

Death in Hollywood

Films that reflect our beliefs and behaviors about death and dying

Course #	21FDEH
Format:	Seminar
Moderators:	Michael Miller Paul Cooper
Date and Time:	Monday, 1:30-3:30 PM 10 weeks, starting 9/27/2021
Format:	Online
Maximum number of participants: 18	
Auditors accepted:	Yes, up to 2

Purpose: Movies both reflect and influence American attitudes towards death and dying. What beliefs do films confront? What attitudes are fostered or lampooned? In the face of the great unknown, what are we willing to empathize with or laugh at?

Description: Death and dying remain the greatest mystery of human existence. It's one that we all face, think about, and deal with. So inevitably, popular culture has explored it since the beginnings of civilization.

Hollywood has a long and complicated relationship with the subject. Many thoughtful films, comic and serious, have explored our beliefs and behaviors around dying. Whether empathetic or mocking, movies offer us a wide-ranging opportunity to examine our culture's subterranean norms.

Especially now, as the harsh reality of the pandemic confronts us, understanding our attitudes towards dying can give us insight into the varied ways in which people have reacted to a national health crisis.

Contagion and *Outbreak* predicted the possibility of pandemic. *Harold and Maude*, the Japanese masterpiece *Ikiru*, or the noir classic *DOA* deal with people confronting their own demise or that of loved ones. *The Sixth Sense* or *Heaven Can Wait* deal thoughtfully or playfully with the possibilities of an after-life.

Role of participants: All participants will be encouraged to watch the films to be discussed. Each film will be presented by one or two people, who will summarize as necessary, call attention to key scenes and overt and implied cultural messages, and guide conversation about the issues and attitudes expressed in the movie.

This seminar lends itself well to the on-line environment. Film clips are not required but can be incorporated into PowerPoint or as a YouTube offering(s) to be shared on the Zoom platform.

Resources: Films can be obtained through one of many streaming services, or from public libraries (Kanopy, Hoopla, CW-MARS). The films selected films will be available for free or at low cost.

The moderators will provide a curated list of potential films that offer rich examples of Hollywood's "take" on death or dying. Participants will be welcome to find others, as the potential list of excellent films on the subject is very long.

About the Moderators: Paul Cooper and Michael Miller are cinophiles who have not directed major motion pictures but enjoy thought-provoking films and discussing their meanings and interpretations.