

IT MUST BE LOVE:  
AN EXPLORATION OF THE CHARACTER ARC MODEL IN  
SCREENWRITING PRACTICE AND THEORY

A Practice Led PhD

By

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## Abstract

This practice led research is a study into the contested screenwriting narrative form known as the 'character arc'. The character arc is a term that refers to the motivational and emotional trajectory of a character through the totality of a given narrative. Through practice I developed an original cinematic screenplay *It Must be Love*, as a way of exploring the research questions and enabling me to critically reflect upon the creative development and writing process. The two areas that framed this practice led research were the character arc, and the romance genre.

The study considers the development of various theories of the character arc before defining its form through methods of textual analysis, practice and critical reflection. The practice screenplay *It Must be Love* was developed as a romance. In consideration of this, the impact of genre will be referenced throughout the exegesis.

This practice-led research arrived at a new definition of the character arc illustrating that it can operate across genres and is autonomous of other narrative forms. This research also found that characters may arc multiple times within a given narrative. These findings may be salient to screenwriting practitioners in developing or exploring their practice and widens the debate around this narrative form.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

The purpose of this practice led research is to explore and assess the impact the 'character arc' has had upon the process of developing and writing a screenplay. As this research is practice led, I will draw mainly upon ideas from within contemporary screenwriting manuals, which seek to set out processes for the practical creation of screenplays. Screenwriting manuals will also be considered and critiqued through the lens of contemporary screenwriting theory, which offers a broader perspective on the field of screenwriting practice and theory. I am however, first and foremost a screenwriting practitioner, therefore it is appropriate to engage with the manuals that practitioners utilise, whilst remaining mindful of their position and context within the wider screenwriting sphere.

### **1.1 Theoretical background to the study**

Approaches to screenwriting theory and practice have expanded considerably in the last forty years, and whilst the contextual review chapter will draw upon theories and philosophies beyond this field, for example from media and film studies, the specific focus of this research is located within the realms of contemporary screenwriting practice and theory. There exists some tension between the field of screenwriting manuals and contemporary screenwriting theory as Maras (2009, p.5) suggests:

“Screenwriting as it is emerging in the UK, Australia and the US, embedded in a particular engagement with story, character and dramatic structure, is developing at a distance from not only other production disciplines, but areas such as screen studies, film history, media studies and literary analysis”

The approach adopted in this exegesis involves examining in depth the emergence and ubiquity of the term character arc, which has found acceptance without clarity in screenwriting manuals. The research is also practice led, which builds upon a culture of professional screenwriters articulating specific approaches to practice in popular screenwriting manuals. Despite this approach being common, a robust academic approach to practice is less prevalent. As Taylor and Batty (2016, p.210) suggest:

“it seems that the screenwriter’s perspective and experience of script development is underrepresented in literature to date.”

Another argument for locating the practice led research within the context of contemporary screenwriting manuals is because this is the field where the character arc is mostly referenced. Although it is acknowledged within contemporary screenwriting studies to a lesser extent, both fields will be drawn upon in exploring the character arc.

#### **1.1.1 The character arc**

The character arc as a narrative form is focused on revealing character motivations through the choices characters make, rather than through plot and structural markers. As the character arc finds its own form and conventions, it too can be argued to be just another set of imperatives to be adhered to. This may well be the case, but the character arc may be distinct in that it focuses on character and privileges this above structure and plot.

Furthermore, there are sufficient inconsistencies and contradictions in relation to the character arc within the Anglo American field of

screenwriting theory which justify the focus of this exegesis to remain within this sphere at present. These will be explored within the contextual review chapter.

The character arc implies or suggests the great sweep of change or development a character undergoes through the length of a given cinematic narrative as Duncan (2008, p.6) states:

“This concept means that all your characters- your protagonist, antagonist and key pivotal characters – grow or change over the course of the story.”

Once a working definition has been established, it is the aim of this practice led research to explore the character arc within a single cinematic practice screenplay entitled *It Must be Love*. This will be achieved through the iterative process of critical reflection within and upon my screenwriting practice. This approach is appropriate as practitioners develop knowledge and understanding through practice. The practice of developing and writing a screenplay in dialogue with screenwriting manuals and contemporary screenwriting theory will offer the opportunity to discuss and reflect upon this relationship. In this way the development of the practice screenplay *It Must be Love* will allow insights into current accounts of the character arc based on how they impact upon the creative process. The function of the character arc is to reveal the psychological drivers and motivations within a character's given story. Consequently, the character arc may be specific to individual characters and their individual stories, rather than aligning with singular overarching narrative forms such as Campbell's (1949) mono-myth, which foreground plot above character.

The character arc will be considered in totality as well as its relationship to other elements such as structure, genre and theme. By exploring the character arc it will be possible to draw conclusions which will impact upon and further develop approaches to screenwriting practice.

The character arc appears to privilege character development and motivation above all other elements to consider within a narrative, as Bordwell and Thompson (1979, p.109) state:

“In the classical Hollywood narrative the chain of actions that results from predominantly psychological causes tends to motivate most or all other narrative events.”

Here the importance of the character being at the heart of a classical Hollywood narrative is acknowledged. This psychological underpinning can also be seen to pervade the wider form and reading of a given cinematic narrative.

It is important to note that whilst most examples within the sphere of this research will draw upon classical Hollywood narratives, there are also examples of the character arc drawn from international cinema. This is because the character arc operates beyond classical Hollywood narratives, which in Dancyger's (2001, p. 91) opinion is almost a moot point as to him “Hollywood has been global from its beginnings”. McKee (1998) holds similar views around what he terms ‘classical design’ or ‘Archplot’ as he offers it which is:

“timeless and transcultural, fundamental to every earthly society, civilised and primitive, reaching back through millennia of oral storytelling into the shadows of time.” (McKee 1998, p.45)

The traditions of Anglo American contemporary screenwriting theory clearly stem from Aristotelian ([4<sup>th</sup> Cent. BC] 1996) foundations and some consideration of his work needs to occur in order to contextualise this research.

#### **1.1.2 Aristotelian traditions**

Aristotle’s (1996) Poetics gave us many narrative terms that we still use to this day. There appears to be on a superficial reading a leaning towards plot and structure over character as he suggested:

“So the plot is the source and (as it were) the soul of the tragedy; character is second.” (Aristotle 1996, p.12)

However, the bifurcation of these elements is more nuanced in practice and Aristotle (1996) does not entirely dismiss the importance of character either. Aristotle (1996) is pertinent to this research enquiry in that he offers terms and forms that relate to, or at least resonate with the character arc as I will outline below. However, before discussing Aristotelian concepts in more detail, a context of where Aristotle’s (1996) ideas preside in relation to screenwriting manuals and contemporary screenwriting studies is worth articulating. Macdonald (2013, p. 58) rightly asserts that:

“In the English-speaking screenwriting world, that there is a firm consensus favouring the broad neo-Aristotelian orthodoxy and its paradigms.”

This research broadly follows a neo-Aristotelian approach in relation to practice, however, the central focus within this research is how all theories and elements relate ultimately to the character arc. In relation to character, the notion of ‘Hamartia’ as an error of judgement, foregrounds the importance of choice in the revelation of character. The concept of ‘Katharsis’ too, implies transformation, and so without articulating a specific process for a character arc the architecture and frameworks are arguably illuminated within these concepts. Aristotle (1996) provides further ideas that lay foundations for the character arc when he asserts:

“Additionally, the most important devices by which tragedy sways emotions are parts of the plot, i.e. reversals and recognitions.” (Aristotle 1996, p.12)

Here, Aristotle (1996) connects the emotional response of the audience with reversals and recognitions which he deems to be parts of the plot. However, it is easy to argue that reversals can come from character as can recognitions. It could be argued that reversals of character and recognitions of character can also move the emotions, but the point is not whether character or plot are mutually exclusive or whether one is more effective than the other. The crucial point to be made in relation to the character arc is that reversals and recognitions offer a means for the audience to engage emotionally. I would suggest that these two ideas could be linked to the potential for the character to recognise their motivation and furthermore, for the potential and actual reversal of motivation to transpire.

These are key components of the character arc, which I will articulate and discuss further within this exegesis. Two further connections can be drawn between Aristotle's (1996) work and the character arc in relation to character choice and the theme.

The character arc ostensibly articulates character motivation by revealing the choices taken within their story situations. Aristotle (1996, p. 12) acknowledges the importance of choice in communicating what he terms character in the following statement:

“Character is the kind of thing which discloses the nature of choice; for this reason speeches in which there is nothing at all which the speaker chooses or avoids do not possess character.”

For Aristotle (1996), choice denotes character, however, whilst he does not link this idea directly to character motivation, at least all choices effectively reveal motivation, and so the importance of character choice by association articulates the importance of character motivation. However, the nature and importance of choice or ‘Prohairesis’ is addressed in *The Nichomachean Ethics*, Aristotle (1953). It is not addressed directly in the *Poetics* (1996).

Macdonald (2013) makes this important connection in summary of Aristotelian concepts in relation to screenwriting practice; however, he does not interrogate the idea of ‘Prohairesis’ further. Macdonald (2013) does, however, illuminate an often misconstrued interpretation of Aristotle when he reminds us:

“That design for Aristotle, is concerned with causality and the discrete complete entity of the poetic work, not with the superficial pattern of act division.” (Macdonald 2013, p.50)

Aristotle (1996) effectively gives voice and form to many of the narrative devices and notions that are still in use. However, as the character arc as a term has established itself within contemporary screenwriting manuals, it is to these manuals I will refer in exploring the concept and its definitions further.

### 1.1.3 **Monomyth**

Most contemporary approaches to screenwriting practice, particularly manuals within the last thirty years have tended towards a focus on Jungian based narrative models. These models were principally adopted and developed by Campbell (1949) and Murdoch (1991). Additionally, Vogler (1992) made the most to galvanise the screenwriting practice manuals in a narrative paradigm that purports to be all encompassing.

In the past decade contemporary practice led screenwriting studies have engaged with the mono-myth model in an effort to address the lack of emotional complexity it affords characters. Batty (2009) and Jacey (2010) both use Vogler's (1992) paradigm as a foundation for articulating and formulating an emotional and transformational development of the narrative model.

Vogler (1992) and Marks (2009) both cite the character arc within their own work. For the purpose of this discussion, I am taking their views as consistent with each other, as they each seek to establish and embed the notion of a character centric transformational arc within the constraints of the wider mono-myth model.



#### 1.1.4 Genre

The practice screenplay *It Must be Love* is a love story and therefore will be developed with reference to the romance genre. To this end, some consideration and critical reflection of the genre will be undertaken to establish what impact it will have upon a practice led approach. The romance genre has arguably been undervalued and underrepresented in screenwriting theory to date with only a handful of theorists giving any focus to it.

Regarding the wider context, Altman (1999), Neale (2000), Regis (2003), Fuchs (2004), Mittell (2004) and Frow (2005) offer some cultural perspective and their ideas will be outlined in the contextual review. The romance genre is also international in scope and appeal and this exegesis will draw upon cinematic examples from South East Asia as well as European and Hollywood cinema. It can be argued that European cinematic romances clearly engage with and utilise character arcs to a significant degree. Cinematic examples such as *The Horseman on the Roof* (1995), *Une liaison pornographique* (1999), *Ma Vie en Rose* (1997), *La Perfume de Yvonne* (1994), *Delicatessen* (1991), *Love me if you dare* (2003), *Read my Lips* (2001) and *2 days in Paris* (2007) all utilise clear character arcs within their telling.

The 'active question', is a useful term offered to define the central narrative question that forms the spine of any story according to Heggie (1990). The central active question of romance narratives operates around the notion of whether the central characters end up

together or not. In this light and again with reference to cinematic examples such as *40 shades of Blue* (2005) and *I'm a Cyborg but that's okay* (2006) which are both character driven as opposed to plot driven narratives, the romance genre can be seen to operate on a relatively simplistic level in terms of structural narrative imperatives and genre conventions. Cinematic examples of romances such as *Three Times* (2005) and *Before Midnight* (2013) demonstrate a paucity of narrative paradigms, structural models and genre conventions in their construction. They focus far more on character development and motivation. These exemplars have offered precedents for the practice screenplay *It Must be Love*, enabling me to focus principally on character and motivation.

Another key element of the romance genre is what Jacey (2010) terms the need for 'Union'. In psychoanalytic terms, the development of a mature relationship is seen as an achievement and progression from a more immature or unhealthy state. This development correlates quite neatly with ideas around the character arc, and specifically a positive character arc, where a character is seen to develop and grow in pursuit of an appropriate and psychologically mature relationship.

This approach is reflected in both Erickson's (1959) ideas about the need for love and meaningful work as a principal driver and reward for psychological maturity, and Freud's (1910) ideas about the need for adults to move away from immature Oedipal and Electra complexes to more mature relationships. In this light, the character arc not only illuminates a character's specific motivations, but also a layer of psychological depth by way of navigating choices for themselves through dilemmas.

The character arc is principally concerned with a character's individual storyline and is not about the plot or the narrative as a whole. The relationship between the character arc and act structure is again something I would argue as being distinct as a function of a character arc is to reveal character motivation, and not to directly impose or provide structural markers. In this sense notions of mainstream cinema or 'Archplot' in McKee's (1998) terms and non-mainstream or 'Anti-plot' also in McKee's (1998) terms have little if any bearing, because the character arc is focused on character. Therefore, if a character reveals their motivation in a given narrative then they arguably do so via this process alone.

It is not within the scope of this research to broaden the engagement of the character arc and its functions beyond the cinematic form, or even beyond the generic form of romance. Indeed, the romance as a genre has so many sub-generic *forms* such as the romantic comedy, time-travel and epic. The romance genre was chosen as films such as *Flirt* (1995), *Lovers of the Arctic Circle* (1998), *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004), *Three Times* (2005), *I'm a Cyborg But that's Okay* (2006) and *Thirst* (2009) offer examples of narratives that are relatively light in terms of screenwriting structural paradigms and genre conventions. At the same time these films open up narrative space for character exploration. It is hoped that the narrative space gained by the limited employment of genre conventions and screenwriting structural forms will allow greater manoeuvrability, as the practice screenplay, *It Must be Love* wrestles with the character arc as a narrative form. The relationship between the character arc and the romance genre specifically may prove tangential to the process of developing a character arc, as every screen narrative employs a genre regarding

conventions and story. It is hoped that the character arc may be transposable across genres, however, exploration of this lies beyond the scope of this research.

The idea is not to superimpose the character arc as a form on top of existing forms, or to challenge or work in opposition to them, but rather to find its own way within a cinematic narrative. This practice led approach will be guided by romantic genre tropes and the needs of the characters engaged in character arcs. In this way, the character arc can arguably be explored within a relatively loose screenplay form.

## **1.2 Methodological foundations of practice led research**

“The creative process does not license theoretical discourse or criticism, because criticism creates angst and angst creates tension. Tension in turn hamstrings creativity.” (Kallas 2010, p.14)

Kallas (2010) articulates a fundamental tension between practice and theoretical discourse that has historical credence and persists to this day. The development of this practice led exegesis has continued to grapple with this tension principally with respect to the synthesis and synergy of these two approaches. Nelson (2013) acknowledges that distinctions between practice led, practice based, research through practice, practice as research and praxis are not always clear. As a practitioner and screenwriter embarking upon a practice led research project, negotiating this territory has been, and continues to be, much like the field itself, ever evolving. In order to articulate the specific methodological approach I have adopted, I will begin by outlining the

research questions and then the methodological approaches I have chosen to utilise.

This practice led research aims to raise questions in relation to the screenwriting form termed the character arc. Key research questions are as follows:

- Does a clear definition of the character arc form exist?
- What is the character arc's function within a cinematic narrative?
- How does a character arc operate in practice?
- Where is the character arc positioned structurally within a cinematic screenplay?
- What is the character arc's relationship to other screenwriting models and paradigms?
- Can the character arc operate more than once for a single character within a single narrative?

These questions principally drive this practice led research. However, I am mindful and aware of potentially unforeseen questions and answers that may arise from this investigation, and this research remains open to questions that may present themselves throughout this process.

The objective of exploring the character arc form is to investigate its potential flexibility, and to discover whether it can be extrapolated from established screenwriting structural paradigms. Jung (1964) derived screenwriting structural paradigms dominate screenwriting theory and manuals, and so any potentially new screenwriting forms must

negotiate in response to them. Whilst this exegesis is not interested in disavowing or dismissing these forms; it will seek to establish the character arc in process, position and practice as distinct.

Another objective of this exegesis is to consider the character arc in relation to narrative timeframes. The contemporary presentation of the character arc aligns it firmly within act structure and cinematic narratives. This exegesis will consider and explore whether this is the case. Disentangling the character arc from this imposed constraint may open up the scope of its applications, potentially offering new modes of practice. The character arc in this light could be articulated across screen narratives utilising a variety of timeframes from short films to long-running television series.

The research will be practice led in approach, as it is through practice and reflection upon that practice that new insights and knowledge may be gleaned. This is a form of experiential learning as articulated by Kolb (2014) and Johns (2017). The character arc has often been cited in screenwriting studies and screenwriting manuals without sufficient detail or clarity being offered. Marks (2009), McCollum (2013) and Jarvis (2014) all address the character arc directly. However, they all fail to articulate the character arc comprehensively. The specific reasons for why this is the case will be expanded upon in the contextual review chapter that follows this introduction.

The field of screenwriting manuals operates in an uncomfortable pedagogic atmosphere of creative encouragement and paradigmatic absolutism. As a practicing screenwriter and lecturer in screenwriting I am interested in the exploration, development and communication of new approaches to screenwriting practice embracing both approaches. Price (2017) recognises the schisms within the field and attempts to

seek commonalities between screenwriting practitioners and screenwriting scholars. In the process he completely marginalises the manuals, which I would argue undermines his objective. I would argue that practitioners and scholars should be, and are, mindful of the tensions the manuals present. The manuals are an easy target for critical dismissal when at times they are too reductive to be considered seriously by academics. However, their proliferation and utility, acknowledged or concealed within the professional practice sphere means their notions and concepts are seeping through. I am mindful of presenting any findings within the limits of my own practice first and foremost, to avoid any dogmatic approach to screenwriting craft processes. However, the landscape of manuals has impacted upon my own practice and therefore they cannot be dismissed for any serious critical reflection upon my own practice to develop.

The research will utilise a practice led methodology. Praxis as Nelson (2013) defines it, is when practice is imbued with theory in a symbiotic relationship and this is one of the methodological approaches I have chosen to adopt. Nelson (2013, p. 26) goes further by asserting that:

“The practice, whatever it may be, is at the heart of the methodology of the project and is presented as substantial evidence of new insights.”

This viewpoint validates practices as a methodological approach in its own right. However, there is a need to capture the process of practice and reflect critically upon the approach and decisions taken. Therefore, the critical reflection will also be utilised as a methodological approach. In terms of critical reflection Nelson (2013, p.60) suggests that:

“the purpose of critical reflection in a Practice as Research context is better to understand and articulate – by whatever specific means best meet the need in a particular project.”

A practice led methodological approach of creative and critical reflection was settled upon very early in the process with Batty (2010) and Jacey (2010) as screenwriting exemplars. How to engage with and negotiate a specific practice led methodology developed during the process. Clarifying this approach sooner, and understanding the intrinsic value of creative practice as a legitimate research methodology would have perhaps moved the research forward more expeditiously. The approach and writing of the exegesis was not unlike writing the screenplay in that whilst a linear approach was anticipated, a more circuitous non-linear approach was adopted in practice. The dialogue between the practice screenplay and the exegesis proceeded in this way throughout the process, so there was never a clear linear approach to either. The practice screenplay developed in relation to the exegesis and visa-versa. The process could be usefully categorised as a continuing open dialogue of iterative developments between each element. As Goddard (2010) suggests:

“both the practice and the exegesis reflect upon the chronology of the research process.” (Goddard 2010, p.118)

The character arc as a theoretical form is definable and communicable, however, when, where and how to engage with it in practice remained mercurial. These questions and potential answers could only be gleaned through a practice led dialogical and iterative process. An iterative approach to creative endeavour is not uncommon and this part of the process I felt familiar and comfortable with as a practitioner. A dialogical process seemed to be less familiar and in conflict with my own perceptions of how the creative process might progress. However, on careful reflection, a dialogical process is precisely what occurred in



practice and this informed the various iterations. Capturing and reflecting upon this circuitous process is difficult to map out or plan as Barrett and Bolt (2010, p.3) attest:

“innovation is derived from methods that cannot always be pre-determined, and “outcomes” of artistic research are *necessarily* unpredictable.”

Another important point to make about a practice led methodological approach is that it does not privilege the outcome of the process. The process of capturing and reflecting upon the creative process is why this methodological approach is so pertinent. Batty (2016) has identified a gap in the research of ‘script development’ as a process that requires further work. However, Nelson (2013) provides a workable approach that takes account of the messiness of any creative endeavour articulating it thus:

“insights in Practice as Research have proved to arise as much in the process as in the product, and I emphasized the value of documenting process and critical reflection along the axis aiming to make the tacit more explicit.” (Nelson 2013, p.62)

Making the ‘tacit more explicit.’ was a central concern of this practice led approach and so I critically reflected upon each development stage and iteration of the practice screenplay *It Must be Love*. The practice of screenwriting is inherently iterative and critically reflective whether in an industrial or academic setting. A practice led methodology has allowed me to define the form in the context of other narrative forms, parameters and relation to genre.

The practice led approach to screenwriting research in many ways mirrors what is extolled in the screenwriting manuals, which are often positioned as practical guides to steer individual creatives through the process of developing a screenplay. It is entirely apposite and important to critically reflect upon these processes in theory and particularly in practice, given that this practice led research interrogates many of those manuals. The aim is to ascertain whether there is any insight to be gleaned into how theory is implemented in practice. Working through theoretical forms in practice illuminates more than simply, the applied execution of theory. Not only has this methodological approach allowed me to expand upon and further define the character arc form in isolation, but the insights and findings have also resonated within the practice itself as Goddard (2010, p. 117) states:

“rather than relying only on the written component of an exegesis to demonstrate a reflective process, it can also be reflexively performed within the practice itself.”

Illuminating and critically reflecting upon my own screenwriting practice in relation to my role as a screenwriting practitioner, lecturer and academic lies at the centre of this exegesis. Balancing and untangling these tensions will be discussed and reflected upon in the pursuit of new knowledge. My objective is to widen the discourse around approaches to screenwriting.

“screenwriting is the practice of writing a screenplay, a manuscript understood through notions such as story spine, turning points, character arc and three-act structure” (Maras 2009, p.1).

The practice led focus of this exegesis will seek to explore, illuminate and articulate ideas around the character arc. The contextual review chapter that follows this introduction will explore examples of the character arc and the screenwriting literature that supports it. The contextual review chapter will consider theoretical definitions of the character arc before utilising a defined form to apply to the practice screenplay *It Must be Love*.

### **1.3 Aims**

This practice led exploration of the character arc in form and function, seeks to achieve a broader understanding of its potential uses and impact upon all stages and processes of creative screenwriting practice.

The research aims which stem from the awareness and understanding of the character arc form are:

1. To explore whether or not characters that arc are limited to two predetermined and predictable outcomes.
2. To explore whether the character arc as a form is limited to one character per given cinematic narrative.
3. To explore whether a character may arc more than once within a feature film screenplay.

The idea of writing a screenplay that seeks to engage with these questions is what drives this practice led research. The central characters of Joe and Amy in the practice screenplay *It Must be Love*

are each engaged in multiple stories. The narrative will offer each character the opportunity to arc more than once within the narrative. Exploring this idea and discovering whether this is possible, will potentially open up areas for debate. This research will attempt to engage with some of these questions as they arise in the writing of the practice screenplay and the critical reflection that follows from it.

Furthermore, another important discovery may be that if the character arc is autonomous of conventional cinematic narrative paradigms, it could be utilised to encompass not only more protracted narrative forms utilised on television, but also much shorter form narratives as well.

Finally, this research is interested in establishing a definition of the character arc by drawing together contemporary theories and perspectives that surround the form. A new working model of the character arc will be applied to the practice screenplay *It Must be Love* as a means of demonstrating the form and also offering a process and framework to analyse and deconstruct its impact.

## Chapter 2 Contextual review

This contextual review chapter would be more traditionally termed a literature review; however, this practice-led research approach does not set out the context of the research landscape in such a linear way. Indeed the approach and practice of writing the exegesis and screenplay was not linear with each chapter or scene following on from the next. The practice is often imbricated within the research and the research interruptive of the practice, so a contextual review seems most appropriate.

In this chapter, I will also consider the context of contemporary screenwriting studies and engage with the complexities and tensions of this field as it relates to screenwriting manuals and screenwriting practice. As a practitioner and academic, I am well placed to articulate and consider these tensions, and hope to offer some clarity on my specific approach to exploring the character arc through critically reflecting upon my practice in a practice led approach.

I will firstly consider the landscape of screenwriting manuals and how they may be negotiated and engaged with. The second area of focus is the romance genre as a narrative form of its own with conventions and tropes to be investigated and negotiated within the practice screenplay *It Must be Love*. Thirdly, I will investigate and clarify the screenwriting term *character arc* within cinematic narratives. Looking at a variety of theoretical definitions, I will seek to find similarities and disparities.

I intend to explore the narrative and screenwriting theories of Egri (1946), Field (1979), Seger (1990), Vogler (1992), McKee (1998), Horton (1999), Dancyger (2001), Marks (2009), McCollum (2013), Venis (2013) and Jarvis (2014) in chronological order. The

aforementioned sources all refer to the notion of a character arc or transformational arc of the character and their ideas will be discussed before conclusions on the subject are drawn.

## **2.1 Screenwriting manuals in context**

The ability to understand, articulate, shape, share and replicate creative ideas is seductive and compelling, screenwriting manuals appear to offer this opportunity and potential. There is a danger of course when these observations move beyond forms and conventions to imperatives. Whilst there are clear examples of absolutisms within McKee (1998) and Vogler (2006), I suggest that they are not read as such within the screenwriting practice community. Professional and creative engagement with screenwriting manuals is far more nuanced than is generally perceived. Even Conor (2014, p.97) acknowledges that:

“screenwriters decry the hegemony of manuals and repudiate them as well as acknowledging their centrality to the profession.”

The paradigms and conventions that manuals offer, need to be interrogated and questioned as Macdonald (2013) and Conor (2014) suggest. However, the danger is that these narrative devices, approaches and schema are prematurely dismissed due to a general tonal delivery that vacillates between bombastic proclamations to near-religious zealotry. In order to gain a wider more critical view of screenwriting manuals I will also draw from the field of contemporary screenwriting research, including Batty (2018), Price (2017), Conor (2014), Macdonald (2013), Mittell (2004), and Schrieber (2015). As Price (2017, p.331) suggests:

“collaboration between practitioners, historians and theoreticians will be essential in furthering critical enquiry into script development,”

Regarding my own approach and view, I have engaged with the character arc, as it is the narrative form that I have consistently utilised within my own creative practice. Regarding imperatives, it is a form that can be engaged with or not dependent on individual creative choice. Many cinematic examples employ character arcs in the form that I will articulate, and many do not with no less impact or engagement. Romantic cinematic example includes *Sideways* (2005), where the character of Miles makes three character arc choices which move him from liar in denial of who he is to someone who can tell the truth and accept his own shortcomings. A second romantic example is *Lars and the real girl* (2007) where the character of Lars must relinquish the relationship he cultivates with a sex doll in order to connect romantically with another human being.

There is room for more discourse within screenwriting manuals to not only consider alternative approaches such as, non-Jungian (1954) based approaches, but to further explore and deepen the interrogation of existing forms. There are clearly dominant narrative paradigms and approaches that pervade the manuals, however navigating paths beside those of Aristotle (1996) and Jung (1954) is required to avoid the risk of screenwriting practice being perceived as derivative or limited. My practice led research has developed in dialogue with the approaches of Vogler (1992), McKee (1998) and Parker (1999), utilizing, interrogating and questioning their ideas within my own professional practice. My definition of the character arc has found form in response to and despite of the aforementioned and many other manual writers' approaches to screenwriting practice.

## 2.2 The romance genre in context

The cinematic romance as a distinct genre is not explored in film genre theory to the same extent or depth as it is covered in literary genre theory and even screenwriting genre theory. Shumway (1991) Altman (1999) and Neale (2000) acknowledge it to varying extents. However, they often conflate romance with romantic comedy without considering either as a distinct or autonomous. Shumway (1991, p. 385) at least acknowledges the ubiquity of the romance genre in cinematic narratives when he offers:

“heterosexual romance figures as the leading line of action in the majority of Hollywood films.”

Despite this perception, the focus of his enquiry is arguably pejorative as he asserts there is a “reinforcing of heterosexual love as the social norm” (Shumway 1991, p.395). This statement, however, largely misses the point that romance stories are and can be transposed across genres, gender and sexual orientation without such heteronormative or moral imperatives.

The more pertinent accusation of normativity is better placed at specific endings, which offer romantic affirmation through marriage and the ‘Happily ever after’ trope. I would argue that the happily ever after, abbreviated to HEA as referenced by Regis (2003) and Fuchs (2004) has largely been exposed as merely a trope.

Films such as *Good Dick* (2008), *Shortbus* (2006), *Youth in Revolt* (2009), *500 Days of Summer* (2009) and *Once* (2007) attest to this shift



away from the HEA. Shumway (1997) makes this point to in his analysis of *Desperately Seeking Susan* (1985, p. 395) which he acknowledges is:

“explicit in affirming independence and divorce as potentially positive choices.”

Altman (1999, p. 179) acknowledges that romance is one of the “film genres of choice.” With respect to contemporary audiences, however, he offers scant consideration or analysis of the genre which Neale (2000) also points out in respect of Altman (1999). Neale (2000) discusses the romance and what Neale and Krutnick (1990) termed ‘the new romance’ however, this is presented firmly from within the locus of the comedy genre and therefore romance as a genre is merely a subcategory of comedy in his analysis.

Neale (2000) does move beyond this approach to usefully separate and delineate romance as distinct from comedy in particular. However, apart from offering distinct categorisations he does not develop an analysis or explore conventions or tropes further. Neale (2000, p.225) simply acknowledges:

“the existence of at least three different genres dealing with the ideological issues of courtship, coupledness and community: the musical, romantic drama and romantic comedy.”

Todd (2014) attempts to redress the balance but acknowledges this critical deficit within the field when she states:

“many accounts in cinema scholarship overlook that the notion of ‘love’ is multi-faceted” (Todd 2014, p.5).

This research is focused upon the romance genre, distinct from romantic comedies utilising the work of Parker (1999), Regis (2003) and Fuchs (2004). It utilises their work primarily in terms of the application of specific romance conventions and tropes in my practice. Whilst more traditional film genre theorists such as Altman (1999) and Neale (2000) offer a wider scope and approach to genre theory, in general, their analysis of the romance genre is limited. Altman (1999, p. 24) does offer some interesting observations about narrative structure when he asserts:

“Genre films regularly depend on dual protagonists and *dualistic* structures (producing what I have called dual focused texts).”

