)

In picture 4.1.5.1.2, scenes feature the court situation and confrontation between Robert F. Kennedy and Jimmy Hoffa. It symbolises the era's clash between institutional power and organized labour. Visuals include televised hearings and

Hoffa's heated confrontations, which emphasize the political pressures in the 1960's. The scene is taken in high angle with full shot.

4.1.3.2. 1970's Urban Decline Era

As time progresses into the 1970s, settings depict a more subdued, deteriorating urban environment. In picture 4.1.5.2.1, mob influence has dwindled, and scenes show dilapidated buildings, and run-down interiors, reflecting a sense of decay. The scene is taken in straight-on angle with full shot.



Picture 4.1.5.2.1 Frank prepares to kill Jimmy Hoffa (*The Irishman*, 2019, 02:39:41)



Picture 4.1.5.2.2 Frank drives off. (*The Irishman*, 2019, 01:47:11-01:47:20)

In picture 4.1.5.2.2, the scene set in typical mob-associated locations, such as darkened empty streets, restaurants, hotel rooms, private clubhouses. The settings often feel claustrophobic and intimate, enhancing the sense of secrecy and danger that permeates the characters' lives. The scene is taken in high angle with full shot.

4.1.3.3. Nursing Home



Picture 4.1.5.3.1 An elderly Frank lives in the nursing home. (*The Irishman*, 2019, 00:01:50-00:02:34)



Picture 4.1.5.3.2 An elderly Frank confesses to a priest. (*The Irishman*, 2019, 03:13:46-03:15:59)

In picture 4.1.5.3.1, an elderly Frank Sheeran reflecting on his life in a sterile, almost soulless nursing home, serve as a sharp contrast to the vibrant world of his past. The setting emphasizes the loneliness of his later years. The scene is taken in eye-level angle with close-up shot.

In picture 4.1.5.3.2, Frank prays with the priest in the nursing home, who visits him regularly. He feels lonely and confesses to the priest about his past lives, reflecting his spiritual emptiness of his elderly days. The scene is taken in eye-level angle with medium close-up shot

4.1.4. *Mise-en-scène*

Mise-en-scène in *The Irishman* (2019) is carefully crafted to reflect the themes of loyalty, betrayal, power, and the passage of time. Martin Scorsese uses a combination of visual elements, including costume and lighting to immerse the audience in the world of mid-20th century organized crime and to underscore the emotional and psychological journeys of the characters.

4.1.4.1 Costume

In *The Irishman* (2019), costume design plays a vital role in visualizing the film's span of five decades and in illustrating the subtle transformation of characters across time. The costumes are meticulously tailored to reflect shifts in power, class, morality, and age. Each character's wardrobe speaks volumes about their internal and external identity.

The film's costume meticulously follows the fashion of each era—from wide lapels and fedoras in the 1950s to polyester suits and casual wear in the 1980s. This grounds the film in real historical context, which is crucial given its true-story basis.



Picture 4.1.4.1.1 Frank works as truck driver (*The Irishman*, 2019, 00:07:41-00:08:00)



Picture 4.1.4.1.2 Frank meets Bill. (*The Irishman*, 2019, 00:13:00-00:14:10)

When Frank Sheeran first works as a truck driver, he wears working-class attire. Simple shirts, suspenders, and rugged coats. It reflects his blue-collar roots and outsider status in the mob world.



Picture 4.1.4.1.3 Frank meets Jimmy.
(*The Irishman*, 2019, 00:52:47-00:53:50)



Picture 4.1.4.1.4 Frank speaks during a ball.
(*The Irishman*, 2019, 02:14:38-02:15:00)

As Frank ascends the ranks, his wardrobe transforms. He begins wearing tailored suits and ties, echoing the look of high-ranking mobsters like Russell Bufalino. Costume acts as a visual cue of status and affiliation.

4.1.4.2 Lightning

The lighting in *The Irishman* (2019) plays a subtle but profound role in shaping the emotional and thematic undertones of the film. Using carefully controlled natural and artificial lighting, the film evokes a sense of realism while simultaneously signalling psychological depth and moral ambiguity.

The film often uses soft, naturalistic lighting to ground the story in realism. It mimics the ambient lighting of the time especially during daylight scenes to evoke authenticity.



