

**NZ Writers Guild newsletter, January 2012**

**Section 1.3 NZWG Library News**

**Book Review:**

***Making the Transformational Moment in Film* by Dan Fleming. Michael Wiese Publishing (2011).**

Review by **Colin Hodson**

Both analytical, theoretical and how-to, *Making the Transformational Moment in Film* investigates how film works in its multiple ways, discussing narrative, imagery and historical drivers all at work to create the filmic affect.

The book focuses mainly on the body of films of Vincent Ward to unpick various elements at work to differing degrees across his oeuvre. As a filmmaker, Ward has straddled both the narratively driven Hollywood form and what Fleming dubs 'post-classical' filmmaking: namely the meeting of the linear with a more lateral or open text - or 'pentateuchal'. To Fleming, it is the 'post-classical' film that will deliver the transformational moment - that transcendent or sublime moment that can give a movie so much power.

Noting that Ward's idiosyncratic first three features took him to Cannes, a conflict arose as he was brought into the Hollywood system. For Fleming, this conflict was between the classic Homeric hero's narrative that dominates Hollywood and Ward's style inclusive of 'pentateuchal' elements.

Highlighting the dominance of the Homeric style as the model for filmmaking these days, Fleming points to the plethora of 'how to' script writing books that are all focused on the 'hero's journey' - a notion developed by Christopher Vogler in memo form which became the blueprint for how to structure a script. This model is now repeated endlessly, with variations, in script writing workshops everywhere. It is this dominance that suppresses a 'post classical' film style coming into being, or, as Fleming makes the case in *What Dreams May Come*, the two filmic styles undermine each other, leaving the film floating as both a wonderfully strange imagistic movie fuelled by Ward's tactile moviemaking coupled to a mawkish linear narrative imposed by a Hollywood movie making machine.

As Fleming notes, retrospectively examining films that work in a 'post classical' way will not provide a set of rules by which to make another - the magic in these movies comes out of a unique relation of the artist and how they weave the material, and can't be cookie-cuttered in how-to books to produce those sublime moments that the audience seeks to experience in the theatre.

As a writer, as I am asked to do rewrites or provide treatments along the road of script development, as I dutifully map out the points of accruing action and timely reversals for my hero, reading this book puts me in mind of this: That the magic in your script that pushes the film into the realm of the sublime won't come from blind adherence to the writing plan, but rather from something extra, some intuitive connection to your material that you have to remain open to as you write. It reminds me to be careful with those intangible but magical moments I produced in the first draft, and that are at risk of disappearing as my script goes before the financiers on its way toward the gate and out into production.

Finally, as you read this book, it becomes clear that the book itself is structured in Fleming's own 'post-classical' manner - a series of parallel runs make up the book, rather than an end to end linear structure. With *Making the Transformational Moment in Film*, it won't be until you've taken in the whole book that its richness will emerge.

This book is available from the NZ Writers Guild Library.

<http://colindson.net>

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