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The Godfather Part II

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Francis Ford Coppola had already shown his open-ended prowess in *The Godfather*, shading his gangster story with tortured religious and psychological overtones while sweeping up the audience in the Corleones' passionate family feeling. *The Godfather Part II* was

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morally and stylistically more complicated, with a tricky flashback form that both underlined the disintegration of the Corleone family and compelled viewers to "read" the film even as it grabbed them. When Coppola hurtled from an Ellis Island confinement room where young Vito was singing a Sicilian song to Vito's well-groomed, cherubic grandson en route to his Lake Tahoe communion, he was asking us to consider history's tragic fluctuations. This generational cross-cutting is perhaps the most influential device Coppola has ever introduced; it's been echoed in movies as different as *Daniel* and the uncut *Once upon a Time in America*. Unfortunately, *The Godfather Part II* has proved to be Coppola's last brush with greatness to date. *Apocalypse Now* gave us the Vietnam War as a hollow psychedelic trip. And in *One from the Heart* and *The Outsiders* and *Rumblefish*, he has moved toward creating a world of pure artifice — a celluloid house of cards.