Picture 4.1.4.2.1 Frank's truck breaks down.
(*The Irishman*, 2019, 00:05:30-00:05:42)



Picture 4.1.4.2.2 Russell helps Frank.
(*The Irishman*, 2019, 00:07:32-00:08:00)

4.2. The Causes Behind Frank Sheeran's Pursuit of *American Dream*

In *The Irishman* (2019), Martin Scorsese crafts a brooding and elegiac critique of the *American Dream* by tracing the moral and psychological decline of Frank Sheeran; an Irish-American World War II veteran who transforms from a modest truck driver into a labor union official and contract killer for the Mafia. Rather than outright rejecting the *American Dream* as a failed ideal, Scorsese's narrative offers a more nuanced and haunting deconstruction: the film portrays the causes of the *Dream's* pursuit as deeply entangled with historical realities such as immigrant insecurity, class struggle, and systemic corruption in mid-20th-century America. In this way, the film illustrates how the pursuit of the *American Dream* especially for immigrants and working-class individuals was often conducted through morally compromised avenues, as legitimate opportunities remained inaccessible.

4.2.1. Working-class and Immigrant Background

One of the central causes behind Frank Sheeran's pursuit of the *American Dream* is his working-class and immigrant background, which places him on the margins of mid-20th-century American society. As an Irish-American, Frank inherits a legacy of ethnic exclusion and class subordination, shaped by a nation that, despite its egalitarian rhetoric, was still governed by hierarchical structures of race, class, and ethnicity.

Frank's position as a blue-collar worker; a meat delivery truck driver places him squarely within the American working class, a demographic frequently

excluded from upward mobility unless they could conform to, or manipulate, systems of power. The limited economic opportunities available to men like Frank, coupled with societal pressures to “make something” of oneself, intensify his drive for success even if that success must come through unethical or illegal means.



Picture 4.2.1.1 Frank works as a driver.
(*The Irishman*, 2019, 00:05:34-00:05:44)



Picture 4.2.1.2 Frank unloads his cargo.
(*The Irishman*, 2019, 00:08:22-00:08:34)

The film opens with Frank working as a meat delivery truck driver, barely making ends meet. In a key early scene, Frank is shown being scolded by his employer after being accused of shorting deliveries. This moment not only reveals his precarious economic position but also reflects how the American system offered limited mobility to immigrants.

4.2.2 Alternative to Wealth

Frank Sheeran’s eventual turn to organized crime in *The Irishman* (2019) can be interpreted as a strategic adaptation to a society that promises the *American Dream* but fails to deliver it equitably, especially to those from working-class and immigrant backgrounds. His choice is not purely born of criminal intent, but emerges as a pragmatic response to structural exclusion—a form of survival within a system that offers opportunity selectively. The narrative frames Frank’s descent into the underworld not as a fall from grace, but as a logical outcome in a society where legitimate paths to social mobility are blocked, co-opted, or corrupted.



Picture 4.2.2.1 Frank offers his service.
(*The Irishman*, 2019, 00:09:36-00:10:00)



Picture 4.2.2.2 Frank meets Russell.
(*The Irishman*, 2019, 00:15:53-00:16:30)

In picture 4.2.2.1, Frank offers his service to deliver steak for the local mafia. His approach is subtle and persuasive which eventually accepted by the mafia and leads him deeper in the criminal world. He steals a few steaks and makes a profit for himself which are not ‘legally’ charged by his old company because Bill Bufalino defended him.

The scene where Frank meets Russell Bufalino at a restaurant marks a turning point. Russell takes a liking in him because Frank speaks good Italian and offers him a kind of protection, opportunity, and brotherhood absent from the rigid structures of mainstream America. Here, Frank’s loyalty and work ethic hallmarks of the traditional *American Dream* are redirected into a system of crime and corruption.

4.2.3 Social Climbing

The labour union context in which Frank operates also reflects another layer of the *American Dream* which is social climbing. In theory, labour unions were designed to elevate working-class Americans into the middle class. However, in *The Irishman* (2019), this system is thoroughly compromised by its ties to the

Mafia. The Teamsters union, led by Jimmy Hoffa, becomes both a symbol of working-class power and a reflection of its betrayal.



Picture 4.2.3.1 Hoffa at union meeting. (*The Irishman*, 2019, 00:47:32-00:48:00)



Picture 4.2.3.2 Frank collects union money. (*The Irishman*, 2019, 01:21:00-01:21:25)

Frank Sheeran's role in facilitating the diversion of Teamsters union pension funds to mob-related business ventures represents one of the film's most powerful illustrations of moral compromise in the pursuit of the *American Dream*. Rather than protecting the long-term financial security of working-class laborers. People he ostensibly represents, Frank becomes complicit in trading away collective futures for personal and organizational gain. The pension fund, a symbol of stability, retirement dignity, and earned security for the American worker, is corrupted into a tool of exploitation, used to enrich criminal enterprises and tighten the grip of the mob over legitimate institutions.

