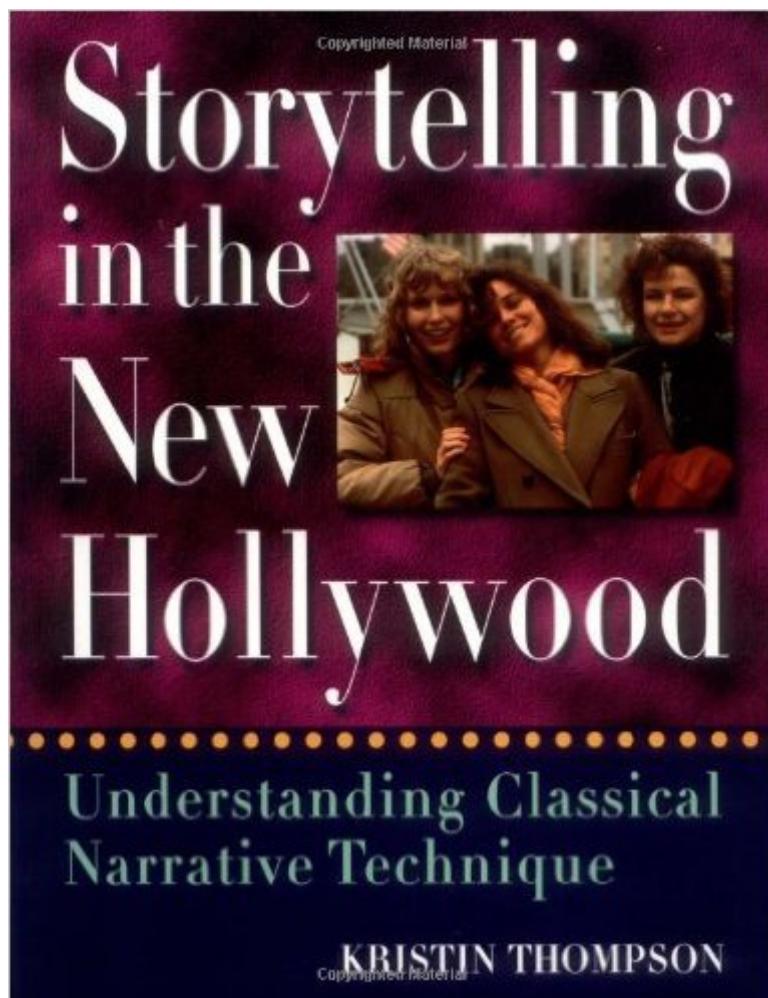


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Storytelling In The New Hollywood: Understanding Classical Narrative Technique



Synopsis

In a book as entertaining as it is enlightening, Kristin Thompson offers the first in-depth analysis of Hollywood's storytelling techniques and how they are used to make complex, easily comprehensible, entertaining films. She also takes on the myth that modern Hollywood films are based on a narrative system radically different from the one in use during the Golden Age of the studio system. Drawing on a wide range of films from the 1920s to the 1990s--from Keaton's *Our Hospitality* to Casablanca to *Terminator 2*--Thompson explains such staples of narrative as the goal-oriented protagonist, the double plot-line, and dialogue hooks. She demonstrates that the "three-act structure," a concept widely used by practitioners and media commentators, fails to explain how Hollywood stories are put together. Thompson then demonstrates in detail how classical narrative techniques work in ten box-office and critical successes made since the New Hollywood began in the 1970s: *Tootsie*, *Back to the Future*, *The Silence of the Lambs*, *Groundhog Day*, *Desperately Seeking Susan*, *Amadeus*, *The Hunt for Red October*, *Parenthood*, *Alien*, and *Hannah and Her Sisters*. In passing, she suggests reasons for the apparent slump in quality in Hollywood films of the 1990s. The results will be of interest to movie fans, scholars, and film practitioners alike.

Book Information

Paperback: 416 pages

Publisher: Harvard University Press; 1 edition (November 5, 1999)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0674839757

ISBN-13: 978-0674839755

Product Dimensions: 1.2 x 7.2 x 9.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.4 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 starsÂ See all reviewsÂ (4 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #797,517 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #628 inÂ Books > Humor & Entertainment > Movies > Screenwriting #952 inÂ Books > Humor & Entertainment > Movies > Theory #1297 inÂ Books > Textbooks > Humanities > Performing Arts > Film & Television

Customer Reviews

While this book covers some of the same ground (if not the same exact screenplays) as Thomas Pope's well-written *GOOD SCRIPTS, BAD SCRIPTS*, Ms. Thompson clearly knows her stuff. Just to have an educated author present an argument against 3-Act structure is provocative (Hollywood wants formulas, not new paradigms). In the rush to collapse the shelves of bookstores across

America, too many "how-to-write-a-screenplay" tomes have twisted the 3-act structure into a cliched checklist far removed from any aesthetic considerations. This book shows the limitations of not only the 3-act philosophy, but other screenwriting "rules" as well. While the critiques of all the films were full of insights, I preferred the chapters which discussed the differences/similarities between "old Hollywood" and "new Hollywood" with regard to "classic" storytelling and today's movies' cookie-cutter-characters with every-plot-point-in-its-place. For both writers and the viewers this book proves to be a thought-provoking read not only about film, but the nature of story itself. You'll never look at movies, or your own memories, the same.

I have read some three dozen books on screenwriting -- most just rehashes of what others have already said. They tend to be mostly accurate but never helpful or illuminating. But Kristin Thompson's book is different and here's my analogy explaining how: If screenwriting was a foreign language then those other manuals might be able to teach you the mechanics (vocabulary and grammar), but Thompson will make you fluent. I can not recommend this book highly enough.

I'm surprised this book hasn't received more attention. Through detailed analyses of several popular films, Thompson argues that effective films feature a major turn near their midpoint (where less effective films tend to sag). This turning results in a structure of 4 acts of roughly equal length, rather than the uneven 3 acts (Syd Field's quarter, half, quarter) typically touted in screenwriting books. If true, Thompson's theory could revolutionize the way young screenwriters approach their stories, and spare countless filmgoers the watch-glancing and bun-shifting that occurs during the drawn-out 2nd acts we often sit through. If you find your 2nd act running out of steam, and/or want a fresh perspective on filmic plot structure, read this book. Better yet, test its theory first: skip to the middle of some of your favorite films and see whether a major turn occurs near the halfway point, pushing the story in a new direction and reinvigorating it. (E.g., Ghostbusters: first half is fun & games, but at the midpoint the demondogs grab Dana and Louis and the Gozer story kicks in.) (To be sure: Thompson's book isn't a how-to or a simple cure-all; there's much more than that going on her analyses. I just wanted to comment on this one aspect.)

This book analyzes 10 movies -- their structure, plot points, etc, protagonists, antagonists, etc. It didn't take me long to get through the book because several of the chapters focus on movies I didn't like. Once through the book and I think you'll find all you need. This isn't one that you pick up again and again to get you through the rough spots. Borrow it from your local library, spend a day or two

pulling out what you need and then return it. There are many other books that will be more useful to you as references.

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