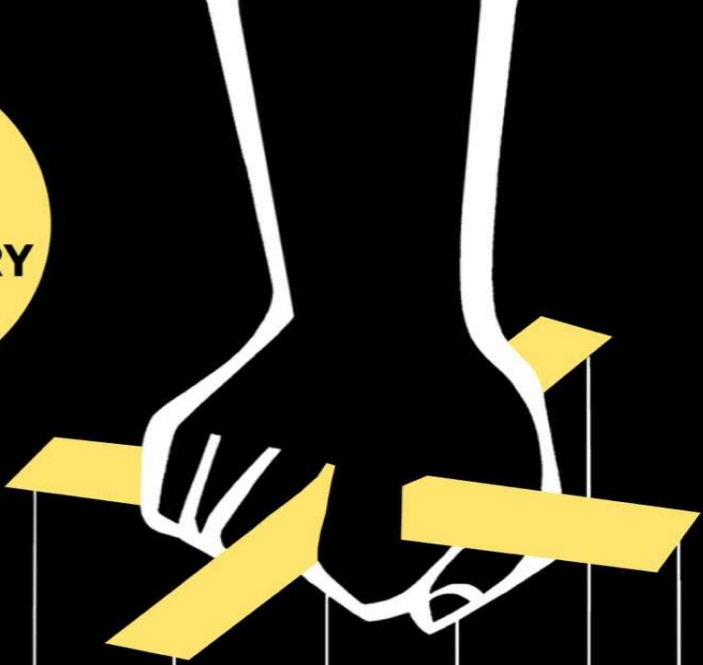


50th
ANNIVERSARY
EDITION



The Godfather

THE CLASSIC #1 BESTSELLER

Mario
Puzo

With a New
Introduction by
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The Godfather

Mario Puzo

With an Introduction by Francis Ford Coppola

Berkley
New York

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Introduction

by Francis Ford Coppola

“YOU DIDN’T MAKE HIM. HE MADE YOU!”

After the success of the movie *The Godfather*, I was in seventh heaven, the young man who’d caught lightning in a bottle. It was a heady time and a shock for a shy kid from Queens, a perpetually bad student who had been temporarily paralyzed by polio. One day I was in a group that included some suspiciously tough Italian men who were stealing glances at me and talking among themselves. I heard the name Mario Puzo on their lips, and a guy who could have played Luca Brasi pushed his way over to me and said aggressively, “You didn’t make him. He made you!”

I didn’t disagree—and not just because I was intimidated by that assemblage of muscle. By then I was in my early thirties and had gone from being an obscure, impoverished young director/writer to being a household name. It is absolutely true that Mario “made” me, and his novel *The Godfather* changed my life.

I had seen an ad in *The New York Times* book section for Mario Puzo’s *The Godfather*, and I was struck by it because the illustration on the cover suggested a story about “power” and the

author's Italian name made me think he was an intellectual on the order of Italo Calvino or Umberto Eco. So when I first sat down to read the book, my first impression was surprise and dismay; this was more like a Harold Robbins or Irving Wallace book, a potboiler filled with sex and silliness. I knew I was being considered to direct it and my first reaction was to turn it down. But needing the money and a film offer very badly, I decided to read it again and this time make careful notes. What I discovered was that lurking within it was a great story, almost classical in its nature: that of a king with three sons, each of whom had inherited an aspect of his personality. I thought that if I could just extract that part of the book and make the film about that, then I could work up some enthusiasm for it.

One thing I did love about Mario's writing was that he was terse. He said in a few words what I would have taken a whole paragraph to express. This extended to his notes to me on the screenplay. In the scene where Clemenza describes a recipe to Michael, I had written, "First you brown some sausage, and then you throw in the tomatoes . . ." Mario scribbled: *Gangsters don't brown. Gangsters fry!* And it was like that throughout my draft of the script—just handwritten notes here and there, but they made a powerful difference.

As much as I admired his talent, his way of expressing himself on and off the page, I just loved to be around him. I loved him like a favorite uncle. He was so much fun to be with, so warm and wise, funny and affectionate. You would see it in the way he spoke of his wife of many years, the fact that he made his home in Bay Shore, Long Island, and the way he spoke of his kids.