4.3. Consequences Behind Frank Sheeran's Pursuit of *American Dream*

4.3.1. Frank Sheeran's Emotional Emptiness

Frank Sheeran's journey in *The Irishman* (2019) is a harsh indictment of the *American Dream*, exposing how its promises of upward mobility, financial prosperity, and personal fulfilment may be realised through ethically ambiguous and sometimes harmful means. Although Sheeran rises from a working-class

background to financial success and prominence in influential circles, his path is characterised by illegal behaviour, blind adherence to corrupt institutions, and emotional detachment. Rather than exemplifying typical *American Dream* characteristics of hard effort, honesty, and family stability, his journey illustrates the moral degradation and emotional emptiness that may accompany the quest of achievement at any cost.



Picture 4.2.1.1 Frank kills Whispers (*The Irishman*, 2019, 00:38:55-00:39:03)



Picture 4.2.1.2 Frank kills Jimmy Hoffa (*The Irishman*, 2019, 02:47:42-02:47:48)

In picture 4.2.1.1, Frank, as a trusted enforcer, is tasked with carrying out the punishment. He kills Whispers not out of personal anger, but as part of the mob's system of loyalty, discipline, and silent rule enforcement. This also reinforces Frank's reputation as reliable and obedient, qualities that help him "move up" in the criminal world. The scene is taken in straight-on angle with full shot.

In picture 4.2.1.2, Frank is told to assassinate Hoffa, the emotional toll is tremendous, yet he goes along with it without hesitation. Frank's friendship with Jimmy Hoffa opposes this ideal. While their friendship looks true, it is ultimately driven by mafia demands and institutional devotion. This incident exemplifies how, when viewed through the viewpoint of power and practicality, *American Dream*

necessitates the betrayal of personal connections in the name of professional survival. Loyalty, another *American Dream* component, becomes disposable. The scene is taken in straight-on angle with medium full shot.

Throughout the film, Scorsese dismantles the myth of the *American Dream* by showing that Frank's success is not earned through virtue but through violence and moral compromise. Frank's rise begins when he starts "painting houses". Euphemism for contract killing, underscoring that his financial ascent is rooted in bloodshed, not merit. The values traditionally associated with the *American Dream* such as honest labour and ethical conduct are inverted, suggesting that in the world of *The Irishman* (2019), real advancement often requires participation in systemic corruption.

4.3.2. Frank Sheeran's Moral Compromise

Frank Sheeran appears to have achieved some aspects of the *American Dream*, including financial stability, a recognised position within the Teamsters union, and strong relationships to influential persons such as Jimmy Hoffa and Russell Bufalino; yet, these achievements are not the product of honest labour or equal opportunity. Instead, they are founded on violence, dishonesty, and unrelenting support for corrupt systems. Sheeran's life epitomises a perverted form of *American Dream*, in which success is linked to moral compromise and ethical decay. The actual cost of his elevation is sadly revealed in the personal life.



Picture 4.2.2.1 Frank wants to see Peggy. (*The Irishman*, 2019, 03:07:15-03:07:31)



Picture 4.2.2.2 Priest visits Frank at the nursing home. (*The Irishman*, 2019, 03:18:25-03:18:50)

In picture 4.2.2.1, Frank is trying to reconnect with his daughter, Peggy. Frank's shattered connection with his daughter, Peggy, most exemplifies the consequences of this flawed goal. Her quiet censure, particularly in the scene when she ignores him at the bank, represents the human cost of his ambition. Despite amassing riches and position, Frank becomes estranged from the same family he once hoped to assist. In a heartbreaking reversal of *American Dream's* promise of home fulfilment, Frank is left alone, emotionally separated from his children, and powerless to make apologies. The scene is taken in eye-level angle with close-up shot.

In picture 4.2.2.2, The scene shows the film's closing act highlights this effect with striking clarity. An old Frank sits alone in a nursing facility, reflecting on his past with no one to listen or forgive him. His attempts to reconcile with the Church, confess, or find peace are presented as hollow gestures rather than acts of salvation. The door he begs the nurse to leave open at the conclusion of the film is not only physical, but also symbolic; a man longing, maybe futilely, for one more

opportunity at connection or forgiveness. The scene is taken with straight-on angle with full shot.

