



Talking Pictures: How to Watch Movies

Ann Hornaday

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Whether we are trying to impress a date after an art-house film screening or discussing Oscar nominations with friends, we all need ways to watch and talk about movies. But with so much variety between an Alfred Hitchcock thriller and a Nora Ephron romantic comedy, how can everyday viewers determine what makes a good movie?

In *Talking Pictures*, veteran film critic Ann Hornaday walks us through the production of a typical movie—from writing the script and casting to the final sound edit—and explains how to evaluate each piece of the process. How do we know if a film is well-written, above and beyond snappy dialogue? What constitutes a great screen performance? What goes into praiseworthy cinematography, editing, and sound design? And what does a director really *do*? Full of engaging anecdotes and interviews with actors and filmmakers, *Talking Pictures* will help us see movies in a whole new light—not just as fans, but as film critics in our own right.

Talking Pictures: How to Watch Movies Details

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From Reader Review Talking Pictures: How to Watch Movies for online ebook

Bill says

Living in Washington, DC, I've been reading Hornaday's reviews and find I often disagree with her. Our tastes in films seems to be radically different. However, her book is well written and well reasoned. It was fun to read her opinions on classic directors and films and to see where her critical aesthetic comes from. The book, arranged by production elements such as editing, directing, and sound, cogently presents her arguments and gives one a good basis in understanding what one should look for in a film. I still don't always agree with her, but now I understand her reasoning.

Nate says

Accessible book introducing the mechanics of what is often very hard to put into words - why a movie does or does not work for you.

I like how the book is broken down and organized by the components of any movie (script, acting, editing, cinematography, sound). Her choice to kick off the book with the script and move directing to the end underscores the uniquely collaborative nature of filmmaking and limitations of the auteur theory.

Each section is filled with both good and bad examples, at least in her opinion. By doing this Hornaday provides a general template for how to talk about movies, but also suggests what to look for if you want a deeper viewing experience and reflection that goes beyond thumbs up thumbs down.

Side Note: Ann Hornaday sure does love All The President's Men and Spotlight. I stopped counting how many times both movies were used as an illustration. I happen to share the enthusiasm, but Ann, your journalist bias is showing :)

Justin Swanson says

?Read with eyes

Literary Soirée says

?????

Early in my career I reviewed films as a freelancer. So was thrilled to find veteran movie critic Ann Hornaday's TALKING PICTURES: HOW TO WATCH MOVIES on NetGalley. Loved her intro, where she describes not being a film fan, but finding her way to the critic's seat anyway.

For me, it was the opposite ... I ADORED movies and still do. Left to babysit my brother, I had the riches of Saturday Night at the Movies. One night Kev and I watched "Niagara" as Marilyn Monroe and Joseph Cotten sped toward the falls in a dinghy. We both screamed at the screen, "Jump," while Cotten retorted over

the roar, “We can’t. We’ll be torn apart by the rocks.” Hooked from that moment on!

Ann, by contrast, came circuitously to the job ... a fascinating trip which included a stint as Gloria Steinem’s P. A. She describes writing her first official film review, terror stricken, knowing she loved the flick but couldn’t fathom how best to say why. Then she recalled advice from TV critic David Friedman, who riffed off Goethe when he told her to ponder three questions, “What was the artist trying to achieve? Did they achieve it? And was it worth doing?”

Ann survived that moment of terror to go on to bigger gigs, eventually making her way to the elevated realms of The Washington Post, where her reviews are revered.

In TALKING PICTURES, she shares her wisdom by taking readers through the production of a typical movie--from script and casting to final sound edit--and explains how to evaluate each phase. She instructs on screenwriting, performances, cinematography, editing, and sound design. She also includes engaging anecdotes and interviews with actors and filmmakers ... all designed to shape us into movie critics in our own right. A highly recommended trip for every lover of flicks! 5/5

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Thanks to Perseus Books, Basic Books and NetGalley for the review copy. Opinions are fully mine.

#TalkingPictures #NetGalley

David Quinn says

As much as Ann Hornaday has to say about the elements of movie-making and what constitutes good and bad movies I'll still rely on my instincts. She thought Manchester by the Sea was an excellent movie whereas I hated it; and she'll never convince me otherwise.

This isn't so much a book for the average to below-average (me) movie-watcher as it's better suited for the movie afficianado or someone seeking a career in filmmaking. There were lots of interesting points and much I agreed with and learned but there was just too much detail about things I don't care to know and will never think about again. Also, her go-to movie references are just too repetitive and she repeats about a dozen words (apotheosis and verisimilitude among them) to a nauseating degree.

