Making Movies Through the Eyes of a Historian: The Screenwriters

L. M. Stallbaumer-Beishline, Ph.D.

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1

Directors   Screenplay Writers

Actors

Film Editors   Costume Designers

Camera Operators   **Filmmakers**   Art Designers

Sound Engineers   Props Managers

Crew Members   Musicians & Composers
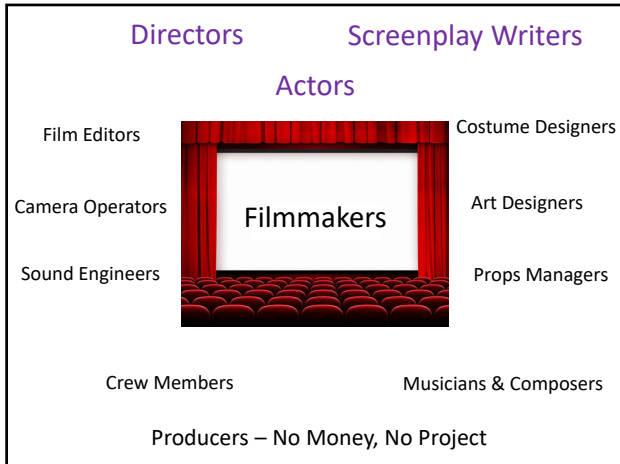
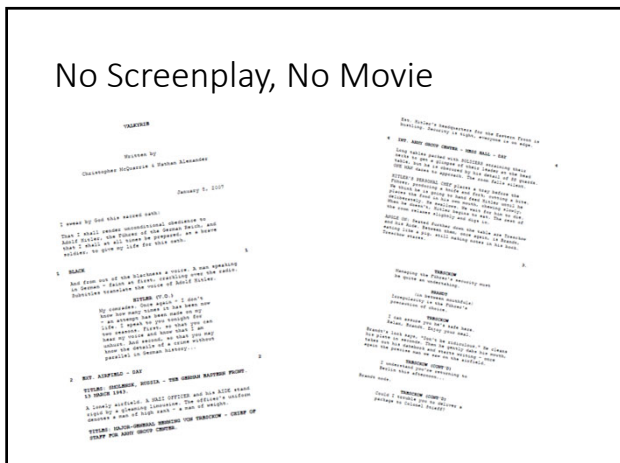Producers – No Money, No Project

2

No Screenplay, No Movie

3

Classical Narrative

- Logical relationships from one event to another
- Provided with a sense of closure
- Focused on characters.
- Attempt to be realistic or objective

Timothy Corrigan, *Film: A Short Guide to Writing About Film*, 8th ed., 2012 , 39-40.

4
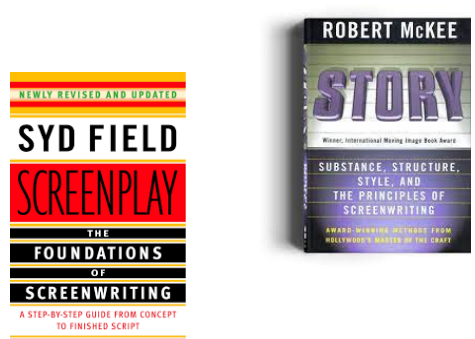
Flashback Narrative

- Explains what a character is saying in a current scene by showing the earlier events
- Provides character backstory and motivation
- Reveals events to another character who did not witness them
- Used to reveal past memories intruding on current scenes
- Techniques in transition:
  - Blurring outer edges
  - Change in color format
  - Screen wipe or dissolve sometimes combined with sound
  - Sound might bridge the two or represent a sharp contrast

http://cinewiki.wikispaces.com/Flashbacks+as+a+Film+Technique accessed 29 Jan 2016

5

6

Slide 7

Screenplay Structure by Syd Field

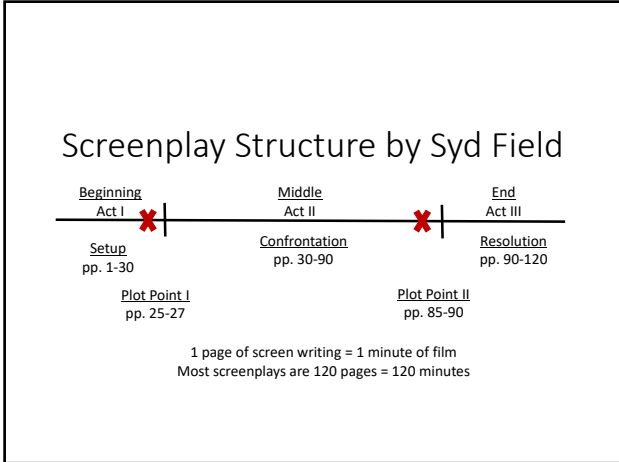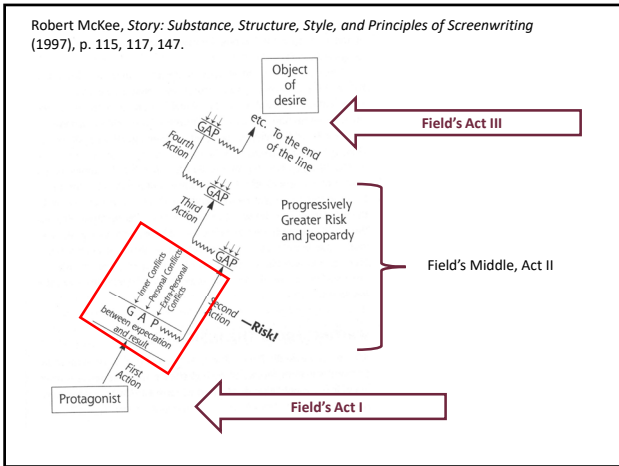| Beginning	Middle	End
Act I	Act II	Act III
Setup	Confrontation	Resolution
pp. 1-30	pp. 30-90	pp. 90-120