Frank's narrative ultimately serves as a cautionary tale. It depicts a version of the *American Dream* in which prosperity is possible but only at the expense of one's conscience, relationships, and, eventually, humanity. His money and power could not hide the terrible loneliness and sadness that defined his dying days. These are the genuine implications of his life choices, and they are a powerful condemnation of any cultural structure that favours ambition above ethics.

4.4. Criticism of *American Dream* in 20th Century America in *The Irishman* (2019)

4.4.1 Illusion of Upward Mobility

At the core of the *American Dream* lies the belief that any individual, regardless of their social class, ethnic background, or circumstances of birth, can achieve upward mobility and success through hard work, determination, and perseverance. This foundational narrative has shaped American identity for generations, fostering the ideal of a meritocratic society in which rewards are based on effort and ability rather than inherited privilege. Frank Sheeran, the protagonist of *The Irishman* (2019), initially appears to embody this ideal. As an Irish-American World War II veteran and working-class labourer, Frank begins his postwar life as a delivery truck driver—performing honest but gruelling labour to support his family. His humble beginnings reflect the typical starting point of the “self-made man,”.



Picture 4.3.1.1 Frank delivers stolen meats. (*The Irishman*, 2019, 00:10:25-00:10:40)



Picture 4.3.1.2 Frank steals a few meats. (*The Irishman*, 2019, 00:11:05-00:11:20)

An early scene in *The Irishman* (2019) shows Frank Sheeran delivering sides of beef as a truck driver for a meat company; a modest but honest job that reflects his working-class status as an Irish-American trying to provide for his family in postwar America. When the opportunity arises to skim meat from his deliveries and sell it on the side, Frank does not hesitate for long. He rationalizes the theft as “just business,” framing the act not as a moral failing but as a practical solution in a system that offers little reward for integrity. This moment marks a crucial turning point in his trajectory: it is here that Frank first blurs the line between survival and exploitation, legality and corruption. His actions demonstrate an early willingness to bend or break rules to advance his position, signalling a warped version of the American entrepreneurial spirit, where innovation is replaced by manipulation and hard work is displaced by hustle within a corrupt framework.

4.4.2 *The Dream as Corruption and Violence*

The Irishman (2019) illustrates how the pursuit of success in 20th-century America particularly in the post-World War II era was far more complex and morally compromised than the idealized vision of the *American Dream* might suggest. In the film, the *Dream* is not depicted as a fair and linear pathway built on merit, integrity, and hard work, but rather as a treacherous web of loyalty, systemic

corruption, and violence. For characters like Frank Sheeran, an Irish-American veteran struggling to find economic stability and social belonging, upward mobility is only achievable through participation in organized crime and moral complicity. The traditional image of the *American Dream* as an egalitarian ladder accessible to all who are willing to work is replaced by a blood-soaked hierarchy maintained by unspoken rules, backdoor deals, and strategic betrayals.

Scorsese's narrative reveals that in the postwar capitalist order, particularly among marginalized immigrant communities, the *American Dream* was mediated not by democratic institutions or equal opportunity, but by proximity to power, both legitimate and illicit. Frank's rise through the ranks of the Bufalino crime family and the Teamsters union reflects how deeply embedded organized crime was in the American labor and political systems. Success is not earned. It is brokered, protected, and often enforced through violence. The acts of killing, silencing, and deception are not anomalies but part of the unspoken price of entry into the elite circles of influence.

Rather than offering a hopeful or redemptive vision of American prosperity, *The Irishman* (2019) presents a grim alternative that the *American Dream*, particularly for working-class immigrants, was never about equality or justice, but survival within a corrupt system. The *American Dream* isn't portrayed as a ladder of merit, but a blood-soaked network of favours, power plays, and betrayals.



Picture 4.3.2.1 Whispers gives Frank money for a job. (*The Irishman*, 2019, 00:31:21-00:31:28)



Picture 4.3.2.2 Frank kills Whispers. (*The Irishman*, 2019, 00:38:55-00:39:03)

Frank Sheeran's involvement in organized crime, particularly his participation in acts of violence such as the arson committed for Whispers and the murders of Whispers DiTullio and Joe Gallo, reveals how violence becomes normalized, commodified, and ultimately rewarded in the world of *The Irishman* (2019). These killings are not framed as acts of desperation or moral conflict, but rather as professional obligations; quiet, calculated, and routine. Frank does not act out of personal hatred or revenge, but from loyalty and obedience to a system that replaces civic responsibility and moral conscience with codes of silence, hierarchy, and transactional loyalty. In this alternative social order, killing is labour, and loyalty to the mob becomes a substitute for patriotism, ethics, or legality.