

FIL 1001, SPRING 2003 TERM
Introduction to Understanding Film
Memorable Scene II
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Writing about another memorable scene, once again has proven to be a pretty difficult task. I almost settled for the famous “dance with an umbrella” scene, from the movie “Singin’ in the Rain”, but instead I’ve decided to write about the scene where the two protagonists meet for the first time, from the same movie. Their encounter will later turn into a wonderful love story, where talent prevails over fame and favoritism.

Due to a flat tire, Don Lockwood—a famous actor played by Gene Kelly—is surrounded by a mob of fans who, in their admiration for him, rip his clothes off and almost injure him. Lockwood escapes by jumping on the top of a car, then on the roof of a tram, and then into the front seat of a car driven by a beautiful young lady, Kathy Selden, played by Debbie Reynolds. The director’s camera seamlessly follows Lockwood’s escape with smooth pans, then zooms out to an extreme long shot that allows the viewers to see him jumping in Kathy’s car—with emphasis on Kelly’s amazing physical abilities rather than the camera movements—and finally zooms in and locks on a medium close-up shot of Lockwood’s encounter with Ms. Selden.

Ms. Selden’s normal reaction to such an unorthodox entrance—shocked and afraid of her unwanted passenger—it’s quite humorous; the dialog they engage in reminds the viewers of a screwball comedy. As previously mentioned, the camera is focused on a medium close-up shot, which captures their great acting abilities and talent to reveal through facial expression, voice

fluctuations, and theatrical dramatization their actual thoughts and feelings: Lockwood fakes that he's feeling victimized by his fans, while Ms. Selden, when she realizes his intention to capitalize on that, pretends that she's not one of his fans and that his acting skills and movie choices are quite limited: "When you've seen one, you've seen them all," she teases him. Lockwood's arm retracts from around her shoulders, as she expected.

After his intentions to seduce Kathy fail, Lockwood tries to make a theatrical exit that would preserve whatever was left of his dignity, but instead his coat gets caught in the door, which rips whatever was left of it. Kelly's facial expression is priceless. The camera captures the whole incident, as well as his expressions, through a medium-long shot. Ms. Selden's hysterical laugh ends the scene, and the viewers know that an intriguing story will follow.

Although the director had used narrative economy relative to the mise-en-scene, the inspired dialog and dramatic interpretation due to the great acting abilities of both actors compensates for it. With the overwhelming actors' presence, there was no use for an opulent background, since it's very unlikely that it would be noticed. The actors' talent fully captures one's attention, and a medium close-up camera shot was the best way to approach and reveal their interaction with each other.

Why do I think that this scene is memorable? While I admit that some may not agree with my decision, I chose this scene because of its dialog and the wonderful interaction between the two very talented actors. Not many people start their first date in such an unusual way, and the kind of subtlety they display on screen is rarely seen in modern movies. There's a certain "je n'ais se

quois” about it: Perhaps it’s the promise of romance; perhaps it’s the fact that the characters display an intelligence rarely seen on screen; or perhaps it’s because they seem innocent and versatile at the same time. One thing’s for sure: the directors’ talent in capturing the star’s persona on screen and to develop the story to a point where it overpowers everything else, a sure sign of a great movie. The viewers don’t want to see the movie just because Gene Kelly is acting in it, but because he is acting in a story with an interesting plot.

Works Cited

Singin' in the Rain, dir. Stanley Donen and Gene Kelly. MGM, 1952.