Mario loved to gamble, so I suggested that we go and stay at a gambling casino in Reno to work on the emerging script. (We did this for the scripts for all three films!) A casino is the perfect place for writers to collaborate. There are no clocks, so you can order up

bacon and eggs (or anything) at any hour. When you reach a snag, you can always go downstairs to play roulette, which Mario loved to do. And then if you hit big losses (which Mario hated to do—he was a truly terrible gambler, despite knowing tons about it), you could escape back upstairs to continue working. Often he would say, “I’m losing thousands down here but making millions upstairs.”

Mario knew his weight was a health hazard, and he would sometimes steal off to the Duke Diet and Fitness Center to do the “Rice Diet.” He’d lose ten or twenty pounds but he wouldn’t really change his lifestyle, so the weight would always come back. I can see him now, dressed habitually in his exercise clothes (though I don’t recall any exercise going with it), eating his beloved Italian food—pasta, pizza, lasagna. . . . He shrugged off the inevitability of the weight coming back the same way he shrugged off his gambling losses—with a smile and a twinkling eye. He was a totally lovable man.

I learned so much from Mario, perhaps most importantly the need to rewrite and keep rewriting and not be daunted by doing more and more drafts. He also impressed on me the value of using everything that is important in your personal life. Mario told me that all of the great dialogue, those quotable lines he put into the mouth of Don Corleone, were actually spoken by Mario’s mother. Yes, “an offer he can’t refuse,” “keep your friends close but your enemies closer,” “revenge is a dish that tastes best when it is cold,” and “a man who doesn’t spend time with his family can never be a real man,” among many others, were sayings he heard from his own mother’s lips. Mario later wrote, “Whenever the Godfather opened his mouth, in my own mind I heard the voice of my mother. I heard her wisdom, her ruthlessness, and her unconquerable love for her family and life itself. Don Corleone’s courage and loyalty came from her, his humanity came from her.”

His enormous knowledge of the mob, the Cosa Nostra, and all of that came from research; Mario himself had never known a *mafioso*. So another piece of advice he gave me was never meet them, never let them think they know you or that you are their acquaintance. It's much like the lore of a vampire, who can never cross your threshold unless he is invited. And I took that advice to heart, and never did I ever meet one of them. Once, during the filming of *The Godfather, Part II*, I was in my mobile office and there was a knock on the one and only door (no escape route!). When my assistant opened it, a growl of a voice said, "Mr. John Gotti is here and would like to make the acquaintance of Mr. Coppola." Remembering Mario's advice, I shook my head no." My assistant politely said I was unavailable, they accepted that, and the door was closed on them.

After the great success of the first film, the owner of Paramount told me, "If you have the formula for Coca-Cola, you should make more of it." In truth I had never thought that there should be a sequel to *The Godfather* film. Some stories lend themselves to additional chapters, but I felt this film was complete. Its protagonist-hero, Michael Corleone, had come full circle when he succeeded his father as "Godfather" and ultimately destroyed what he had changed his life and person to protect: his family. However, there was one tempting aspect for me, and that was the story in the original novel about Vito Andolini, the young Sicilian who came to America after the brutal killings of his father and mother. Young Vito was gentle and kind, yet also had a cold rage inside that expressed itself as deadly cunning. That part of the novel just didn't fit within the structure of *The Godfather* film, yet it was great and I was always sorry that we didn't have a place for it in the movie. Also, I had always been interested in making a story about a father and a son in two different time periods. The father would be a character in the son's story, as would the son in

the father's story. So, little by little, the idea presented itself in a structure that could become *The Godfather, Part II*. As with the first script, I did the first pass, to lay it out and actually draft it, and then I sent it to Mario, and he made changes. Well, in reality *he* had done the first pass by writing his novel, and I was writing a "second draft" in screenplay form. And then he would comment on that.

Not all of my ideas went over so well. Mario was dubious about the idea that it was Fredo who betrayed Michael; he didn't think it was plausible. But he was absolutely against Michael ordering his own brother to be killed. It was a stalemate for a while, as nothing would happen unless we both agreed. Finally I tossed him the idea that Michael wouldn't have Fredo killed until their mother died. He thought about this for a moment and then said okay, it would work for him. He was the arbiter of what the novel's characters would do, while I was offering a kind of interpretation from the perspective of what a movie director would do.

