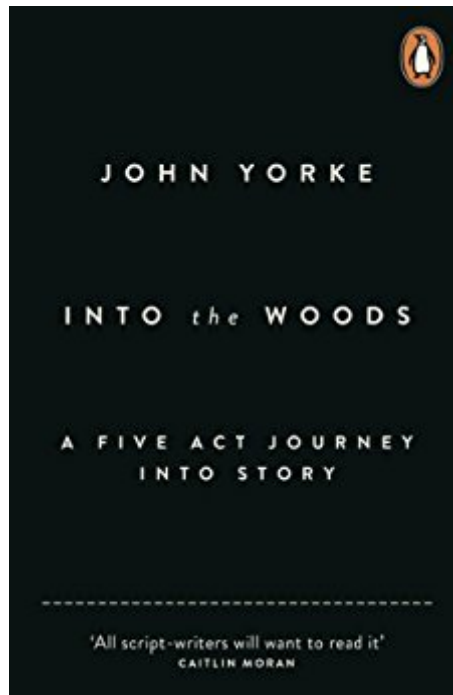




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Into The Woods: How Stories Work And Why We Tell Them



Synopsis

Into The Woods is a revelation of the fundamental structure and meaning of all stories, from the man responsible for more hours of drama on British television than anyone else, John Yorke. We all love stories. Many of us love to tell them, and even dream of making a living from it too. But what is a story? Hundreds of books about screenwriting and storytelling have been written, but none of them ask 'Why?' Why do we tell stories? And why do all stories function in an eerily similar way? John Yorke has been telling stories almost his entire adult life, and the more he has done it, the more he has asked himself why? Every great thinker or writer has their theories: Aristotle, David Hare, Lajos Egri, Robert McKee, Gustav Freytag, David Mamet, Christopher Booker, Charlie Kaufman, William Goldman and Aaron Sorkin - all have offered insightful and illuminating answers. Here, John Yorke draws on these figures and more as he takes us on a historical, philosophical, scientific and psychological journey to the heart of all storytelling. What he reveals is that there truly is a unifying shape to narrative - one that echoes the great fairytale journey into the woods, and one, like any great art, that comes from deep within. Much more than a 'how to write' book, Into the Woods is an exploration of this fundamental structure underneath all narrative forms, from film and television to theatre and novel-writing. With astonishing detail and wisdom, John Yorke explains to us a phenomenon that, whether it is as a simple fable, or a big-budget 3D blockbuster, most of us experience almost every day of our lives.

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Customer Reviews

John Yorke's "Into The Woods: A Five Act Journey into Story" is an excellent book for anyone interested in narrative theory, or wanting an understanding of the power and purpose of stories and storytelling. Those who see this treatise on story structure as a formulation of a script-writing template for successful film and TV stories not only miss its point, they also do the author a grave disservice. Yorke's starting point is an analysis of dramatic form in which he extends Christopher Booker's "The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories" by showing that even Booker's seven can essentially be collapsed down into one universal five-act form, which is itself built from a fractal array of five-fold forms in miniature. The author presents an extensive examination of a wide range of successful stories drawn from over the ages, really driving home the message in a way that demonstrates the far-reaching veracity of his thesis. But Yorke doesn't stop there; to close out his story, he turns to the deeper and more interesting question that follows: why do all stories, regardless of their actual content, share the same basic structure -- and a structure which is so fundamental that it can even be observed even when authors have steadfastly declared their abhorrence for and maintained a deliberate avoidance of it? Yorke's conclusions here are both erudite and rigorous, serving to reinforce beautifully the notion oft expounded by Jack Cohen and Ian Stewart (such as in their "

In the acknowledgements section at the end of his book, John Yorke says a few kind words to Joseph Campbell, Joseph Campbell, and other prominent narrative theorists. "I have attempted to acknowledge my debt to them all wherever possible," Yorke says. Kind words, but in my view the author attempts to take far more credit for many of the ideas throughout the book than the small, humble acknowledgement in the postscript admits. In chapter after chapter, Yorke presents stunning revelations about story as if they were his own, starting with the introduction: "In stories throughout the ages there is one motif that continually recurs--the journey into the woods to find the dark but life-giving secret within." So, the entire premise of the book is based on the initiatory pattern of the hero's journey, recognized by Joseph Campbell 65 years ago. Yorke doesn't bother to mention

this. Yorke dismisses Vogler as too simplistic (though he doesn't really say how), and yet pages later he uses Vogler's analysis of Pulp Fiction, without citation, as a paradigmatic hero's journey. Borrowing ideas liberally is somewhat expected in a popular book, but for a reader who is well-versed in narrative theory, the heavy borrowing without citation and casual criticism of those you're stealing from is deeply irritating. No, John Yorke, you did not invent the wheel, it has been "a-round" a long time. That's my gripe, and it's a serious one, and that's why I dock the author a star. Only a star for something as serious as misleading claims of originality? Yes, I can't give this book anything less than four stars.

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