Plot Point I
pp. 25-27

Plot Point II
pp. 85-90

1 page of screen writing = 1 minute of film
Most screenplays are 120 pages = 120 minutes

7

Slide 8

Robert McKee, *Story: Substance, Structure, Style, and Principles of Screenwriting* (1997), p. 115, 117, 147.

Object of desire

Field's Act III

Fourth Action — GAP

etc. To the end of the line

Third Action — GAP

Progressively Greater Risk and jeopardy

Field's Middle, Act II

Inner Conflicts / Personal Conflicts / Extra-Personal Conflicts

G A P between expectation and result

Second Action — **Risk!**

First Action

Protagonist

Field's Act I

8

Slide 9

Robert McKee, *Story: Substance, Structure, Style, and Principles of Screenwriting* (1997), p. 115, 117, 147.

Object of desire

Begin at the End

etc. To the end of the line

Progressively Greater Risk and jeopardy

Second Action — **Risk!**

First Action

Protagonist

- "[h]ow and why life undergoes change from one condition of existence at the beginning to another at the end?" (McKee, p. 115)
- Work backwards from this question: "As a result of this climatic action, what value, positively or negatively charged, is brought into the world of my protagonist?" (McKee, p. 117)

9

Robert McKee, *Story: Substance, Structure, Style, and Principles of Screenwriting*

Object of desire

etc. To the end of the line

GAP

Fourth Action

GAP

Third Action

Progressively Greater Risk and jeopardy

GAP

Inner Conflicts

Personal Conflicts

Extrapersonal Conflicts

G A P between expectation and result

Second Action

—Risk!

First Action

Protagonist

In a historical film, determined by the outcome of the events.

Either a fictional character placed into a historical setting, or an actual individual from the past.
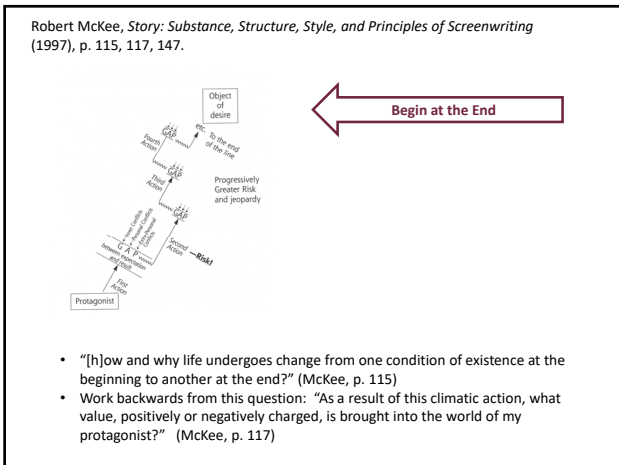
10

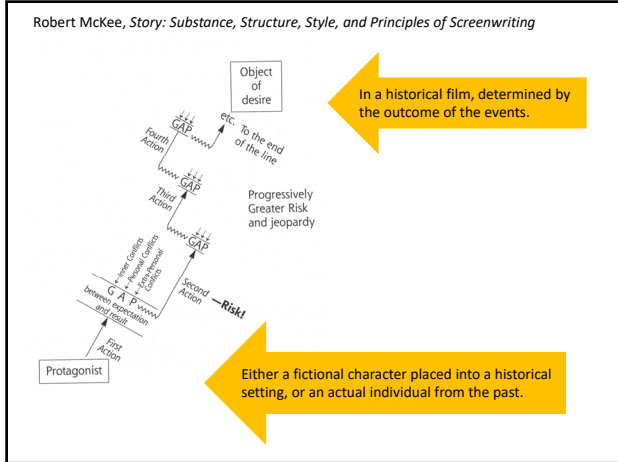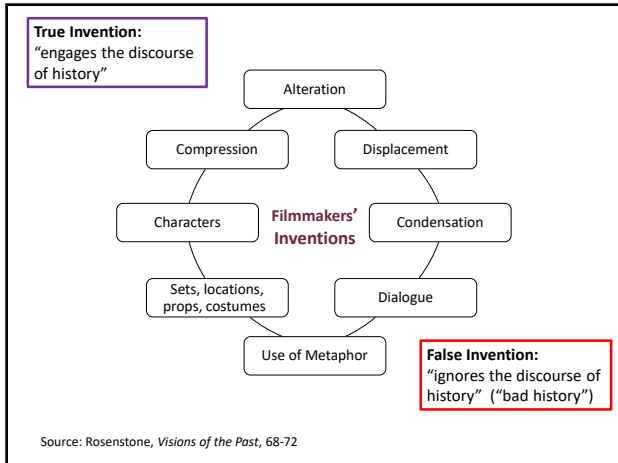McKee advises writers to know the world of the story. "Research not only wins the war on cliché, it's the key to victory over fear [for the writer] and its cousin, depression." (1997, p. 74)