He also had a tough time with the notion that Kay would tell her husband that she had aborted their unborn son. Actually it was my sister, Talia, who came up with that idea. I loved it because it seemed symbolic and the only way a woman married to such a man could halt the satanic dance continuing generation after generation, which Nino Rota's waltz theme expressed. Mario wasn't sure about it, but he let me have it. He was a great collaborator, after all.

Meanwhile I pulled everything I could from the novel's 1920s period and how Vito became Don Vito and eventually the Godfather. And I interwove it with a story set in the 1950s concerning Michael and his stealthy opponent Hyman Roth, based on gangster Meyer Lansky. So I took parts of Mario's novel and combined it with actual mob history to create the screenplay for *The Godfather, Part II*. But I knew that it had been Mario Puzo who really had done the heavy lifting, and so I always insisted that

it would be his name that appeared above the title: Mario Puzo's *The Godfather, Part II*.

Oh, yes, then there's *The Godfather, Part III*, which neither Mario nor I wanted as the title, as it was not meant to be part of a trilogy, but rather a coda to the first two films, and we wished it could be given a different title, one more appropriate. Neither of us had the power to insist on our title, but in my mind, the film will always be called *The Death of Michael Corleone*.

As usual, it was Mario who wrote whatever quotable lines it had. "Just when I thought I was out, they pull me back in" was from him, though it perfectly expressed my own reality regarding *The Godfather*! Just as my first impression of the original novel was that it was sensational and commercial, in fact, it won me over completely, and the more familiar I became with Mario's work, the more impressed I was.

A NOTE FROM ANTHONY PUZO, SON OF MARIO PUZO

Fifty years ago this month, the idea for *The Godfather* was born. Tired of being broke and in debt, my father vowed to write a bestseller. When his two previous novels received terrific reviews but didn't make a penny, he realized it was time to grow up and sell out. Or, as his family, friends, and creditors admonished him, time to put up or shut up.

His publisher wanted a book about the Mafia, but there was just one problem. My father often said that he was embarrassed that he had never met an honest-to-God gangster. (Yet, a famous hoodlum said, "Puzo knew our life cold. He had the whole atmosphere, the way we talked. Either he was getting help or he was some kind of genius.") But he had many stories as a boy growing up in Hell's Kitchen. And he had read many volumes of books on the subject. Fortified by the transcripts he requested from the Library of Congress (the Valachi hearings had concluded), he felt confident he could write a novel depicting the Mafia in a new light.

Locked in a small office in his basement, he began the process. He often yelled at his children to be quiet; he was writing a bestseller. We laughed and continued to make even more noise.

My father's unique and ultimately brilliant idea to base *The Godfather* on family values was the key to its success. He believed that nobody had more family values than Italians. That's why, he claimed, they are so good at being in the Mafia. What is *The Godfather*, he often said, but a heartwarming story about a family with great, solid family values? (In Italian neighborhoods you would call a close friend of your parents' "compare" or "godfather." Nobody ever used "godfather" in reference to criminals. Not even the Mafia. The term didn't exist until my father's book.) The fact that they kill people once in a while (well, just bad people) he found amusing. Also, wouldn't everybody love to have somebody to go to for justice, without going through the courts?

Through his characters my father heard the voices of his brothers and sisters. The Don, strangely enough, was based on my grandmother. Whenever the Don opened his mouth, my father said that in his own mind he heard the voice of his mother. He heard her wisdom, ruthlessness, and

unconquerable love for her family. The Don's courage and loyalty came from her. Like the Don, she could be extremely warm or extremely ruthless. (My grandmother was always warm to me, never ruthless.)

The success of *The Godfather* was phenomenal, beyond my father's wildest dreams. Number one on the New York Times bestseller list for many months. He had written the bestseller that he had vowed to write. My father was criticized for glamorizing the Mafia, but he felt that if you were a true novelist, your first duty was to tell a story. If you wanted to moralize, write nonfiction.

