

GREAT PERFORMANCES ON FILM

Professor: Patrick Finelli, Ph.D.

Hello everyone, and welcome to Great Performances on Film. I'm glad you could join me today. My name is Dr. Patrick Finelli. You may call me Dr. Pat. And I hope you have as much enthusiasm in taking this class as I did in putting it together for you. I think we're going to have a great time this semester watching movies, thinking about them, writing about them, and exchanging ideas.

This class isn't about film theory. It's about great performances. It's about the actor, and how actors achieve their effects on film.

So we begin by looking at the early silent film actors and the comedians, who relied primarily on physical action. Later in the semester, we'll be looking at the 1950s and '60s, when we had a slew of actors that you may have heard of, for instance, Marlon Brando, Robert De Niro, and so forth. And they have a technique that's been called method acting. So how do we get to method acting on film? Well, it has roots in theater with a Russian by the name of Stanislavski.

Now one of the things I'd like you to be aware of as you proceed in the course, or as you begin the course, is how much of what the actor does-- the emotional content, the conviction, the themes, the ideas-- how much of that is the actor? And how much depends on the elements, the technical elements of film?

Today films are filled with CGI. Michael Bay blows up a gas station in every movie. That's not what we're interested in. We're interested in performance, in great performances. So we'll look at actors from classical Hollywood. We'll look at actors during the time of the motion picture code, when certain things were prohibited, such as kissing. We'll look at race, gender, and sexual orientation in film.

We'll also look at horror and comedy. That seems like an unlikely pairing, but in contemporary horror films, the scare, the fright, is always set up with some sort of comic relief. We'll also look at independent cinema. We'll look at foreign films, and pretty much run the gamut from the early silent films to the contemporary films that win awards, or that won awards this year.

Film takes you away from where you are. Even if the film is realistic, it makes you think. It makes you analyze. It makes you reflect. It makes you feel. And these are all reasons why we go to the movies.

Thank you very much for being with me today. I hope you enjoy the class. You're welcome to get in touch with me any time.