

Class 6 : Portraits

B. Portrait and Performer

1. Main title 3 (Three Lincolns)

Another kind of portrait is the one created on film by a director and actor. In this hour, I want to look at two, or if time three, iconic figures who have been portrayed multiple times in films or television. The first is **President Abraham Lincoln**. Now we know what he looked like, and what he did and said in public, but we only have descriptions of what he sounded like and how he interacted with others in closed settings. So by what criteria do you judge a modern performance? I am going to give you two, both showing the President in a semi-private situation, in the cabinet room or in his office. The first goes back 92 years, actually, to **Walter Huston's** portrayal in the 1930 **DW Griffith film, *Abraham Lincoln***, in which he is appointing General Grant to lead the Union army. The second is **Daniel Day-Lewis** in the 2012 film by **Steven Spielberg**, called simply *Lincoln*. We'll watch them back-to-back, and then discuss them. As you watch, try to separate the director's intent and the skills of the particular actor.

2. Walter Huston in *Abraham Lincoln* (DW Griffith, 1930)

3. Daniel Day-Lewis in *Lincoln* (Steven Spielberg, 2012)

4. Three Lincolns (repeat)

Let's discuss.

5. Three Dianas

With **Princess Diana**, we have a different situation, in that she lived not so very long ago, and we have numerous clips of the real person in real life. I won't show any of them, however, because they are only peripherally relevant to a acted performance. Yes, it helps if the actress bears some resemblance to the original we all know. **Emma Corrin**, in the TV series *The Crown*, undoubtedly does, but that in itself does not make hers a great performance. **Kristen Stewart** in the 2021 film *Spencer*, directed by **Pablo Larraín**, has less of a natural resemblance, but what matters is the actors' ability to get inside the character. It is one thing to do a convincing impression of Diana appearing in public; it is quite another to show her one-on-one with Prince Charles or the Queen. But that is precisely the comparison I am going to ask you to make. I am showing you the *Spencer* scene first, because it comes chronologically earlier in Diana's story. But this is also important, because I think that if we think that some performance is "just like Diana," there is quite a possibility that we have at least partially replaced our knowledge of the real Diana by Emma Corrin's incarnation on our screens during all those weeks last season. So I ask you: how would you react to these performance if you did not think you knew the original at all?

6. Kristen Stewart in *Spencer* (Pablo Larraín, 2021)
7. Emma Corrin in *The Crown* (season 4, 2020)
8. Three Dianas (repeat)

Let's discuss.

9. Three Capotes

Even if there is not time for full discussion, I am going to end by showing you two representations of **Truman Capote** that came out at almost the same time: *Capote* in 2005 starring the American actor **Philip Seymour Hoffman**, and *Infamous* in 2006, with Englishman **Toby Jones**. Both films are a dramatization of Capote's 1966 "non-fiction novel" *In Cold Blood*, about his journey to Kansas to attend the trial of two men accused and later executed for committing a horrific mass murder. In both clips, after being first refused access to the men, Capote, who is there with his childhood friend **Harper Lee**, author of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, manages to wangle an invitation to the house of Sheriff **Alvin Dewey**, whom he needs to impress if he is to go any further. This is a different situation yet again from either of the others, in that Capote was a flamboyant gay man who made his entire life something of a performance, and here he is definitely putting on an act to impress his hosts. So as you watch, see if you can distinguish between three things: the performance being mounted by Capote himself, the performance of the two actors, and the choices of their respective directors.

10. Toby Jones in *Infamous* (Douglas McGrath, 2006)
11. Philip Seymour Hoffman in *Capote* (Bennett Miller, 2005)
12. Three Capotes (repeat)