



# The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories

By Christopher Booker



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This remarkable and monumental book at last provides a comprehensive answer to the age-old riddle of whether there are only a small number of 'basic stories' in the world. Using a wealth of examples, from ancient myths and folk tales via the plays and novels of great literature to the popular movies and TV soap operas of today, it shows that there are seven archetypal themes which recur throughout every kind of storytelling.

But this is only the prelude to an investigation into how and why we are 'programmed' to imagine stories in these ways, and how they relate to the inmost patterns of human psychology. Drawing on a vast array of examples, from Proust to detective stories, from the Marquis de Sade to E.T., Christopher Booker then leads us through the extraordinary changes in the nature of storytelling over the past 200 years, and why so many stories have 'lost the plot' by losing touch with their underlying archetypal purpose.

Booker analyses why evolution has given us the need to tell stories and illustrates how storytelling has provided a uniquely revealing mirror to mankind's psychological development over the past 5000 years.

This seminal book opens up in an entirely new way our understanding of the real purpose storytelling plays in our lives, and will be a talking point for years to come.

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## The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories By Christopher Booker Bibliography

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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Many writing guides have suggested that fiction contains a limited number of basic plots, and Booker offers his version at great length. Furthermore, he claims all of these plots, from "overcoming the monster" to "rebirth," are variations on "the same great basic drama," a Jungian archetypal representation of the development and integration of the mature self. The meticulous detailing of this theory in plot summaries (of everything from *Beowulf* to *Jaws*, ancient comedy to modern tragedy, Western culture and Eastern) is an imposing enough task, but Booker is just warming up. In the book's second half, he explains how the psychological shortcomings of modern authors such as Shaw and Joyce led them to reject archetypal truth in favor of writing out their own sentimental and morbid fantasies. The biographical analysis is simplistic, however, and Booker makes numerous errors in the sections on film. The transition from literary criticism to Jungian psychology might be more bearable were it not saddled with an overabundance of academic cliché surprising in a writer of Booker's extensive journalistic background (he now contributes to England's *Daily Telegraph*). Clearly striving for the intellectual respectability of Northrop Frye, he falls far short, and accusing those who disagree with him of suffering from "limited ego-consciousness" doesn't help his case. (Apr.)

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### Review

"This magisterial volume really does offer readers a genuinely fresh and exciting perspective on virtually every tale ever told." —Bookmark, July 2005 (Bookmark)

'This book...has mind-expanding properties. Not only for anyone interested in literature, but also for those fascinated by wider questions of how human beings organise their societies and explain the outside world to their inmost selves, it is fascinating.' Katherine Sale, FT

'Christopher Booker's mammoth account of plot types, archetypes, their role in literary history and where Western culture has gone horribly wrong.' Times Literary Supplement

'His prose is a model of clarity, and his lively enthusiasm for fictions of every description is infectious...The Seven Basic Plots is...one of the most diverting works on storytelling I've ever encountered.' Dennis Dutton, The Washington Post

'This is the most extraordinary, exhilarating book. It always seemed to me that 'the story' was God's way of giving meaning to crude creation. Booker now interprets the mind of God, and analyses not just the novel - which will never to me be quite the same again - but puts the narrative of contemporary human affairs into a new perspective. If it took its author a lifetime to write, one can only feel gratitude that he did it.' Fay Weldon, novelist

'An enormous piece of work...nothing less than the story of all stories. And an extraordinary tale it is ... Booker ranges over vast tracts of literature, drawing together the plots of everything from *Beowulf* to *Bond*, from Sophocles to soap opera, from Homer to Homer Simpson, to show the underlying parallels in stories from what appear to be the most disparate sources. If stories are about "what happens next", this book sets out to show that the answer is always "the same things", then to explain why. I found it absolutely fascinating.' Ian Hislop, editor of *Private Eye*

'This is literally an incomparable book, because there is nothing to compare it with. It goes to the heart of man's cultural evolution through the stories we have told since storytelling began. It illuminates our nature, our beliefs and our collective emotions by shining a bright light on them from a completely new angle. Original, profound, fascinating - and on top of it all, a really good read.' Sir Antony Jay, co-author of *Yes, Minister*

'I have been quite bowled over by Christopher Booker's new book. It is so well planned with an excellent beginning and the contrasts and comparisons throughout are highly entertaining as well as informative and most original - and always extremely readable.' John Bayley

'Booker's knowledge and understanding of imaginative literature is unrivalled, his essays on the great authors both illuminating and stimulating. This is a truly important book, an accolade often bestowed and rarely deserved in our modern age.' Dame Beryl Bainbridge

**Number 5** in Foyles bookshop Top Ten

'some splendid links between story and reality...enjoyably provocative'  
(Gordon Parsons *Morning Star*)

'It's hard not to admire the commitment of any writer whose book has taken 34 years to evolve. And there can be no doubting that Christopher Booker's 700-page, exhaustive examination of "Why we tell stories" - the book's subtitle - is a labour of love.'  
(Gordon Parsons *Morning Star*)

"...remarkable parallels between the structure of the modern film *Jaws* and that of the Old English *Beowulf*."  
*Writing Magazine*

"If you have any interest in fiction and the way it works, you will enjoy this exploration of the seven basic plots and how they have been adapted and developed across the centuries."  
*Writing Magazine*

"one of the most brilliant books of recent years" (Bel Mooney *Times*)

Mentioned in article about author in *The Lady*, 17/07/07  
(*The Lady*)

Title mention in article  
(Neil Philip *Books For Keep*)

"Fantastically entertaining" *The Times*

mention in *Evangelical Times*, 1 May 2009

"This magisterial volume really does offer readers a genuinely fresh and exciting perspective on virtually every tale ever told." —Bookmark, July 2005 (Sanford Lakoff)

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#### About the Author

Christopher Booker writes for the *Sunday Telegraph* and is the bestselling author of *The Seven Basic Plots*, *The Real Global Warming Disaster*, *The Great Deception* and *Scared to Death* (all published by Bloomsbury Continuum). He has been an author and journalist for nearly 50 years, and was the founding editor of the satirical magazine *Private Eye*.

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**Anthony Moss:**

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