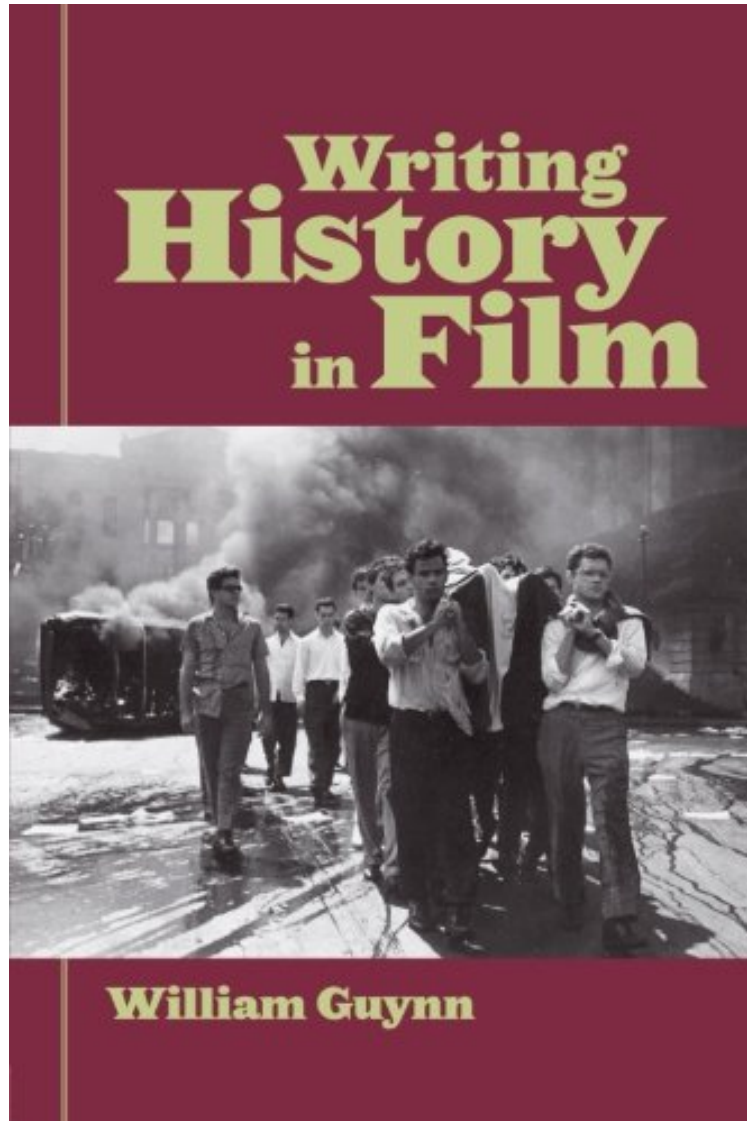


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Writing History in Film

William Guynn

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William Guynn : Writing History in Film before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Writing History in Film:

3 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Setng the clock back for writing about film and historyBy Orson WellesWhy can't historians write well about film? Why do they talk about film as if video and DVD don't exist? Why do they address only a handful of films, usually the same ones? Why can they make use of narrative theory but not film theory? Why do historians who say they think film can be historical like so few films? Why do they want to

police the medium to determine which fraction of historical films are genuinely historical? Guynn's *Writing History in Film*, which begins by giving a book report on work in the field by historians dating back to the 1970s, raises all of these questions, without meaning to do so, of course. Why he didn't include Hayden White's essay in the intro and begin with it instead of waiting until page 62 to summarize is beyond me. Philip Rosen's excellent *Change Mummified* (2001) is ignored. So is Priska Morisse's 2004 book on French historians and filmmakers. Ditto for Amy de la Breteque's 2004 book on medieval film. Even more striking is the absence of Frederic Jameson's work on narrative and history. Instead of worrying that some historians don't like film, historians would do better how to actually read films. They have an astonishingly ahistorical approach to the medium. Clearly, the 60 year old plus generation of academic historian, or in Guynn's case, art historian, is unable to get beyond positions formulated two decades ago. See Robert Rosestone's 2006 book on history and film and you'll see the same thing. Guynn's case is all the more astonishing since he is an art historian. I would be shocked if he approached art the same way, with no attention to form. Guynn's summaries of other people's work are lucid, and the book can serve grad students as a shortcut to the many of the standard works of criticism in the field. The book has an introductory feel about it, as if it were written to freshmen students. Perhaps some of it comes out of Guynn's lecture notes. But the book is more likely to make readers, assuming they manage to stay with the book, lose interest in the field.

Historical film has been an important genre since the earliest silent films. The French Revolution, the American Civil War, the conquest of the New World, World War II--all have been repeatedly represented in film. But how do we distinguish between fictionalized spectacle and authentic historical representation? *Writing History in Film* sets out the narratological, semiological, rhetorical, and philosophical bases for understanding how film can function as a form of historical interpretation and representation. With case studies and an interdisciplinary approach, William Guynn examines the key issues facing film students and scholars, historians, and anyone interested in how we see our historical past.

"the book clearly challenges us to deepen our received positions on the subject and to move well beyond the usual theorist suspects. In this respect, it is a valuable contribution to the ongoing debate about historical filmmaking." -- Canadian Journal of Film Studies
About the Author William Guynn teaches film studies at Sonoma State University where he is a professor in the art department.