



# How UFOs Conquered the World: The History of a Modern Myth

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not all fairy tales contain the thirty-one functions that Propp proposed. His project, then, is to 'reconcile the work of Syd Field with that of Vladimir Propp in order to create a better method of analyzing a typical Hollywood screenplay' (27). In his move away from the 'amazing uniformity' of Propp's theory (13), Murphy opens up the potential for an acknowledgement of the differences, as well as the similarities, in fairy-tale plot structures.

Murphy's analyses of both the fairy-tale genotypes and the corresponding Hollywood film genotypes are generally well explained, with tables at the culmination of each chapter outlining the progression of functions within the narratives. He offers excellent summaries of the texts—particularly the films in question, so that analysis without having seen the films is still possible—and he demonstrates with ease his argument against the uniformity of plot structures. However, if his motive was to enable easy comparison between the fairy-tale plots and their corresponding film screenplays, his decision to place each analysis in a separate chapter, rather than analyse them directly alongside one another, does not serve this purpose. The complexity of the analysis—although a strength in and of itself—means it would have been preferable at least to have organized the summarizing tables to run parallel with each other so that direct comparison could be more easily made.

*From Fairy Tale to Film Screenplay*, it might also be noted, works from the premise that condensing all plots into one basic structure is not beneficial to screenwriters, suggesting instead that even within a paradigm there is an element of 'choice' that creates difference (between a comedy and a tragedy, for example). However, despite this claim, Murphy does not make reference to the heterogeneity of the fairy tales in question. Nor does he always acknowledge the particular version of the tale he is analysing, mention its source, or refer to the other versions of the tale which may or may not have the same structure. The implication of this oversight is that Murphy misses the opportunity to see variance and irregularity within the versions of the tales themselves. While Perrault's 'Little Red Riding Hood' ends in tragedy, what can be said of the Grimms' 'Little Red Cap', in which the girl and her grandmother are saved? What impact would these plot differences have on the overall genotype? Murphy leaves these questions unanswered.

Although Murphy's analysis is interesting and thorough, offering a deeper understanding of the journey through a successful narrative, the comparative aspect with fairy tales is somewhat lacking. His simple and easy-to-follow prose makes it a suitable text for the novice screenwriter hoping to aid their writing with plot genotypes, but *From Fairy Tale to Film Screenplay* falls short from a folklorist's perspective and does not draw clear and effective conclusions from its comparative efforts.

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**How UFOs Conquered the World: The History of a Modern Myth.** By David Clarke. London: Aurum Press, 2015. 312 pp. Illus. £18.99 (hbk). ISBN 1-78131-303-9

There are probably two subjects within the fields of Fortean investigation, or the study of unexplained phenomena (depending on how you want to approach it), which produce more printed matter and more discussion than any others. One of these subjects is ghosts and haunting events; the other is Unexplained Flying Objects (UFOs). Of these two, the latter generates far more controversy.

When it comes to UFOs, people fall into two distinct camps. Either you believe the extra-terrestrial hypothesis, and UFOs are alien craft from beyond our planet, or you dismiss this approach, and UFOs are exactly what the term was coined to describe them: objects, which are flying—and unexplained. The people who fall into these two camps rarely move between them. They have usually either always been believers, or always been sceptical of the alien approach.

That David Clarke breaks this convention is one of the key reasons why this book is such a different—and highly pleasing—analysis of the UFO phenomenon.

Growing up in the 1970s, Clarke fell into the believers group. He went on ‘skywatching’ trips. He joined the appropriate groups and societies. As time went on, his views changed. Clarke realized that, in his opinion, the extra-terrestrial hypothesis was probably not the correct one. The more than thirty years of research that followed make up the backbone of this study. But this book review appears in the pages of *Folklore*. As an analysis of an area of study traditionally sitting alongside cryptozoology, unexplained weather phenomena, and the like, is *How UFOs Conquered the World* looking at events in ways which would be of interest to the purer folklore researcher? The answer is resoundingly in the affirmative. David Clarke is a well-respected folklorist, and his approach to the field looks critically at the process of myth-making, considering witness testimony and social context in depth in order to draw its conclusions.

Clarke’s track record of work and research makes him ideally suited to produce an investigation of this calibre. Previously employed as a journalist (and now teaching journalism and media law at Sheffield Hallam University), Clarke draws on this experience when he interviews the many and varied witnesses, investigators, academics, and believers whose views and thoughts he uses to back up his findings. Since 2008, he has also acted in the capacity of spokesperson for the National Archives during the period of declassification and release of governmental UFO files. At no time, however, does Clarke allow any kind of bias to cloud his presentation of the facts as he finds them. His analysis at all times is lucid, free from jargon, and well constructed.

Throughout the book, Clarke freely employs the principle of Occam’s razor to demonstrate his reasoning: this philosophical principle suggests that the simplest answer is usually the most likely; or the more assumptions that have to be made in a theory, the less likely it is to be the correct one. Applying this approach, Clarke skilfully deconstructs the subject matter, concluding that the phenomenon of the UFO as an alien craft is essentially a form of folk myth coming out of the Western world and being constructed by people drawing on the culture surrounding them and their own wants and needs. At no time, however, does Clarke fall into the trap that many writers suffer from of insulting the opinions of those with whom he disagrees. The book is respectful of everyone whom it cites, however outlandish their views may seem to others. This in itself adds more credence to the arguments it presents.

Another strength of Clarke’s approach is that it sets out from a starting point of having no assumptions. It is by listening to witnesses, analysing evidence and archives, and making comparisons that it begins to form its argument and draw its conclusions. The ten chapters that the book contains each examine a different aspect of British UFO history, and yet the book flows naturally from beginning to end as a complete study. Because prior assumptions are not made, Clarke makes a very ‘clean’ study of people’s individual experiences and uses the proper folklorist’s approach of examining why the witnesses concluded that they experienced what they did and what meaning may be imbued in their experience. In other words, it is the people who are more important than the experiences themselves.

*How UFOs Conquered the World* is a fascinating distillation of the many years of diligent research that David Clarke has put into his field of study, as well as being an excellent example of what a first-rate investigation and presentation of findings should be. Many other researchers would do well to study this book and the techniques of its author, whatever their own chosen area of research.