

**Three Cheers for Mr. Brando: A  
Dramatistic Analysis  
of *Listen to Me Marlon***

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# Artifact: Listen to Me Marlon (2015)

Directed by Stevan Riley

Produced by Passion Pictures

The documentary offers an intimate look at the notoriously private actor via previously unreleased audio tapes that make up the bulk of the documentary, allowing actor Marlon Brando to tell his own story.

It features home videos as well as a digitized version of Brando's head to narrate the documentary in the absence of "talking heads."

# Purpose Statement

In an era of increased media scrutiny of celebrities, there are few times when celebrities are not performing for an audience. Their entire lives have become overwhelmingly performances for the benefit of their career and public image.

Research Question: How can a man be ordinary in an extraordinary situation?

This study uses Kenneth Burke's Dramatistic theory to focus on the personal life of actor Marlon Brando, as shown through the documentary *Listen to Me Marlon* (2015), to give insight into dealing with fame, and in his case how fame turned him into a cynic.

# Method: On Doing Being “Ordinary”

Developed by Harvey Sacks (1984)

Ordinariness is not a given, rather it is worked towards through how we communicate about events and individuals.

*“There are people who are entitled to have their lives be an epic” (Sacks 419).*

Storyable people are the subjects of detailed reports, such as how they walk into a room, what they wear and other mundane details.

Celebrities are considered storyable people.

# Method: Dramatistic Theory

Developed by Kenneth Burke in *Grammar of Motives* (1945)

The theory seeks to find motivation behind actions.

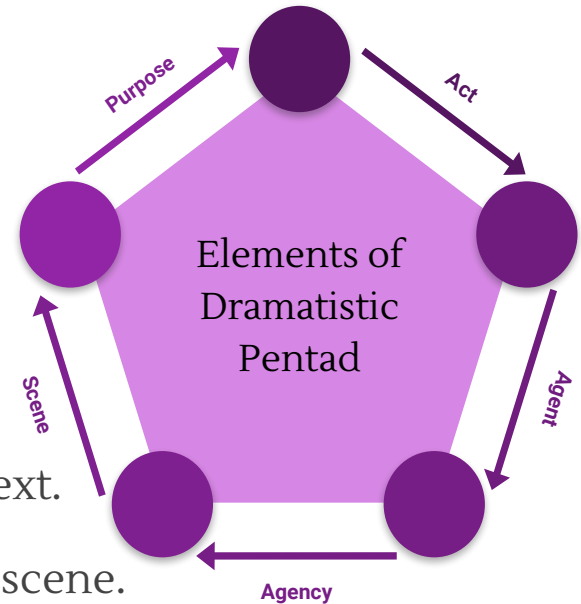
Life *is* a stage and we are all actors.

The theory employs the Dramatistic Pentad.

One can look at all five elements or focus on the ratio between two elements.

Scene encompasses both where the act occurs and context.

Agent refers to who is involved and their role within the scene.



# Scene-Agent Ratio

The scene is depicted as the scrutiny of media and fans, and the agent as Marlon Brando.

The agent takes on some of the qualities of the scene. There is a correlation between the two, the agent must make sense in the scene.

*"How could a man be 'good' in a 'bad' situation?"* Burke, 1945 (83).

This study poses the question: How can a man be ordinary in an extraordinary situation?

Can a celebrity find a balance between their personal self and public persona?

## Act One: Rise to Stardom

Brando's breakout role was in *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1954) as Stanley Kowalski.

He shaped his own image, rather than being a product of a studio.

*"I very often am struck with the illusion of success. Sometimes it's difficult when you meet people because you see that they've pre-judged you - not to be treated normally"* (Brando qtd. in Riley).

This quotation shows that Brando had felt the impact of the scene on his identity.

He felt more authentic to fans, but this fame stripped him of his anonymity.

## Act Two: Activism and Excess

Decline in acting career and increasingly hostile media led to an increased role as activist

The media turned hostile and as the agent Brando turned hostile in return.

Supporter of the Civil Rights Movement

Native American Rights - 1973 Oscar speech

Activism allowed him an outlet from fame, interacting with people more concerned with social issues than with celebrity.



## Act Three: The Closing Curtain

Documentary shows footage of Brando, an isolated house surrounded by trees, cameras and a spiked fence.

Contrasted with a carefree Brando on his Tahitian Island, looking relaxed, talking and dancing with locals

Fame reached even the Island due to the death of his daughter's boyfriend Dag Drollet and then her subsequent suicide

Brando hid himself away from cameras; he was hiding away from the fame that chased him.

# Conclusions

Can a man be ordinary in an extraordinary situation? In the case of Marlon Brando the answer is no. He never found the ordinariness he sought.

He found moments of ordinariness, but ultimately fame took over his entire life. As an agent he was unable to escape the attributes of the scene his career placed him in.

Fame culture permeates through social media and paparazzi focusing on the everyday details of celebrities. It's easy to forget to see the "Man behind the King."

“

*“You were just too damned famous. And too damned good. You can turn down those awards all you want. But, like your worst dreams, they’ll keep on coming. Best Actor for All Time: Marlon Brando*

*The King Who Would Be Man, Budd Schulberg*

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