While reading the book I kept thinking about the movie Adaptation and its satirical take on the script-writing process. I didn't love the last quarter of the movie but I still think it's an excellent film. This scene is a good sample (and Bryan Cox's speech in the final minute of the clip is riveting):

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_VseQ...

SusanInSedalia says

I learned a lot! Can't wait to try out my new knowledge at the next movie I see.

Margaret Sankey says

After watching a movie, I can almost always say whether or not I liked it, although whether a movie was good or bad get much more difficult quickly. Hornaday offers the casual viewer the framework and vocabulary to think about and explain how we can judge movies outside of our personal attachment to them—was the success or failure due to the script, or the casting, or the production design? How do the elements come together to create something, and how does that something fit in the context of its time, endure as a classic or quickly fade as an artifact of its time? Using vivid and accessible examples, this is a good primer for movie fans.

Diane Hernandez says

Have you ever wondered about the engine under the hood of your favorite movie or television show? If so, *Talking Pictures: How to Watch Movies* is a comprehensive resource you need to read.

Beginning with the screenplay, this book has a chapter about each part of the movie making process. Other chapters focus on acting, production design, cinematography, editing, sound/music and directing. There is also a short chapter about documentaries in the appendix.

Each of the chapters offer an in-depth look at the work of the providers of the skill. The author defines some industry terms. There are fascinating stories from the past. Who knew the first time the title of production designer was used was for *Gone with the Wind*? Names of actors and movies are given as both good and bad examples of the skill being studied. Finally, at the end of each chapter is a list of recommended movies to watch to see the craft at its highest level.

Talking Pictures: How to Watch Movies is enchanting. It's perfect for movie fans who want to see the multiple skills necessary to make a great movie. I loved it! 5 stars.

Thanks to Basic Books and NetGalley for an advance copy in exchange for an honest review.

Chance Lee says

A couple months ago, I found myself waiting in line to return something at a major big box store. The man in front of me turned around, looked at me with clear, ice-blue eyes, and said, "You like *Pulp Fiction*?"

I looked down at my shirt, a faded image of Uma Thurman from the iconic film poster across my torso. "I've seen it," I said. "And the shirt was on clearance." *Pulp Fiction* was my favorite movie when I was twelve, but I didn't feel the need to share that.

"I love movies," the lean, dreamy-eyed man in front of me said as he fiddled with the thick blue work gloves on his hands. "A lot of people like *Pulp Fiction*. It's a lot of people's favorite."

"I used to love it. But I don't care for Tarantino anymore."

"My favorite movie is *Terminator 2*. They don't make movies like that anymore." He took off one glove, scratched his (normal-looking) hand, and put it back on.

As we talked, basically all he could say about *T2: Judgement Day* was that it was "good" without articulating why. I wondered: does he try to talk about movies with any random stranger? Maybe he's the most movie-knowledgable person in his friend group and excited to find someone else who likes movies? Will he marry me? Why is wearing thick work gloves inside during summer?

I later saw him at the grocery store, and he was wearing gloves there, too.

If I see him again, I'm not daring enough to ask him why he wears gloves (or if he'll marry me) but I will recommend this book, *Talking Pictures*.

Talking Pictures is a valuable resource for anyone who wants to talk about movies on a deeper level than "it was good/bad/fun/boring." *Washington Post* film critic Ann Hornaday details all the moving parts that go into moving pictures, from screenwriting to editing to sound mixing to directing, and what they need to do right to make a film transcend being a 90-minute diversion to a masterful timeless work of art.

Around the time I was falling into the gloved one's bottomless blue eyes, I went to see *A Quiet Passion*, a film about Emily Dickinson written and directed by Terence Davies.

I did not like it.

Characters are introduced, disappear for most of the film, the reappear only a) to die or b) to have just died. Scenes that should be longer are cut short while other scenes drag on. After coming down with an illness, Emily spasms for what feels like eternity. What does that tell us, the viewer, other than Cynthia Nixon is really good at spasming?

From reading *Talking Pictures*, I learned that these scenes tell us the film is poorly edited. A sharper cut could have made the movie more engaging. Nixon was wonderful, as was Jennifer Ehle. An unknown actress over-acted all her parts, as if she were on stage instead of in a film, but the director also *let her do it so...*

Back to the book, your mileage may vary depending on your knowledge of the cinematic machine. My ignorance is broader when it comes to editing and music than, say, writing or cinematography. Hornaday delivers example after example after example, so a lot of the book is skimmable once you grasp her point.