He called himself a romantic writer with sympathy for the devil. He felt businessmen were far more criminal than the Mafia, especially the Hollywood moguls. Having worked in Hollywood writing screenplays for many movies, he had learned how poorly the writer was treated. The moguls would cheat you blind if you let them.

A few years later, *The Godfather* won best picture and best screenplay Oscars at the Academy Awards. This despite the fact that my father had never actually studied the form. But he had a sense of how his characters should speak. Francis Ford Coppola remembers writing a description of Clemenza in the kitchen browning garlic in olive oil. My father crossed it out with the note: *Gangsters don't brown. Gangsters fry!*

For *The Godfather, Part II* he decided to read a guide to successful screenwriting. In the first chapter the writer declared that one of the finest screenplays ever written was the one for *The Godfather*. So that was the end of his studying.

Hollywood treated writers very poorly. They had no power. Low man on the totem pole. So much so, that even as a screenwriter with two Oscars, he could have his words changed by the producer's girlfriend!

My father always wished he had worked harder. He always thought of himself as goofing off. He loved writing above all. (Maybe not as much as his family; he was Italian, after all.) But he ultimately realized that creating *The Godfather* and many other fine novels was not such a bad legacy.

Very ill in the last week of his life, he was determined to finish *Omerta*, his last book. And he did. He always said, "I like the idea of sitting at my desk and as I finish the last word I fall over dead." Which is very close to what happened!

Anthony Puzo
May 31, 2016

For Anthony Cleri

Contents

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright Page](#)

[Introduction](#)

[A Note from Anthony Puzo, Son of Mario Puzo](#)

[Dedication](#)

[BOOK I](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[BOOK II](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Chapter 13](#)

[BOOK III](#)

[Chapter 14](#)

BOOK IV

Chapter 15

Chapter 16

Chapter 17

Chapter 18

Chapter 19

BOOK V

Chapter 20

Chapter 21

Chapter 22

BOOK VI

Chapter 23

Chapter 24

BOOK VII

Chapter 25

Chapter 26

Chapter 27

Chapter 28

BOOK VIII

Chapter 29

[Chapter 30](#)

[Chapter 31](#)

[BOOK IX](#)

[Chapter 32](#)

[*Afterword*](#)

[*About the Author*](#)

BOOK I

Behind every great fortune there is a crime.

—BALZAC

Chapter 1

Amerigo Bonasera sat in New York Criminal Court Number 3 and waited for justice; vengeance on the men who had so cruelly hurt his daughter, who had tried to dishonor her.

The judge, a formidably heavy-featured man, rolled up the sleeves of his black robe as if to physically chastise the two young men standing before the bench. His face was cold with majestic contempt. But there was something false in all this that Amerigo Bonasera sensed but did not yet understand.

“You acted like the worst kind of degenerates,” the judge said harshly. Yes, yes, thought Amerigo Bonasera. Animals. Animals. The two young men, glossy hair crew cut, scrubbed clean-cut faces composed into humble contrition, bowed their heads in submission.

The judge went on. “You acted like wild beasts in a jungle and you are fortunate you did not sexually molest that poor girl or I’d put you behind bars for twenty years.” The judge paused, his eyes beneath impressively thick brows flickered slyly toward the sallow-faced Amerigo Bonasera, then lowered to a stack of probation reports before him. He frowned and shrugged as if convinced against his own natural desire. He spoke again.

“But because of your youth, your clean records, because of your fine families, and because the law in its majesty does not seek vengeance, I hereby sentence you to three years’ confinement to the penitentiary. Sentence to be suspended.”

Only forty years of professional mourning kept the overwhelming frustration and hatred from showing on Amerigo Bonasera’s face. His beautiful young daughter was still in the hospital with her broken jaw wired together; and now these two *animales* went free? It had all been a farce. He watched the happy parents cluster around their darling sons. Oh, they were all happy now, they were smiling now.

The black bile, sourly bitter, rose in Bonasera’s throat, overflowed through tightly clenched teeth. He used his white linen pocket handkerchief and held it against his lips. He was standing so when the two young men strode freely up the aisle, confident and cool-eyed, smiling, not giving him so much as a

glance. He let them pass without saying a word, pressing the fresh linen against his mouth.