Here Altman (1999) makes two interesting points that affirm not only Parker’s (1999) dual protagonist romance ideas, but also offers a reassessment of how many screenwriting narrative paradigms exclusively operate with only a single protagonist at their core. The Campbell (1954) derived quest paradigm popularised by Vogler (1992) does not effectively function beyond the single protagonist and yet it is still considered salient to all forms of narrative within the screenwriting orthodoxy. This limited view of narratives possessing a singular central character is challenged by the character arc in that it offers an approach that encourages multiple protagonists with singular protagonists being an exception.

Mittell (2004, p.4) widens the genre discourse further and is interested in the broader cultural impact aiming to:

“understand how genre definitions impact media more broadly than artistic design.”

However, artistic design is precisely where this research is focused in the development of and reflection upon practice. Mittell (2004) acknowledges the legitimacy of this approach even if it is not where his interests lie, offering:

“Definitional accounts certainly may be useful as “practical theory” designed to teach artists how to effectively create, as Aristotle’s text *Poetics* was designed” (Mittell 2004, p. 4).

Meanwhile, Schrieber (2015) articulates some valuable considerations about the shifting conventions of the genre and in particular the endings of romances, suggesting that:

“a romance film made within the independent sphere of production can have an anticlimactic ending that does not tell the audience anything about a couple or their relationship” (Schrieber 2015, p.171).

However, Schrieber (2015) focuses mainly upon romantic comedies which are traditionally more conventional than romances. Schrieber (2015) does acknowledge the difficulty of a genre that despite clear lines of delineation between comedy and romance is generally perceived as symbiotic or inseparable. Schrieber (2015, p. 170) articulates this frustration thus:

“we can learn a great deal more about the postfeminist romance cycle, both past and present, if we continue to eliminate the typically iron-clad binary between comedy and drama.”

The majority of critical consideration of genre I have engaged with in relation to this practice-based research has been within screenwriting and literary genre theory. These two areas acknowledge love stories as the locus of the romance genre rather than co-opt or dismiss it by discussing it only in the context of another genre, be it screwball, melodrama or comedy. In contrast to traditional film genre theory, there is a wider critical discourse within literary genre theory from Ramsdell (1999), Regis (2003), Fuchs (2004) and Frow (2006).

Regarding specific genre conventions Parker (1999, p. 32) suggests:

romance operates as a spectrum along which various types merge with each other, but where three distinct types define either ends of the spectrum, and the mid-point.”

Parker (1999, p.29) also states that:

“all genres have two distinct sets of elements. These are the primary elements, which separate them from other genre, and secondary elements, which when combined with primary elements define the parameters of a particular type of thriller or romance.”

This tier system approach to genre works effectively in relation to my own screenwriting practice process, gathering characters and narratives within the broader genre initially, whilst offering scope to accommodate sub-genres via the secondary elements. In turning

directly to the romance genre, Parker (1999, p. 32) articulates his ideas thus;

“The primary elements of this romance spectrum are:

- The narrative centres on the notion of love.
- The two central characters are both involved in romance stories.
- The central protagonists have an equal narrative weight in terms of the narrative time spent with them, and the level of problems they have to overcome to realise their love.”

Despite there being only three clear elements, two of the elements do not resonate with other theorists in the field. The first element that does align with Regis (2003), Hague (2005) and Duncan (2008) is that the narrative should centre on love as the principal focus of the stories. The issue is principally around two or dual protagonists of equal weight within a given romance narrative. Many romances in practice utilise this form such as *Before Sunrise* (1995), *5x2* (2004), *Sideways* (2004) and *2 days in Paris* (2007), so it is not to contest this assertion as Altman (1999) acknowledged. However, no other theorist effectively articulates how this may work in practice within their genre definitions.

Regis, (2003), Hague (2005), Duncan (2008) base their genre conventions and process steps upon the notion that there is one singular protagonist who is pursuing another character as an object of desire or goal. The concept of a romance predicated on two characters of equal weight within a narrative is not discussed or addressed by them.

Parker's (1999) primary elements will be adopted for the practice screenplay *It Must be Love*, as it seems a more contemporary approach to relationships and resonates with the romantic genre films that I have analysed. That said, it has proven difficult to juggle two central characters and keep them both balanced throughout the development of the practice screenplay *It Must be Love*.

This could be due to the fact that it is difficult to meet Parker's (1999) primary elements, when the majority of theorists suggest one protagonist for a romance such as McKee (1999) and Mernitt (2001). Many cinematic examples do underpin the single protagonist theory, which can invite doubt into the creative process as conventions, steps and elements vie for the attention of the creative practitioner such as the page by page plot assertions of Grove (2008). The focus on dual protagonists also has ramifications for the character arc form, as the contemporary work on the subject overwhelmingly suggest a singular arcing character as will be discussed later.

The primary elements of Parker's (1999) approach to the romance genre numbers just three, and are not so much structural markers as considerations for characters. The specific conventions for the romance are offered at the point of the secondary elements. These secondary elements are delineated in the main, by distinct tonal considerations numbering three. These are the dramatic romance, the romantic comedy and the tragic romance. Each utilises the primary romance elements and then employs the secondary elements specific to their tonal distinction. I will principally consider the dramatic and tragic romance in relation to the practice screenplay *It Must be Love*, as these two tonal distinctions resonate most closely with my work. A potential difficulty could arise in defining which of the two tonal distinctions exemplifies my own screenplay. This question may

continue to be present, interrogated and negotiated through the process and practice of creating the screenplay *It Must be Love*.

One clear negotiation of generic elements with regard to Parker's (1999) ideas, concerns the specifics of tone and tonal distinctions as mentioned. According to Parker (1999), a romance with a dramatic tone can end either positively or tragically for the characters involved. Therefore, negotiating whether I am writing a dramatic or tragic romance is difficult to clarify at this stage in the process.

This is not to question or unpick Parker's (1999) definitions regarding the distinctions, however, ambiguity may persist for my creative practice and screenplay reader as a superficially tragic end could be interpreted as tonally dramatic or tragic without clear understanding. Awareness and negotiation of these nuances may be present throughout the creative process; however, a definitive answer to the tonal distinction may not emerge until after several drafts have been completed. This point reinforces the approach to this exegesis in general which has been non-linear and iterative throughout.

### **2.3 The character arc in context**

To establish the ideas, concepts and development of the character arc, I will, therefore, look at screenwriting manuals chronologically and their notions in direct relation to the character arc. I will then examine and discuss the various approaches to identify parallels or conflicting views, before offering some conclusions on the present position of the character arc within the field of contemporary screenwriting manuals.

Hungarian playwright and theorist Egri (1946) wrote principally about writing and developing plays. However, Egri's (1946) work is well known and utilised within the field of screenwriting, and to this end, I will discuss his ideas as directly applicable to screenwriting. Egri (1946) argued for the primacy of character over the plot which ran against traditional Aristotelean ideas, which privileged plot over character, paving the way for more character-centric narrative models evidenced in contemporary screenwriting manuals.

He utilised Socrates' work from his conversations in Plato's (2002) *Dialogues*, offering that "three steps - thesis, antithesis and synthesis - are the laws of all movement" (Egri 2007, p. 72). This establishing framework is significant to the character arc in that the basic foundations are the same. Within some notions of the character arc, which I will discuss later in this chapter, the principal idea is of a dialogue between opposing ideas for a character to deliberate upon. Egri (2007) does not dwell on the mechanics of this process; however, there are further points he makes that are worth considering.

Egri (2007) focused on the notion of a premise being the central spine of a story. Principally, an idea or statement that the story and character is bound to prove or disprove by the end of the narrative. Egri (2007, p. 19) offers the following on the subject of the premise:

"everything has a purpose or premise. Every second of our life has its own premise, whether or not we are conscious of it at the time."

Here the notion of the central idea of a story is encapsulated in what Egri (2007) terms 'the premise', offering a strong central focus for all elements of the narrative to revolve around. If we look back to Egri's (2007) integration of Socrates' ideas articulated in Plato (2002) of



‘thesis, antithesis and synthesis’ we can usefully conclude that the premise is analogous to the thesis.

This notion is useful to the character arc in that it sets up a dilemma for the character to consider throughout the narrative, the thesis versus the antithesis. A character arc reveals character motivations clarified by presenting dilemmas in which a character must choose. Utilising Egri’s (2007) approach, it is clear how dilemmas can be extrapolated from the conflict and tensions of the thesis and antithesis of a premise. Egri (2007) does not delve into the details of how this might operate in practice, but it can be adopted within my screenwriting practice and utilised in developing the foundations for a character arc to emerge.

The other two key points from Egri’s (1990) work relate to character motivation and transformation. Once again he highlights the importance of each of these elements within a story. Nevertheless, the specific articulation as to how they operate is not entirely clear. Regarding character motivation, Egri (1990, p.29) offers:

“no writer can create a three-dimensional character without knowing why people act as they do”.

Here he articulates the idea that character motivation is at the heart of audience engagement, but he is much more concerned with finding the root of all human motivation. Egri (1990, p. 29) suggests that:

“motivation is endless but still it can be simplified, if you accept the concept that insecurity is one of the most important and complex of all human emotions and conflicts”

Finding a universal definition for motivation is what Egri (1990) is concerned with. He suggests insecurity as the root of all motivation, but there is no expansion of the process of how to implement or reveal motivation within a creative work. The implication is that the premise is a vessel in which to reveal motivation, but he is not concerned with the mechanics of how this might operate in practice. Despite Egri (1990, p.192) articulating views such as:

“a writer can’t help but profit by knowing the source, the motivation, of why his character acts the way he does”

He does not articulate how this may operate within a story in practice.

This idea becomes all the more frustrating when combined with his acknowledgement and articulation of transformation as a key component of character development in general. Egri (1990, p. 84) states:

“there is only one realm in which characters defy natural laws and remain the same – the realm of bad writing.”

Here the notion of change and transformation is embraced. Egri (1990) is aware that transformation of character is an important element of character development alongside motivation; however, he fails to make the direct link between transformation and motivation. Perhaps this is because in offering a root definition for all human motivation, he makes any further dramatic exploration of motivation redundant. If he were to keep open the connections between motivation and transformation, then further revelations may have been gleaned or articulated.

Regarding stance on character change, Egri (1990, p. 205) asserts that “we must see tremendous growth in characters”. This position aligns with the idea of a character arc, as change and growth are fundamental to this transition. This notion of growth is not only related to playwriting, but to wider forms of dramatic writing, perhaps including screenwriting:

“we can safely say that any character, in any type of literature, which does not undergo a basic change is a badly drawn character” (Egri 1990, p. 205.)

Egri (1946,1990, 2007) who continued to work through ideas about change and transformation, goes on to offer a contradictory view of the necessity to change asserting:

“a protagonist, in order to achieve his purpose or goal, may bend, but change is out of the question” (Egri 1990, p. 42).

Moreover, he later suggests that it is the antagonist and not the protagonist that changes, which contradicts most other screenwriting manuals, which positions the protagonist as the agent of change and the antagonist as the constant. Nevertheless, regardless of his views on this specific point, the idea of change and transformation is largely articulated and supported.

Where Egri’s (1990) work most closely connects with the character arc, is to be found in the following quotation which suggests that the development of decisions is what drives the premise of a narrative. Egri (1990, p. 84) articulates it thus:

“the character’s decision necessarily sets in motion another decision, from his adversary. And it is these decisions, one resulting from the other, which propel the play to its ultimate destination: the proving of the premise”.

Here Egri (1990) gets close to contemporary notions of a character arc in that decisions are cited as pivotal moments about motivation and transformation or change. Therefore, he does not extrapolate further and so these disparate notions of change, decisions and motivations brought so close together in the above quote, are not distilled further.

Egri (1990) articulates some major ideas that interconnect and lay firm foundations for notions of the character arc. Despite views and ideas on transformation being contradictory or unclear, he identifies motivation, decisions and change as important concepts even if he does not draw direct connections between them (Egri 2007). As an early writer on contemporary drama, Egri's (2007) work is clearly foundational to screenwriting theory and discourse (Field 2005) and work upon the character arc that followed has evidently been developed in light of his ideas.

Field (1979) was one of the first texts specifically aimed at the craft of screenwriting. He makes several references to the character arc, however, he does not articulate the process or form in any depth. Field (1979, p. 63) does assert that "they go through some kind of change or transformation". Here he cites transformation as a key concept, taken up later by many other screenwriting theorists in particular Marks (2009) who terms the character arc the transformational arc of the character. Field (1979), discussing character transformation, posits that a character may change and that it is important to identify, define and articulate that change, including the character's emotional arc.

Field (1979) asks questions of the character arc rather than attempting to define it. He does suggest that the sweep of the arc might run throughout a story, as the character changes from beginning to end. Field (1979, p. 69) later does make direct reference to the character arc suggesting:

“if you’re unclear about the character’s change, take the time to write an essay in a page or so, charting his or her emotional arc.”

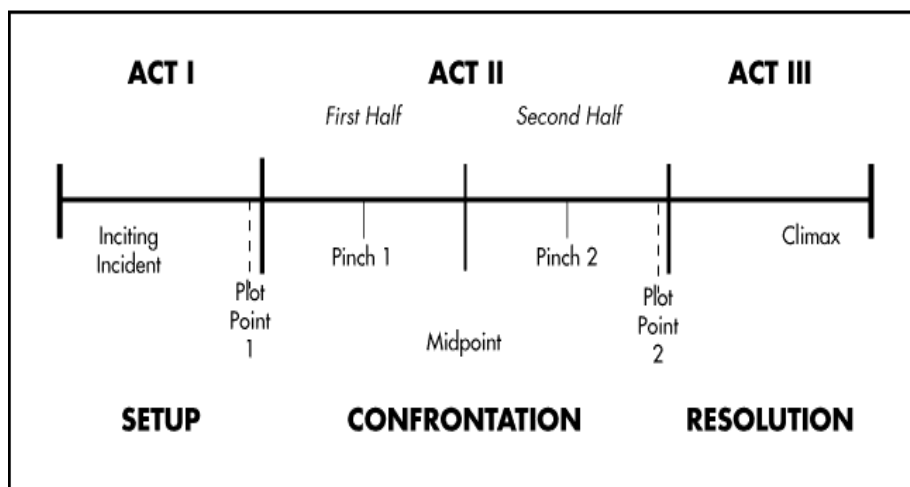
This is as far as he ventures on the subject. He articulates the idea of a character arc, and its placing across the journey of a central character. However, he never suggests a process as to how this may be implemented.

Field (1984) went on to offer exercises and step-by-step instructions on how to write a successful screenplay. Although this work directly duplicates the text on character transformation from his earlier work, it interestingly omits the term character arc and pays less attention to it than previously within Field (1979). Field (1984) also omits the questions related to finding an arc and the suggestion to write an essay to discover one.

It is clear that Field (1979, 1984, 2003) is aware of the idea of transformation, even suggests that it is a key component for a strong cinematic character. Field (2003) is less clear, however, on exactly how it may manifest itself within a screenplay and how it may be engineered. He does suggest that it is a way of expanding the emotional complexity of a character, but does not offer a process for developing this notion.

It could be that the territory of a character's emotional development is not the focus of Field's (1984) approach, favouring structured plot points over structured character development. Later he does acknowledge shifts in narratives and plots the structure out quite meticulously, but here is where his approach may be limited. Field (2003) tackles screenplays in terms of key markers and plot points and these act as chronological markers positioned at key temporal points within a screenplay. His three-act paradigm is not directly concerned with the motivation of characters outside of this framework. In the presentation of his structural framework diagram characters are effectively there to serve the plot.

### **The Syd Field "Paradigm"**



**Figure 1 The Syd Field "Paradigm" (Field 1984, p. 199)**

In figure 1 above the three-act structural markers of a screenplay are clear, however, the focus is on the plot. The characters developments are essentially contained and moved within plot edicts, rather than dictating their own structure. The structural paradigm relates to character in that the inciting incident, setup, confrontation and

resolution all pertain to characters and their stories. However, the specific focus for Field (1984) is on these key markers rather than the nuances of character motivations.

Whilst Field (1979, 1984, 2003) provides many clear references to the character arc as an important element within the construction of a screenplay; he does not present any clear definition of how it might operate with or outside of his paradigm.

Seeger (1990), as another early contributor to the field of screenwriting manuals, focuses almost exclusively on character creation and comes close to areas associated with the character arc. She cites transformation of character and character choices as important elements, without drawing clear links between either.

Regarding the establishment of a complex character, Seeger (1990, p. 58) does focus attention on character backstory suggesting:

“if a character is going through major changes in the present, there often needs to be some backstory information to help clarify these actions and decisions”.

Here Seeger (1990) articulates relevant concepts as follows; a character's backstory as a source of conflict and contradiction to the central desire; An acknowledgement of 'major changes' required to build a character which clearly resonate with character transformation or a character arc; and lastly a reference to character decisions as being a vital element in the revelation of character and motivations. Seeger (1990, p. 110) goes on to assert:

“the writers challenge is to explore the difficulty of the choice, and the potential attractiveness of both choices”.

This balancing of choice through dilemma is a key element in the development of a character arc, by offering a mechanism for clarifying character motivation. If Seger (1990) had pursued this notion further, then clarity about how the character arc worked in totality, perhaps would have been gleaned. However, her final thoughts on the matter show this is still a work in progress. Seger (1990, p. 114) summarises her ideas on the subject thus:

“working out character triangles is analogous to juggling many objects and keeping them constantly in play. Some of the knottiest script problems I’ve encountered have involved the creation of the character triangle.”

Seger (1990) comes close to articulating the character arc or transformation. If not fully articulated, she does formulate key concepts of ‘Choice’, ‘Decision’ and ‘Consequences’ and the importance of a balanced dilemma with which to present a character. These concepts arguably still hold true, still, more clarity is required to provide a form and process that can be demonstrated and articulated for application to a screenplay.

Vogler (1992) re-contextualised Campbell (1949) for screenwriters, and remains a key text today even if effectively contested by Maras (2009), Macdonald (2013) and Yorke (2013). The popularity of Vogler’s (1992) paradigm has permeated through the field of screenwriting manuals, to the point where many subsequent writers of manuals have effectively remained unquestioningly within its parameters. This is arguably due in part to the commercial success of feature films that overtly championed this paradigm such as *Star Wars* (1977) and *The Lion King* (1994) and *The Matrix* (1999).



Regarding developing a character's emotional or psychological complexity that could facilitate a character arc Vogler (1999, p. 41) suggests:

“a real character, like a real person, is not just a single trait but a unique combination of many qualities and drives, some of them conflicting. And the more conflicting, the better.”

This acknowledges the need for complexity, but does not cap the number of internal conflicts or complications a character may possess, but rather encourages a multitude.

In using Jung's (1964) archetypes as Campbell (1949) did, a potential archetype to employ as a character's dichotomous personality would be the 'Shadow archetype'. Vogler (1992, p.87) asserts that:

“the shadow archetype is a useful metaphor for understanding villains and antagonists in our stories, as well as for grasping the unexpressed, ignored, or deeply hidden aspects of our heroes.”

Here there is the potential for a defined schism within a character that may remain constant throughout, the shadow as 'hidden aspects' of the hero although it is not fully developed or directly related to transformation by Vogler (1992).

With specific regard to three-act structure and character transformation Vogler (1992, p.22) states that:

“movies are often built in three acts, which can be regarded as representing 1) the hero’s decision to act, 2) the action itself, and 3) the consequences of the action.”

Here act structure appears to correlate to character arcs in so much as there are three turning points to each. A crucial point is ‘the hero’s decision to act,’ which suggests that character dictates the development of story by making a decision and acting upon it. This does not relate to other interpretations of the character arc, as there is no further opportunity for the character to make decisions at the second and third act climaxes.

Vogler (1992, p.22) states that the character is “committed to the journey and there’s no turning back.” This suggests one crucial decision that is not readdressed again within the narrative. Nevertheless, it could suggest that the central dichotomy of the character is simply constant, but it is not clear.

In terms of three-act structure Vogler (1992) does refer to an important stage of the hero’s journey as “Crossing the First Threshold” (Vogler 1992, p. 149) which delves deeper into the mechanics and defines it as “an Act of will in which the hero commits wholeheartedly to the adventure” (Vogler 1992, p. 149). This notion correlates more closely to arc structure, where characters are responsible for the development of the story through the decisions they make. Vogler (1992, p. 150) goes further stating:

“heroes come to decision points where their very souls are at stake, where they must decide “Do I go on living my life as I always have, or will I risk everything in the effort to grow and change?”

Here the idea of the central character or hero as master of their own destiny seems to define thresholds and their purpose. They are moments of decision for characters that pivot on an act of will, a choice. Vogler (1992, p. 150) then asserts that:

“often a combination of external events and inner choices will boost the story towards the second act”

suggesting that the crossing of thresholds is not exclusively down to the decisions of the central character.

Clearly the choices and decisions a character makes will be in response to some external factors and forces, but Vogler goes on to assert that:

“some heroes are “shanghaied” into the adventure or pushed over the brink, with no choice” (1992, p.150).

Consequently, there are at least two alternatives that need not be mutually exclusive when a character is faced with crossing a threshold. Firstly by way of plot, without the central character’s involvement in the movement between acts, or secondly, by a decision taken by the central character that makes the transition from one act to another by force of will.

There is no further exploration of their potential symbiosis. For example, if the crossing of the first threshold can be achieved by a character’s force of will or by external force dictated by the plot, should this not be the case for the subsequent two thresholds to be crossed? Are they interchangeable? The first threshold may be crossed by force

of will, but are the subsequent two by external plot points? What this approach highlights is that there is no consistent or clear progression for a character arc or transformation, as act thresholds can turn on either plot or character or both. The consequences of any of these permutations would have a profound impact on a narrative, yet this is not considered or explored.

The first time Vogler (1992) makes an explicit reference to the character arc is about what he terms “character flaws”, which effectively relates to what Seger (1990) calls the character backstory or character wound. In setting up a psychological or emotional backstory or flaw for a character, it facilitates the opportunity for confrontation and transformation as Vogler (1992, p. 33) attests:

“flaws also give a character somewhere to go – the so called “character arc” in which a character develops from condition A to condition Z through a series of steps”

Here he makes the important link between a character’s flaw and the potential for the character to grow or ‘arc’. Vogler (1992) does not proceed to make the link as Seger (1990) does between the character transformation and decisions. Specifically character revealing decisions predicated on a dilemma presented to characters at key points in the narrative. Seger (1990) also attempts to draw links between the character transformation and the character flaw, or backstory, but doesn’t then explore this in depth.

Vogler (2007) acknowledges the character arc as a form and term, yet rather than articulate it as a distinct from any other form, he attempts to subsume it within his own paradigm. He simply asserts:

“the stages of the Hero’s Journey are a good guide to the steps needed to create a realistic character arc” (Vogler 2007, p. 205).

Following this, he then outlines the character arc as a twelve-step model in complete synchronicity with his own twelve-step ‘Hero’s Journey’ model as illustrated below.



**Figure 2 The Character Arc (Vogler 2007, p. 206)**

By integrating the character arc into his own structural paradigm, Vogler (2007) resists further investigation of the form as anything other than a variation in the terminology of his own. In Vogler’s (2007) view the character arc is directly analogous to the hero’s journey, and so beyond integrating the character arc, he does not distinguish or investigate it further.

Later on he does refer to the character arc, which would suggest it could be autonomous of the Hero’s Journey paradigm. He suggests:

“examine the character arc of your hero. Is it a realistic growth of gradual changes? Is the final change in your character visible in her actions or appearance?” (Vogler 2007, p. 212).

The onus is clearly on the writer to investigate and determine whether the character arc is in operation. In Vogler's (2007) articulation of the character arc, if a writer adopts or utilises *The Hero's Journey* paradigm, then they are effectively articulating a character arc. Even if *The Hero's Journey* paradigm and the character arc are not the same, they are synonymous with each other enough for the character arc to be a natural by-product of his paradigm.

Vogler (2007) makes one final reference to the character arc in relation to character polarity, which sits quite outside of what he has offered up until this point. It is interesting to note that he suggests the subheading "Polarity and the character arc" (Vogler 2007, p. 321), before discussing the dynamic effect of placing two protagonists with polarised stances in pursuit of the same goal. Vogler (2007, p.323) states:

"they may want the same overall, external goal, but they go about it in wildly contrasting ways, generating conflict, drama, suspense, and humor through polarity."

This approach suggests dual protagonists and binary character arcs which are typical of buddy narratives and romances. However, this sits quite apart from the Hero's journey which favours the single protagonist for its paradigm. If as Vogler (2007) suggests, the character arc operates in synchronicity with the Hero's Journey, then any dual protagonist character arc narrative must require two Heroes Journeys. This must also ring true for narratives with multiple characters and character arcs, if Vogler's (2007) synchronising of the character arc with the hero's journey is to be accepted.

Vogler (2007) makes some interesting points about character complication. A character needs to be bifurcated in some way whether

towards a desire or to have some “Inner polarity” (Vogler 2007, p.332), in his terminology in order to generate dilemmas and choices. Here Vogler (2007) arguably speaks of the character arc form which he acknowledges. What is frustrating, however, is that in close defence of his paradigm he is unable to see other possibilities and narrative forms.

The character arc for Vogler (2007) hits all twelve steps of his paradigm exactly and precisely at each stage, without complication or contradiction. Whilst not directly dismissing the character arc, he arguably undermines its autonomy as a form by subsuming it. The damage done to the character arc by Vogler (2007) is significant as writers of screenwriting manuals that follow do not challenge his approach, perpetuating the notion that the character arc is merely the quest paradigm rebranded.

McKee (1998) contributes some useful terms to the field of screenwriting in his concepts around character dilemma, choice and the bifurcation of character motivation. This was evident through his notion of a character’s conscious and unconscious desire. McKee’s (1998) explanation of theme or ‘controlling idea’ in his terms is also of note and arguably relates to the character arc, although McKee (1998) never overtly makes this connection. My analysis of McKee’s (1998) work attempts to draw parallels to the character arc and interrogate whether his work articulates a similar or distinct approach to the ideas articulated in this exegesis.

In contextualising McKee’s (1998) theories, it is clear that he subscribes to the idea of the mono-myth of Campbell (1945). On the subject McKee (1998, p. 196) asserts:

“in essence we have told one another the same tale, one way or another, since the dawn of humanity, and that story could be usefully called *the Quest*.”

Despite aligning his ideas to the “Quest”, he rarely makes reference to the monomyth, nor does he articulate how each of his concepts resonates with the quest and its stages throughout. McKee (1998), does articulate the importance of character within the story and lays the foundations effectively for the development of character transformation.

In defining the territory, McKee (1998) finds that there is no real argument regarding which is more important to him, “structure is character; character is structure” (McKee1998, p. 100). In terms of highlighting and articulating a transformational arc, McKee (1998, p. 41) relates the idea directly to the character and states:

“at the end of the story, you should see the arc of the film, the great sweep of change that takes life from one condition at the opening to a changed condition at the end. This final condition, this end change, must be *absolute* and *irreversible*.”

The notion that character change needs be ‘*absolute*’ and ‘*irreversible*’, links to Aristotle’s (1996) idea of unity. It also pertains to the consistency of story focus. That change being finite suggests that the story is exhausted for the character and thereby will not be addressed again. This does not preclude the same character involving themselves in another story altogether separate from the first. There are many cinematic examples of this where a character may return for any number of distinct narratives, the *James Bond* film series being a relevant example.



It does, however, suggest limits to a character regarding a single cinematic narrative. Furthermore, it asserts the unity principle of Aristotle, which all actions and change must share a unity of purpose. This framework does not limit the amount of acts or major reversals that a character might experience before the end change, so by virtue it need not reside or be aligned to a three act structure. McKee (1998, p. 105) aligns structure and character in the following way suggesting that:

“the function of STRUCTURE is to provide progressively building pressures that force characters into more and more difficult dilemmas where they must make more and more difficult risk-taking choices”.

Here the notion of dilemmas and choice is brought to the fore. I would argue that these ideas are pivotal to the character arc, in that the focus is directly upon dilemmas and decisions. With specific relation to the character arc, McKee (1998, pg. 104) suggests:

“taking the principle further yet: The finest writing not only reveals true character, but arcs or changes that inner nature, for better or worse, over the course of the telling”.

Clearly, structure is the framework that helps illuminate the progression of a character or characters and their arc or arcs. McKee (1998, p. 106) goes further:

“if you change event design, you have also changed character; if you change deep character, you must reinvent the structure to express the character’s changed nature”.

Here the central idea is the symbiosis of character and structure. The structure is there to facilitate an audience's understanding of the character within the story. With character and structure entwined in McKee's (1998) eyes, it must transpire that three-act structure is effectively the result of character development or transformation. In this interpretation, it can be read that a character arc of three choices could in itself generate its own three-act structure.

This is something that resonates with my own practice and research, in that the development of a character arc generates its own three-act structure. In essence, one begets the other, character arc begets three-act structure and three-act structure begets a character arc. Here McKee (1998) offers the opportunity not only to find a causal link between character and structure, but to offer a clearer definition of the character arc.

The other key idea that builds upon Egri (1946) and Seger (1990) is the notion of character dilemma and choice. On the subject, McKee (1998, p. 103) states:

“the only way we ever come to know characters in depth is through their choices under pressure.”

These choices in McKee's (1998) view can come at any point in the story, so they can be interpreted as appearing at the act turning points, but at no point is this overtly stated.

The Act turning points in McKee's (1998) view are deemed major reversals of character, and so it could be suggested that a dilemma

and choice precede and facilitate these reversals, but it is never explicitly articulated as such. In relation to character choice, McKee (1998, p. 249) asserts that “how a character chooses in a true dilemma is a powerful expression of his humanity”. This concept of compelling characters to choose when presented with a dilemma is fundamental to the idea and mechanics of a character arc.

McKee (1998) would seem to agree particularly about the point of crisis in his narrative model. He goes on to suggest that when the story reaches the next structural milestone which he terms the ‘Climax’, that:

“this crowning Major Reversal is not necessarily full of noise and violence. Rather, it must be full of meaning” (McKee 1998, p.309).

Here is where some stretching of concepts needs to occur to interweave his various ideas into a consistent whole and specifically a character arc.

McKee (1998) terms this event a ‘major reversal’ and so we can interpret this as a new decision or a climactic decision. It is possible to make this judgment as he suggests the climax should be full of meaning. If ‘meaning’ was interpreted as character motivation, then it can be suggested that the climax is another point of dilemma and decision for a character. This is not asserted or clarified by McKee (1998), and so it still remains open to debate. McKee (1998, p. 249) does champion the role of the true dilemma and decision stating it is “a powerful expression of humanity”. However, this is not overtly linked to the character arc, and so the point of how a character arc is constructed is not articulated. As to where and when to place the dilemma beyond the ‘Crisis’ and to a lesser extent the ‘Climax’ he never makes this clear.

If McKee (1998) never explicitly moves beyond two potential points for the character arc dilemma and decision, there is scope for a character arc form based on three key choices in two further areas of his work. The first is with respect to what he terms “taking story to the end of the line” (McKee 1998, p.319) suggesting a story:

“must move through a pattern that includes the Contrary, the Contradictory and the Negation of the Negation.” (McKee 1998, p.320).