ROBERT McKEE

STORY

Winner, International Moving Image Book Award

SUBSTANCE, STRUCTURE, STYLE, AND THE PRINCIPLES OF SCREENWRITING

AWARD-WINNING METHODS FROM HOLLYWOOD'S MASTER OF THE CRAFT

11

Historical Facts?

12

True Invention: "engages the discourse of history"

Alteration

Compression — Displacement

Characters — **Filmmakers' Inventions** — Condensation

Sets, locations, props, costumes — Dialogue

Use of Metaphor

False Invention: "ignores the discourse of history" ("bad history")

Source: Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past*, 68-72

13

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(1997, p. 25)

Who are the characters?

What do they want?

Why do they want it?

How do they go about getting it?

What stops them?

What are the consequences?

14

Structure and Genre

ROBERT McKEE

STORY

Winner, International Moving Image Book Award

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AWARD-WINNING METHODS FROM HOLLYWOOD'S MASTER OF THE CRAFT

NEWLY REVISED AND UPDATED

SYD FIELD

SCREENPLAY

THE FOUNDATIONS OF SCREENWRITING

A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE FROM CONCEPT TO FINISHED SCRIPT

15

"History is an inexhaustible source of story material and embraces every type of story imaginable. The treasure chest of history, however, is sealed with this warning: What is past must be present. A screenwriter … must find an audience today. Therefore, the best use of history, and only legitimate excuse to set a film in the past thereby add untold millions to the budget, … to use the past as a clear glass through which you show us the present. …
"… Historical drama polishes the past into a mirror of the present, making clear and bearable the painful problems of racism in *Glory*, …"
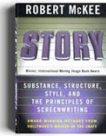
(1997, p. 83)

16

Presentism & Relevancy

17

"[Biography is a] cousin to Historical Drama focuses on a person rather than an era. Biography, however, must never become a simple chronicle. That someone lived, died, and did interesting things in between is of scholarly interest and no more. The biographer must interpret facts as if they were fiction, find the meaning of the subject's life, and then cast [them] as the protagonist of his life's genre … "
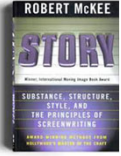
(1997, p. 84)

18

Pacing

ROBERT McKEE
STORY

positive scene, sequence, or act climaxes

PREMISE

negative scene, sequence, or act climaxes

(+) LAST ACT CLIMAX
IDEALISTIC CONTROLLING IDEA

Idealistic: Upending, positive, hopes, dreams, "life as we want" (p. 123)

Express cynicism, loss, misfortune, decline, dark side of humanity, "life as we dread it" (p. 124)

(-) LAST ACT CLIMAX
PESSIMISTIC CONTROLLING IDEA

"complex, dual nature of existence, a simultaneously charged positive and negative vision; life at its most complex and realistic." (p. 125)

LAST ACT CLIMAX
IRONIC CONTROLLING IDEA
(+) & (-)

(1997, p. 123, 151)

19

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positive scene, sequence, or act climaxes

PREMISE

negative scene, sequence, or act climaxes

(+) LAST ACT CLIMAX
IDEALISTIC CONTROLLING IDEA

Historical Reality ?

(-) LAST ACT CLIMAX
PESSIMISTIC CONTROLLING IDEA

LAST ACT CLIMAX
IRONIC CONTROLLING IDEA
(+) & (-)

20

Questions to ask:
1. Why this story line?
2. What is the message?
3. Why this structure and genre?
4. Why these characters?
5. Why this sequence of events?
6. Why these sets and locations?
7. Why this dialogue?
8. Why this pacing?

Accuracy Scavenger Hunt

21

Authenticity to the screenwriter is the creation of "an internally consistent world, true to itself in scope, depth, and detail. …"

"Show, don't tell."

ROBERT McKEE
STORY
SUBSTANCE, STRUCTURE, STYLE, AND THE PRINCIPLES OF SCREENWRITING
AWARD-WINNING LECTURER FROM HOLLYWOOD'S MASTER OF THE CRAFT

(1997, p. 185-86, 334)

22