It helped that Hornaday and I share similar taste in films. Although, she criticizes directors who tell too much by crafting scenes that leave little to the imagination, yet she praises Aaron Sorkin on what feels like every other page. She also reminds readers that an actor who is bad in a movie is often the fault of the director for either miscasting the performer or not getting the performance out of them, let in one instance she criticizes Elizabeth Berkley's performance in *Showgirls*. Verhoeven himself is on the record saying, "If somebody has to be blamed, it should be me because I thought that it was interesting to portray somebody like that. [...] I asked Elizabeth to do all that — to be abrupt and to act in that way, but people have been attacking her about for that ever since." [Source: <http://www.nydailynews.com/entertainm...>]

Aside from these minor differences of taste, I found Hornaday's book immensely educational and readable. She gives viewers questions to ask themselves as they watch a movie -- "Did the story 'want' to be a movie?" or "Where was the camera and why was it there?" She also offers recommended viewing suggestions, classic and modern. This book is a must-read for anyone who wants to do on Letterboxd what they do on

Tommie Whitener says

This is an absolutely fantastic book. I could not recommend it more highly. I have watched thousands of movies, but it is only now, after having read Ms. Hornaday's masterpiece, that I feel I understand what really goes into the making of a movie. However, I certainly did not absorb it all. There is far too much there to grasp it all in one reading. Instead, I will refer to it frequently, especially when the "good" movies come out toward the end of the year in anticipation of the awards' ceremonies. Oh, and about Ms. Hornaday. She's a genius and writes with tremendous insight and brio. This is one very readable book.

Michael says

A guide on how to review films, written in an easy-to-read style that's accessible to casual viewers, Talking Pictures features seven chapters that address how to effectively assess the major components of a film, from its screenplay through its production design to its cinematography. Across the book's chapters, film critic Ann Hornaday alternates between presenting succinct sets of interpretive questions and offering close readings of films that are guided by each question set. The films Hornaday most frequently references are American, and they tend to be selected from either the era of Classic Hollywood or the past three decades. The author's somewhat limited focus, in addition to her over-exaltation of cinematic realism, strengthens the book's ability to appeal to a national audience interested in mainstream films, but weakens its ability to appeal to other kinds of viewers. Still, the book's helpful as an introduction to analyzing film: Hornaday refrains from putting forth prescriptive advice for the most part, offering the tools to help readers discuss film thoughtfully but not necessarily dictating how those tools should be used.

Joshua Gross says

This was an excellent, in depth look at movies and how they are made. The book moves through every part of the process, the importance of each process, and how they affect how good the movie will be. I only wish there had been a few more examples, particularly more modern examples. The author tended to use the same examples over and over, and there were just a few places I needed a better or more modern example.

Cassidy (Reminders of the Changing Time) says

To see all of my book-related content, check out my blog @ <http://bit.ly/2zzVt0R>

Ann Hornaday's Talking Pictures is its reader's first-step towards watching films like a world-renowned movie-critic. Throughout the book, she accessibly breaks down the common errors that are made when it comes to film-making and alternatively, what constitutes a truly fantastic film. The book is fascinating and revelatory, but still easy-to-read without its reader needing to have watched every single film in existence to understand the topics in which the author is discussing.

Because, by breaking down films into their seven major components (acting, production design,

scriptwriting, cinematography, editing, sound/music and directing), Hornaday thoroughly examines each aspect of the movie-making process and shows how, even the slightest margin of error in any of them, can make or break a film.

It is a book that will certainly enhance its readers' film-watching experiences (it certainly enhanced mine!) and each chapter even ends with a list of required viewing; one which illustrates the very best in each film-component, in accordance with Hornaday's vast experience.

Thanks to NetGalley and the publisher for sending me a copy of this book in exchange for an honest review.

Head on over to <http://bit.ly/2y7JSWV> for this book, as well as all of the others featured in my reviews, complete with the added bonuses of free worldwide shipping and bringing a little joy to my life.

Vera says

As I expected - it was a good read, helped me structure my understanding of movie industry and what different roles do during the movie production but nothing groundbreaking.

Callie says

I really enjoyed reading this one! It was engaging and talked about both recent and classic films, which was nice as I feel many books about movies never talk about anything made past the 90s. A great read for anyone who loves watching and talking about good cinema.