The most useful extrapolation here is with regard to three key points within a story as outlined above. It is possible to suggest that these three stages or events effectively outline how the character arc might progress developing in intensity. Nevertheless, at no stage does McKee (1998) make the link. These three stages and the implied transitions between them, only strengthen the argument for a three-stage character arc model. If the second act transitions into the third act via point of a dilemma and decision, then presumably the first and third acts could function in the same way.

It is not difficult to suggest that all acts transition via dilemmas and decisions as McKee (1998, p. 248) states; “a Turning Point is centred in a choice a character makes under pressure”. However, despite this apparent clarity on turning points, and thereby by extension acts turning on dilemmas and decisions, McKee (1998) never directly draws the connection.

Furthermore, McKee (1998) does not draw any direct links between the character arc and the theme of a narrative in the way that Egri (1946)

did. McKee (1998) covers considerable ground in articulating the theme or 'controlling idea' in his terms very effectively. However, he does not make the point that theme emerges from character arc. Using his terminology he sees no overt link between the controlling idea versus counter idea and the conscious desire versus the unconscious desire. The link is loosely implied when McKee (1998, p. 118) suggests that "the story embeds its Controlling Idea within the final climax". However, this is confusing as it is not clear whether he is articulating the final climax as an event, an action or a character decision.

It is possible to make the argument that it could be the character's decision that is pivotal to the climax, yet McKee (1998, p. 131) never makes this connection explicitly instead obliquely offering "study your story Climax and extract from it your Controlling Idea". McKee (1998) in the suggestion to "Study" the climax is not articulating any particular method with which to deconstruct the climax or whether to relate it to character specifically. Also in terms of 'Extracting' the controlling idea, it is not clear where we are meant to extract it from within the context of his approach to story. McKee (1998) effectively offers the landscape for us to explore without the tools to locate or define these concepts.

Having argued for the importance of character and character development early on, McKee (1998) then refocuses his attention back to plot and structure in the later part of his book leaving many unanswered questions. McKee (1998) is interested in tackling three-act structure and so his arguments relate directly to this, leaving the once inextricably linked character out of the equation. In tackling three-arc structure, McKee (1998, p. 220) states that "the three-act design is the minimum". He cites examples of cinematic narratives that employ more than the conventional three, offering *Four Weddings and a Funeral*

(1994) which employs “A Shakespearean rhythm of five acts” (McKee 1998, p. 220), and:

“*RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARC* is in seven acts; *THE COOK THE THIEF HER WIFE & HER LOVER* in eight” (McKee 1998, p. 220).

In warning against the expansion of acts beyond the minimum of three, McKee (1998, p. 221) argues that “first, the multiplication of act climaxes invites clichés”, and that:

“Second, the multiplication of acts reduces the impact of climaxes and results in repetitiousness” (McKee 1998, p. 222).

When McKee (1998) talks about acts and act climaxes, it is not clear whether these are climaxes of plot or climaxes of character. Earlier in his book, he discusses act climaxes being major reversals for a character. This would seem to suggest, by his definition, that act structure and character arcs are the same or at least synonymous. Still, reference to the character is noticeably absent from his assertions.

Clearly, further clarification is needed here as there appears to be practical exceptions to these all-encompassing narrative models. It would appear that the notion of a character arc, whilst endorsed by McKee (1998), is still wrapped up in act structure of some sort whether three, four, seven or eight acts.

McKee (1998) makes lucid points about a story’s theme, character development and transformation. Nevertheless, some of the work is

undone by the articulation of act climaxes being defined by major plot reversals. By exploring the notion of three-act structure to many more acts, McKee (1998) potentially fails to see the impact this would have on a character other than to suggest it might invite cliché. What is more, by insisting that character and structure are the same, McKee (1998) is unable to extricate these two notions at any point for further scrutiny. This may very well be emblematic of a lot of writers of screenwriting manuals who effectively want to solve all elements of story creation in a single piece of theoretical writing.

Horton (1999) offers a dichotomous approach to the character that encapsulates the wider tensions inherent within screenwriting practice and theory. He is critical of Field (1993) and Vogler (2006) in their focus upon structure and plot over character suggesting:

“an emphasis on structure and plot without a clear understanding of the nature and working of character often leads to a lifeless script” (Horton 1999, p.14).

Yet later Horton (1999) offers his own seemingly intractable “twelve commandments of character-centered screenwriting” (Horton 1999, p.125). Contradictions abound for practitioner/theorists who appear to be swayed ambiguously by an exploration of form and concepts on the one hand and the expectation to package or shape this into practicable approaches to screenwriting on the other. Horton (1999, p. 41) acknowledges the duality thus:

“too much certainty and we are in danger of falling into clichés once again. Too much ambiguity, of course, can lead in the opposite direction: chaos and boredom.”

Horton (1999) usefully offers an approach to narrative that privileges character enquiry and exploration. Encapsulating this notion in the terms 'carnival' and 'carnavalesque' suggesting "Carnival is process – becoming – in its purest form" (Horton 1999, p.28). He opens the debate around character versus plot driven narratives and explores creative approaches to character development and creation. However, he does not venture far beyond established narrative conventions. Rather, Horton (1999) suggests playfulness within clearly defined parameters, for example in terms of the character motivations he offers:

"this is not to suggest that you do away with all motivation: rather it is to say that you should not be a slave to simple/obvious motivations" (Horton 1999, p.30).

In terms of wider structural imperatives again Horton (1999) encourages broad considerations in approaching creativity and critically reflecting upon character suggesting that:

"the character-centred script may or often may not adhere to the tight three-act structure often set forth as a model for the classical Hollywood screenplay" (Horton 1999, p.117).

Here Horton (1999) illustrates his continual vacillation between parameters and moving beyond them. He is interested in the grand sweep of his ideas and less so with the granular level of mechanics and specifics. In reflecting upon a cinematic example which he holds as an exemplar of strong character centred screenplays, *The Full Monty* (1997) he offers little more than superlatives stating; "This is carnivalesque in practice and in its true glory" (Horton 1999, p.201). So whilst Horton (1999) opens up the debate about the need for a



character-centric approach he is less clear and articulate about how this might work in practice.

Dancyger (2001) has a distinct advantage over all the preceding theorists in that his approach is pluralist from the start. Dancyger (2001) and Rush (1995) championed a broader view than preceding screenwriting theory. Whilst advocating a discursive approach to screenwriting, Dancyger (2001) does articulate a screenwriting structural form of his own, which is contained within the conventional three-act structure. It is this model I wish to consider in relation to the character arc to see where connections and insights could be made.

Regarding narrative structure, Dancyger (2001, p.43) suggests four key components: “they are the three-act structure, plot, the character layer, and, finally, genre”. He goes on to state that:

“The character layer is about the inner world, the emotional world, the subjective world. This is the critical feature of the character layer; without it, we wouldn’t be moved by the screen story” (Dancyger 2001, p.58).

A clear link can be made between what Dancyger (2001) terms the ‘character layer’ and the character arc. Firstly the ‘character layer’ illuminates the subjective world of the character, which relates to a character’s perspective and value system. The second point is that it relates to the emotional world, audience understanding and engagement. In establishing a three-act structural framework and then a separate character layer, the foundations are potentially set for a clearly structured character transformation or arc.

The suggestion that Dancyger's (2001) definition of a structural model could lead to a clear character arc, with three clear turning points that pivot on the act turning points resides in the following quote:

“two opposing choices for the main character, will provide the emotional spine of the narrative” (Dancyger 2001, p.43).

Here he makes explicit the link between character dilemma, choice and three-act structure. He then deals with the development of each act in isolation. Dancyger (2001) articulates the major steps along the way in order to accomplish not only the character layer but all other elements that he considers important in the development and creation of a screenplay. The first act of Dancyger (2001) establishes many narrative elements including the character layer. In setting up the character layer, Dancyger (2001, p. 49) states that it:

“articulates the premise in terms of two relationship choices for the main character”.

So the notion of a dilemma of two equal polarised choices is firmly established. Regarding where specifically this is established, Dancyger (2001, p. 49) remains open, suggesting:

“the character layer, can be present early in Act I or later. Character layer can also fill Act I entirely”.

The point to make here is that the character layer predicated on two opposing choices is firmly established within the first Act. It might follow that the turning point of the first act would see an impasse necessitating a choice which would establish a clear progression into act two. I have extrapolated this view in seeking to adopt a clear character arc model, however, like theorists before him Dancyger

(2001) is not clear or specific in what constitutes the turning point from Act one to act two.

On the transitional turning point of Act one, Dancyger (2001, p.50) asserts:

“the Act 1 turning point or first major plot point should be a powerful event that opens up the screen story.”

At no point does he clarify what a ‘powerful event’ might constitute or what it is not. It could be interpreted as a character dilemma and choice. However, this is not explicitly articulated. Furthermore, the second act turning point clearly progresses on a dilemma and choice for a character. Consequently, to exclude it from the first act turning point cannot be seen as a mere oversight. It would appear that Dancyger (2001) does not consider the turning point of act one to be a dilemma and decision moment for a character.

He continues the approach of theorists before him who appear unconcerned with the first major turning point of the character layer being driven by a dilemma and character choice. This is all the more strange in that the second act is focused almost exclusively on this dilemma as Dancyger (2001, p. 52) suggests:

“what takes up the most screen time in Act II is that these relationships or options have to be fully developed.”

This approach would suggest that the character layer does not surface until the second act. Nonetheless, Dancyger (2001) earlier asserts that the character layer needs to be set up in act one. If this is the case,

then exactly how is it articulated, and why is the first act not concluded with a dilemma and decision?

Dancyger (2001) is primarily focused on the turning point in act two and three. If the act two dilemma and choice is pivotal, as a 'major reversal' in McKee's (1998) terminology, then must it not be a reversal of a decision taken in the first act? Consequently, in order to be able to present a reversal at the end of act two, there must have been a dilemma and decision taken at the first act's turning point to which the reversal relates. This would seem a reasonable conclusion, however, at no point does Dancyger (2001) or any other writer of manuals or screenwriting theorist explore or articulate this. This is a contribution to new knowledge as no one to date has articulated the first act turning point to be a moment of dilemma and decision, despite suggesting the second act turning point is a reversal of some earlier undefined decision.

Terminology remains an issue in relation to the character arc and its constituent parts. The term 'turning point' is used by Dancyger (2001) quite loosely to mean an event or a decision which are two separate things. In his view, the act two 'turning point' is explicitly a dilemma and decision. Conversely, the act one turning point is described not as a dilemma and decision but as an event. Further clarity is needed here in order to establish whether the definition of a turning point is intentionally open or not.

Dancyger (2001) offers some strong terminology within his character layer model that lays the foundations for a character arc to be articulated. However, despite his clear and robust three-act framework for a character arc or character layer in his terms, the first act turning point is still ambiguous at best and requires further clarity.

Marks (2009, p.29), champions the importance of the character arc which she terms “transformational arc of character”. Marks (2009), builds upon the work of Campbell (1945) and Vogler (1992) in establishing a framework for the character arc to exist within three-act structure, and the Quest paradigm. In firmly aligning her transformational arc to three-act structure and the Quest, Marks (2009) does not consider any flexibility of the form outside of this framework. Whether a character arc could exist within shorter form films or television series is not considered. This does not mean that the character arc could not work outside of these parameters as Marks (2009, p.39) states:

“when a story has a strong arc of character, the plot forms the container in which the inner journey of the character is made possible.”

Here the plot is seen as a container and as such could stretch or contract to support the character arc. This reading seems reasonable and resonates with the ideas of Dancyger (2001) and Jarvis (2014) although Marks (2009) never explicitly articulates this.

In terms of the character arc and its place within the construction of a screenplay, Marks (2009) focuses the majority of her ideas around three-act structure and a central protagonist at the heart of the arc. Where Marks (2009) is at odds with other theorists on the subject is when she limits the amount of characters that may arc. On the subject, Marks (2009, p.58) states “a strong story has only ONE protagonist.” This single protagonist perspective is problematic for the practice screenplay *It Must be Love* as it has two protagonists at the heart of the romance story. On further scrutiny Marks (2009) does concede that a feature film narrative may have more than one protagonist

although she warns against it claiming; “this means that the thematic focus of the film is very unclear and confusing” (Marks 2009, p. 65).

Whether multiple characters make the thematic focus unclear or not, Marks (2009) does make the link between character arc and theme, asserting that:

“all decisions for the actions of the protagonist can be derived from the writer’s thematic intentions” (Marks 2009,p.75).

Not only does Marks (2009) align the character arc to a story’s theme which McKee (1998) failed to do directly with his ‘controlling idea’; she also implies decisions are an integral part of this relationship. Whether these are character decisions played out within scenes or the decisions of the writer crafting the story, it is not entirely clear. If they are character decisions, then this concept builds upon Dancyger’s (2001) ideas of the importance of dilemmas and choices for his character triangle model. On the subject of theme, Marks (2009, p. 333) states:

“it is the single most essential aspect of a story that allows the writer to develop a strong and meaningful arc of character.”

However, despite clearly linking theme to the character arc, it is not clear whether one stems from the other, or whether they coexist in a mutually exclusive way. Marks (2009), seems to suggest that finding and developing the theme will result in a character arc, whereas McKee (1998) and Dancyger (2001) suggest that the theme emerges after several drafts of a screenplay. Whichever way the theme is approached, the main point to take away is that they have a clear relationship with each other that is important to acknowledge and explore.

Having raised the importance of decisions in the character arc process, it is worth considering the turning points of each act and how Marks (2009) addresses them. Firstly she clearly subscribes to three-act structure which offers the potential for three turning points at the end of each act. Marks (2009, p. 178) asserts:

“act breaks and page counts are extremely relevant in terms of giving the writer guide posts and boundaries within which to organise and make maximum use of structural elements.”

Turning then to the act turning points and what they pivot on, Marks (2009, p. 200) suggests:

“a TURNING POINT is an escalation of the conflict that turns the story in a new and unexpected direction, substantially raising the stakes for the protagonist.”

Here the importance of the turning point as a pivotal moment in the development of a character arc is clearly articulated. However, it is not clear where exactly these turning points are located.

Marks (2009, p. 202), promises clarity In terms of identifying the first act turning point when she asserts “It’s relatively easy to find the first turning point in any existing well-written film”. However, frustratingly she never illustrates or articulates just how this may be achieved. Within the same chapter Marks (2009, p. 202) then contradicts this assertion stating, “there is no directory in which you can look up a great turning point.” Clearly there is scope for further scrutiny around act turning points and what they pivot upon as Marks (2009) avoids any useful definition.

It is only when the second act turning point is discussed that Marks (2009) returns to the subject of how one act transitions into the next. At the stage of the second act turning point Marks (2009, p. 334) suggests:

“at the end of the first and second acts, an incident or event occurs that shifts the conflict of the plot and subplots in a new direction.”

The transition for Marks (2009) appears to be an incident or event, however, again it is not clear what this specifically refers to. It could be a plot point or character action, therefore, there is no illumination of what this transition could or should be predicated on. This seems problematic particularly in view of the focus of her work, which is about articulating a transformational arc of character. If character transformation is at the heart of her argument, framed within three-act structure, surely there should be some relationship between the arc and the three-act turning points that transition each act.

There is some suggestion that Marks (2009) is aware of this relationship, as when analysing the second act turning point in *The Fisher King* (1991) she states, “in this film it is important to focus on the dilemma” (Marks 2009, p. 267). Here Marks (2009) clearly articulates that the second act is predicated on a dilemma and potentially a decision in response to the dilemma. This assertion chimes with Seger (1990) and Dancyger (2001) who articulate the same idea. Still, there is no specific mention of a decision at any other stage in her transformational arc model.

Moving on from the first and second act climaxes that remain loosely defined by Marks (2009) to the transformational moment that occurs at the end of the third act Marks (2009, p. 333) suggests:



“for the transformational arc to be complete, the protagonist must make a conscious decision to change.”

Here finally the point is made about a decision being pivotal to the transformational arc. Although the dilemma is not articulated, it is possible to assume that there may be one in order for a decision to be made. If a dilemma is articulated for the second act turning point, then it must also be articulated for the transformational turning point of the third act.

Marks (2009) fails to address this point and appears to be preoccupied with the structural framework of her transformational arc model, rather than clarifying what or how transformation occurs. Her model leans heavily upon the three-act structure and the Hero's journey archetype is offering little in the way of new insight into the process of the character arc, to which her thesis would appear to be focused. Surely act turning points are pivotal markers if you are to frame the character arc within the three-act structure, but Marks (2009) only loosely defines what constitutes these structural signposts. What is more, the first act turning point is left unarticulated; the second requires a dilemma and the third requires a conscious decision, but any relationship between them is never addressed overtly or otherwise.

McCollum (2013) writes about the character arc form principally in relation to novel writing, however, her ideas and process can be easily adapted to screenwriting. An interesting point to make is that McCollum (2013) does not align her definition of the form to any pre-existing narrative model such as three-act structure, so there is malleability to her presentation of the character arc. This is refreshing in light of the

screenwriting approaches that frame it firmly within conventional models of the hero's journey or three-act structure.

In terms of where to place the character arc form in the process of writing, McCollum (2013, p.69) suggests:

“it is okay to find or develop or change your character arc after you write the book. Sometimes it's easiest this way.”

Stating it is a form that can be layered upon a narrative. McCollum (2013) mainly refers to novels, but she acknowledges that the character arc can be transposed to other narrative forms including screenplays. This affirmation of the character arc as structurally malleable is profound as it refutes the argument of Vogler (1992), Dancyger (2001) and Marks (2009). Their definitions of the character arc place the form firmly within pre-existing narrative frameworks of three-act structure or the quest paradigm, suggesting it cannot be autonomous. Here for the first time McCollum (2013) notes that the character arc might exist in a narrative framework of its own.

McCollum (2013, p. 30) takes a very clear beginning, middle and end, approach stating:

“there are a number of major milestones in the story's structure that may coincide with the major events of the character arc.”

Here the possibility of some clarity is offered in her development of the character arc and the process for structuring one. This illumination is,

however, frustratingly unexplored as McCollum (2013, p. 30) then states that “a full discussion of story structure is beyond the scope of this book”.

Where McCollum (2013) adds to the articulation of the character arc is largely in supporting the notion of dilemmas and decisions in developing an arc. McCollum (2013) does not particularly add new insights here, but rather affirms what McKee (1998) and Dancyger (2001) suggested in their earlier works. McCollum (2013, p. 29) states:

“positive reinforcement of good choices is all part of building a convincing character arc.”

Here the notion of a choice is clearly cited as a means of articulating character motivation. In clarifying motivation further, McCollum (2013) agrees with Dancyger (2001) in suggesting that choices need to be in response to dilemmas, rather than a more general or arbitrary selection of choices. On this point McCollum (2013, p.49) states:

“if a character has no moral dilemma, nothing worth changing for, never even considers altering, there’s little conflict.”

Arguably McCollum (2013) supports the idea of dilemma and choice in developing a character arc. However, she never discusses the mechanics of the character arc in practice. Instead, McCollum (2013) suggests requirements for the arc to work and frames them within a loose three-act structure of beginning, middle and end. In conclusion, McCollum (2013) adds support to the notion of character arcs and their effectiveness in articulating character motivation. However this is

articulated without offering any specific new insights beyond potentially extricating the form from the three-act structure.

Venis (2013) articulates a far more useful definition of the character arc regarding the process and creative application, with particular reference to the first and second arc turning points. Venis (2013) interestingly does not offer a third arc turning point in her appraisal of the character arc, preferring to fall back on the Campbell (1954) referencing his steps of climax and new awareness instead. It can be suggested that Venis (2013) is open to a character arc working autonomously of three-act structure, or any other overarching narrative paradigm, however, this is never overtly stated. Rather Venis (2013 p.42) prefers to suggest that:

“finding the proper balance between premise and theme is very important.”

Regarding the character arc Venis (2013) references it at two significant stages of her seven-stage “three act structure’s basic plot points” (Venis 2013, p.113). The first reference is at stage three where she asserts that; “it’s the plot beat that forces your heroine to make some sort of choice.” (Venis 2013, p.113). However, it is not expanded upon further. Fortunately, earlier Venis (2013) states that in order for a character to grow they require “a crisis, a trauma, a life-altering dilemma” (Venis 2013, p.112). So here the notion of a dilemma to which a character must choose can be usefully connected.

The second reference to the character arc and the need for another choice is highlighted at stage five. Here Venis (2013) states that:

“just as your protagonist made a decision to act at the first act break, the second act break requires her to make another decision” (Venis 2013, p.114).

Here the importance of the character decision is highlighted; however, there is no discussion of whether this decision is about the first choice and decision. The need for consistency or causality is referenced when Venis (2013, p.112) suggests:

“what needs to be determined is the causal relationship between the exterior developments of the story and the interior developments that occur within the character.”

However, this notion relates to the interrelationship between the plot, exterior goal and character development rather than the causality and consistency of character actions motivations and specific choices. Venis (2013) does not directly draw links between these two choices and decisions. With character choices at least being pivotal at two stages of her seven stage structural form, they are then not referenced again with her remaining stages. Characters encounter a self-awareness and epiphany which leads them to a “New Awareness” (Venis 2013, p.114). However, this is not linked, overtly or otherwise, to the choices and decisions undertaken earlier in the process.

Venis (2013) like many previous manual writers, such as Seger (2003), Vogler (1996) and Marks (2009) articulates the character arc in parts but does not remain focused upon the process in sufficient detail to offer a comprehensive definition. This partial definition is frustrating; however, it also reaffirms this research’s validity in seeking to articulate the process of the character arc more closely. As Venis (2013, p.110) attests:

“How a protagonist’s inner conflict interacts with the story’s exterior conflict is the basis of the character’s arc, and this arc is the true “driver” of an involving story.”

The character arc as a form has acknowledgement within screenwriting manuals and contemporary screenwriting studies as they site, allude, reference and partially articulate a shape and form. However, this research seeks to remain focused upon the character arc specifically , in order that it can be explored and engaged with outside of the parameters of more prescriptive narrative forms such as the hero’s journey and McKee’s (1998) five stages of narrative construction.

Venis (2013, p.110) asserts the importance and centrality of the character arc within cinematic stories:

“the nature of this change is the substance of the character arc. A character starts in one position – call it “Point A” – and ultimately ends up in another, “Point B.” The arc is the shape of the shift.

Venis (2013) approaches the stages of the character arc by aligning them with three act structure directly, although the use of ‘roughly’ leaves the possibility of some flexibility. There are also clear allusions to Campbell’s (1954) monomyth as a framing device. There is no discussion of how a character arc might or does operate outside of these parameters or whether they are mutually exclusive or inseparable, other than when Venis (2013, p.112) offers:

“more often than not the character arc has a structure that tends to run parallel to the structure of the plot.”

Venis (2013) does leave the possibility of a more flexible approach to the character arc open; however, she never addresses this directly.

The most recent addition to the debate comes from Jarvis (2014). Much like manual writers before her, Jarvis (2014) places great stock on the second act turning point as the pivotal point in establishing a character arc. In alignment with Field (1979), McKee (1998) and Dancyger (2001), Jarvis (2014) names the second arc turning point the crisis. This decision she sees defined by morality, in that it is the morally right choice for the character. Here she assigns morality to a societally conventional or normative value. This perspective works well enough, but Jarvis (2014) does not really question morality as a notion and critically what the morality is based upon. I would argue that the term morality is useful in this context, but would be better served by clarifying what the morality at play is governed by. Jarvis (2014) does not add anything beyond making a connection.

Jarvis (2014) rightly distinguishes between the character arc third act turning point and what is typically termed the climax of the narrative. Distinguishing the two distinct events within the story, by terming them emotional climax and the major dramatic curve climax. The rising action and obstacles of Jarvis' (2014) model suggests using tactics and barriers and listing them to pave a way through the second act.

What is not clear or suggested is a consistent approach to these or a clear definition of how they relate to the character arc. Conversely, what she suggests is that the story goal although clear and fixed, may have many varying obstacles and tactics before the character reaches the crisis; which is the next stage of the character arc in her terms. The problem with varied tactics and obstacles is that they do not focus the narrative in terms of a consistent theme that is to be explored.

The other issue pertains to the character arc itself and what it is exploring and revealing. If there are a series of random tactics and obstacles, then there is no sense of a character struggling with an internal conflict or dilemma. Jarvis (2014) does suggest that the crisis point could be represented as a 'crossroads' decision for the character, but this is the first and only time she connects character choices and dilemmas with the character arc. I would argue that dilemmas and choices are precisely what the character arc is fundamentally built upon at all stages of a narrative.

In attempting to offer a character arc model, Jarvis (2014) holds too closely to three-act structure limiting the definition. She fixates on plot points regarding the structuring of the arc and forgoes articulating character conflict and dilemmas in favour of citing structural markers.

Jarvis (2014) goes some way to articulate a character arc, yet frustratingly confuses the external and inner goals rendering her definitions contradictory at best. Jarvis (2014, p.23) states that:

“a character can only have one goal and one major dramatic question for the story, there can be many needs. A need is something more emotional or conceptual.”

The clues to her confusion are embedded in the terms 'emotional', 'conceptual' and 'needs'. The character arc is absolutely about the emotional development or lack thereof for a character, as the latter part of this exegesis will show. The emotional development of a character through considered choices is an essential part of a working definition



of 'The Character Arc'.. If there is no emotional focus for a character to engage with, then it is simply an external, emotionless goal.

The conceptual element is key, as it relates to the theme of the narrative. This is very closely wrapped up with the character arc, as it is a consequence of the ending of the character arc. The 'needs' in Jarvis's (2014, p. 23) terms are: "a by-product of winning the goal". Here the logic is flipped in that the need is seen as ancillary to the plot and external goal. Instead, it would appear to be the other way around if the narrative is employing a character arc. It is by focusing on and addressing the need that the goal is achieved.

The external clarification of achieving the goal is precisely because the emotionally focused character arc has been addressed and completed, rather than as a consequence as Jarvis (2014) assumes. Jarvis (2014) does clearly make the connection between the character arc and theme, however, her articulation of how it develops in relation to the character arc contradicts Seger (1990), McKee (1998), Dancyger (2001) and Marks (2009). Moving beyond theoretical discussion of the character arc, I will conduct textual analysis of cinematic examples; the aim being to establish how the character arc may be evidenced in professional practice, and how it impacts upon story and character development.

## **2.4 Cinematic examples of the character arc in practice**

Below I have analysed the character arcs that occur in two cinematic examples to clarify its flexibility within the narrative form, and its importance to the understanding of the characters and the narrative as a whole. The first example is *Insomnia* (2002) which utilises two

character arcs; one for the central character and one for a supporting character. The second example is *Atonement* (2007) which utilises one character arc for a secondary character who acts as narrator for the two central characters' story.

### ***Insomnia* (2002)**

The character arc of Police Detective Will Dormer, runs thus; Dormer, a distinguished detective is called up to investigate the murder of a teenage girl in Alaska away from his home in Los Angeles. From the back-story we learn he is under investigation from internal affairs for a past case in which he wilfully faked evidence to ensure a conviction. As a result, Dormer begins the story as an outwardly morally upright character that harbours an immoral duplicity, similar to Aristotle's (1996, chapter 7.2 First deduction) intermediate character.

"This is the sort of person who is not outstanding in moral excellence or justice"

The story then concerns the detection of the teenage girl until Dormer accidentally shoots his partner Hap Eckhart. This event of shooting his partner I would argue is the act's climax in terms of plot but not the arc climax in terms of character. It is the plot climax as it is clearly an irreversible action and event because Hap dies from the wound. What is more, prior to this event Hap clearly stated that he would assist the internal investigation of Dormer's past cases, including the one where he forged evidence.

This event then leads to the first character arc climax and turning point, which takes the form of a choice or decision; one that is the sole responsibility of the central character or protagonist. As there were no

other witnesses to the shooting, Dormer is offered an explanation of the event, about which he must make a decision or choice. The assumption by the rest of the police team is that the murderer, who they were chasing at the time, shot and killed Hap. The audience and Dormer's character know this to be untrue.

Dormer has the clear choice to lie and absolve himself of the responsibility of murdering his partner accidentally, or tell the truth as he and the audience witnessed it. Dormer chooses to lie and corroborate the false statement given by the Police Chief. Having established the choice at the first arc turning point and clarified the dilemma, to lie or tell the truth, this remains a constant for the remainder of the narrative.

Having delivered an answer to the first arc climax, the character can move into their specific second act. This act, as stated before, may or may not be aligned to the act structure designated by plot. In terms of defining the actual moment of Dormer's first character arc choice, the Police Chief asks him the question, 'is that what happened?' having delivered their inaccurate extrapolation of events. Dormer responds to the question by nodding his head. This is the action that defines his choice to lie and moves the character into their second act. The plot turning point into the second act may, as stated, be the death of Hap, which puts it in close proximity with the character arc turning point, but they are separate and distinct.

The second act brings the consistent or unified dilemma further into focus, with scenes balanced between Dormer's character maintaining and protecting the lie and then at times seeking to pursue the truth and uphold justice. Switching the bullets to evade detection by ballistics clearly illustrates the desire to evade detection and maintain the lie. In

balance to this, all scenes with the character of Ellie Burr played by Hilary Swank, depict Dormer's active dilemma by his character insisting she do a thorough investigation and seek the truth. The second act climax in terms of plot can be seen as the pinning of the murder on the teenager's boyfriend, by the planting of evidence to support this line of investigation. The actual murderer's gun is planted at the boyfriend's residence and subsequently ensures his arrest and charge of murder.

This can be seen as the act turning point, as it shifts the story in a major way, solving the crime. Nevertheless, it does not involve a character choice; it merely sets up the dilemma for the character of Dormer. The arc turning point takes place a later in the scene on the ferry. Dormer meets with the actual murderer, Walter Finch, and confronts him about his actions.

However, the tables are quickly turned and Dormer is given a dilemma by the murderer; to either let the conviction stick with the boyfriend, or to bring to justice the real murderer and confess to his role in the accidental death of his friend Hap. Given the choice Dormer's character responds in dialogue this time, stating 'What do you need from me?' This line confirms his allegiance to deceit and is consolidated as a choice when the character of Walter reveals he recorded their conversation as further evidence of Dormer's corruption.

The third arc climax for Dormer's character occurs when he confronts Walter a second time on an isolated bridge. The murder case has now been closed and Dormer is set to return back to Los Angeles having seemingly solved the case. Will is torn between the need to maintain his professional reputation and the desire to see justice done. This dilemma is brought to a climax and decision moment, when Will draws a gun on the defenceless Walter and threatens to kill him to ease his

guilt and see justice served. Because the third arc choice is a repetition of the second arc choice, Will chooses not to kill Walter and maintain his outward integrity at the expense of his inner guilt and frustration. Effectively he chooses to uphold the lie and maintain the deceit.

The complexity of Will Dormer's character can be distilled to a clear and contradictory stance or value system that is consistent throughout the narrative. It is important that each choice, when presented, is a dilemma of comparable weight for the character. Using Robert McKee's (1998) framework of conscious and unconscious desire, we can see that Will Dormer's Conscious desire is to tell the truth. Conversely, Will Dormer's Unconscious desire is to lie. Subsequently, the arc can be illustrated as below:

**1<sup>st</sup> arc choice**

A. To lie and conceal the truth about his partner's death and therefore avoid implication.

B. To tell the truth and reveal that it was an accident but risk implication.

Will takes choice A, to lie.