The parents of the *animales* were coming by now, two men and two women his age but more American in their dress. They glanced at him, shamefaced, yet in their eyes was an odd, triumphant defiance.

Out of control, Bonasera leaned forward toward the aisle and shouted hoarsely, “You will weep as I have wept—I will make you weep as your children make me weep”—the linen at his eyes now. The defense attorneys bringing up the rear swept their clients forward in a tight little band, enveloping the two young men, who had started back down the aisle as if to protect their parents. A huge bailiff moved quickly to block the row in which Bonasera stood. But it was not necessary.

All his years in America, Amerigo Bonasera had trusted in law and order. And he had prospered thereby. Now, though his brain smoked with hatred, though wild visions of buying a gun and killing the two young men jangled the very bones of his skull, Bonasera turned to his still uncomprehending wife and explained to her, “They have made fools of us.” He paused and then made his decision, no longer fearing the cost. “For justice we must go on our knees to Don Corleone.”

IN A GARISHLY DECORATED Los Angeles hotel suite, Johnny Fontane was as jealously drunk as any ordinary husband. Sprawled on a red couch, he drank straight from the bottle of scotch in his hand, then washed the taste away by dunking his mouth in a crystal bucket of ice cubes and water. It was four in the morning and he was spinning drunken fantasies of murdering his trampy wife when she got home. If she ever did come home. It was too late to call his first wife and ask about the kids and he felt funny about calling any of his friends now that his career was plunging downhill. There had been a time when they would have been delighted, flattered by his calling them at four in the morning but now he bored them. He could even smile a little to himself as he thought that on the way up Johnny Fontane’s troubles had fascinated some of the greatest female stars in America.

Gulping at his bottle of scotch, he heard finally his wife’s key in the door, but he kept drinking until she walked into the room and stood before him. She was to him so very beautiful, the angelic face, soulful violet eyes, the

delicately fragile but perfectly formed body. On the screen her beauty was magnified, spiritualized. A hundred million men all over the world were in love with the face of Margot Ashton. And paid to see it on the screen.

“Where the hell were you?” Johnny Fontane asked.

“Out fucking,” she said.

She had misjudged his drunkenness. He sprang over the cocktail table and grabbed her by the throat. But close up to that magical face, the lovely violet eyes, he lost his anger and became helpless again. She made the mistake of smiling mockingly, saw his fist draw back. She screamed, “Johnny, not in the face, I’m making a picture.”

She was laughing. He punched her in the stomach and she fell to the floor. He fell on top of her. He could smell her fragrant breath as she gasped for air. He punched her on the arms and on the thigh muscles of her silky tanned legs. He beat her as he had beaten snotty smaller kids long ago when he had been a tough teenager in New York’s Hell’s Kitchen. A painful punishment that would leave no lasting disfigurement of loosened teeth or broken nose.

But he was not hitting her hard enough. He couldn’t. And she was giggling at him. Spread-eagled on the floor, her brocaded gown hitched up above her thighs, she taunted him between giggles. “Come on, stick it in. Stick it in, Johnny, that’s what you really want.”

Johnny Fontane got up. He hated the woman on the floor but her beauty was a magic shield. Margot rolled away, and in a dancer’s spring was on her feet facing him. She went into a childish mocking dance and chanted, “Johnny never hurt me, Johnny never hurt me.” Then almost sadly with grave beauty she said, “You poor silly bastard, giving me cramps like a kid. Ah, Johnny, you always will be a dumb romantic guinea, you even make love like a kid. You still think screwing is really like those dopey songs you used to sing.” She shook her head and said, “Poor Johnny. Good-bye, Johnny.” She walked into the bedroom and he heard her turn the key in the lock.

Johnny sat on the floor with his face in his hands. The sick, humiliating despair overwhelmed him. And then the gutter toughness that had helped him survive the jungle of Hollywood made him pick up the phone and call for a car to take him to the airport. There was one person who could save him. He would go back to New York. He would go back to the one man with the power, the wisdom he needed and a love he still trusted. His Godfather Corleone.