



Invisible Storytellers: Voice-Over Narration in American Fiction Film

By Sarah Kozloff

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"Let me tell you a story," each film seems to offer silently as its opening frames hit the screen. But sometimes the film finds a voice—an off-screen narrator—for all or part of the story. From *Wuthering Heights* and *Double Indemnity* to *Annie Hall* and *Platoon*, voice-over narration has been an integral part of American movies.

Through examples from films such as *How Green Was My Valley*, *All About Eve*, *The Naked City*, and *Barry Lyndon*, Sarah Kozloff examines and analyzes voice-over narration. She refutes the assumptions that words should only play a minimal role in film, that "showing" is superior to "telling," or that the technique is inescapably authoritarian (the "voice of god"). She questions the common conception that voice-over is a literary technique by tracing its origins in the silent era and by highlighting the influence of radio, documentaries, and television. She explores how first-person or third-person narration really affects a film, in terms of genre conventions, viewer identification, time and nostalgia, subjectivity, and reliability. In conclusion she argues that voice-over increases film's potential for intimacy and sophisticated irony.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Sarah Kozloff is Professor and Chair of film studies at Vassar College, and has published articles in *Film Quarterly*, *Cinema Journal*, and *Film/Literature Quarterly*.

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