**2<sup>nd</sup> arc choice**

A. To lie and further avoid implication, but only by cooperating with the real murderer of the teenager.

B. To tell the truth and convict the real murderer, but risk implication because of his actions to cover up Hap's death and frame the murderer for his own crime as well as the murder.

Will again takes choice A, to lie.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> arc choice**

A. To lie and maintain the status quo and his reputation to everyone else.

B. To tell the truth. Now wracked with guilt and seemingly determined to see justice done, he can choose to tell the truth and convict the real murderer. Still, this would also incriminate himself for all his mistakes.

Will is defeated and again takes choice A, to lie.

Because the character has been consistent in their choices, the character must serve convention and perish; in this case he is shot and dies at the end.

There is a smaller arc for the rookie police officer of Ellie Burr. The inciting incident for her character arc happens when she discovers the shell casing from Will Dormer's gun. She investigates and deduces that Will's testimony is false and clarifies her findings by Matching Will's gun to the shell casing found at the scene of Hap's death. After the case of the murdered teenager is closed, Ellie is then given the opportunity to reveal this information. She can either reveal the truth or conceal it from the rest of her team and lie. Aristotle's (1996) *Unity* is again in evidence as her character arc choices are the same as for Will, to lie or tell the truth. She chooses to lie for her first arc choice as is necessary for the character arc to be established.

Ellie is then offered the opportunity to make a second choice when she confronts Will about the death of Hap in Walter's cabin. Will confesses the truth to Ellie and she arrests him. The choice for Ellie at this crucial

point is again to maintain the lie or pursue the truth. She takes the new course of pursuing the truth and so her character is on a 'redemptive arc' to use McKee's (1998) terminology. The third arc choice comes in the closing moments of the film as Will's character lies dying. Her choice is consistent and a strong dilemma, to throw away the evidence that incriminates Will and so retain his reputation but at the cost of maintaining the lie, or incriminate Will for his past injustices and serve the higher cause of truth. As convention dictates she repeats the choice made at her second arc climax, and chooses to serve justice on Will.

Therefore, within a plot that utilises three acts, two characters are able to arc in opposing ways. Will Dormer's story arc is the spine of the narrative and is tragic, whilst Ellie Burr's character has a minor arc that is redemptive.

### ***Atonement* (2007)**

*Atonement* (2007) offers a character arc not for the two central characters of Cecilia Tallis and Robbie Turner who occupy the central romantic story, but rather for Bryony Tallis, the sister of Cecilia who frames their story. Bryony Tallis has the character arc dilemma and choices and therefore drives the overarching story which gives rise to the film's title. Her first arc choice is whether to tell the truth or lie about what she saw in the grounds of her house; the attempted rape of a family friend. Bryony chooses to lie for her first arc choice and so the rest of the story concerns her need to atone for this decision. The second arc climax sees her confronted by Robbie Turner, and here she confesses her mistake and agrees to make amends. This is a false or weak second arc choice for two clear reasons: Firstly the dilemma is not clear, in terms of what is at stake for the character. Subsequently,

the second arc choice should be the same dilemma as the first arc choice. The character of Bryony approaches the second arc climax with added hindsight, in this case clear remorse for the lie she told at the first arc choice. This is the case and she does indeed regret her initial decision and wants to tell the truth. But what is at stake to make this second choice a dilemma?

The Second World War has brought parity to the character's social stations so there is little to risk here. The characters that could effect change in Robbie Turner's circumstances if informed of the truth are not confronted, and the character of Bryony simply promises to tell the truth. Bryony may harbour feelings for Robbie, however she was never a credible suitor, so she does not stand to lose anything by revealing the truth to him.

The major flaw of this turning point is that it is later revealed that this scene was actually a fabrication within Bryony's novel and imagination. Therefore amends were never made and being a fantasy, nothing was ever at risk or challenged. This could, however, be interpreted as another decision to lie, although this time the lie is to the audience rather than the characters within the scene. The character has chosen to deceive us, the viewer, rather than deceiving the characters within the narrative itself.

The third arc turning point occurs when the character of Bryony, now an elderly author, is interviewed about her novel 'Atonement' and she states that everything within it is the absolute truth. The dilemma needs to be constant and so it is here, where she has the choice once more to tell the truth or lie. The character decides to be truthful and reveal that the sequence leading up to and including the second act choice was a lie and that she has sought atonement for her initial first



arc decision all her life. It is interesting to note that the character reveals that she is dying in this final scene, which echoes the conventions that all characters who have the potential to arc die either physically or psychologically if they fail to reverse their choice at the second arc turning point.

The romance story between Cecilia Tallis and Robbie Turner is highly charged in terms of unrequited sexual tension, particularly because their first and only love scene is interrupted by Bryony, but as for revelation or character depth in terms of conscious or unconscious desire, these characters possess very little if any. They are simply established as desiring one another, which climaxes in the interrupted love scene. From then on, the plot conspires to keep them apart as much as possible. They do not have any dilemmas or complexity and therefore do not drive the story forward.

As with Will Dormer's character in *Insomnia* (2002), the complexity of Bryony Tallis's character can be distilled to a clear and contradictory stance or value system that is consistent throughout the narrative. Again using McKee's (1998) framework of conscious and unconscious desire, we can see that Bryony's conscious desire is to tell the truth. Conversely her unconscious desire is to lie. Accordingly, the arc can be illustrated as below:

### **1<sup>st</sup> arc choice**

- A. To lie and incriminate Robbie, the man she loves from afar, as punishment for her jealousy and rejection.
- B. To tell the truth and reveal that it was the character of Marshal who assaulted Lola and risk the loss of a powerful family ally. To make this

choice would also have her acknowledge that she cannot romantically have Robbie Turner who is in love with her sister Cecilia.

Bryony takes choice A, to lie.

### **2<sup>nd</sup> arc choice**

A. To maintain the lie and keep Robbie and Cecilia apart.

B. To tell the truth to her family and the authorities regarding the wrongful conviction of Robbie Turner.

Bryony takes choice A, to lie. This time the lie is to the audience convincing us that she will repent and make amends, but the later revelation is that she never did take action on her promise and so it remains a lie.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> arc choice**

A. To lie and maintain the status quo and not reveal her mistake.

B. To tell the truth, and finally acknowledge her guilt and part in separating two innocent people who were in love.

Bryony finally decides to confess the truth and her deceit to the audience about the fabricated second arc climax scene. She absolves herself of guilt by fabricating the final scene, where the lovers enjoy each other's company at the seaside.

Because the character has been consistent in their first and second arc choices, the character must serve tragic convention and suffer. In this case she is suffering a terminal illness and will die shortly.

It is interesting to note that unlike *Insomnia* (2002), which ensures that there is unity as Aristotle (1996) suggests there should be, Bryony's story has no unity with that of the characters involved in the romance. Bryony's story is a tragedy that sees the character suffers for her choices.

If a character has pursued an action, idea or goal through three or more major decisions then they will have achieved a character arc. The arc will have ultimately clarified for the audience the character's dominant value system. Effectively a transformation or change will have taken place within a character if they arc.

The question remains, is it possible for a character within a singular cinematic narrative able to arc more than once? Identifying cinematic examples of a character that can arc more than once, within a specific narrative is difficult. A character could potentially be involved in more than one parallel story and arc separately in each. This could allow for separate split value systems for each individual story. Cinematic romance stories such as *2046* (2000), offer the central character three alternate relationships spread across decades in which to arc separately.

*The Fountain* (2006) also utilises a similar conceit, where lovers attempt to unite across centuries in three separate stories. Although these two examples on the surface appear to offer an arc structure of nine acts, three for each story and period in time, they actually split their stories into three acts and the central characters only cross three thresholds in total, one for each act. Thus, here we have the character arc form stringently tied to three act structure and so in this lack of separation and clarity confusion persists.

Having discussed the character arc, I have been able to arrive at a series of stages to the process of creating a character arc, which I will implement into the practice screenplay *It Must be Love*. The next part of this chapter will briefly consider the chosen genre of the romance. It will be useful to articulate the specific set of conventions and tropes that will be adopted. The interplay and dynamic between the character arc and genre conventions will not overtly be discussed within this section. The relationship between the two will instead be discussed and critiqued in the critical reflection chapter that follows on from the practice screenplay *It Must be Love*.

## **2.5 The character arc: Towards a new definition**

The character arc is clearly a narrative form that exists in practice as evidenced above, and operates with cinematic storytelling and fields of screenwriting manuals and contemporary screenwriting studies referenced by Macdonald (2013) and Novrup Redvall (2013). No clear consensus has to date been reached on what constitutes a character arc or how it is put into practice. With over forty years of writing on the specific subject of screenwriting narrative forms and practice, there are few writers of screenwriting manuals or theorists that cover the character arc in great detail, and arguably none to date that articulate the form comprehensively. This is despite the fact that as McCollum (2013) suggests character arcs have been a part of fiction since before Aristotle (1996).

The character arc has yet to be fully articulated as a process to the point where it can be easily grasped by a screenwriter attempting to engage with it in practice. There seems to be some consistency during the setup and foundations of the form that constitutes an arc backstory, but very little on the first pivotal turning point that transitions this act

into the second. No one to date has articulated a dilemma or decision for the first act turning point, or has offered a clear or demonstrable example of what it could be in practice. My exploration of this within this exegesis and the practice screenplay *It Must be Love* demonstrates new knowledge by articulating this approach and process.

I would argue for the need for the first arc turning point to embrace a dilemma and decision, to affect a clear transition into the second act. The theorists discussed may concur with this conclusion; however, they never articulate this point within their models.

The consistency of thought across the theorists discussed tends to be largely about the foundational and concluding aspects of the character arc. In an effort to provide a clear and comprehensive approach to articulating the process of utilising a character arc, I will draw upon the manuals and theorists discussed. Where there is a lack of clarity and inconsistency of approach, I will suggest a new articulation and approach for practice. This will be explored and developed within the practice screenplay *It Must be Love*.

The specific area of the character arc process that requires reconsideration and clarification is the first act turning point and what this specifically pivots on. I will offer cinematic examples to illustrate my argument and then proceed to implement this newly articulated process within *It Must be Love*. A point to make before offering new knowledge in the form of a newly articulated approach for the character arc is that I do not suggest that this is a new model per se, more that it has not to date been effectively articulated. The articulation of the

character arc model that I will offer potentially exists in practice; however, I believe that it has not been articulated within any screenwriting field to date, whether that is within screenwriting manuals or screenwriting studies. This articulation will demonstrate new knowledge.

## **2.6 Reflections on the practice led methodology**

Returning to Nelson's (2013) multi-mode epistemological model for Practice as Research or PaR, articulated as "modes of knowledge: 'know-how; know-what and know-that'" (Nelson 2013, p.38). The first mode 'Know-how' is articulated by Nelson (2013) as 'tacit knowledge', and he acknowledges its intangibility when stating that "one of the key challenges of PaR is to make the tacit more explicit" (Nelson 2013, p.43). The second mode of approach is to utilise 'know-what' which takes the form of critical reflection. Nelson (2013, p. 44), here argues that:

"through reflection he can learn and criticize the tacit understandings that have grown up around the repetitive experiences of specialized practice."

The third mode, 'Know-that' relates to established knowledge within our field of enquiry as Nelson (2013, p. 31) attests:

"this means that we know the backstory of our work and experience other people's practice as professional artists typically do."

Whilst offering this sound methodological approach for practice led research, Nelson (2013, p. 39) acknowledges that it is not without problems and:

“it may not ultimately be possible to make the tacit thoroughly explicit (that is, expressed as propositional knowledge in writing.”

However, this approach was adopted as the principal methodology which enabled me to interrogate and articulate key decisions taken about the central concerns of the character arc and the romance genre. This approach enabled me to critically reflect upon the creative process and mapped out an emergent process as Barret and Bolt (2010, p. 6) suggest:

“the emergent aspect of artistic research methodology may be viewed as a positive feature to be factored into the design of research projects rather than as a flaw to be understood or avoided.”

The practice led research has interrogated my own creative practice and the theoretical landscape in an exploratory and pluralist way. This exegesis also articulates and focuses in depth on the character arc as an isolated form in its own right, whilst demonstrating that it can work within or alongside other structuralist narrative forms and paradigms.

Whilst this practice led research may prove to have value within wider screenwriting debates, this research and its findings are a singular practice led perspective on a screenwriting. This research does explore and investigate the landscape of screenwriting manuals principally, however, it is also mindful of contemporary arguments and debates around their validity within screenwriting theory, and thereby sits within

this context, with all the inherent tensions this brings. As Goddard (2010, p. 119) suggests:

“the role of an exegesis is not to attempt an analysis or critical interpretation of the work, but to present a sense of the creative-decision making processes within the context of the research practice.”



### **Chapter 3     Practice Screenplay *It Must be Love***

Please read the accompanying Original Feature Film Screenplay entitled *It Must be Love* before continuing on to read Chapter 4.

## Chapter 4 Critical reflections and findings

In this chapter I will critically reflect on the original screenplay *It Must be Love* from conception to completion of a rough first draft principally from two perspectives. The first part will set out the main reflections on contemporary screenwriting theory in relation to the character arc. I will then address and analyse the engagement with and process of utilising the character arc form. The second part will explore how genre conventions and tropes impacted on the development of the screenplay.

Regarding the character arc form, the limited definition I applied, although not comprehensively to my practice and theoretical approach was Dancyger's (2001) model of the 'character layer' and 'character triangle'. A more comprehensive and new definition was arrived at through the practice led process of writing the screenplay as I will outline later. However, in terms of the initial establishment of a character arc I utilised Dancyger's (2001) work. Dancyger (2001, p.10) terms the character layer "the direct expression of the premise of the film" and goes on to offer that "often the premise is worked out through the exploration of two relational choices" (Dancyger 2001, p.7). Here he articulates that the character arc spans the entire screenplay in direct relation to its central premise. So as I critically reflect on the practice screenplay of *It Must be Love*, I will pay particular attention to the dilemmas presented and the decisions taken to illuminate and question the character arc in practice.

As outlined in the contextual review, the genre of *It Must be Love* was chosen as a romance for a number of reasons, not least being that it is

popular, ubiquitous and for its ability to operate outside of conventional linear presentations of narrative. Examples such as *5X2* (2004) deliver a relationship breakdown presented in reverse chronological order, and *Three Times* (2006) offers a portmanteau of three stories with little in the way of structure or plot other than the central romantic relationships. These two examples suggest that romance narratives are simple and clear enough that they are recognisable and understood even when the plotting and structure of the narratives are complex. Genre theory, in terms of screenwriting, generally posits a subscription to a series of narrative conventions that frame and focus a story. This is carried out in order to illuminate to audiences what they can expect, or anticipate from the given narrative. As Dancyger (2001, p.11) suggests, genre conventions are a “substructure that audiences identify with.”

However, defining the specific conventions to utilise is largely about individual choice as theories around genre differ considerably. For the development of *It Must be love* and the purposes of this analysis, I have looked principally at the work of Parker (1999) as his articulation of two central characters needing to be present within a romance moves beyond all other theorists who posit one central character. In this way Parker (1999) positions romantic narrative relationships as meetings of equals rather than reducing characters, male or female into simple story goals, as is the case in *Sex in the City* (2010) or *Bridesmaids* (2011). It is worth stating at this point that Parker’s (1999) stipulation for two central characters, as opposed to one suggested by Regis (2003) and Hague (2011), was engaged with as specific convention for two principal reasons, the first being that it overtly democratises a romantic relationship. The second reason was that by avoiding using one of the characters in the relationship as the story

goal, the notion or value of love becomes separated from the story goal and can be potentially explored as a concept unto itself.

#### **4.1 Screenwriting cultures and paradigms**

My research question attempts to define and test a narrative form that has yet to find a clear definition or means of how to engage with and articulate that form in practice. My working definition of the character arc is a contribution to new knowledge in demonstrating this through the practice screenplay *It Must be Love* in a professional context, the pursuits of financial and or critical success are clearly key drivers. To this end, proven or tested structural forms or paradigms can be seductive to new and struggling screenwriters.

This research has attempted to navigate and explore the character arc within the orthodoxy of three-act structure and the 'Hero's Journey Myth'. However, whilst engaging with these ubiquitous forms, this practice led research has done so without privileging or theoretically subscribing to either. As an exploratory piece of practice led research, I have been mindful of the pejorative light in which manuals are seen by Conor (2014, p.88) for instance who charges:

“as a genre, the manuals represent a site of particularly rigid and durable set of instructions and exhortations based on individualised discourse.”

Whilst I would concur in principle with this assertion, I think the creative engagement practitioners establish with these manuals may be more nuanced and dialogical in practice.

This research has chosen to articulate the character arc principally outside of any Jungian derived models, as its all-pervasive nature tends to stifle discourse. Macdonald (2013, p.51) acknowledges the ubiquity of a Jungian approach to screenwriting within the orthodoxy articulating that:

“all accounts refer to, or bear some resemblance to, Vogler’s view of mythic structure (1996), drawn from Campbell’s ideas of the Hero’s Journey (1972).”

The work of Campbell (1972), Vogler (1996), McKee(1998), Marks(2010), Jacey(2010) and the majority of Anglo/American screenwriting manuals all reflect Jungian theory (1964) to varying degrees. Where the mythic and metaphysical plays a dominant role both structurally and ideologically, Jung (1964, p.71) is more explicit in foregrounding not only a metaphysical approach but an almost theological basis to ideas when he states:

“in the mythology of earlier times, these forces were called mana, or spirits, demons, and gods. These are as active today as they ever were.”

If a Jungian approach to screenwriting can arguably be deemed metaphysical, theological or non-secular, then a secular approach to screenwriting would be dialogically opposed to any Jungian (1964) based screenwriting notions. Certainly, a distinctly secular approach to screenwriting would offer something new, particularly outside of what is articulated in American screenwriting manuals as Indick (2004, p.xiv) acknowledges:

“Carl Jung’s theories of archetypes and the collective unconsciousness have arguably become even more influential among creative artists than Freud’s theories.”

The point to be made is that there are clear divisions and mutual exclusivity in both approaches, however, the majority of Anglo/American screenwriting manuals utilise a Jungian approach without questioning this fundamental ideological schism. For the purposes of this research, a Freudian or Jungian approach to narrative forms need not imply exclusion of one for the other, but there are clearly tensions in terms of specific approaches and ideologies.

The need to challenge or question a Jungian approach to the character arc by way of Freudian principles is to form an argument against the perceived omnipotence of the Jungian approaches which dominate screenwriting manuals. Clearly, supplanting or offering a Freudian stance as an alternative, is simply replacing one doctrine with another. That may need to be explored and articulated further if only for all the screenwriters who find little relevance or meaning in a metaphysical approach to narrative construction.

Irrespective of whether a secular or non-secular position is argued or sought, the dominance of any ideological approach, in this case, Jungian, is potentially detrimental to a field where creative endeavour is involved, especially when you consider how dogmatic the manuals can be. McKee (1998, p.196), exemplifies this dogmatic zeal when he asserts:

“in essence we have told one another the same tale, one way or another, since the dawn of humanity, and that story could usefully be called the Quest. All stories take the form of a Quest.”

The intention of this practice-based research is not to exclude or decry a Jungian based approach; however, it is important to foreground its ideological foundations as they are exclusory by their very nature. Another important reason for demonstrating a detachment from the Jungian derived screenwriting model is to offer the position that the character arc may be able to operate and function outside of it, which would refute McKee’s (1998) charge that all narratives are mere facsimiles of it. As Macdonald (2013, p. 41) acknowledges and argues:

“the orthodoxy is hard to contradict because the manuals’ discourse (especially in the US) tends to express it as something pre-ordained, the way it is, a natural order which needs exploring, rather than questioning.”

Conor (2014, p. 100) too recognises practicable problems with this paradigm asserting:

“Vogler’s ‘Hero’s Journey’ is one of the most openly exclusionary paradigms for screenwriting labor, although not often acknowledged as such. It is exclusive in terms of gender but also in its assumption of an individual protagonist at the centre of a narrative arc.”

Although *It Must be Love* does not subscribe to any specific framing paradigm, it does not attempt to extricate itself from the theoretical territory of structural paradigms. Screenplays can exist as a literary genre unto themselves as Maras (2009) and Macdonald (2013) argue.

However, the driving force behind most screenwriting endeavours is, arguably, to see the 'Screen Idea' articulated by Macdonald (2013), and the screenplay as artefact metamorphose into the wider experienced form of performance, whether that be for television or film.

To this end, the value and positioning of instructive manuals on screenwriting can be seen as part of a wider landscape; validating themselves through popularity, endorsement or ubiquity. As discussed earlier, Nelson (2013, p. 43) suggests of practice led research or practice as research as he terms it, that "Indeed one of the key challenges of PAR is to make the 'tacit' more 'explicit'". This notion arguably resonates with what the manuals aim for, which is to make the tacit explicit. This is to be encouraged, however, turning what may be tacit into dogma is of course to be challenged and discouraged.

## **4.2 A wing, a prayer and the character arc**

The ending of a character arc offers closure to a character's story and signals the end of the narrative in terms of the thematic viewpoint, by positing a thematic statement. This thematic statement can be extrapolated or deduced from the ending of the arc, as the fate of the character undertaking the arc experiences the consequences of their decisions in a causal conclusion that impacts upon their experience. The conclusion of a narrative defines a position either politically, ethically, morally, theologically or philosophically which has been derived at through the completion of a character arc. This defined position can usefully be termed as the theme of the narrative as it is constructed as a result of the characters' arcing decisions.



Moving beyond a working definition of the character arc form, my questions were directed towards the character arc's position within narratives as either:

- Structurally aligned with three act structure.
- or
- Autonomous of three act structure.

The potential to simply subsume the character arc within three-act structure and the hero's journey as both Vogler (2007) and Marks (2010) ascribe, is something I wanted to explore and question. The reason for this is that I wanted to see whether the character arc was something more narratively amorphous or flexible in shape and position. This for me was the more intriguing question, as separating or distinguishing the form from these narrative conventions offers up a potentially new or autonomous approach to narrative construction.

The implications of this distinction are multifarious and pertinent to the screenwriting manuals field that at times seems content to perpetuate iterations of the same narrative paradigm without much investigation or enquiry. However, it is not within the scope of this enquiry to articulate some of these tensions in too much depth. Helpfully Vogler's (2007) side by side linear alignment of the character arc to the writer's journey paradigm suggests they are analogous. Consequently, connecting to the two is not really the debate, but rather where the two conflict or contest each other.

For the purposes of this enquiry, the narrative model offered by Dancyger (2001) articulated as the character triangle, best matched my tacit understanding of the character arc. What is more, it reflected clearly in examples of cinematic screenplays and feature films that I had digested. Once this form was distilled into a series of stages to form a clear process in the development of an original screenplay, the assumption was that many benefits would ensue; not least that the creative process of writing an original screenplay would be somehow less complicated.

Attempting to approach the original screenplay in a linear manner was more problematic than first assumed. Unpicking the reasons why, was important in not only contextualising the process of creating an original screenplay, but questioning how and or why we engage with models, forms and paradigms. McKee (1998) offers a clear linear chronological methodological approach to initiating an idea, developing that idea through prescribed forms of outline, treatment, and step outline to the completed draft screenplay. Price (2017 p.326), also acknowledges this as an issue when he suggests:

“script development almost by default, means consideration of the progress of individual projects through a series of iterations and interventions.”

This is a key question that I will return to later as it will be better addressed in the findings and conclusion chapter.

My own expectations and application of the development of *It Must be Love* attempted to follow this linear approach and fell foul when I tried to remain fixed to this tack. On one level, it is easy to be flippant and

or dismissive of a process that appears to demand formality and arguably impedes it. Nevertheless, it may be an issue specific to my own non-linear approach to practice.

In terms of a linear approach to narrative development often extolled by screenwriting manuals, it is easy to see how expanding iterations from outline to treatment, to step-outline and ultimately beget a screenplay of approximately ninety pages. The structural positioning of the character arc, however, in the mechanics of its operation and in terms of its position within the process can float quite untethered from the plot and story. This suggests that not only is it potentially mercurial in its specific narrative position, but also in its place in the assumed linear development chain of the creative process. This flexibility appeals to my own practice approach to script development. My own screenwriting practice is rarely linear, but rather iterative in random ways, dictated by ideas and thoughts that occur to me spontaneously or sporadically. The character arc focuses on character first and story second, which is arguably a much more mercurial approach to screenwriting, and an approach that resonates with my own professional practice. Two important questions arise:

- Where to place the character arc within the narrative?

And also

- Where and when to approach it within the process of practice?

Even with a character arc centric approach, the development and creative process still has the ability to confound or confuse. Thus, in articulating and reflecting on the practice of writing and completing the screenplay *It Must be Love*, it is necessary to uncover what can be gleaned from my specific practice processes.

### **4.3 In dialogue with the character arc**

The practice of engaging with a theoretical model, establishing a process, executing the process and reflecting on its application seems a clear, linear and achievable proposition. The process of developing the practice Screenplay *It Must be Love*, has been anything but linear in hindsight. This is down to a multitude of factors, which I will try to extrapolate in order to illuminate my practice led approach, as opposed to expectations set out in the development phase pre-practice, in the theoretical overview and anticipated approach.

The two key elements within this practice screenplay that are to be explored are the genre and the character arc. There are a multitude of other ideas, stimuli and assumptions that come into play. However, the key defined elements of focus were that of character arc and genre as outlined in Appendix A. I have attempted to incorporate and acknowledge as many of the factors that have informed and influenced the process as possible. Still, it is perhaps only reasonable that the focus concerning this exegesis returns again and again to these two areas predominantly.

### **4.4 Negotiating genre**

Notwithstanding the wider contextualising work of film and television genre theorist such as Neale (2000) and Mittell (2004), that foreshadows this research, this practice led approach to screenwriting genre theory and the romance genre specifically, has not been overly critical or challenging of the genre conventions or tropes. This is not principally what the research questions are concerned with. That said,

some critical engagement regarding which genre conventions and tropes to work with and which were to be discarded was consciously undertaken and rationalised within the process. It is worth mentioning here that this tension is ever present in the continued projected and reflective negotiation between practice and theory, and so acknowledges the limited perspective an individual has about any creative process. Romance genre theorists such as Parker (1999), Regis (2003), Duncan (2005) and wider ideas and theories of Shumway (1991), Neale (2000) and Schrieber (2015), were utilised in order to arrive at a set of conventions and tropes to be integrated or utilised.

Parker's (1999) conventions and elements of Regis's (2003) were the most explicitly useful for the practice screenplay of *It Must be Love*. Yet, even with a clear and unequivocal acceptance of these conventions, the process reveals a negotiation between acceptance and application, as certain conventions are integrated and adopted more overtly or not within the practice screenplay. I am wary at this juncture to avoid a simple explanation of each convention in sequence and then a highlighting and justification, of how and where each convention was integrated into the practice. This simple evidencing of theory within practice does not offer more than a superficial explanation of how theory impenetrably follows seamlessly into practice, with one informing or self-affirming the other in a solipsistic way.

Aside from the formal consideration of conventions, the simplest elements to deal with are genre tropes in that they sit as fragmentary moments, such as romantic lines of dialogue, and romantically familiar arenas. In isolation, these and further tropes can be applied as disparate and individual elements. However, cumulatively they build

and contribute to the narrative in layer upon layer, enabling the recognition and acknowledgement of a particular genre.

Therefore, small seemingly random actions and objects such as sexual encounters, discussions focused on relationships, romantically associated arenas of bedrooms, workplaces, and remote landscapes all feed into a sense of understanding of the genre. Regarding the process of application, tropes require no formal chronology, as their impact is cumulative rather than explicit or fundamental to the experience and recognition of a particular genre. On reflection, the tropes utilised were employed at the stage of draft and re-draft of the screenplay, rather than at the development stage, when details are not defined or pivotal to the whole. In this sense, tropes are details and cues, visual and aural, that embellish and confirm the genre, rather than contain or frame the narrative in a wider structural sense.

Genre conventions offer this wider structural form and in particular those posited by Parker (1999) and Regis (2003), give clear linear outlines about how to implement them. My own approach to the practice screenplay *It Must be Love*, reveals a less than clear linear approach to the development and utilisation of these conventions, and once again the notion of a clear linear approach to the creative practice of writing a screenplay is challenged.

The romance conventions outlined by Regis (2003, p.30) are as follows:

“society defined, the meeting, the barrier, the attraction, the declaration, the point of ritual death, the recognition and the betrothal.”

What is more, Regis (2003, p. 30), asserts that “these elements are essential”. Whilst this definition is clear and methodical, the notion that these elements are ‘essential’, arguably limits the form and flexibility of the genre and hence the practise screenplay artefact, if it were to adopt all elements as essential. Therefore, a level of negotiation has already begun as I chose consciously or otherwise to embrace or reject these ‘essential’ elements.

In the main, I have embraced Regis’s (2003) elements apart from the element of betrothal which is politically still up for negotiation as acknowledged by Fuchs (2004). The ‘Happily Ever After’ requirement of Romantic Genre fiction is already under reconsideration in part due to the ‘Happy for Now’ renegotiation of the conventions and my personal inclination is towards the latter. It can be argued that these endings are simple extrapolations or permutations of the betrothal convention rather than rejections of it, so the convention remains but in a renegotiated form. Parker (1999) explains his own distinct conventions for a romance of which I have specifically attempted to integrate three within *It Must be Love*. Parker (1999, p. 32) states that:

“Characters must embark on a love story from a position of loneliness or isolation.” “Love stories must explore the pursuit of love from the perspective of two central characters, both of equal weight within the narrative.” And that finally “all the secondary and tertiary stories and characters need to orbit around the idea of love and the pursuit of love.”

Establishing that the central character is lonely at the beginning of a love story offers up a clear foundation for a character to arc effectively. Duncan (2008, p. 162) suggests the same asserting:

“the protagonist in a romantic comedy is the character who most needs love in his or her life.”

Thematically, ensuring that all stories orbit around the notion of love is clearly evident, in many romances such as *Love Actually* (2003), *Italian for beginners* (2000), *2046* (2004) and *Three Times* (2005). Duncan (2008, p. 171) again concurs with this view stating that:

“even though the main plot in a romantic comedy is a love story, you still need a subplot love story in which to explore the stories theme.”

This thematic approach allows a wide consideration and investigation of romantic relationships, which is important regarding presenting a broad perspective on notions of love. Parker (1999) suggests that romances are effectively led by dual protagonists. This approach is distinct from Regis (2003), Duncan (2008) and Selbo (2015) as they all approach the romance from a singular protagonist perspective. The dual protagonist was something I wanted to engage with as it offers a balanced or democratised approach to romance in terms of the relationship under investigation, rather than the simpler single protagonist pursuing a romantic object of desire. The dual protagonist approach also fed into my enquiry in relation to the amount of character arcs that a cinematic narrative can comfortably sustain.



