

Praise for *So Your Mama Loves It, But Is It Ready for the Big Time?*

"Finally, a screenwriting book that can actually take my skills to the next level. If you are ready to move past Screenwriting 101 into the land of understanding what separates a screenplay from a sellable script, 'So Your Mama...' is your mama. Hands down the best advanced scriptwriting book I've ever read -- and I've read them all!" -- ***Fran Harris*** is a film/television producer, broadcaster, speaker, entrepreneur and author of six books including *Crashing Hollywood: How To Keep Your Integrity Up, Your Clothes On & Still Make It In Hollywood.* www.franharris.com.

"Sheila's book reminds us that screenwriting is more than just a 'craft' -- or an exercise in enjoining a computer program -- that it is the vision of a drama -- small or great -- that must be shaped and reshaped until it satisfies its greatest test -- to move us. Working with Sheila is about searching for the heart and the soul of a script, and remembering why we love movies." -- ***David Chisholm*** is a veteran writer who is currently writing back to back features for acclaimed producers at Warner Bros.

"In chapters that delve into structure, character development, exposition, description and dialogue, Gallien offers sensible advice for making your screenplay more focused, more compelling, and more professional. She uses examples from recent movies to illustrate her points on subjects like constructing story points that are connected without being contrived and creating an original, interesting protagonist. Throughout the book, her ideas are fresh and thoughtful and presented in a light, conversational tone that makes it a fun, easy read." --***Melissa Prusi***, AbsoluteWrite.com

"Gallien speaks directly to the reader as confidante and coach, distilling her many years of high-level experience working on scripts not only being developed, but scripts being made into big-time Hollywood movies. Her insights are invaluable in helping you craft your work-of-art into a salable script." --***Pamela Jaye Smith*** of MYTHWORKS™ is a mythologist, writer, consultant and award-winning producer/director. Her much anticipated book, "*How to Write and Create Characters Through Their INNER DRIVES*" will be published by Michael Wiese Productions in early 2005.

"I love the simplicity and no nonsense way you present the facts of life. I especially like that you define a problem, explain why it's a problem, and show what needs to happen to correct it. I've read a lot of screenwriting authors including Bob McKee, Linda Seger, Michael Hauge, Syd Field, Lew Hunter, Linda Cowgill, Susan Kouguell, Lajoes Egri and Aristotle. I've read a zillion articles and been in dozens of workshops, on-line and in person. I wish I could've read your book first. It would've saved me a lot of learning curve." --***Robb Auspitz***

"I do believe your book has shown true genius in simplifying an almost impossibly complex world, and given a real working analysis for the serious screenwriter." --***Scout Riley***

“I bought it today and I am loving it. I'm working on three completely different projects, all hard as hell, and am finding sweet notes of clarity in your book.” --**Jan Smith**

If you are serious about success, and honest with yourself, it will be impossible to dismiss Sheila's book as just another dusty tome full of screenwriting platitudes and theory. From page one you'll know that Sheila's addressing real, intuitive, practical issues that directly relate not only to your story, but to your script's marketability. You will address these issues at some point in your career---and I would much rather learn about them from Sheila now, than from the 15th executive who just passed on my script. --**Larry F. Hill**

“Your book is written with astonishing clarity.” --**Jim Cornelius**

“I think the crowning achievement of your book is how condensed it is. You touch on many things and even though the book is short I don't feel as though you only gave cursory attention to any of the topics. Your analysis of a topic is thorough, concise and entertaining. I've read it twice already and yet I still think it will take several more passes before I have grasped all it has to offer and I will continue to refer to it through the writing of my script.” --**Anthony Jackson**

So Your Mama Loves It, But Is It Ready for the Big Time?

The 10 Most Common Mistakes Screenwriters Make
(And How You Can Avoid Them)

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Prologue

Can a book like this help you?

Analyzing art through theory is like analyzing love through therapy. You can break it down into words and structure and relationships, shoulds and coulds and ought-tos, but there is something beyond, something that can't quite be touched. Art, like love, transcends pure language, rational thought, everything we can truly name.

This book talks about stories in terms of theoretical ideas. But before I say a word about theory, I want to remind us all that movies, stories, are not just “products.” We think so much about the “industry”—we can recite grosses, dream of seven-figure sales—that we forget movies are works of art, every bit as mysterious and transient as love. I can't explain, for example, why Talk to Me moved me, any more than I can explain why my knees buckled when I saw Van Gogh's “Starry Night” in person for the first time.

What brings a vision forth, fully formed, beautifully executed, is beyond my ken. And yet, like you, I am driven to try to express this vision to the maximum extent of my talent, and to try to push the limits of that talent, make it grow.

I say all this because I don't really believe we can explain why stories work. We know when they do; we know when we read or see something extraordinary. Great artists study, though each artist does it in his own way. Whether William Goldman ever read Robert McKee, I don't know. But I do know Goldman (and McKee) studied the works of Ingmar Bergman. That Robert Duvall studied Horton Foote and Horton Foote studied Tennessee Williams. Great writers have worked and studied and tried and practiced and created their own “poetics,” their own systems of organization. They may never have articulated those poetics, but they are conscious as they work, and they make their decisions based on *something*.

You've probably had the experience of having a story in your head, feeling it reverberate within you, and yet when you try to write it, it looks nothing like what you had envisioned. You can't quite touch it. It is elusive, its essence a mystery. While we wrestle with that mystery, we must create our own poetics. We can do this through study and practice, trial and error, internalizing the masters, breaking down the films and stories we love. We can develop our own tricks to get both inside and outside our own work. And it is within this process that the study of different theories and ideas can be helpful. There is no one right way to look at structure. Even the word structure implies a certain set of assumptions. But a work of art doesn't materialize from nothing. You will need building blocks, whether you build them yourself or borrow from others until yours come into focus. You cannot blindly write a movie any more than you can blindly compose a violin concerto.

While we grasp at the greater mysteries, it seems to me that theories are better at explaining what does not work rather than what works. That's why the thrust of this book is mistakes. I'm not a great theorist or a great artist. I'm just someone who has read a lot of screenplays and has a very good sense of when a writer is running into a wall. If we can all learn from each other, if we can save ourselves from making the same mistakes over and over again, then perhaps we can come a little closer to greatness. But neither this book nor any other should be taken as gospel. It's a starting place. When I say that the desire of the protagonist drives the story, it sounds like a sterile thing. But how can the desire for love be sterile, if that is the protagonist's desire, as it so often is? And isn't it amazing how many directions the human heart can go while questing for that love? So I hope these ideas are helpful. They are meant as a guide to help you through familiar territory and lead you into the place where you can grapple with the great mysteries, the stuff of great stories.