

# British Theatre Guide

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## Script Analysis for the Theatre

Robert Knopf

Bloomsbury / Methuen Drama

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While this book has what seems like an academic title, it is actually a practical manual for fledgling theatre directors on how to properly use a script, from the first time you read it as a production you are to direct to writing a pitch to producers, designers and others involved in the production to put across your "vision".

The methodology used is largely derived from Stanislavski with terminology borrowed from the original translations of *An Actor Prepares* by Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood such as "objectives", "tempo-rhythm" and "given circumstances" with a fair dose of what has become known as "actioning", where individual lines are assigned active verbs to describe the character's intentions for the actor to play. There's even a bit of Keith Johnstone thrown in when discussing status (*Impro* must be the most well-thumbed book on my shelves).

These terms are not always defined as clearly as in the original source, although there are good examples from plays that should be familiar, or at least are readily available, to most directors in Europe and the US. Knopf uses excerpts from a wide range of scripts, including *Hedda Gabler*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Twelfth Night*, *Oedipus the King*, *How I Learned to Drive*—a good selection from different genres and periods.

It's a practical approach that has been developed by the author through his own directing work in American colleges and at small theatres in New York, which, though there is a college production feel about the way it is described, should work fine as a starting point for a new director, and possibly give a few ideas to those who have just started out as directors for the stage.

There are further aids provided, including some blank forms to use in the different aspects of the analysis—there is a lot of paperwork in this method—and sample verbs for all occasions if you are hampered in your actioning by momentary lapses in vocabulary.

This is not, however, a guide for academic or literary analysis—it doesn't have sufficient rigour for that and doesn't provide enough detail of the origins of the various techniques. This is a description of a practical process that clearly began with Stanislavski and others but which the author has evolved into a practical system that works for him—the roots of the system matter little in the rehearsal room as long as the required results are achieved.

The system does have its limitations. Stanislavski himself was adamant that his 'system' could be applied to any style of theatre, not just naturalism (he also regularly directed opera) but never entirely justified this. Similarly, Knopf tries to apply his techniques to many different styles, but a few techniques clearly designed for a world of psychological realism seem a bit odd, if not counter-productive, when applied to, say, Oscar Wilde or Ancient Greek drama.

He does have a short section on what he terms the "avant-garde", i.e. work that "deliberately rejects the conventions of linear, casual action." For those, he says the techniques are useful for helping to find how they are different from "traditional plays".

While there is nothing new here, it brings several techniques together into one book and applies them to a good range of plays. However it is priced more as an academic textbook than a "how-to" manual (RRP £27.99—and not discounted at all on Amazon), which may greatly limit its potential readership.

**Reviewer:** [David Chadderton](#)