The first engagement with these conventions in Nelson's (2013) terms of 'Knowing what', came at the level of thinking about the story or 'Screen Idea' in Macdonald's (2013) term, before committing any thoughts or words to paper. Moving then to Nelson's (2013) approach of 'knowing how' in terms of process, I adopted a formally conventional or industrial approach to screenwriting advocated by screenwriting manuals and in my own professional practice, which assumes iterative versions of recognised developmental stages. The stages of development in document form typically or at least linearly follow thus:

- i) The premise, which is a few sentence document that hints at the central spine of the story and conflict.
- ii) Outlines, which can be short or long from a page to a few pages in length expanding the story and principle characters further.
- iii) A treatment details the story in prose form and can run anywhere from five to fifty pages.
- iv) Moving on from the treatment a step-outline or beat sheet may follow which is typically a more mechanical delineation of the story with scene numbers and a brief summary of what happens in each scene.

I have chosen to include an early outline document below and will analyse it regarding the process and engagement with the character arc and genre. In terms of my own approach, I loosely adhered to the conventional development stages of outline, to treatment, to step outline and on to first draft screenplay. Samples of these documents can be found in Appendix B. I will articulate below in early drafts of the outline and longer outline, how characters and story engage with the conventions offered. I will do so, in order to illuminate how I negotiated conventions throughout the development process. The brief outline for the screenplay below *Six to One*, an early working title for the final

screenplay, is the first documented iteration of the narrative that I will reflect upon. Whilst doing so I will be mindful of the wider contextual stance to script development practices prescribed by the manuals and imbibed within my practice. Conor (2014, p. 80) makes a salient point when she cautions against the propensity of manuals to offer:

“conservative and exclusionary notions of what screenwriting is and how it should be done.”

#### 4.5 Initial practice screenplay outline

##### Six to One

##### Outline

*What are the odds of finding your one true love?*

*Forty-five-year-old Joe is holding out for the one true love of his life. His expectations are high; with a wish list of essential qualities his true love must possess. The once optimistic Joe having thus far failed to find his soul mate has resigned to settling for what he thinks is second best, or more accurately fifth best, as Joe has found elements of his ideal partner in five different people. Attempting to juggle five relationships is taking its toll and Joe is a man in freefall. It's only a matter of time before his partners discover the truth leaving Joe to face his actions and a life alone.*

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In consideration of this brief outline concerning Nelson's (2013, p.37):

“Know what works, Know what methods, Know what principles of composition and Know what impacts principles.”

I will offer some considered reflection. Beyond the change of title and fixation on the polarized qualities each relationship holds, which does not carry forward so overtly into the larger expanded documents, it is of value to see how and where genre conventions are articulated in the initial outline. The overtly stated character desire of Joe to find 'true love' underpins not only the central spine and theme of the story, but signals the genre to be that of romance.

This framing of genre in the opening tagline 'What are the odds of finding your one true love?' is echoed and reaffirmed in the final sentence that threatens 'a life alone' for the central character of Joe. This stance is the antithesis of what is generally sought in love stories, which is a solution to isolation through a relationship. The genre is then framed overtly, in one sense and without much attention in another, simply an affirming statement and a return to this focus at the end of the outline.

This approach to my process of writing is very much emblematic of how the genre can be applied, overlaid and communicated in relatively few steps. The genre as a set of parameters can impose, in Parker's (1999, p.29) view, two sets of criteria which he terms "Primary and Secondary elements."

Primary elements denote typical story types to be found in genres and secondary elements are more loosely based elements such as tropes and characters. In relation to the outline above, arguably only secondary elements are being offered to the story and narrative conventions remain at this stage of the development at least more amorphous. This has an undeniable appeal to the writer when the story and resolution are still to be locked down.

It is worth noting that the character arc is only implied and there is nothing overtly confirmed or stated here, other than a clear dilemma articulated between one relationship and many at the heart of the narrative. Regarding genre conventions, Joe is placed at the centre of the narrative, with the relationships portrayed as a barrier to his ultimate happiness. Another central protagonist of equal weight is not articulated or identified within this document in respect of Parker's (1999) ideas on romance conventions. Whilst a document as brief as the one above can evade convention and commitment due to its brevity, it will be interesting to note whether this element remains elusive throughout the development of the screenplay.

Again with respect to Nelson's (2013) methodological approach of knowing what works, what methods, what principles of composition and what impacts, the document above is embryonic offering only a semblance of the story to be developed and explored. The development document above is at the same time elusive and malleable enough to evade too much scrutiny in relation to the character arc. One clear point to make is that the character arc, although alluded to in this document, does not appear as a fully formed and resolved structural framework within it.

Relatively brief development documents can mask the complexity of what becomes apparent or further complicated as a narrative expands, from these sketches to the more tangible and refined screenplay. Understandably, early development documents operate at a level of detail that implies more than can feasibly be delivered. As each linear developmental stage of the narrative expands in building towards the screenplay, opportunities for clarity or confusion continue to present themselves.

At the level of genre convention and the expectations implicated therein, these documents could be further engaged with and refined at a much more critical level. Engaging with the narrative at this more manageable stage in the process may resolve issues before they potentially amplify in longer documents; however, this may not be possible. The idea of articulating the macro elements of the story was attempted in an effort to contain and define the character arc effectively in the developmental stages of writing, rather than as a retro-fitted imposition on a completed screenplay.

This embryonic document cannot be expected to have fully articulated even one of the potentially many character arcs that are to be explored. If part of my desire was to tackle the character arc in early developmental documents such as outlines, longer outlines and treatments etc. then what factors were at play that resulted in my failure to achieve this? The simple argument is to defer to what can be termed creative licence and state that the writing of any creative work is partly informed by the idiosyncratic behaviour and approach of the writer, in relationship to whatever narrative structures or forms they negotiate. A screenplay narrative is not always conceived, developed and written in a linear and chronological way. Certainly, I found it difficult to conceive the form and framework as a clearly defined and prescribed approach. As the creative process moved through development documents until the first draft screenplay, a chronological and linear approach was attempted although not always adhered to.

#### **4.6 Where and when to locate the character arc in the screenwriting process?**

In terms of applying the character arc form to *It Must be Love*, I adopted a linear development approach in Nelson's (2013) term of

'know what methods', that attempted to form character arcs early in the development process. This was in the hope that the character arcs of the individual characters would be clear, present and transposable to the screenplay as I wrote it. As character arcs are specific to each character, I separated each and then attempted to chart the stories in an effort to keep track of the various arcs. A linear three-act structure was also utilised again in reference to Nelson's (2013) 'Know what principals of composition' in relation to my own professional screenwriting practice, which offers a known narrative framework that allowed for a dialogue and reflective approach as each form negotiated and impacted upon the other. An important element in the character arc is a dilemma, where two clear and consistent choices are offered. Articulating what these choices are was much more elusive than first anticipated as the dilemma ideally needs to remain consistent and deliberated upon throughout the narrative.

#### **4.7 The first draft: in search of story**

The first draft screenplay began in earnest utilising a colour coded treatment of six pages that separated seven distinct character stories by colour, so that changes could be made to any given individual story. Also, to ensure that plot points could be tracked more easily by approaching each story in isolation and then placing them together in a sequence that would ultimately become the completed screenplay.

In terms of my creative choices in relation to character motivation, genre conventions the character arc and theme, I consciously attempted to utilise the concepts of Parker's (1999, p.124-126) nineteen-point "Sequences in a feature film." In terms of genre, his six elements of a romance story were the main genre conventions I

engaged with. Although it is inevitable and acknowledged that I may have assimilated other screenwriting manual writers' ideas such as Egri (2007), Jacey (2010) and Venis (2013) alongside cinematic exemplars, my reflection will be principally about the ones mentioned.

The linear process of writing development documents from an outline to treatment and step outline, laid down the foundations for the story, in terms of structure and plot points. There was, however, no real mechanism or process to access or account for the translation of these short prose documents accurately into script form. The question of how to recognise when a prose development document finally equates to a complete screenplay of approximately ninety pages, remains frustratingly nebulous, until the actual writing of the feature film screenplay begins and develops.

With the first draft screenplay of *It Must be Love*, having utilised all available stories by approximately page sixty, feedback was required on the screenplay to ascertain what was required to address the issue. Feedback provided by Phil Parker on the first draft suggested a slower pace and establishment of all the central characters in more depth before the stories began to develop further. This notion of pacing and rhythm, so fundamental to the writing of a screenplay, is strangely absent in the majority of screenwriting manuals beyond the notion of assigning key plot points to specific page numbers in the way that Grove (2008) stipulates.

It may be that closer adherence to page numbers as signposts is a valid or supportive approach in ensuring that developmental documents written in prose translate effectively, or more exactly to the required pages count of a typical feature film screenplay. In my focus

on the character arcs and Parker's (1999) nineteen-point form, I failed to achieve the required page length first time around. This is not a criticism of these approaches, but more a reflection on how structural forms can be interpreted and the notion that they cannot realistically account for a range of approaches to how they may be read or utilised in practice.

With detailed feedback on the first draft from my supervisors, I was able to rework the treatment document and expand stories and scenes. This was important in order to re-approach the screenplay with a clearer sense of whether I would be able to reach approximately ninety pages.

#### **4.8 The first draft, second time around**

The second attempt at the screenplay started from page one and progressed in a linear approach, referencing and adhering to a revised treatment I wrote as a formal guide or roadmap. In this way, I hoped that the screenplay would reach the required running time of approximately ninety pages rather than run out of story prematurely. The resulting draft of *It Must be Love* totalled ninety-four pages and it is this draft that I will principally refer to in the remainder of my critical reflection.

In terms of the approach and process of writing the screenplay, I stuck quite rigidly to a regime that did not allow me to reflect or revise what I had written moving forward. The approach was to keep writing from page one onwards and to resist the temptation to deviate from this task



by attempting any major revisions until I had reached the end of the screenplay. The treatment and step-outline served as guides in the process. It is easy and seductive to rework and revise what is written again and again before moving forward. However, this approach was resisted, not only to ensure I completed a draft but to keep a sense of the narrative momentum. Critical reflections upon a completed draft screenplay follow.

#### **4.9 Critical reflections on practice**

Scene 2 on page 1 centres on a group of foxes by the side of a busy motorway and is emblematic of the larger story. Within this small scene of semi-anthropomorphised foxes, we have a scene that links into the wider theme of romance, and polygamy versus monogamy. We also have a clear character arc for the fox that has choices between suitors and clear consequences and a resolution for their choices.

This establishing of a character arc albeit for a fox, within scene 2, demonstrates that a character arc can operate and be articulated within a short scene of only a few minutes. The character arc is typically attributed to a character developing over a longer time span of an entire feature film narrative as both Vogler (1992) and Marks (2009) suggest. However, this is not the case in this example. Using Dancyger's (2001) character triangle form as the basis for my own development of the character arc form, we are able to see that all the required components are in place.

There is a clear central character in the fox and a clear dilemma for the fox between two suitors of potentially equal value. There are then choices that escalate for the fox. These two choices remain consistent, so a pattern is formed and a conclusion can be offered in response to the set of choices. The conclusion in this story is tragic for the fox, bestowing an instant moral judgement that is effectively articulated in a theme. The thematic statement being that cheating results in punishment, or in this case death. This rather punitive, morally conservative standpoint once articulated, can then be a source of negotiation, dialogue and debate for the writer and reader/audience, as the stories and choices that develop either counter or support this thematic statement. Here in this small scene, the character arc form could be demonstrated to be autonomous of other structural narrative paradigms in its brevity of length both temporally and in the articulating of a resolved story.

The script then focuses on the human subjects and their stories, principally introducing the two main lead characters of Joe and Amy at a motorway service station. Joe is introduced in scene 5, page 2 and his relationships with other characters established via phone and text conversations. The establishment of Joe as a central character plus his many relationships was something I breezed over in the earlier draft to get to the central dilemmas. My thoughts were that if you present a character and their dilemma, then backstory and establishment of stakes and value can be gleaned by the dilemma itself and the decision taken. The feedback on the script was that the relationships needed to be established more to ensure reader/audience engagement with the characters and their specific stories.

Joe enters into several phone and phone text conversations with characters he is in relationships within the first few scenes; however,

there is no real sense of what is at stake, or the dynamics of these relationships beyond expositional details. There is no relationship to a dilemma or choice related to the character arc for any of these characters at this stage, as no clear dilemma has been presented. When Joe encounters Amy in the men's toilets, his interest is piqued and he attempts to ingratiate himself with her by flirting.

Nonetheless, this is done in isolation and away from the other relationships, so no threat to the status quo or a need to make a choice is presented. There is the implication to the audience that Joe is a character that is happy to flirt with women and also may be prone to infidelity. At this stage, these are links or assumptions the reader/audience can make, but there is no overt mechanic of the character arc at play.

Similarly, the first few scenes with Amy from page 3 onwards are about establishing the character and her overall attitude. Amy is promiscuous and brash. She entertains Joe at arms' length and they are forced by the circumstance of the motorway accident to spend some time together. They share the same profession and appear to be as promiscuous as each other, so the stage is set for future encounters. These first scenes are about establishment of their lives rather than a dilemma, about the character arc.

Joe and Amy are polarised in their reactions towards each other, Joe is interested and Amy is not, but their choices have no real consequence at this early stage as the dilemmas of what they are willing to risk or sacrifice for a relationship together has not been clearly established. This is an interesting point in that a choice without context potentially

lacks meaning. A character makes a decision, but that decision and its importance about their arc and the story, in general, are lost without some context and articulation of a dilemma.

Of course, all choices are made in some context, even if it is only the immediate environment that the character is situated within. The context of the character's situation and story, or their backstory, effectively articulates the value of what is being considered by a character who is engaged in an arcing dilemma. How are we to know as readers or an audience the value a character places upon another character, an idea, concept or position moral or otherwise, without some form of context? Many values are implicit, for example, a character running from an axe-wielding killer clearly values their life over death, but how to articulate more subtle choices and values?

The romance genre has been chosen in part because it appears to share similar shorthand to horror in the simplicity of articulating a context and desire. The desire to be with, or pursue someone romantically implicitly communicates the desire to reject loneliness as the alternative. A character in a horror story typically values life over death; whereas, in a romance story, characters value romantic union over loneliness. The equity of the dilemma is not entirely satisfactory here, as although something of value has been defined through the romantic pursuit, nothing has actually been offered as an equal value alternative. Loneliness is a poor equal to the romantic union and so something needs to be presented to characters involved in a romantic character arc, to potentially equal and therefore threaten a romantic union.

Amy's first arcing dilemma appears in scene 34, page 16, when she retrieves Joe's phone number on a piece of paper. She can either call him or not and she ponders this dilemma before making a decision. She lets the number fall into the toilet and it lands on the toilet seat. This outcome is meant to force her to consider her options further. She does so by flicking the slip of paper into the toilet and flushing it away. This implies a choice between Joe and Paul and a rejection of Joe, by letting his number be flushed away. This is Amy's first arcing decision and it is to reject Joe as a potential romantic partner.

Joe sends a text in the evening although it is not to Amy, it could be to the other characters. There is a clear possibility of confusion here regarding who the relationship is with, and what the agenda might be. If I were to show who received the text then the storyline is clear; however, I do not, other than to clarify that the text has not been sent to Amy. It has been established that Joe has multiple partners, so it does complicate the narrative without progressing a clear and specific arcing story. Narrative threads could potentially be inferred if the story is simple and clear. Yet, the more storylines in operation the more explicit the lines of action need to be, to clarify the intent and to establish and retain the meaning.

Joe's story is complicated further when Pia tells him that she is pregnant in scene 37, page 18. It is a major plot development in term of the romance in that the connotations of raising a child are commitment and betrothal in the romantic genre context. Joe's reaction is one of shock, but he quickly feigns enthusiasm in response. This development sets up Joe's first major dilemma, whether to commit to a long-term monogamous relationship with Pia or continue to be casual and promiscuous.

This dilemma is implicit rather than explicitly stated, so a scene to debate this more explicitly takes place between Joe and his friend and ghost of Christmas future, Terry. The character of Terry is typical of the romance genre in that there is a clear friend, confidant and exemplar of some facet of the protagonist for them to debate with and seek counsel from. Terry is all doom, gloom and so consistently argues for autonomy, promiscuity and a general rejection of romantic conventions.

Having debated the pros and cons of what to do with Terry and effectively given narrative space to the dilemma at hand, Joe then makes his first arc decision in response to Pia's revelation. Joe proposes to Pia and this sets up an expectation that he will effectively honour this decision as the dominant value within his dilemma. Commitment has won over independence, or monogamy has won out over promiscuity. In all iterations of the character arc and particularly Dancyger's (2001) character triangle, the first decision serves some key narrative functions and so it does within *It Must be Love*. The first arcing decision is always wrong for the character, to fully explore all possibilities of their dilemma before making a definitive and irreversible decision.

This decision comes approximately just under a third of the way through the narrative, which corresponds to where the first act of a screenplay ends. This is often where the link or connection between character arc turning points and three-act structure turning points are affirmed. A character arc turning point is often located at the end of the first act; however, they should not be thought of as inextricably linked

as the character arc has more malleability whereas acts are more fixed.

Joe buys Pia an engagement ring in scene 43, page 22, after deliberating and presents it to her with a proposal for marriage. The ring and proposal signify commitment and so his first arc decision has been taken and communicated to the audience. Joe has now communicated his desire. However, this does not prevent him from contradicting it or acting in defiance of it. Here the debate simply intensifies for act two as Joe having signified his commitment to Pia now has more to lose if he reneges on this decision.

The following scene has Joe and Amy meet up at the depot, effectively to draw them together as characters and to develop their potential romantic relationship. This scene also clarifies that neither of them called each other when they had the opportunity to do so. This reaffirms Joe's decision to choose Pia over Amy and Amy's decision in choosing her husband Paul over Joe. With their positions clarified, the next plot development presents itself in the form of the Welsh contract, which offers Joe and Amy the opportunity to work away from home for a month. They both take this contract which has an impact on their situations. Firstly, it ensures that Amy and Joe will be in relative proximity for a protracted amount of time, which is a typical convention of the romance genre. This simply ensures that there is a credible amount of time and space for the characters to develop their relationship.

The counter-argument to be made about this decision is that it may be interpreted as their first arcing decision, as it does have an impact on

the narrative. They have both chosen to work away from home together and the subtext of this is easily extrapolated given that this is a romance.

So, is this decision to take the contract the first arc decision? I would argue that it is not for the following reasons. Firstly, it has no emotional dilemma attached to it in the same way as choosing between relationships has. It is also for a limited amount of time and so this choice is not a major upheaval in the long term the way a commitment to a relationship is generally perceived to be. A better definition of this shift in the plot and location would be the act turning point, effectively the end of act one. Here there is a pivotal change in the story and events. However, it is more aligned with plot and does not present itself as a dilemma or thematic concern at any other point within the story. It has an impact on the character arc for both Amy and Joe as now they will be able to develop their relationship if they so wish. The point to make is that whatever actions they take in respect to each other from here on, are done so from a stance of commitment to their respective partners.

This decision to take the Welsh contract can be read as a dismissal of their responsibilities, and indeed Joe qualifies his decision as being positive in that he will bring in more money that can be spent on Pia and his wedding. Clearly Joe does feel guilty, but he has not lied or deceived Pia. Amy states to Joe that she needs 'time out'. This does not signify an arcing decision moment to pick Joe over her husband Paul, but rather a time to ruminate on her decision, and to signpost the looming decision to the audience.



Reflecting on the first act overall, the story development for Joe's character offers multiple relationships and the opportunity for a serious commitment with Pia, partly made more substantive by the implied responsibilities of her son and her pregnancy. All Joe's other relationships whether with Ramya, Carly, Sonia or the potential relationship with Amy, are all less consequential in part due to the lack of responsibility beyond a commitment to them as individuals.

If this is a romance narrative regarding the genre then the character of Amy, in Parker's (1999) view, it is potentially underdeveloped as she does not have a clear dilemma of equivalent value to Joe who is the dominant character in terms of screen time and dilemmas. Amy currently has her marriage to Paul to lose, but this is portrayed as problematic and largely unappealing, so her dilemma is not that compelling.

The arcs for the other characters relate to the theme, which Parker (1999) suggests is a unifying force within a narrative. The thematic debate is largely focused upon the effects and consequences of lies and deceit. So Pia lies about her pregnancy and debates within her arc whether to reveal the truth or not. Sonia lies about securing a place at University and her story arc charts the progress of this decision to either remain deceitful or to admit the truth.

The character of Tanya has a similarly themed story about a potential affair with an underage student and the ramifications of this on her life and her relationship with Joe. The theme of deceit comes in the same form as Sonia's, in that she is withholding the truth from Joe. Whether revealing or withholding this truth will have any effect adverse or

otherwise on their relationship is debatable, as their attachment is quite casual.

Nadia's character presently has no arcing dilemma and so whilst she facilitates the plot in key areas, she does not vacillate in any way between one choice or another. In order for her to engage with an arc, one would have to be created for her alongside her present supporting role in the story. It may be worth mentioning briefly here that the point at which an arc is introduced, appears to be fairly flexible and loose. The option to plan, plot and structure one early in the development stages is clearly possible; however it would appear that implementing one onto a character after several drafts and redrafts of the screenplay has been written is also a practical option.

The second act ostensibly focuses on Amy and Joe's developing relationship. They debate key issues pertinent to their dilemmas, as well as build their rapport physically and emotionally. In very simple romantic genre terms, it is the act that facilitates the possibility of them falling in love.

Joe and Amy share an experience, when on their travels they witness a boy losing his dog. Scene 79, page 38, is about Joe displaying his compassion to the audience where hitherto he has been rather self-serving. For Amy, the scene is a similar contrivance for her to observe Joe as a paternal figure to the boy and thereby paint Joe in a more appealing light. Their relationship builds incrementally whilst away from home with Joe flirting with her every chance he gets. Amy slowly becomes more amenable to Joe's manner, although their relationship builds over conversations rather than through sexual encounters. Amy

continues to be promiscuous whilst away with random men and this irritates Joe, flagging up his jealousy. In an effort to reaffirm his commitment to Pia and flag up his character arc dilemma, Joe calls her on his phone in scene 85, but it is clear the sexual tension between Amy and Joe is rising.

In the following scenes Amy and Joe send a series of text messages to each other; however, the audience is not privy to them so we can only assume their content. The payoff to this flirting is sex in scene 89. They have sex without any real decision or dilemma being presented as we cut from a scene of casual flirting to the act on page 45. The point of the decision being removed relegates the moment to a plot point rather than a key defining arc turning point for either of them. The post-coital conversation in scene 90, focuses on the development of their sexual relationship, but as we know that they are both promiscuous and away from partners the sense of threat or conflict is removed somewhat.

The sex develops and improves over the next few days and a conversation turns towards the crux of the dilemma for Joe. The conversation is between Amy and Joe and she asks him directly whether he would give everyone up for her in scene 96, page 49. This is direct foreshadowing of the dilemma, as this is precisely what Joe is contemplating and will have to make a decision about. The dilemma of Amy versus the other relationships is brought into relief and Joe and the audience are then able to digest this idea before the story brings us to the climax of this dilemma, where Joe will be faced with deciding one way or the other.

Amy, by contrast, is not fully drawn into the dilemma and her options are not as pronounced or balanced as will be discussed. In terms of

Amy's developing interest in Joe as a romantic partner, we have their shared promiscuity and work/lifestyle. The incident where Joe intervened with the boy and the dog was designed to make Amy warm to him for being compassionate. The conversation, however, has skewed heavily in Joe's favour and so Amy has not yet articulated what she wants to Joe. Amy's relationship with her husband Paul is clearly in disarray and so does not really pose a credible dilemma for Amy, certainly from a superficial perspective.

Amy has articulated her desire for children to Paul, but not to Joe at this point. Joe has articulated that he is open to children and so his appeal to Amy is increased by this. At this stage, the issue for Amy is to find out what is keeping her from embracing the opportunity with Joe fully? A dilemma has really not been established for her in the way that Joe has Amy or the other women. Amy does have Joe or Paul as a dilemma, but Paul's plus sides have really not been effectively established enough for us to credibly consider why Amy would contemplate Joe as an option.

The counter-argument to this is that this is actually not necessary. The reason being that if a character is simply given an option that disrupts the status quo, then this is enough to offer a dilemma. In this way, Amy need only be offered Joe as a romantic option and immediately we evaluate her existing life and relationships in opposition or as equivalents to Joe. This is the principle value of the character arc in terms of articulating a dilemma or debate. For every choice or option articulated, there is a counter choice or option whether explicitly articulated or not. The character arc directly links to the theme in this way and keeps the characters and audience focused on a central dilemma or concern. In this sense, the focus of the story and clarity of the character's motivation is created from the act of taking a decision

rather than the parity or equity of any choices presented within a given dilemma.

The discussion between Joe and Amy intensifies in scene 102, page 51, with respect to them choosing each other over their other respective relationships. Joe proclaims he is ready to tell the other women and effectively announce his commitment to Amy over them. Amy introduces the potential stumbling block of her husband and Joe reacts badly to this revelation, effectively derailing their commitment to each other. This twist in the plot relates to the conventions of the romance genre, in that as soon as they get together there is a need to prise the characters apart as McKee states (1998, p. 95.):

“The most important question we ask when writing a *Love Story* is: “What’s to stop them?”

With the occurrence of this pivotal romance genre convention, the character arc and character motivations take a slight back seat as the mechanics and expectations of story and plot develop and convene. The key plot developments here are the central character’s re-engagement with their lives as established at the beginning of the screenplay and the development of the plot as the women in Joe’s life discover his cheating and mount a response.

Joe has another encounter with Amy in scene 124, page 58, where he apologises for judging her with respect to her being married. This scene offers the potential for them to reunite. However, it is Amy’s opportunity to reject Joe in the same way that he did when he found out she was married. Amy obliquely reveals she is pregnant;

nonetheless, Joe misses the point of this thinly veiled revelation and affirms that he is willing to sacrifice what he has for her. The scene ends on a question for Amy: will she agree to commit to Joe? The question is left hanging as Amy does not answer and retreats to her lorry.

In terms of the character arc it is important, perhaps if only to remind the audience but also within the diegesis of the story world, for the characters to be reminded as well of what it is they are struggling with in terms of their particular dilemmas.

From page 63 onwards, the next few scenes concern the confrontation between Joe and the women he is in relationships with. These scenes are inevitable in terms of the plot and development of the story and finally answering the active question of what will happen when they finally find out what Joe has been up to. The confrontation occurs in scene 132. It is set at a book club and most, but not all of the women Joe is in a relationship with, are there. Pivotal Amy is not at the confrontation scene as the decision was made to keep her story and Joe's dilemma with her separate. In this sense there is a clear defining line between Amy as one side of the dilemma and the other women who are effectively grouped into the alternative choice for Joe. There are of course developments to the relationships that Joe has with Carly, Pia, Ramya, Naomi and Sonia that can be extrapolated, but they are effectively reduced to a group in order to manage the dilemma.

This simplification of the narrative sets up the question, can a character have more than one arcing dilemma? The circumstances of the confrontation scene may not be the best example to use as a

demonstration either way, as arguably the imperatives of the genre are more important at this point in the story. There needed to be the revelation that the women discovered Joe's cheating as part of the plot development. There also needed to be a crisis moment in the story that ensures that the characters are yanked out of their comforts and rituals in order to reassess what they want from their situations.

The confrontation in scene 132, page 61, does not address the wider character arc debate of whether to tell the truth or to lie beyond Joe. He is forced to tell the truth about his behaviour. Nevertheless, he still does not reveal the truth about his desires. He does confess he loves all the women, but this is effectively attempting to maintain the status quo. Joe also singles out Pia as the focus of his true love above the other women. In terms of the character arc and the development of the character I would suggest that it has minimal impact, in that Joe merely states a position in dialogue and therefore can easily contradict or refute his stance. Crucially, there is also no action within the confrontation scene that qualifies a choice or decision in a way that sets the story and character motivation along a new trajectory.

Here the arcing dilemma comes under question as appropriate for the genre. I chose the clear dilemma between lying or telling the truth as a clear delineator of one stance versus another. In terms of how this relates or impacts on the romance genre is up for debate. A key theme of romances is the question of whether to commit or not, however, this is arguably more nebulous as a dilemma for a character arc for the following reasons. Firstly, if a character arc is predicated on the dilemma to commit or not the action of engaging with one relationship over another, would suggest a decision in this respect. If, however, there are a multitude of relationships to choose from and gradations of

commitment, then the decision between commitment or independence becomes complicated and potentially confusing.

The post-attack scene 135, page 68, between Carly and Joe is meant to open up the debate regarding what it is they want from the relationships and situation. Carly confirms that she wants to use Joe as part of her defence against an inappropriate affair with a student and so effectively reveals the truth, where she has up to this point avoided it. This represents a small arc turning point for Carly, but an arc turning point all the same in that she has admitted the truth to Joe. In this example, the arc is simply predicated on changing a position or stance from one to another. Carly at first lies or conceals the truth and then changes position to reveal the truth. This is a fundamental switch from one position to another and has ramifications in terms of her story. This is her second arc turning point in the way that her first was simply to resist the urge to reveal the truth to Joe.

Within this small post-attack scene, there is also the opportunity for Joe to clarify his thoughts even if an arcing decision is not fully realised. The character arc for Joe arguably needs to operate on actions rather than simple communication in that way that Carly's does. Joe and Amy as the central characters need time to ruminate on their dilemmas, vacillate somewhat and talk them through before making their respective arcing decisions. In this scene Joe appears to contradict the commitment he made to Pia in the previous scene and his thoughts swing back to Amy. Carly acts as a supportive mentor in this scene and asks what his course of action will be with respect to Amy versus the other relationships. The outcome would appear to be that Joe is coming round to believing Amy is the relationship he is most invested in. At this point, however, we are just privy to the discussion and no decisive action has been taken either way.



The following scene 136, page 69, has Joe visit Amy's house and effectively stalk her from his car. He is intercepted by Amy's husband and is ward off as one of a long list of suitors. Amy is privy to the scene from the vantage point of her bathroom window and Amy's husband Paul has a chance to assert his relationship with Amy to Joe. This scene is an attempt to strengthen the ties between Paul and Amy's relationship and is a reminder to Joe that Amy is as promiscuous as he is. The first real problems in terms of the character arc are that the scene is viewed from Joe's perspective, which in general dominates the proceedings. This is problematic in Parker's (1999) definition of the romantic convention that suggests two clear central protagonists driving the story as opposed to one singular protagonist such as Joe.

This balancing act of equally apportioning narrative space to two central characters takes some planning or negotiation as drafts of the screenplay develop. *It Must be Love* is not entirely successful in balancing the genre convention of dual protagonists and is something to address in further drafts of the screenplay. The second problem, which again relates to the character of Amy, is that the screenplay has yet to establish a strong or valuable relationship between Paul and Amy to the point where Amy is credibly conflicted between Paul and Joe as equal suitors. This undermines her character arc in that she does not appear to have much to keep her with Paul, whereas she has plenty of narrative space and engagement with Joe. This will need to be addressed in subsequent drafts in order to facilitate an engaging and difficult decision for Amy in rejecting one partner for another.

Joe attempts to reconcile with Pia in scene 145, page 74. An outward action such as this would appear to confirm a shift in focus for Joe, but this action comes at the beginning of the scene and there are two key story beats which follow that shift the dynamic. Firstly, Pia reveals she has been lying to Joe about her pregnancy. This is important in terms of her character arc as she has lied about being pregnant up until this point and in keeping with the theme of lies versus the truth, this action shifts her position. Secondly, Joe admits he is unable to assure Pia he can remain faithful. In one sense this is Joe telling the truth, and in another it is a concession that his feelings for her are not entirely as all-consuming and committed as he claims them to be. The scene ends on this revelation and so the overriding meaning to be taken away from the scene about Joe is that he still cannot be faithful.

In scene 149, page 76, Joe returns home to drink himself into oblivion, after conceding that he may never be faithful to Pia. This sets up the opportunity for a drunken dream sequence with Amy. The dream is part denial of responsibilities as the lorry they are in is left driverless to cause destruction and wish fulfilment as Joe is able to indulge his desire for Amy unimpeded. The scene acts in one sense as an omen of what may come and also to reaffirm that Joe has Amy on his mind in terms of his central active question dilemma.

In an effort to maintain Joe's focus across the series of relationships, in the next few scenes Joe is buffeted between Amy, Pia and then Sonia who he bumps into and manages to catch up with, specifically regarding the development of her story. Sonia has the opportunity to maintain her lie about gaining a place at university or to come clean. Here Sonia's arcing dilemma echoes the wider thematic landscape of lies versus the truth. This simplification of the arcing dilemma and its alignment into a consistent dilemma enables the story and

development to be succinct and interpretable as characters clearly vacillate between two options.

In terms of Carly's story and arc, she reveals to Joe that she has been lying about all being well outside of their relationship. This would appear to be a character arc turning point moving from lies to revealing the truth. However, there are gradations to the revelation in that she has only revealed the lie to Joe as a single character, but not to the wider characters or community. Sonia's development is similar in that she too has revealed her failure to secure a place at university to Joe and the other women involved with Joe, but not to her former workmates who celebrated her apparent achievement in a send-off party.

Subsequently in terms of revelations, dilemmas and changing arc decisions it would appear that it is not simply a case of changing stance or position in and of itself. It is one thing to reveal or change stance to oneself or another character, however, there are further gradations of revealing these choices to a wider sphere. This is a key question to consider in deliberating whether choices are minor vacillations or pivotal character arcing moments or turning points.

The following scene 161, page 80, with Amy and the warehouse worker is there to demonstrate that she is resisting the compulsion for casual sex, which communicates that she is conflicted about her options. Amy's story is still underdeveloped in this respect as her dilemma is focused primarily on whether or not to remain with her husband Paul, or to attempt a more permanent relationship with Joe.

Amy's pregnancy is a key development factor in her story, and as her pregnancy progresses, Amy's focus and motivations begin to shift in response to it. It may be that this new story development dilutes her arcing dilemma or more drastically shifts the focus entirely. Her original dilemma appeared to be simply between the many relationships she was involved in including the one with her husband versus a relationship with Joe. With the introduction of her pregnancy, Amy's focus shifts to whether to keep the baby or not, which is not predicated on any other relationship working out or not. Clearly her husband is not interested and so the focus shifts to Joe as a more suitable parental figure, but this is not really what the wider themes are engaged with. The values of dual or single parenthood are not explored or commented on beyond Amy's situation and it does not impact on the wider story.

The way that Amy's pregnancy impacts on the character arc and wider narrative is more in terms of the romance genre. The positive romantic ending of either 'Happily Ever After' (HEA) or 'Happy for Now,' (HFN), are usually communicated in the form of some commitment between the central romantic characters. Therefore, any story element that implies or communicates a sense of commitment and timescale effectively meets the HEA or HFN convention. If Joe commits to Amy at the end of the narrative, then the expectation is that he will adopt some parental responsibility, and thereby an investment of time. Similarly, if Amy commits to Joe then the expectation is that she will do so for the foreseeable future. The pregnancy and subsequent baby are in a way, a device to communicate this investment in their relationship. It is not overtly stated at any point, but it is implicit in the subtext.

The women meet up again socially in scene 162, page 80, which is an opportunity in terms of their respective arcs to discuss motivations and

address their positions with respect to the theme of deceit. Ramya reveals she was cheating on Joe to Pia and Sonia which is an admission of deceit. The women do not judge her as the revelation does not impact upon on them. This point regarding disclosure of information and who it is disclosed to is quite significant.

Any disclosure of information by a character whether privately or publically within their world will always be received by the audience or reader as the privileged party. An audience can be positioned to receive information from a limited or constructed perspective in order to be misdirected, but if this is not the case then how does it relate to the character arc? If a character has a particular position or stance that is to be challenged or developed by the character arc, then there are clearly gradations of challenge and development.

For example, if a character needs to admit something about themselves they are in denial about, there are obvious stages we can assume that incrementally raise the expectations and ramifications for the character. The first significant step would be to confront their denial. The second step might be to admit to a partner or close friend, the next step to their family and then the community with the assumption that with each development step the stakes are raised.

Returning to the scene with the women dissecting the book club confrontation, Pia is unable to reveal the truth about her false pregnancy to her new friends despite being able to do so to Joe. Here is a good example of a character's specific value system in terms of the lie Pia is protecting. She is able to admit the truth to Joe about her false pregnancy, which has the most impact on her story in terms of his

actions and response. However, she is unable to admit the truth within a social context that has little or no impact on her specific story.

The rest of scene 162, page 80, between the women serves the story function of planting the seed for them to entertain the idea of using Joe for casual sex the way he used them. By planting the seed of this idea, the next time the story returns to these characters the expectation is that they will have considered this proposition and begun to form views on how to proceed.

Scene 163, page 82, Amy is back at home and has the opportunity to discuss the pregnancy with her husband Paul. She confirms she wants to keep the baby and offers him the chance to agree to this development. Paul is resistant, not least by doubting his paternity. Amy packs and leaves in an action that would appear to be linked to the character arc. A decision translated into a clear action that has significant consequences for her story trajectory. She has not made a decision connected to the wider theme of denial versus the truth; however, she has made a decision that will have a profound effect on her life and lifestyle. At this point, the notion of scale can be considered in terms of her decision and the impact it may have. She is all but estranged from her husband and he is aware of her extra marital promiscuity so the risk to this relationship is reduced in terms of their relationship bond.

Amy decides to leave him on the issue of the baby. Here the baby has superseded Joe as the motivation or impetus for change, as she is not necessarily looking for love in the way that he is, but more so fulfilment in terms of becoming a parent. The issue relates directly to the

introduction of a baby and the implications this holds. Amy walking out at this point is a statement and has some narrative impact. Nevertheless, it does not preclude her from returning to Paul and for him to take her back. A sense of finality or conclusive development has not as yet been reached, and so we can only see this scene as a stage in the process, rather than a pivotal or even irreversible decision that will have profound consequences for the character.

Naomi and Joe meet in scene 170, page 84 to catch up, and in terms of their character arcs, simply perpetuate the status quo regarding their relationship. Their relationship is not unpicked or dissected in a way that effectively develops the story or their characters. Naomi justifies her actions and supports Joe whilst Joe appears to be ruminating on what to do. The characters of Naomi and Joe both see their relationship as casual and so without investment, stakes or an obvious development, their story simply stagnates for them and the audience.

In scene 174, page 86, in the school playground with her son, Pia relents to her son's pressure and resumes contact with Joe. This can be seen as a character arcing moment, in that she is choosing Joe over loneliness and it is a definitive action that changes her position. The choice and decision however, is not related to the theme of deception and the truth, so it is contestable whether this is in fact part of her arc or simply a choice that develops the plot and story. The character arc has three key decision points as Dancyger (2001) and the previous chapter has argued; however due to the continued vacillations a character has between the opposing choices, it is easy to see how a vacillation may be interpreted as a character arcing moment and not simply a vacillation.

The following scene 176, has Sonia and Joe reconcile, which has an impact in two key ways. In terms of Sonia's character arc, she has already admitted the truth about her failure to secure a place on a University course so the lie has been removed as a barrier. Sonia accepts Joe back at the end of the scene by running to catch him up before he leaves. The details of the reconciliation are not disclosed, as their interaction takes place away from the audiences' audible range. Nonetheless, it is clear they have reconciled and their romantic relationship has effectively resumed. This impact relates directly to Sonia's arc in that she has now decided to be with Joe, as opposed to being alone.

Conversely, Joe whilst accepting Sonia back in a largely passive way, has yet to make the defining decision in relation to Amy. In this regard, the reestablishment of relationships with Naomi, Carly, Pia and now Sonia, serve the purpose of countering Amy as a romantic proposition, balancing the dilemma for Joe. The following scenes build to a sequence around the death of Terry, Joe's work mate and ostensibly his ghost of Christmas future. The death of Terry serves a few purposes, namely to regroup Joe's partners again, to give Joe a sense of urgency to his situation and to bring Joe and Amy together so they can make their final arcing decisions.

Sonia attends the funeral with Joe and when she spots Amy in attendance, she suggests to Joe that he should be honest with himself and that he should approach her. Sonia focuses the conversation back onto the theme of truth versus lies and sets the context for the next interaction between Joe and Amy. At this stage Pia, Carly, Naomi and Sonia have all reconciled with Joe in some way, either by remaining friends or continuing their romantic relationships in spite of his promiscuity.



Joe may have promised that he will be faithful but no one is under any illusion he will be. The focus then for Joe's arc is not principally about fidelity or commitment, but rather about honesty to the other characters and to himself. Here some further unpacking will need to be done in terms of whether the focus for Joe is consistent.

Joe and Amy are given scene 184, page 89, to clarify their motivations and either commit to each other or not. Amy poses the question to Joe, having come to the decision that she would like to raise her child together with Joe. Here her arc returns to the romantic genre focus of love and commitment versus loneliness and freedom. Amy has decided she wants to be with Joe and reveals this to him. The question of whether this is her arc decision is debateable given that her character has two areas of focus in having a baby and a romantic relationship that are in no way inextricably linked.

Joe, faced with the prospect of a commitment and a relationship with Amy, has the chance to make his final character arcing decision. The moment is drawn out and the decision made explicit by having him receive a text from Pia at the point of decision. Here, the focus of what he is debating is writ large for his character and the audience. With Amy offering her love, Joe's dilemma needs to be reinforced in order to add clarity to his decision. In this clear polemic, a decision one way effectively closes the other option for the character. Consequently, with the dilemma offered to Joe, one way to extend the point of decision is for the characters to debate and argue their positions. Joe reveals he loves Amy, which he has proclaimed to the other women so the words may not hold too much substance. However, his argument is that he is

not worthy of Amy and this is an attempt to communicate that he values her more than the other women.

Here the character of Joe moves the debate from the value of love to the meaning of love. This may underline a significant distinction within the genre conventions of romance that clearly has an impact on definitions of the genre as well as the character arc itself. The pursuit of love as a goal signified and represented by another character is but one interpretation of a romance, but is this the case with *It Must be Love*?

Joe appears to be equating love with signified goals represented by the women he is in relationships with, and Amy would appear to be another version or alternative to them. In this reading love is no more than a goal to be pursued and obtained. The gaining of a relationship with either Amy or the other women could be seen as gaining love. Even if only one of these choices is seen as love, it still reduces the notion of love to securing a relationship with someone of your choosing. Yet, if Joe is truly attempting to debate what love is or rather what love means to him, then this potentially comes into conflict with the simpler representation of love as a goal.

After Joe's final arc decision to reject Amy in favour of Pia, Sonia, Carly and Naomi we get the aftermath and resolution of the stories. Principally Amy and Joe's story resolutions so that when the narrative ends we have a strong sense of how their lives may pan out. In scene 189, page 92, Joe returns to Pia and we understand that he has chosen her and the other relationships over Amy. Amy is then seen in

a montage extricating herself from her husband by way of divorce and continuing her life on the road with some focus on her baby.

By scene 194, page 94, Joe has fallen into the same old habits and routines he started the narrative in, so for his character the arc is tragic. He was offered the chance of something new with Amy, but instead he chose the familiar and safe life he had already established with the other women he was in relationships with and continues to look for new relationships via book clubs. By scene 196, page 94 the focus shifts to the foxes beside the motorway which are used to book end the screenplay.

#### **4.10 The aftermath of the practice screenplay**

In terms of the concluding tone and theme of *It Must be Love*, I struggled and still struggle to an extent to find the ending I felt appropriate for the characters and for myself. The relationship between Amy and Joe built and developed, however, evaluating whether they should remain or part is still up for negotiation. This draft of *It Must be Love* is a first draft, in that it is the first draft to reach the end and a conclusion. I have consciously resisted the compulsion to revisit and redraft the screenplay in order to evaluate the impact that developing and utilising the character arc has had until this point.

At the stage of first draft there exists more cohesive character possibilities, than before I completed it. The character arc at this stage has served the development to some extent. Nevertheless, I believe its value and ability to aide my characters; their development and my

writing will only fully come to fruition in subsequent drafts. Story design and plotting are in many ways simple frameworks that are akin to structural foundations. The mechanics of their construction and placing within cinematic narratives may be visible or not but they are arguably not what draws us into a narrative. On this subject Dancyger (2001, p.3) states:

“drama is intensified and structured for a purpose – to entertain or to capture us in a moral swamp where we can sink or swim with a character.”

This suggests that character is what engages us and the choices they make, yet attempting to manoeuvre and shape them in the development stages of writing a screenplay as we might do with structure and plot, is not entirely feasible. Characters grow, change and develop even as they are written and so perhaps a more effective strategy would be to consider the character arc and its fullest implementation at the stage of rewrite when the foundations of the story, plot and basic character motivations have been articulated. It is worth reiterating here that it is a practice led approach that has led me to these conclusions as Macdonald (2013, p.221) suggests:

“in research through practice, sharing subjective insight normally only available to the practitioner, rather than to the academic analyst, is important.”

#### **4.11 The barrier and the character arc**

Within *It Must be Love*, the compulsion for characters to lie, rather than reveal the truth, forms the dilemma for their character arcs. The central

conflict within the character is effectively dichotomous in this approach and can be related to McKee's (1998) conscious versus unconscious desire. The conflict can also be considered in relation to what Truby (2007) terms the 'backstory wound'. In both approaches, there is clear conflict; however, Truby's (2009), approach is to locate the source of this conflict in the character's past rather than in a character's immediate present. The question to ask then is, do character arcs require clear barriers? And in turn are those barriers required to be broken down in order for characters to progress? Effectively a backstory wound operates as a mechanism to demonstrate to the audience that the arc has succeeded or not. If the backstory wound, is healed then the arc is deemed to be successful, positive or transformative. If, however, the backstory wound remains then the character arc has failed and ended in tragedy for the character that is arcing.

#### **4.12 Gradations of debate and dilemma**

A central element of the character arc is that the characters require clear dilemmas upon which they make causal decisions. A decision demands a choice and that choice defines or articulates motivation. The perceived wisdom of this form is that the dilemma itself needs to be balanced in terms of equity of value, but how is this negotiated or practically implemented? Some narratives have an easier time of this than others. For example, a romantic comedy where a character has the dilemma of choosing between two equally eligible suitors in the way that Bridget Jones has in *Bridget Jones' Diary* (2001).

However, many choices in narratives are specific to the characters within them and they may have value systems and dilemmas that are

not so easily bifurcated in a convenient and equitable way. The point to be made then is that the dilemma needs to be balanced in terms of the character's own specific value system. It should not take account of the audience or societal conventions which only serve to generalise, and thereby remove us from a deeper understanding of the character engaged in the character arc. In order to accomplish this distinction, a character may need to articulate the specific emotional value they place on each side of the dilemma, so that the audience perceive and understand the character's context and value rather than a generalised or assumed one.

#### **4.13 Where to locate the character arc in practice**

On reflection, even with an apparently clear approach to the character arc and its requisite dilemma, differences or nuances between what the screenwriter and audience interpret as important are negotiable. Is the character arc about an accumulation of small consistent decisions or only three profound decisions? Any decision taken infers a choice and dilemma, so how to distinguish the important decision from the trivia ones? The context of the character's story is clearly crucial as it can point us to the significance and persistence of a consistent dilemma about the story.

Unpicking the scenes in this chronologically linear way is effective in tracking the minutiae of changes and story beats. Yet, it lacks the holistic perspective that a wider knowledge of the entire screenplay would afford. This is pertinent to the character arc and tracking the key character arc turning points, as there are many minor vacillations that characters negotiate during the story. Pinpointing which decisions are

minor and which are pivotal to the arc is clearly easier to track once the screenplay is complete.

In terms of applying the character arc form to *It Must be Love* the intention was to outline the character arcs for the individual characters so they would be clear, present and transposable to the screenplay as I developed the stories. The developmental table below reveals the processes of this approach and how the critical reflection of the practice screenplay prompted a refinement of the stages. The table below was the first attempt to capture the process of the key elements of the character arc for each individual character and where they would be located within the first draft feature film screenplay. I separated each character arc into its own table and then attempted to chart the stories in relation to how the character arc might play out. This practice led attempt to make the tacit more explicit in Nelson's (2013) terms benefits screenwriting research and the screenwriter as a practitioner as it seeks to illuminate hidden practices and processes.

| <b><u>1. First Dilemma</u></b>   | <b><u>2. Consequences of the choice</u></b>   | <b><u>3. Second Dilemma</u></b>   | <b><u>4. Consequences of the choice</u></b>   | <b><u>5. Third Dilemma</u></b>  | <b><u>6. Consequences of the choice and thematic resolution</u></b>                   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| <p>A character is presented with a dilemma between two options:</p> <p>A or B</p> <p>About which they make a decision.</p> | <p>There follows the natural results of this decision in terms of impact on character.</p> <p>(NB: this need not be on screen).</p> | <p>The same dilemma is presented a second time. The choice is again between the same two options, A or B?</p> | <p>The direct results of the character's choice are revealed. (NB: this need not be on screen).</p> | <p>The same dilemma is presented a third time. This is again the same choice between the two options, A or B?</p> | <p>There is an ultimate resolution for the character in response to the decision.</p> |

**Table 1 Initial Character Arc Table**



Reflecting on Table 1 above, some of the development stages of the character arc are not clearly articulated, or as developed as they have become through engagement and creating the practice screenplay *It Must be Love*. The first attempt to articulate the character arc in this way was useful to the development of my screenplay; however, the process of practice has allowed greater interrogation on how to engage with the character arc.

#### **4.14 Genre negotiations**

The genre conclusions are less clear but in many ways less problematic as I will attempt to explain. Genre conventions and particularly genre tropes form part of the grammar when writing in a given genre. Whilst developing and writing the story, I was acutely aware of the conventions and tropes and made efforts to include or engage with them in some form. It is worth reiterating that genre and romance genre conventions specifically are not consistent across film theory, literary theory or screenwriting theory as each has its own focus and locus of concern. This practice led approach to genre takes its primary cues from screenwriting genre manuals which attempt to offer staged processes and conventions. I have utilised them as suggested modes of engagement rather than definitive or “conservative and exclusionary notions” as Conor (2014, p.80) cautions. Even here, however, there is no consensus to be found as contradictions abound, so inevitably some negotiation of what to include and what is to be expected needed to occur.

#### **4.15 Affirming or undermining genre**

Defining the relationship between the current draft of *It Must be Love* and the romance genre is more difficult to ascertain for a number of reasons. Any genre has many tropes and conventions that shift and resonate dependent on culture and timings. The relationship between the two is only relevant to the snapshot of time in which the script was completed and analysed. The genre has continued to move forward beyond that time. In consideration of the relationship between the two, there was never a consideration to manipulate, transform or undermine genre conventions if only for reasons of focus and clarity upon the story and the character arc. The genre was chosen partly from personal preference and its demonstrable scope regarding form, variety, structure and content. The genre is arguably the most malleable in terms of narrative possibility as I have discussed earlier chapters.

Of course, there are always creative tensions in negotiating and delivering conventions or tropes without descending into cliché or trite contrivances, but this I would argue is where creativity is challenged and developed in the dialogue and reshaping of tropes and conventions whilst potentially retaining the intentions they are emblematic of. The creative dialogue with genre is where a writer can renegotiate conventions and tropes, but this can be as accidental a process as it can be calculated. It is impossible to encompass all contemporary developments in a given genre as it is an amorphous thing constantly developing new forms and definitions. The arguably 'libertine' nature of the central characters is not something that challenges or undermines the genre as they are both desperate to find love as in many other romances. The characters may not begin their romantic stories as innocents, however, they do negotiate what love means to them and pursue this. What I think is of interest are contemporary renegotiations of romantic relationships such as monogamous versus polygamous relationships. The practice screenplay *It Must be Love* is interested in this contemporary romantic landscape. Framing notions of

unconventional approaches to relationships within the romance genre affirms the flexibility of the form. Changes or developments in romantic tropes and to culturally specific conventions are more evident or clearly defined I would suggest. The relationship with the romantic genre will continue to develop as the screenplay develops and I would offer that it is a very sustaining and supportive relationship in practice. Conventions such as the dual protagonist articulated by Parker (1999) are still under negotiation in *It Must be Love*. However, as with all creative endeavours there is cooperation, agency and conflict, and perhaps the reality is that a negotiated compromise is always the outcome.

Any narrative form whether genre conventions or structural models or paradigms need a considerable amount of practical application and procedural interrogation posited by Batty (2016) to illuminate and articulate notions of script development. The danger of any form is that by articulating itself in isolation, it risks the reading and perception of a straightforward linear and applicable process. In terms of undermining the genre, I would suggest that the romance genre distinct from the sub-genre of rom-coms is incredibly flexible as a narrative form. *Three Times* (2006), *Flirt* (1995), *2046* (2004) and *5x2* (2004) all utilise portmanteau or no linear approaches that very directly present the narrative in distinct or challenging ways.

The central characters of Joe and Amy may potentially be perceived as atypical romantic characters, perhaps even considered libertines due to their promiscuity. This tension may relate to the perception of what is considered a romance in terms of genre. There is a clear need to distinguish love stories, or romances from romantic comedies, which are quite distinct forms, but are rarely considered thus in contemporary genre theory apart from Parker (1999) and Selbo (2015). *Shame* (2011), *The Piano Teacher* (2001), *Un Liason Pornographique* (1999),

*Read my lips* (2001), and *Silver Linings Playbook* (2012) all have characters who are unconventionally romantic in their polygamous or promiscuous approach to romance. Regarding generic conventions, the characters of Joe and Amy meet many of the criteria for romantic characters. They are each lacking in terms of their relationships and actively engage in seeking someone to fulfil their romantic desires.

If Amy and Joe are romantic characters according to Parker's (1999) definition, then there needs to be some form of equality and balance in their romantic relationship with each other. Therefore, it should only follow the notion that romances are dual protagonist narratives, rather than single narrative stories effectively following one protagonist in pursuit of an object or person they desire. The frustration with accepting this theoretical position is that I failed to implement this convention effectively over all others. On reflection, this is the most fundamental convention of the romance and yet this balancing act of giving equal weight to two central characters has not come to fruition in this draft.

Acknowledging this deficit in the current draft of *It Must be Love* to me points once more to the importance of process and how forms, themes, conventions and tropes are negotiated. They can be developed and addressed in the development stages of a screenplay and this helps focus many key elements of genre identification. Yet the process of drafting and redrafting is vital in ensuring that each component of the screenplay, whether the character, dialogue, character arc or genre convention be as effective as it needs to be. The question of who makes the judgement on the effectiveness of any element of a screenplay changes in relation the development process and industrial context. For this practice led approach, the principal voice in the creative and critical reflections is my own.

The question of whether the romance genre is distinct from romance plots is worth consideration. There exists a multitude of romance sub-genres, particularly in romance fiction. They may embrace specific plots of *Romeo and Juliet* or *Tristan and Isolde*, however, they may be free to use other plots as well. If this is the case, then we must consider the notions of genre and plot distinct. Accordingly, the romance genre and romance plots are not necessarily the same thing.

The romance genre can operate across the two aforementioned romance plots. This suggests that there are at least three distinct romance plots available before we even consider genre conventions. The abundance of romance plots would appear to compound genre conventions and tropes, whereas the development of the practice screenplay did not struggle in this respect.

Genre theorists such as Duncan (2008) and Selbo (2014) offer a multitude of romance sub-genre conventions that are distinct unto themselves, so the potential to complicate or confuse a narrative would appear to be a real issue. Through my own practice, I have negotiated genre conventions and tropes applying them from a personal aesthetic, as they resonate or not with the story and characters. It is difficult to argue for anything other than a deeply personal approach and negotiation of genre given that strict adherence to theorised conventions could potentially produce derivate work.

For the purposes of this research, the romance story and genre has been a supportive and open narrative space where ideas and characters are given room to breathe. The only real difficulty with the romance genre is when the writer attempts to offer clear definitions of

love as a tangible notion. In this sense, the simplest option is to retain love as a story goal objectified through a relationship rather than attempt to offer a definition. The thematic value of love delivered at the end of a narrative can be reduced to either broadly positive or negative, dependent on the outcome of the central relationship.

An important element to note with the romance genre is the strength of the core active question: 'Will they or won't they get together?' is a clear and compelling active question. By comparison, the central active question of a quest narrative is simply: will the protagonist succeed? However, the consequences of a character's success or failure should be articulated as each quest is specific. There is no such requirement for romance, where audiences inherently understand the connotations of the consequences of a happily ever after or not.

There is an intangible nature of genres and their conventions. All genres resonate within a specific cultural context that ensures they are somewhat transient or at least malleable. The various genre theories on offer seldom intersect, yet often deal in absolutes that are not acknowledged by other theorists in the field. Regis's (2003) 'Happily ever after' is the one apparently mandatory requirement, and Parker's (1999) dual central protagonists is another. Without critiquing or decrying either theorist, the point to be made is that genre theory is very much contested territory.

Parker's (1999) posting of two separate stances on the notion of love seems clear and effectively ties into the mechanics of a character arc with its concern with character debate and dilemma. What this offers is a chance to interrogate the notion of love between the two central characters. One potential complication with Parker's (1999) position is in relation to the increase of character dilemmas. If the singular

protagonist has love as one part of the character arc dilemma and something in equitable opposition, then it is clear that love is at the heart of the character arc. If Parker's (1999) dual protagonists operate in the same way, then are they simply the same character mirrored in that they are both deliberating over love as one part of their dilemma? If we focus on the alternative to love within the dilemma, then must this be the same alternative for the dual protagonists? Or are they able to individually negotiate their own dilemmas? If this is the case, then love is potentially just as un-scrutinised as a notion as it is in the singular protagonist form.

Another issue to consider in relation to genre conventions that use only a singular central character, is its impact on the character arc. The singular central character convention uses love as one goal, and therefore an alternative goal needs to be presented to deliver a clear dilemma. The polar opposite to a romantic relationship could be singular isolation or loneliness which does not make for a compelling or balanced dilemma. Here alternate lifestyles or career goals are pitted against romantic love as an alternative. This model is effectively what is used in many personal dramas, which do not necessarily equate as romances.

An example of this would be the tragically toned *Leaving Las Vegas* (1995), where a goal of self-destruction is paired as a dilemma with a goal of romantic love. As a romantic dilemma, this does not really seem balanced or credible without a shift in the genre, which is precisely what occurs. Consequently, the wider issue of whether those cinematic narratives that call themselves romance narratives are actually romances needs to be considered. Parker (1999) makes this distinction, however, other theorists in the field do not. This is problematic in relation to the character arc, as it seeks to establish a

clear and compelling dilemma for characters to grapple with and explore.

Navigating this territory was difficult and remains so in that the conventions of the genre are still under negotiation. The connection between the character arc and the theme of a narrative are clearly symbiotic. Thus, further work around this area is needed to clarify what type of romantic genre narrative works most effectively with the character arc.

#### **4.15.1 Character choice versus character goal**

In an attempt to resolve the issue of either defining love as a story goal, or a notion to be explored, a simpler dilemma for the character arc was chosen. Characters were given the dilemma to either choose to tell the truth or lie, as a way to negotiate the character arc within the romance genre. This would appear on one level to connect with romantic ideals and ideas of honesty and openness associated with a loving relationship and commitment, versus the more pejorative connotations of lies and deception.

What is more, it would offer a clear polarity of choice between quantifiable actions of lying or telling the truth. The direct actions of lying or telling the truth within a narrative context are more immutable, compared to expressions of love, which can be more nebulous. Of course, there are socially recognisable markers and expressions of love; be they verbal proclamations of 'I love you' or commitments to marriage. These expressions remain problematic in that they may mask the truth. Hence, polarised or ambivalent actions work best within the character arc as they are immutable.



Whether or not the romance genre was the most appropriate narrative form to support the character arc needs to be considered. If love via romantic union is the one and only positive option for characters, what can be posited as a credible alternative? Love endures as a positive goal so, what could be offered up as credible or equitable alternatives? Family and career are typical alternatives; however, *It Must be Love* attempted to question the value of love in and of itself. On reflection, it would have been easier and perhaps more illuminating for the characters to simply debate love in relation to something tangible to ensure clarity within the character arc.

#### **4.16 The character arc: beyond foundations**

In offering a new definition of the character arc I am essentially building upon cinematic examples, the work of manual writers and theorists hitherto discussed, as well as my own explorations through creative screenwriting practice. It may be that the ideas I suggest are already understood and utilised in practice. Nevertheless, there is to date no clear articulation of this process that precisely articulates the entire character arc process. Specific to a clearer or full articulation of the character arc is the first act turning point or first dilemma and decision. In order to define the character arc as a working practice model, I will offer an explanation of the stages by way of a narratively linear process. This approach has been chosen so that the character arc can easily be transposed to a screenplay in a way that accommodates application at the development or rewriting stages of completing a screenplay. Application of the character arc is what will be explored in the practice screenplay *It Must be Love*. The subsequent chapter will critically reflect upon this practice led approach in terms of my own screenwriting practice and its wider context within the fields of

screenwriting manuals and studies. The stages articulated below contribute to new understanding with respect to the character arc. My approach involves paying close attention to the mechanics and possibilities rather than attempting to provide an overarching theory for the character arc.

#### **4.17 Suggested stages of the character arc:**

##### **1. Establishing the character arc central dilemma**

In order for a character arc to operate, the arcing character needs to be conflicted externally or internally before their story arc begins. This conflict is largely under their control at the beginning of their arcing story. Examples of the bifurcated conflict may be to love or to hate, to lie or tell the truth, to accept or deny, to build or destroy etc. Binary opposites work most effectively, as they are easier to define and to chart through a narrative.

##### **2. Introduce the character arc inciting incident**

Having established an inherent conflict within the character that is to arc, this character will experience an inciting incident or meet another character that shifts their perspective to lean heavily on one aspect of their inherent conflict; either to lie or tell the truth or to accept or deny something related to the story. The inciting incident as a structural marker for the character arc resonates with Field (1979), Seger (1990) and Dancyger (2001) and so this point simply affirms their ideas.

### **3. The first arc turning point dilemma and decision**

The inherent conflict of the arcing character will be tested and build to a point where the character feels compelled to choose a preference of one of the facets of their schism. So in the case of acceptance or denial, they may choose denial as their overriding approach to their story situation and circumstances as a way to resolve conflict moving forward. The turning point is purely predicated on a character's dilemma and decision. This is the stage in the arc that is not clearly articulated by manual writers or theorists to date. As previously discussed, some theorists do acknowledge the turning point at the end of act one; however, I argue that this turning point is predicated solely on a character dilemma and decision. This adds to existing theories and is key to a new definition.

### **4. The character arc aftermath, and development of the central debate**

Once the character has made a clear decision in favour of one element of the character's internal division, the story can move into the second act development. Here the character attempts to solve the developing conflict, leaning predominantly on their first arc decision. There then follows a series of events and developments that challenge the effectiveness of the initial decision, forcing the character to re-evaluate their original decision. The character may begin to vacillate between the original inherent conflicts, in an effort to resolve the story problem. The character can even flirt with the alternative stance to their first arc decision, so if they resolved to lie, they might now begin to tell the truth or if they chose denial then may begin to accept certain things they had denied at their first decision. This part of the narrative is about testing the effectiveness of that first arc choice about their story problem and circumstances.

## **5. The dilemma revisited: Second arc turning point dilemma and decision**

This is a widely accepted stage and is often cited as the Crisis. The character effectively reaches a crisis point where their initial arc decision has proven ineffective and they have begun to explore the alternate solution to their story problem. The character arc then conspires to present a clear dilemma for the character to make a decision once again. The dilemma remains constant at its heart, even if the scale and specifics of choice are different. Consequently, if the dilemma revolves around acceptance or denial, the character will choose one definitively over the other in relation to their past experiences of exploring the two options.

A point of consequence is worth noting here that will result from this second arc choice rather than as part of the process for the writer. Whatever choice the character makes at the second arc turning point effectively sets the agenda for the character arc and conclusion of the narrative. If the character chooses the same option as they did at the first arc turning point, then the character is deemed tragic in their arc and will suffer tragic consequences for themselves and their story problem. If the character chooses the opposite aspect of their inherent conflict, then the character will be on a redemptive or transformational path that will see them succeed in their story problem.

## **6. Aftermath of the decision and resolving the debate**

The character having either consolidated their first arc choice, or resolved to embrace a new choice, must attempt to solve the story

problem one final time to effectively confirm that their new choice is right for them and their story problem. The character may still vacillate between their inner conflicts, but the choice they made at the second arc turning point dominates their actions.

#### **7. The third arc turning point dilemma and decision: confirming a stance**

This is traditionally termed the Climax of the narrative. The character is forced to make a final decision about their dilemma and effectively reaffirm their second arc decision. This is often symbolically the most difficult choice; however, it is about expelling any final doubts and for the character to own their decision. This third consecutive decision serves to communicate that the character is dedicated to their decision and will not waiver from this path, be it tragic or transformative.

#### **8. Character arc consequences and the theme defined**

The character arc artificially constructs apparent character autonomy to a reader or audience by way of orchestrating choices and decisions for characters. Characters are presented with dilemmas and the choices they make have consequences and impact on the resolution of their stories. The character arc ensures that consequences arise from character decisions and actions which impact upon their life and story choices. If the character has resisted change and remained wedded to their first arc choice throughout the narrative, at the key turning point decisions, then their character arc is deemed tragic. Tragic characters typically suffer for their inflexibility. The character arc articulates why characters suffer, in relation to their choices.

For example the characters in *A Perfect Storm* (2000) persist three times in their decision to fish in the face of the perfect storm and so suffer the consequences of their decisions. A positive and transformative resolution awaits the character that having made a decision at the first arc turning point, makes a diametrically opposed decision to the first, at the second and third arc turning points. This is how internal conflicts of characters can be articulated, challenged and resolved, predominantly in favour of one value over another, be that tragic or transformative.

The character arc ensures consequences for character choices and actions. Those consequences can usefully be articulated into a theme. The theme of the narrative is defined through the character arc as the story and character problems have been resolved or not, as a direct result of the character's decisions. The theme or a thematic statement effectively encapsulates the writers' value system in relation to the character's central conflict. For example, if a character was conflicted about whether to choose denial or acceptance with respect to the story problem. Whatever the character's choices, the consequences and resolution will offer a thematic statement in support of the writers' value system. In order to resolve a particular problem, a character will need to choose denial or acceptance.

The character arc can operate on the premise of a choice or goal. The reluctance to accept or choose that goal without an overt alternative as an audience, or reader will instinctively rationalise what the alternatives may be. This could be deemed unsatisfactory for the writer, as the alternatives for a character are left open for interpretation by audiences. A principal positive of the character arc is that it irrefutably establishes what the central conflict is about, and what the two definitive choices are for the character in to solve their story problem.

For a character to make a meaningful choice, an alternative choice must exist. The issue to consider is whether this alternative need is articulated or represented. In consideration of this question, the tables 2 and 3 below attempt to outline the issue of negotiating a character arc with and without a clearly articulated dilemma.

| <b>Dilemma Presented</b>   | <b>Decision Taken</b>   | <b>Consequences of the Decision Revealed</b>  |
|--|---|---|
| Dilemma articulating options:<br><br>Option <b>A</b><br>(Articulated/presented)<br><br>+<br><br>Option <b>B</b><br>(Articulated/presented) | Character decision in relation to options:<br><br>Option <b>A</b><br>(Articulated/presented)<br><br>+<br><br>Option <b>B</b><br>(Articulated/presented) | Consequences of Decision Revealed to the character in relation to:<br><br>Choice <b>A</b><br><br>+<br><br>Choice <b>B</b> |

**Table 2: Dilemma, Decision, Choice Revealed.**

| <b>Single Option Presented with no Dilemma</b>  | <b>Decision Taken</b>  | <b>Consequences Revealed</b>  |
|---|--|---|
| Single option presented:<br><br>Option <b>A</b><br>(Articulated/presented)<br><br>+<br><br>Option <b>B</b><br>(Unarticulated/implied) | Character decision despite options:<br><br>Option <b>A</b><br>(Articulated/presented)<br><br>+<br><br>Option <b>B</b><br>(Unarticulated/implied) | Consequences of Decision Revealed to the character.<br><br>Lack of clarity in terms of the value of the decision. Having nothing to value the choice against.<br><br>Option <b>B</b><br>(Unarticulated/implied) |

**Table 3: Option, Decision, Consequences Revealed.**

In Table 2 the dilemma is articulated and presented consistently throughout the process, so the audience is clear in understanding what

the central dilemma constitutes. The choice of A or B over the other clarifies a rejection of one over the other in the resolution of the arc.

In Table 3 the character makes decisions that appear to be dilemmas in that they are difficult and deliberated upon. However, no clear articulation is presented of what the alternative choice may be. In this presentation, the audience may appoint an alternative rightly or wrongly, or fail to see any alternative undermining tension by an unclear or absent dilemma.

#### **4.18 The clarity of the choice**

A decision made by a character within a narrative will always have some form of reference or context, whether environmental or in relation to the story they are in. The most overt form of decision making in relation to the character arc would be to have both choices presented at the same time, in order that they appear to be an immediate and compelling dilemma. Whether this is always the case or necessary is a compelling question. It appears that a dilemma can exist without articulating what that may be as in (Table 2). However, this is potentially unsatisfactory as an audience is effectively projecting what alternative may be given the characters.

When a clear dilemma is presented before a character to which they need to make a decision, we can extrapolate vital information in relation to their motivation and thus the character arc. Therefore, when choices between A and B are presented to a character and that character deliberates between the choices, we can assume that these



choices represent a compelling and approximately equal weighting in terms of their value. The dilemma in this form appears compelling and difficult for the character engaged in the decision, as one choice means the loss of another. Consequently, the demands of the character arc require ultimately sacrificing one choice in favour of another.

The question then in relation to the choice becomes, need the dilemma be literally articulated on screen before the character makes their arcing decision? Furthermore, the ideal scenario for an arcing dilemma decision would be to have the two choices present for the character and audience to deliberate over on screen. There are many more cinematic examples where a character is clearly offered a choice between two options on screen and then seen to choose one over another to demonstrate their arcing choice. This is the case in examples such as *Sophie's Choice* (1982), when she must choose between the life of her son or daughter. The dilemma is also present in *The Return of the Jedi* (1983) when Luke must choose between the dark and the light side of the force by saving or destroying his father.

By representing and articulating the dilemma visually, there can be little doubt in the audience's mind as to what is being deliberated and what the choice represents. The clear stages of the presentation of the dilemma, the decision upon the dilemma and the aftermath of the choice can all be presented on screen and within the same scene if required. The emotional impact of this event should be clear to an audience, as they are able to witness and experience the dilemma, choice and aftermath as experienced by the character arcing.

If we break down the key components of the arcing choice as just mentioned into the three component parts of:

A: Presented dilemma

B: Choice

C: Aftermath of the decision

then we can usefully see if removing or representing any of these in other ways would alter the character arc. The Presented dilemma requires two mutually exclusive choices. If one of the choices is missing and the character decides to take an action, how is the audience to know it is in exclusion of another choice? The character could articulate the dilemma and then make a choice articulating what is at stake. For instance, the character could be reminded of what the choice is using cinematic grammar. In *Star Wars* (1977) Ben Kenobi urges Luke to “Use the force,” thus reminding the audience of the dilemma at hand, either to trust in technology or use the force. Similar reminders of the dilemma are present when a character receives a flashback in a moment that requires a choice, thus articulating the dilemma to the character and audience before the decision is made. In *Monster* (2003) Aileen Wuornos confronts a man and threatens to kill him. The man is non-threatening and passive, so in order to make the decision a dilemma, she reveals a backstory from her childhood about abuse. This helps to offer a valid motivation and choice as to why she should kill this man in the present, even though he remains passive and non-threatening. Here a scene without a clear visual dilemma is offered one through dialogue within the scene.

Another way to articulate a dilemma is for a character to possess or acknowledge something that has come to symbolise one aspect of the

dilemma. In *The Return of the Jedi* (1983) Luke Skywalker having defeated his father Darth Vader is invited by the Emperor to join him as his apprentice. Luke is flushed with the power of the dark side of the force, yet he notices his father's severed robotic hand and then looks to his own robotic hand. The symbolism is clear; if he chooses to serve the Emperor, he will end up more machine than man like his father. The robotic hand then is symbolic of the other choice facing Luke and so the dilemma has been presented compelling him to choose the dark side or the light.

If the dilemma is not articulated in some way close to the point of decision, then the choice that is made risks being misinterpreted or lost as a decision of significance whether to the story or the character. The point is not about the scale of choice per se, but the simple presentation of a dilemma; a choice and then aftermath of the decision clarifies what was at stake and the significance of the choice for the character undertaking it. So in conclusion, either approach could be used. Nevertheless, the clearer approach would be to articulate the dilemma and choice spontaneously before the character that makes the arcing decision. This way the character's deliberations can be dramatised within the scene; and so can the narrative and emotional impact of their decision to embrace one choice over another be felt, if we remain to witness the aftermath of the choice.

#### **4.19 Defining the character arc: A new approach**

This research would not be complete without an attempt to offer a definition of the character arc that builds upon ideas and theories posited by Egri (1942), Seger (1990), McKee (1998), Dancyger (2001), Marks (2009), McCollum (2013) and Jarvis (2014), in an effort to offer a

clear process and illuminate the mechanics of the form. It may very well be that the definition does little more than reframe or re-contextualise known ideas around the development of character or narrative structure. Even if it succeeded in achieving this, it would contribute more to our understanding of the character arc than currently exists particularly within the parameters of three-act structure and constitute a contribution to new knowledge

.

I have attempted to explore concepts of the character arc and its forms from within the orthodoxy of three act structure for three main reasons. Firstly, the form is often referenced in direct relation to three act structure by the majority of manuals, with the character arc often directly linked to act turning points by Dancyger (2001), Marks (2009) and Venis (2013). This view perpetuates the assumption that three act structure is synonymous with the character arc turning points as Venis (2013, p.115) asserts:

“the beats of the character arc in such a story roughly correspond to the beats in the exterior story as used in three-act structure.”

Therefore, before articulating and demonstrating whether the character arc can or cannot be extricated from this form some exploration of its position and pertinence to this form needed to be uncovered.

Secondly separating the character arc from three-act structure was not an initial intention of this research as it was presumed to be synonymous. This research has subsequently successfully disentangled the character arc from three-act structure, however, connections and clear interrelationships persist, and it is important to

note that they are not mutually exclusive concepts. The point to make is that despite the fact that three-act structure and the character arc are often wrongly amalgamated or conflated there is enough shared lineage and intent that we need not present them as anathema.

The third reason for retaining a clear relationship between three-act structure and the character arc despite the character arc as defined by this research having eight stages is in part to do with grappling with the form in practice. As the practice screenplay, *It Must be Love* utilises multiple character arcs across the entirety of the narrative, with one specifically aligning directly with the act breaks of 3 act structure whilst others do not. Therefore, within the practice screenplay I have effectively demonstrated both synchronicity with and abstraction from three-act structure.

A fourth and perhaps final note on three-act structure within this exegesis is the most aptly summed up by Macdonald (2013, p.49) when he articulates:

“defying the three-act paradigm may always be difficult. One cannot avoid the conclusion that any narrative with a beginning and an end is therefore bound to have a middle, and the basic ‘paradigm’ is therefore a case of *reductio ad absurdum*.”

Kallas (2010) also acknowledges the pervasiveness of the three-act structure more broadly asserting that Freytag (1895) extolled it, and that its use stretches beyond western approaches to narrative construction asserting:

“the division of a story into three parts is not only a Western idea. Storytelling also falls into three parts in the tradition of Japanese No Theater” (Kallas 2010, p.19).

Moving beyond the notion of the three-acts I have argued earlier that the more constraining paradigm is the Hero's Journey myth of Campbell (1954), Vogler (1996), McKee (1998) and Marks (2009) which is arguably more pervasive within screenwriting manuals. This narrative paradigm seeks to appropriate, frame, or subsume all other approaches to narrative construction within its grasp with almost quasi-religious fervour. Here some attempt to separate the character arc has been sought if only to allow the character arc to be explored and defined on its own terms. The most direct bifurcation of thought can be defined on theological grounds. Jungian ideas support and promote the metaphysical whereas adopting Freudian ideas of atheism offer a direct and irrefutable argument against them. This research does not want to veer too much into a theological debate. However, it is enough to say that if these two approaches to narrative are incongruous, then it stands to reason that the same may be said of their approaches to narrative construction.

An important note to make is that the thematic statement is a value statement of the writer's making and not bound by any societally imposed morality. If a character on an arc presented with consistent dilemmas chooses to go against conventional modes of morality in their choices and succeeds in solving their story problem, then this reveals the writer's morality or philosophy and is not dictated by societal codes of morality or anything else.

Where the theme and character arc intersect is a clear question that emerges from this investigation, as they have been demonstrated

within *It Must be Love* to be independent notions. They may be the same in many respects; however, the notion of backstory or character wound in Field's (2005) terminology opens the debate wider. Need there be consistency across these elements of wound, character arc dilemma and theme for them to work? Or, are they interdependent elements that are up for negotiation with each other?

Below I have placed the redefined character arc form into a reworked table to illustrate my process and how cinematic narratives including *It Must be Love* operate within it.

|   |  |   |   |   |   |  |  |
|---|--|---|---|---|---|--|--|
| 1: Establish the character arc central dilemma  | 2: Introduce the character arc. Inciting incident  | 3: The first arc turning point dilemma and decision.  | 4: Character arc Aftermath, and Development of the debate.  | 5: The Dilemma revisited. Second Arc turning point dilemma and decision.  | 6: Aftermath of the decision and resolving the debate.  | 7: The third Arc turning point dilemma and decision. Confirming a stance.  | 8: Character Arc choice Consequences and the theme defined.  |
| Cinematic Examples:   |  |   |   |   |   |  |  |
| <b>GRAVITY (2013)</b>   |  |   |   |   |   |  |  |
| The character of Ryan has recently lost her only child. Her dilemma is whether to carry on living or give up. (Survive or Die.) | The Space station disaster is the inciting incident that forces her into a life or death situation | To survive or give up. Ryan is okay whilst supported but doesn't want to let go of her partner who will die so chooses death.                     | With her partner now gone Ryan must try and get back home but she is not fully committed to this path despite the situation.  | She makes it to the next space station and hallucinates her partner and hears a baby crying and she considers giving up, but she doesn't she chooses to survive this time instead of death. | She has a short window in which to make it back to Earth and she must make it to the Chinese space station and escape module. | She makes it to earth but risks drowning. One third and final time she chooses to survive over death.                                  | She emerges from the sunken capsule reborn.<br><br>Theme defined : Never give up hope.   |
| <b>District 9 (2009)</b>  |  |   |   |   |   |  |  |
| 1: Establish the character arc central dilemma  | 2: Introduce the character arc. Inciting incident  | 3: The first arc turning point dilemma and decision.  | 4: Character arc Aftermath, and Development of the debate.  | 5: The Dilemma revisited. Second Arc turning point dilemma and decision.  | 6: Aftermath of the decision and resolving the debate.  | 7: The third Arc turning point dilemma and decision. Confirming a stance.  | 8: Character Arc choice Consequences and the theme defined.  |
| The character of Wikus is a selfish racist jobs worth. At home he has a loving wife whom he adores.                             | He becomes infected with alien DNA which mutates him slowly into an alien.                         | This occurs in the third act of the film. Having been told by his alien friend to wait three years for help. Wikus chooses to attack him instead. | Without the help of his friend Wikus is left at the mercy of local gang and security forces. He manages to hide inside an exo-skeleton military mech to save himself. | Having escaped the security forces Wikus overhears that his alien friend will be killed. He must choose to save himself or his friend. He chooses to help Christopher Johnson.              | Now that Wikus is committed to helping the alien he must suffer terrible injury to keep him safe.                             | Wikus sacrifices himself to save the alien Christopher Johnson one more time confirming his stance to put someone else before himself. | The alien is able to escape and Wikus now fully transformed into an alien must wait at least three years for their return. In the meantime he makes flower sculptures for his wife.<br><br>Theme defined. It's |



|  |  |   |  |  |   |  |   |
|--|--|---|--|--|---|--|---|
|  |  |   |  |  |   |  | who you are on the inside that counts.  |
| <b><i>It Must be Love (2016)</i></b>                       |  |   |  |  |   |  |   |
| 1: Establish the character arc central dilemma             | 2: Introduce the character arc. Inciting incident  | 3: The first arc turning point dilemma and decision.  | 4: Character arc Aftermath, and Development of the debate.   | 5: The Dilemma revisited. Second Arc turning point dilemma and decision.   | 6: Aftermath of the decision and resolving the debate.  | 7: The third Arc turning point dilemma and decision. Confirming a stance.  | 8: Character Arc choice Consequences and the theme defined.   |
| Joe is involved in several relationships and is not happy. | Joe has two: The intro of Amy and Pia's news of pregnancy.   | Joe chooses to marry Pia and be faithful (He takes the Welsh contract to earn more.)                | Joe has committed himself to Pia however away from home he pursues and develops a relationship with Amy.                 | Joe vacillates too much presently in the draft submitted. He doesn't fully commit to either Amy or the other relationships. This needs to be addressed in subsequent drafts. | Joe builds bridges after the attack. He effectively attempts to regain the status quo which does not confront the character arc.      | Joe is offered a relationship with Amy but he decides to reject this in favour of the other relationships.   | Joe having resisted the opportunity to change is back to the beginning contemplating a series of unhappy relationships. |
| Amy is involved with multiple partners and is not happy.   | Amy meets Joe however her inciting incident is more oblique with the reading of the advert of the nuclear family | Amy confronts her husband and about starting a family. She also takes the Welsh contract to escape. | Amy continues to be promiscuous but also develops feelings for Joe. Their relationship develops into something intimate. | Amy has revealed she is pregnant to her husband and wants them to raise the baby together. He refuses so she leaves once and for all.  | Amy simply visits her father for a place to stay which doesn't address her active desire or narrative purpose. This needs addressing. | Amy has left her husband and attempts to convince Joe to begin again with her. Nothing is countering this desire so it is not so much an arcing moment for her. This needs addressing. | Amy having embraced her decision to settle down and start a family takes positive steps to move forward.                |

**Table 4 Reworked Character Arc Key Stages**

The iteration of the character arc form outlined above arose informed by the research undertaken and presented in the contextual review chapter. The process of developing and writing the practice screenplay *It Must be Love* added further insights in terms of engagement with the character arc, for example, challenging a linear and chronological approach to implementing the character arc within the process of writing. Engaging

with the character arc also proved to be valuable for questioning ideas, character motivation and themes in relation to my own creative intent. This newly articulated staged process focuses the character arc more effectively in terms of my own practice, and it is anticipated that subsequent drafts of *It Must be Love* will continue to refine and offer further insights into this form.

#### **4.20 Findings**

The character arc as a narrative form for exploration, illumination and interrogation of character has been engaged with through this practice led research. The research started with the premise that the character arc, although ubiquitous as a term in screenwriting manuals and studies has as yet not been sufficiently explored or articulated. An initial approach to engaging with the character arc in response to research and practice was presented in the contextual review chapter. Below is a further refined iteration of this staged approach to the character arc, which has emerged in response to the writing and reflection upon the practice screenplay *It Must be Love*.

##### **Establishing the character arc central dilemma**

- The arcing character requires a clear and consistent polarised viewpoint or value system.
- The story begins with this conflict under their control.

### **Introduce the character arc inciting incident**

- The arcing character typically experiences an inciting incident event, or meets a character that shifts their perspective to make them lean heavily on one aspect of their inherent conflicted viewpoint.

### **The first arc turning point dilemma and decision**

- The inherent conflict will be tested and build to a point where the character feels compelled to make a choice in preference of one of the facets of their schism.
- The turning point is purely predicated on a character's dilemma and decision (This is the process in the character arc that is not articulated by anyone else to date, and is a contribution to new knowledge).

### **The decision aftermath and development of the central debate**

- Once the character has made a clear decision in favour of one element of the character's inherent division the story can move into the second act development favouring the value system they have chosen.
- Here the character attempts to solve the story problem leaning predominantly on their first arc decision.
- There then follows a series of events and developments that challenge the effectiveness of the initial decision forcing the character to re-evaluate their original decision.

- The character may begin to vacillate between the original inherent conflicts, in an effort to resolve the story problem.
- The character can even flirt with the alternative stance to their first arc decision.
- The character may indulge in the alternative stance without repercussions.
- This part of the narrative is effectively about testing the effectiveness of that first arc choice in relation to their story problem and circumstances.

### **The dilemma revisited. Second arc turning point dilemma and decision**

- The character effectively reaches a crisis point where their initial arc decision has proven ineffective and they have begun to explore the alternate solution to their story problem.
- The character arc then conspires to present a clear dilemma for the character to once again make a decision.
- The dilemma remains constant at its heart even if the scale and specifics of the choice are different.
- Whatever choice the character makes at the second arc turning point this effectively sets the agenda for the character arc and conclusion of the narrative.

- If the character chooses the same option as they did at the first arc turning point, then the character is deemed tragic in their arc and will suffer tragic consequences for themselves and their story problem.
- If the character chooses the opposite aspect of their inherent conflict, then the character will be on a redemptive or transformational path that will seem them succeed in their story problem.

### **Aftermath of the decision and resolving the debate**

- The character having either consolidated their first arc choice or resolved to embrace a new choice must attempt to solve the story problem one final time to effectively confirm that their new choice is right for them and their story problem.
- The character may still vacillate between their inner conflicts, but the choice they made at the second arc turning point dominates their actions.

### **The third arc turning point dilemma and decision: confirming a stance**

- This is traditionally termed the climax of the narrative.
- The character is forced to make a final decision in relation to their dilemma and effectively reaffirm their second arc decision.

- This is often symbolically the most difficult choice; however, it is about expelling any final doubts and for them to own their decision.
- This third consecutive decision serves to communicate that the character is dedicated to their decision and will not waiver from this path, be it tragic or transformative.

### **Character arc consequences and the theme defined**

- The character arc is about constructing character autonomy by way of choices and decisions and so there needs to follow consequences for character actions and specifically their life and story choices.
- If the character has resisted change and remained wedded to their first arc choice throughout the narrative at the key turning point decisions, then their character arc is deemed tragic and they will suffer for their inflexibility.
- The positive and transformative resolution awaits the character that having made the wrong decision at the first arc turning point chooses the alternative path of their inner conflict at the second and third arc turning points. The inner conflict of the character has been challenged and resolved predominantly in favour of one value over another. Through the process of the character arc, the character has transformed and solved the story problem and is able to reap the rewards of their actions.

Returning to the research aims set out in the introduction I will offer responses to the three questions articulated there, having explored them through a practice led approach. It is worth noting that the below questions reveal a general anxiety and scepticism in relation to the character arc which stems from the wider ambivalence screenwriting practitioners like myself feel in relation to the screenwriting manuals culture that pervades screenwriting practice. My practice led approach has allowed me to gain a wider perspective on approaches to screenwriting forms and the character arc specifically. The research aims are listed below with responses to each in turn:

To explore whether or not characters that arc is limited to two predetermined and predictable outcomes.

The question stems from the perception or anxiety that offering an arcing character only two choices is profoundly limiting in the sense that vacillation upon a single dilemma simplifies characters into a binary schism. The simple answer to this question is yes. Characters that utilise a character arc are constrained in this way and become vessels for a potentially limited dichotomous debate. However, a wider perspective on the character arc may be gleaned by returning to the practice screenplay *It Must be Love* and cinematic and televisual examples that illuminate the character arcs scope and subtlety. In relation to *It Must be Love*, Joe and Amy ponder and make decisions upon their views on love and its value to them. The decisions they make are in response to their experiences, and their emotional and psychological states. The mechanics of a binary schism or polemic does not necessarily mean an intractable stance on a given subject. Rather the landscape or debate and dialogue is established by the character arc and then it is within the story characters and screenwriters scope to explore, interrogate and investigate each aspect of the debate.

The notion of debate or dialogue is useful in articulating what the character arc facilitates in the story and for screenwriters wishing to explore ideas and motivations. Returning to the question posed above, the answer of yes should not be seen as a limitation of the character arc as it does not suggest prescribed predetermined outcomes, only clarification of one outcome over another. The character arc guides the screenwriter to provide an outcome for the story in terms of character motivation and theme. The specific outcomes facilitated by the character arc are ultimately conceived, developed and offered by the screenwriter responsible for generating them and not dictated by the form itself.

The second question posed in the aims was as follows and again an answer is provided in response:

To explore whether the character arc as a form is limited to one character per given cinematic narrative?

The answer to this question is again in the positive and was demonstrated in the practice screenplay *It Must be Love* where the two central characters of Joe and Amy both arc individually. Furthermore, minor characters were also able to arc albeit in smaller more simplified ways.

This question again arose partly through anxiety in relation to the assumed limitations a narrative form impresses upon the creative process of writing a screenplay. The creative anxiety that arises in response to any narrative form or structural approach no matter how



malleable is that it risks constraining or even inhibiting creativity. However, in my screenwriting practice and approach I found the character arc form to be supportive and enabling of multiple characters and stories. The process suggests presenting questions and challenges to characters rather than enforcing plot markers or conventions for their own sake.

The third question presented in the aims is as follows with a response below:

To explore whether a character may arc more than once within a feature film screenplay.

This question more than the previous two reveals my initial anxieties in relation to the presumed limitations that the mechanics of the character arc form would impose. In summary, the character arc is about facilitating debate about a dilemma or narrative problem, this can be and often is explored over the entirety of a given narrative format. However, there is no prescribed approach in terms of how a character arc may be implemented in terms of timeframe, and so it may be explored over the entirety of a narrative, or it may take place within a shorter timespan offered in a scene sequence or act. This then frees up the possibility for multiple character arcs to be explored by individual characters within a single narrative whatever the timeframe. The point to consider however, is that debate and vacillation over multiple dilemmas and problems may confuse or over complicate stories and characters exponentially. The point remains however, that this is possible and could be engaged with should a screenwriter so wish.

#### **4.21 Analysis of the findings in relation to practice led research**

What has emerged in terms of the findings is pertinent to screenwriting practitioners and scholars as I will outline below. In terms of screenwriting practice and the world of screenwriting manuals the findings have illuminated the following.

- i. A clear and demonstrable articulation of the character arc as a narrative form of its own that contributes to new knowledge on the subject.
- ii. A staged approach to the process of developing a character arc that may be utilised by practicing screenwriters, interested in adopting a character arc within their work.

In terms of my own creative process and engagement with the character arc I have discovered that it has been a far more fluid, disparate and tangential experience in practice. A linear approach to narrative development and screenwriting is largely assumed or projected upon screenwriters particularly by the manuals, and this needs to be interrogated and challenged. However, the fact that the character arc can be engaged with in a non-linear fashion is worthy of note for any practitioners who may want to engage with it within their own practice.

In terms of the potential value of this practice-based research to contemporary screenwriting studies, attempting to engage openly and positively with the culture of screenwriting manuals in a way that is still

critical and reflective offers scope for further debate across the divide. Screenwriting manuals are potentially highly problematic. However, I would argue that only through engaging critically with their staged approaches to narrative development can opportunities to reassess or re-contextualise narrative forms such as the character arc be gleaned. Whether practice-based or practice led research, there is still a bifurcation between practice and research. For me contemporary screenwriting studies offers a historical and cultural framework and context for practice, however, the manuals also offer ideas and utilitarian advice for practice flawed as they may be in their presentation. The acknowledgment of and engagement with both of these spheres has been important to my process as both screenwriter and scholar as I develop as a reflective practitioner. The final chapter below summaries and concludes this practice-based research.

## **Chapter 5 Conclusions**

In this chapter, I will draw together conclusions from across this practice-based research and its area of focus. I set out to consider the notion of a character arc, its definitions, form flexibility, application and impact within the development and completion of the final practice screenplay. Also of interest was the choice and impact of genre on the development and creation of a screenplay. Furthermore, I wanted to explore how this might facilitate or inhibit the creative process and its impact on the narrative structure of the screenplay. Conclusions and further thoughts will be offered as to how the character arc may be reconsidered in light of this research and how it may be applied and utilised in the development of screenplays of any genre in future.

The research agenda aimed to establish whether the character arc form had flexibility within the parameters of a cinematic narrative, exploring this possibility through a model screenplay. The practice screenplay *It Must be Love* would serve as an exemplar and offer conclusions as to whether the form was malleable. *It Must be Love* attempted to present a variety of character arcs and variations of form in order to be fully investigated and reflected upon.

The research question stemmed from uncovering a lack of examples of characters that arc more than once within the same narrative. The research revealed not only that the existing definitions of the form were unsatisfactory, but that the form is also far more flexible than previously considered. Contemporary screenwriting theorists such as Vogler (2007), Marks (2010) and Jarvis (2015), all position the character arc firmly within the parameters of three-act structure or the quest story form. This research argues that the character arc can function effectively outside of this structure just as well.

By offering the possibility of an arc model that is flexible and multifarious in form, the argument shifts to asserting that the character arc exists not within the quest or three-act structure, but as distinct and separate from them. This is important as it distinguishes the form as autonomous from other narrative models. The majority of western screenwriting narrative forms are built upon the Jungian derived monomythic quest. They do not express themselves outside of this model, so in this respect, the character arc offers something entirely new.

Where I believe this exegesis contributes to new knowledge is in defining the character arc in totality, and demonstrating that it can operate autonomously from the quest paradigm and three-act structure

without being mutually exclusive. Currently, there exists no other clear definition of the character arc that explains the process of how it works in practice. There are many cursory attempts that acknowledge the term, yet they are ultimately unsatisfactory in that they fail to cover each incremental stage in sufficient detail.

One of the key arguments of this research was that there is still a need for a clear definition of the character arc. After all, there is a multitude of cinematic narratives that utilise it in some form or another as I outlined in the contextual review chapter. In terms of investigation and contribution to new knowledge, I would assert that this exegesis achieves this goal on the strength of the definition and clarification of the character arc form.

Having developed a new approach to the character arc, the exegesis moves now to the question posed at the outset of the research which was to namely to test the flexibility of the character arc form in practice. The question around the flexibility of the form in some way has been answered by contemporary cinematic examples such as *City of God* (2002) that reveal multiple character arcs within a single cinematic narrative.

The question however, has shifted, or at least offered up a new position, given that all character arc models currently exemplified by screenwriting theorists are wedded to either the quest paradigm or a three-act model. By simply separating the character arc from these models, the form offers a whole wealth of flexibility and opportunity that was hitherto restricted by the mandates of the more dominant narrative forms. The character arc is not limited to three or five act structure. It is not structurally aligned or exclusively synonymous with the quest despite Vogler's (1992) claims and it can operate across a

variety of narrative timeframes typically delineated by format such as; shorts, feature films, television series and serials.

## **5.1 Answers to the research questions**

I now return to the practice led research questions related to the character arc outlined in the introduction and will offer responses to each in turn. The original questions and responses to those questions are as follows:

- Does a clear definition of the character arc form exist?

Until this practice-based research engaged with the character arc, no clear articulated definition in terms of the entire process existed. Having explored the character arc in terms of relevant literature within the contextual review chapter and engaged with the character arc in practice a new definition of the character arc has emerged. This new definition of the character arc was presented in the findings section of the previous chapter and demonstrates a contribution to new knowledge.

- What is the character arc's function within a cinematic narrative?

The character arc is a form that aims to reveal character motivation to an audience by facilitating a clear and consistent dilemma or debate within the arcing character during a given narrative. The arcing character explores various facets of their given debate in order for them to appear to reach a conclusive decision which ultimately impacts

upon their circumstances and story. The character arc facilitates debate upon a subject or theme and offers a form that explores motivations in a multifaceted way.

- How does a character arc operate in practice?

This question may need qualification in that for me this relates to process rather than function. Here the shadow of screenwriting manuals has been challenged and debunked. My initial limited approach was to find a screenwriting form and process that would facilitate and guide a methodical and creatively painless approach to my own screenwriting development and practice. I did attempt a linear approach to creative development, However, I found this problematic in terms of my own creative practice and largely abandoned this linear approach. The character arc was engaged with and supported the development of the practice screenplay *It Must be Love* at various stages throughout the process. What this has established for me is that process and practice are not and should not be considered as wholly linear activities as they largely are within screenwriting manuals.

The character arc has provided appropriate questions and room for character exploration and interrogation and this I believe is of potential value to other screenwriters looking to develop character motivations further.

- Where is the character arc positioned structurally within a cinematic screenplay?

The answer to this question is a matter of choice for the practitioner. It may be aligned to the typical three act structure of a feature film or it

may be utilised within a much shorter sequence or scene within a larger narrative. There is no right or wrong approach here, nor would I seek to suggest or impose one. The character arc has proven a valuable approach and process to explore and present character motivations. For me it was positioned where it felt appropriate for a given character and their individual story. This is where the character arc appeals to my own creative practice, as it offers a form and process of articulating ideas without locking them into a prescribed or constrained framework.

- What is the character arc's relationship to other screenwriting models and paradigms?

Vogler (2007) suggests the character arc is simply analogous to the quest. This research has demonstrated that the character arc is its own autonomous form that can work within, alongside or separate from other forms. It is typically aligned to three act structure given the three arcing decisions. However, I have suggested and demonstrated within the practice screenplay, that the character arc is far more amorphous. In relation to timeframes the character arc can work across a variety of formats and so remains fluid and interdependent of other models or paradigms.

- Can the character arc operate more than once for a single character within a single narrative?

This question was answered within the last chapter's findings section as it was also posed as a question within the aims section of this practice-based research. The answer to this question is yes, however, further arcs require further specific dilemmas, which suggests further



complication in terms of plot and presentation. For example, the way that romance narratives typically resolve this issue is to separate three character arcs for the same character across three separate stories, across three separate timeframes as is the case with *Three Times* (2006).

## **5.2 Practice led research conclusions**

In summary, this practice led research has afforded me the opportunity to explore develop and establish the following points in relation new knowledge and its significance to the field.

- This practice led research has allowed me to define the character arc form in isolation offering a definition and process in relation to practice that is distinct from other narrative forms.
- This practice led research has allowed me to define the character arc in relation to other screenwriting narrative paradigms, specifically the, hero's journey paradigm and three-act structure in relation to cinematic narratives.
- This practice led research has allowed me to explore and define what the character arc articulates within a given character story within a larger narrative.
- This practice led research has allowed me to explore and articulate how the character arc may be engaged with and implemented in practice.
- This practice led research has allowed me to investigate and explore how romantic genre conventions operate alongside the character arc and remain largely autonomous of each other.

The significance of uncoupling the character arc form from other narrative paradigms offers the potential to screenwriting studies and practitioners to interrogate and consider the form and function of the character arc distinctly. This approach has not been considered or attempted to date and offers a new perspective on the character arc form. I would argue that I have demonstrated that the character arc can be significantly uncoupled from other narrative forms, specifically the hero's journey paradigm and cinematic three-act structure. Whether this provides an entirely new or autonomous narrative form is a question for further debate. The focus of this practice led research was to investigate and articulate the form and possible approaches to engaging with it in practice. This exegesis offers a new definition of the character arc form and offers considerations around how to engage with it in practice.

Practice is by definition an individual and intimate pursuit that encompasses many idiosyncrasies. Attempting to unpick, investigate and illuminate this often tacit process has been largely frustrating, yet ultimately rewarding. My current view of practice, having approached this exegesis from a position of confidence in my own practice, is that investigating and critically evaluating creativity is painful and difficult. To challenge, question and reflect on every aspect of the creative approach to developing a screenplay was difficult but ultimately illuminating.

The creative and industrial practice of screenwriting theory, perhaps more than most creative endeavours, offers a wealth of paradigms and models to embrace and this exegesis is no different in this respect. This practice-based research chose the character arc as the narrative form to engage with, in an effort to shape the creation of an original screenplay. Through the process of critical practice, a new definition of

the character arc has emerged that attempts to offer a clearer and focused route through the form.

Arriving at a new definition of the character arc has been of immense value to my understanding of the form and my own creative practice. Of course, further questions will emerge from the synthesis of this critically reflective practice. Nonetheless, the hope was to offer thoughts and clarity on a narrative model that was underexplored. It is my hope that this exegesis has further contributed to the debate around the function and form of the character arc, offering up a workable narrative process that sits not within but rather alongside other narrative forms and paradigms.

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## **Appendix A. Early Development Documents**

The document and tables below serve as an illustration of one of many attempts to articulate and develop the character arc within my practice. The document reveals my processes and efforts to articulate the character arc as well as the constant dialogue that prevails between practice and theory.

### **Five to One**

What are the odds of finding your one true love?

Five to one is the story about the lengths Joe Reason will go to find the true love of his life. His expectations are high, but he is no slouch and knows he can't afford to trust in fate. To this end he has compiled a list of the essential elements that will make up his ideal partner. Half a lifetime of searching has taken its toll and the once optimistic Joe has resigned to settling for what he thinks is second best. Or more accurately fifth best, as Joe has found elements of his ideal partner in five different people. Attempting to juggle five relationships isn't easy and Joe is a man in freefall. It's only a matter of time before his many partners discover the truth and challenge his behaviour.

### **Initial Ideas**

The idea for Five to One from a structural perspective is that it will offer five distinct and separate narratives for the central protagonist to engage with. If we take the central character and give him his own overarching story, then this adds another story taking the total to six distinct stories. The aim then is to offer six distinct character arcs for the central character to determine whether this is achievable with the narrative space of a feature film of typically ninety to one hundred and

twenty pages. To add further complication and taking theorist Phil Parker's ideas about Romance narratives being distinguished by not only one but two central protagonists within the romance genre, this will bring the total amount of stories to seven. There will be six stories for the major central protagonist and one for the secondary protagonist.

If the romance genre necessitates that all stories orbit around the idea of love or the pursuit of love, then the central protagonist must have this idea as their primary goal in each separate story. Given that the character arc model needs two goals in direct conflict to establish a dilemma for the central protagonist then the central protagonist will need to wrestle with seven choices throughout the narrative. The six distinct elements will form one half of each story's dilemma and the consistent alternative in each story which will be represented by the central protagonist's pursuit of love. The six distinct desires will be represented by specific criteria that the central protagonist has designated should form an essential element of his ideal partner e.g. intellect, charisma, outlook etc. The following diagram should help illustrate the intention.

Story 1: Romanticism versus Love

Story 2: Intellect versus Love

Story 3: Charisma versus Love

Story 4: Loyalty versus Love (commitment, social expectation, predictable, conservative)

Story 5: Promiscuity versus Love (swinging, gay, subcultures, superficial, unpredictable, liberal)

Story 6: Physical attraction versus Love

Story 7: This is the secondary character's story and she needs to have her dilemma defined.

It is important to depict each choice as viable and sensible options and the subjectivity of prejudices or preferences should be wholly attributed to the central protagonist. The other issue to consider is what constitutes love or true love from the character or narrative's perspective? It will need to be a constant in terms of a definable goal otherwise the risk of remaining vague and nebulous is great. It could be argued that the abstract idea of love should remain intangible, but for the sake of a closed and cohesive narrative, some sense of a definition will be given and remain a consistent throughout, if only to maintain an element of narrative control.



## Story 1. Romanticism versus Love

|                   |  |  |                                    |  |   |   |                        |
|-------------------|--|--|------------------------------------|--|---|---|------------------------|
| Inciting incident | <b>Conscious Desire:</b><br>To associate love Romanticism. | <b>1<sup>st</sup> arc choice</b><br><b>Embracing the conscious desire.</b><br>Pursuit of the Ideal of The one true love in your life despite the consequences. | <b>Direct Results of decision.</b> | 2 <sup>nd</sup> arc<br>Rejection<br><br>To reject the conscious desire | Direct Results of decision  | 3 <sup>rd</sup> arc reject the conscious desire         | resolution             |
|                   | <b>Unconscious Desire</b><br>To find true love.            | <b>1<sup>st</sup> arc choice</b><br><b>rejection of unconscious desire.</b>  | Direct Results of decision         | 2 <sup>nd</sup> arc To embrace the unconscious desire                  | Direct Results of decision<br>Isolation<br>understanding<br>focus | 3 <sup>rd</sup> arc choice<br><b>Embrace true love.</b> | Resolution<br>Positive |

## Story 2. Intellect versus Love

|                   |   |   |   |   |  |   |                            |
|-------------------|---|---|---|---|--|---|----------------------------|
| Inciting incident | <b>Conscious Desire:</b><br>To associate love with intellectual attraction. | <b>1<sup>st</sup> arc choice</b><br><b>Embracing the conscious desire.</b><br><br>Pursuit of the Intellectually attractive character. | <b>Direct Results of decision.</b><br>1.Euphoria.<br>2. Pride.<br>3. Over critical.<br>4.Paranoia.<br>5. Lack of empathy. | 2 <sup>nd</sup> arc<br>Rejection<br><br>To reject the conscious desire. | Direct Results of decision   | 3 <sup>rd</sup> arc reject the conscious desire         | resolution                 |
|                   | <b>Unconscious Desire</b><br>To find true love.                             | <b>1<sup>st</sup> arc choice</b><br><b>rejection of unconscious desire</b>  | Direct Results of decision  | 2 <sup>nd</sup> arc To embrace the unconscious desire                   | Direct Results of decision<br>Isolation,<br>Understanding,<br>Focus. | 3 <sup>rd</sup> arc choice<br><b>Embrace true love.</b> | Resolution<br><br>Positive |

### Story 3. Charisma versus Love

|                   |   |   |   |  |   |   |                            |
|-------------------|---|---|---|--|---|---|----------------------------|
| Inciting incident | <b>Conscious Desire:</b><br>To associate love with attraction to personality. | <b>1<sup>st</sup> arc choice</b><br><b>Embracing the conscious desire.</b><br><br>Pursuit of the character with attractive personality. | <b>Direct Results of decision.</b><br><br>1.Euphoria.<br>2. Pride.<br>3. Over critical.<br>4.Paranoia.<br>5. Lack of empathy. | 2 <sup>nd</sup> arc<br>Rejection<br><br>To reject the conscious desire | Direct Results of decision  | 3 <sup>rd</sup> arc reject the conscious desire         | Resolution                 |
|                   | <b>Unconscious Desire</b><br>To find true love.                               | <b>1<sup>st</sup> arc choice</b><br><b>rejection of unconscious desire</b>  | Direct Results of decision  | 2 <sup>nd</sup> arc To embrace the unconscious desire                  | Direct Results of decision<br>Isolation<br>Anxiety<br>understanding focus | 3 <sup>rd</sup> arc choice<br><b>Embrace true love.</b> | Resolution<br><br>Positive |

#### Story 4. Loyalty versus Love (commitment, social expectation, predictable, conservative)

|                   |  |   |   |  |  |   |                            |
|-------------------|--|---|---|--|--|---|----------------------------|
| Inciting incident | <b>Conscious Desire:</b><br>To associate love with commitment. | <b>1<sup>st</sup> arc choice</b><br><b>Embracing the conscious desire.</b><br><br>Pursuit of the loyal/committed character. | <b>Direct Results of decision.</b><br><br>1.Euphoria.<br>2. Pride.<br>3. Over critical.<br>4.Paranoia.<br>5. Lack of empathy. | 2 <sup>nd</sup> arc<br>Rejection<br><br>To reject the conscious desire | Direct Results of decision   | 3 <sup>rd</sup> arc reject the conscious desire         | Resolution                 |
|                   | <b>Unconscious Desire</b><br>To find true love.                | <b>1<sup>st</sup> arc choice</b><br><b>rejection of unconscious desire</b>  | Direct Results of decision  | 2 <sup>nd</sup> arc To embrace the unconscious desire                  | Direct Results of decision<br>Isolation<br>Anxiety<br>understanding<br>focus | 3 <sup>rd</sup> arc choice<br><b>Embrace true love.</b> | Resolution<br><br>Positive |

### Story 5. Promiscuity/lust versus Love (swinging, gay, subcultures, superficial, unpredictable, liberal)

|                   |  |  |   |  |   |   |                            |
|-------------------|--|--|---|--|---|---|----------------------------|
| Inciting incident | <b>Conscious Desire:</b><br>To associate love with promiscuity | <b>1<sup>st</sup> arc choice</b><br><b>Embracing the conscious desire.</b><br><br>Pursuit of the promiscuity | <b>Direct Results of decision.</b><br><br>1.Euphoria.<br>2. Pride.<br>3. Over critical.<br>4.Paranoia.<br>5. Lack of empathy. | 2 <sup>nd</sup> arc<br>Rejection<br><br>To reject the conscious desire | Direct Results of decision  | 3 <sup>rd</sup> arc reject the conscious desire         | resolution                 |
|                   | <b>Unconscious Desire</b><br>To find true love.                | <b>1<sup>st</sup> arc choice</b><br><b>rejection of unconscious desire</b>                                   | Direct Results of decision  | 2 <sup>nd</sup> arc To embrace the unconscious desire                  | Direct Results of decision<br>Isolation<br>Anxiety<br>understanding focus | 3 <sup>rd</sup> arc choice<br><b>Embrace true love.</b> | Resolution<br><br>Positive |

## Story 6. Physical attraction versus Love

|                   |   |   |   |  |  |   |                            |
|-------------------|---|---|---|--|--|---|----------------------------|
| Inciting incident | <b>Conscious Desire:</b><br>To associate love with physical attraction. | <b>1<sup>st</sup> arc choice</b><br><b>Embracing the conscious desire.</b><br><br>Pursuit of the physically attractive character. | <b>Direct Results of decision.</b><br><br>1.Euphoria.<br>2. Pride.<br>3. Over critical.<br>4.Paranoia.<br>5. Lack of empathy. | 2 <sup>nd</sup> arc<br>Rejection<br><br>To reject the conscious desire | Direct Results of decision   | 3 <sup>rd</sup> arc reject the conscious desire               | resolution                 |
|                   | <b>Unconscious Desire</b><br>To find true love.                         | <b>1<sup>st</sup> arc choice</b><br><b>rejection of unconscious desire</b>  | Direct Results of decision  | <b>2<sup>nd</sup> arc To embrace the unconscious desire</b>            | Direct Results of decision<br>Isolation<br>Anxiety<br>understanding<br>focus | <b>3<sup>rd</sup> arc choice</b><br><b>Embrace true love.</b> | Resolution<br><br>Positive |

**Story 7. This is the secondary character's story.**

|                   |   |  |   |  |  |   |                            |
|-------------------|---|--|---|--|--|---|----------------------------|
| Inciting incident | <b>Conscious Desire:</b><br>To associate love   | <b>1<sup>st</sup> arc choice</b><br><b>Embracing the conscious desire.</b> | <b>Direct Results of decision.</b><br><br>1.Euphoria.<br>2. Pride.<br>3. Over critical.<br>4.Paranoia.<br>5. Lack of empathy. | 2 <sup>nd</sup> arc<br>Rejection<br><br>To reject the conscious desire | Direct Results of decision   | 3 <sup>rd</sup> arc reject the conscious desire               | resolution                 |
|                   | <b>Unconscious Desire</b><br>To find true love. | <b>1<sup>st</sup> arc choice</b><br><b>rejection of unconscious desire</b> | Direct Results of decision  | <b>2<sup>nd</sup> arc To embrace the unconscious desire</b>            | Direct Results of decision<br>Isolation<br>Anxiety<br>understanding<br>focus | <b>3<sup>rd</sup> arc choice</b><br><b>Embrace true love.</b> | Resolution<br><br>Positive |

## **Appendix B**

### **Sample development documents: Outlines and treatment.**

The sample development documents below reveal further the processes of my practice. These documents were referred to and returned to within the writing of the screenplay. These documents will continue to influence and change themselves as the practice screenplay is developed further. These Documents are also referred to in the Critical Reflection of Chapter 3.

#### **It Must be Love**

##### **Outline**

Road Haulier Joe Reason is dead centre of a mid-life crisis, in the unenviable position of being committed to five relationships simultaneously. All the women are unaware of each other and apparently content according to Joe, but he is far from happy and consolidating the essential attributes of his ideal partner across five women is not all it's cracked up to be. He is desperate to find all the things he needs from a relationship in one woman but the future doesn't look bright until holed up in a motorway services, Joe runs into Amy, also a haulier who is similarly free and easy with her affections. Joe is keen to make acquaintances but Amy turns him down flat. Joe is not used to the rebuff and turns on the charm. Amy is placated a little and says she has no time for just one man. Joe understands and reveals his appetite is equally large. Amy laughs him off "That's what they all say." But they do exchange details. As a parting shot Amy grabs Joe and pulls him into a spontaneous clinch. This is unexpected and he's smitten.



Joes' relationships continue to progress at speed with four of his partners demanding some sort of commitment, to marriage, to moving in, to becoming a father. Joe unable to confront the truth agrees to all demands and bumbles along the best he can. All the while his interest and feelings for Amy continue to flourish. Crunch time arrives when the five women discover the truth and reel on Joe. Joe is fairly sanguine about this turn of events and sees this as an opportunity to really pursue Amy, and an intense affair develops. Amy is however still ensconced in multiple relationships, but a breaking point arises when she finds her cuckolded husband involved in an affair of his own. Amy calls off the relationships including the one with her husband. She wants time to consider and reflect on her future. Joe meanwhile is delivered an unexpected offer when three of his old partners decide they are happy for Joe to continue their old arrangement and invite him back. Joe is thrilled as he didn't expect to be flattered with such an opportunity, multiple partners who would understand his needs. Amy by now has decided what she wants and it is a monogamous relationship, and the obvious candidate against her better judgement is Joe. They are so alike and equally afraid of commitment that they might just work out together. Amy confronts Joe with her feelings and admits she loves him, but there is a catch, he must commit to her alone as she promises to do the same for him. Joe is enamoured of Amy and he knows that he has never met anyone like her, but the prospect of one partner when he has the option of many is just too much to ask. Joe declines Amy's offer and they part ways.

Joe is then invited to a party where all his partners are in attendance. Joe has nothing to fear as they all indulge him, but it is unexpectedly a hollow experience. He feels stifled and irony of ironies, used. He sets off in search of Amy and having caught up with her confesses the error of his ways. He loves her and wants to commit to her alone. Amy is surprised by Joe's admission but reveals she has moved on herself and is now attached to someone else. She admits they could have

been great together, but that the timing wasn't right. Joe is left devastated, having lost the one woman he truly loved.

The longer outline below goes further in fleshing out the details of story and motivations of characters. Commentary will be offered to encompass the character arc at this stage, as well as genre conventions. Nevertheless, I am keen to focus on the areas of omission as well. I have not returned until now to these documents in my process of a linear approach to the stages of the narratives construction, and so tracking them here is potentially very illuminating. The longer outline below entitled *The Little Black Book* is an early working title for *It Must be Love*.

## **Extended Practice Screenplay Outline**

### **The Little Black Book**

#### **Longer Outline**

*Road Haulier Joe Reason is dead centre of a mid-life crisis, in the unenviable position of being committed to five relationships simultaneously. All the women are unaware of each other and apparently content according to Joe, but he is far from happy and consolidating the essential attributes of his ideal partner across five women is not all it's cracked up to be. He is desperate to find all the things he needs from a relationship in one woman but the future doesn't look bright until holed up in a motorway services, Joe runs into Amy, also a haulier who is similarly free and easy with her affections.*

*Joe is keen to make acquaintances but Amy turns him down flat. Joe is not used to the rebuff and turns on the charm.*

*Amy is placated a little and says she has no time for just one man. Joe understands and reveals his appetite is equally large. Amy laughs him off "That's what they all say." But they do exchange details. As a parting shot Amy grabs Joe and pulls him into a spontaneous clinch. This is unexpected and he's smitten.*

*Joes' relationships continue to progress at speed with four of his partners demanding some sort of commitment, to marriage, to moving in, to becoming a father. Joe unable to confront the truth agrees to all demands and bumbles along the best he can. All the while his interest and feelings for Amy continue to flourish. Crunch time arrives when the five women discover the truth and reel on Joe. Joe is fairly sanguine about this turn of events and sees this as an opportunity to really pursue Amy, and an intense affair develops. Amy is however still ensconced in multiple relationships, but a breaking point arises when she finds her cuckolded husband involved in an affair of his own. Amy calls off the relationships including the one with her husband. She wants time to consider and reflect on her future.*

*Joe meanwhile is delivered an unexpected offer when three of his old partners decide they are happy for Joe to continue their old arrangement and invite him back. Joe is thrilled as he didn't expect to be flattered with such an opportunity, multiple partners who would understand his needs. Amy by now has decided what she wants and it is a monogamous relationship, and the obvious candidate against her better judgement is Joe. They are so alike and equally afraid of commitment that they might just work out together. Amy confronts Joe with her feelings and admits she loves him, but there is a catch, he must commit to her alone as she*

*promises to do the same for him. Joe is enamoured of Amy and he knows that he has never met anyone like her, but the prospect of one partner when he has the option of many is just too much to ask. Joe declines Amy's offer and they part ways.*

*Joe is then invited to a party where all his partners are in attendance. Joe has nothing to fear as they all indulge him, but it is unexpectedly a hollow experience. He feels stifled and irony of ironies, used. He sets off in search of Amy and having caught up with her confesses the error of his ways. He loves her and wants to commit to her alone. Amy is surprised by Joe's admission but reveals she has moved on herself and is now attached to someone else. She admits they could have been great together, but that the timing wasn't right. Joe is left devastated, having lost the one woman he truly loved.*

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## **Extended Outline Analysis**

On reflection, it is easy to see how the story in the longer outline is beginning to broaden out as there is more scope and expectation to deliver if not the entire story then a broader sense of what the story may cover and focus on. This longer outline acknowledges some key areas of omission in the earlier brief outline, the first being the clear dual protagonist of Amy who although arguably still a little subservient to Joe in terms of sharing the narrative, has at least risen up to occupy this space. Parker's (1999) position that the two romantic characters need to be of equal weight and value, is not adhered to within the screenplay with Amy as an underdeveloped character persisting at this stage and beyond to the first draft screenplay.

This is noteworthy given that documents such as outlines and treatments are typically considered working sketches towards the finished narrative and perhaps not the key mechanical tools from which to analyse and scrutinize the key factors or focus of the story. Detecting the fact that Amy is underdeveloped at this stage in the development process, adds credence to the importance of the formative and developmental documents in offering the ability to detect or recognise issues or deficits in relation to genre and story.

### **The arcing stories in isolation**

Story 1. Joe's story is about deciding what to do about love. It is not clear if this should be a personal journey separate to the pursuit of love or not. Is this story about commitment or not? Is there a physical or objectified goal? Is this more an existential predicament revisited as the narrative unfolds? Terry is his mentor or ghost of Christmas future that will prey on his fears and hinder his progress.

Story 2. Amy (Name means Loved One), 39, Joe's soul mate. Her story will in many ways mirror Joe's and be about whether to continue to play the field or settle down.

Story 3. Carly (Born to lead) 55. Energetic, controlling, maternal. She sets goals and achieves them. Clearly a need to impress burns below the surface, but her wealth of achievements and her dismissive attitude towards them are both attractive and intimidating at the same time.

Story 4. Pia (dutiful, pious) 33 Practical rational and loyal.

Story 5. Naomi (Pleasure) 34, decadent and unconventional. She likes to take risks and needs constant drama in her life to feel engaged.

Story 6. Ramya (Beautiful) 43, the stereotypical beautiful and superficial objectified woman. This character needs more substance. Her focus on vanity is a cover for deeper seated issues, may need to simplify them to ensure she is just a secondary character.

Story 7. Sonia (Intellectual) 44, will drive the plotting through her investigations armed with the little black book.

The obvious issue with equating each story and character with a dominant attribute means that the characters are potentially oversimplified. Whilst it is useful to distinguish the characters through their dominant personality traits for the sake of clarifying their role in the narrative, it will be important to add further subtlety and dimension to their characterisations to ensure that they are more than just types. Once the character arcs are clarified and the mechanics of the narrative as a whole become clear, it may be necessary to address this issue in order to avoid an oversimplification of the romantic characters.

## **It Must be Love**

### **Treatment**

1. Joe is at the graveside of his father. He confides in his fears of dying alone, especially given that his father died age 46, just one year away for Joe.

1. Pia 33, in the office toilet discovers she's pregnant. She doesn't appear to be ecstatic about it even though there are mementos around her desk to suggest a stable relationship with Joe. She tries to contact him to no avail.

2. At the Road Haulier depot Joe encounters Terry 66, a wizened ghost of Christmas future. Terry is mistrustful and bitter about all relationships and believes there isn't anything that can't be fixed by regular visits to massage parlours. Joe is adamant that he can find love and is on a mission to do so.

1. Later that evening a smartly turned out Joe is entangled with the maternal Carly 55, at an exclusive boutique hotel in Manchester. They are comfortable with each other, but it is clear she has a confidence issue regarding her age. Joe is slightly down, but doesn't go into the details, to which Carly immediately suspects herself as the cause and suggests a treat to remedy his malaise. The treat on offer is a new sharp suit from a designer outlet that Joe is happy to swagger about in. The balance appears to have been restored between them and they flirt and kiss at a café afterwards. Joe is Carly's bit of rough and she is glad that, their lives beyond their time together is a bit of a mystery to each other. Joe detects Carly's sensitivity here and states that he loves her, but has been scared to say so because of the obvious power imbalance. Carly is all a fluster at the admission and leaps on the opportunity to express her love for Joe to.

1. Joe meets Amy 39, at a motorway service station. Joe interrupts a sexual encounter between Amy and someone else. Joe hears a commotion in the cubicle next to his. Curiosity gets the better of him and he peers over the wall. Below him are a couple busily shagging. Joe cracks a grin and then freezes as he locks eyes with the Woman, Amy. She appears nonplussed and throws him a wink. Joe's footing slips and he cracks his chin on the way down knocking himself out in the process. He is awoken by Amy who is now clothed and in concerned mode. Joe is a little embarrassed but also keen to make acquaintances. Amy gives him the shrug off but Joe is not so easily deterred. Joe is impressed and a little turned on. He tries his luck but is rebuffed. After some persistence Amy agrees to swap contact

details and then pulls Joe into a spontaneous clinch before pushing him aside and moving on. Joe is absolutely smitten. Joe races after her and finds her at her Eddie Stobart cabin. He asserts that he “I haven’t met many women, if any quite like you. I can honestly say I might well be in love with you.” Amy is gentle but firm and states “Grow up!” Joe is left rebuffed but undeterred.

**2. Joe finally shows up at Pia’s house to find her clearly anxious. She reveals her news expecting a pessimistic response, but in stark contrast to her expectations Joe is delighted. She is encouraged by this, and decides to honour their relationship and do the proper thing by the baby. The questions lay heavy in the air until Joe takes the initiative and goes down on bended knee. “Will you have me then?” he enquires. Pia accepts and they celebrate.**

3. At the Haulier depot Joe confides in Terry about his impending fatherhood. Terry, the perennial bachelor believes nothing good will come of it, but Joe thinks this might be the impetus he needs to make a decision about who to truly love.

2. Carly indulges Joe in several shopping sprees, 2. but still Joe is distracted with infatuation for Amy sending her a flurry of texts messages. With Joe preoccupied, he fails to spot a looming encounter 1. with Naomi. Naomi is delighted to meet Carly but Carly is severely deflated and flees the scene. Joe tries to contact Carly and hopefully diffuse the situation, but she is incognito.

2. Joe is frank with Naomi from the beginning if only because they met via the personal ads with the line ‘Good Times No Commitments.’ He admits that his sexual appetite is large, but that he is really looking for something more meaningful. Naomi defines herself by her sexual voracity and is not particularly interested in meaning just yet. She would rather push the envelope before settling down and to that end



suggests this is a perfect opportunity for a quickie. Joe is pleased that the afternoon is not an entire loss.

4. At work, Terry thinks Joe is too soft trying to actually entertain all these women in a serious way. He thinks he has gotten too close already.

1. Sonia, 44 is ecstatic having just been offered a HAULAGE RECEPTIONIST. She is however anxious about how this will impact on her relationship with Joe. They have been together for six months and she values what they have. She decides to pamper Joe in order to prime him before revealing the news. Whilst enjoying a romantic meal out that evening Sonia reveals her news to an impressed and encouraging Joe. She states that she may need to relocate and without much thought, Joe suggests he could come along. As they return to her flat Sonia discovers condoms in Joe's jacket. She confronts him about them and he states they are for them. Sonia contemplates this clearly not convinced, but then decides to check her suspicions and regains the mood, suggesting they indulge each other more often before leading him to the bedroom.

1. The next day whilst out with Ramya Joe gets a rude awakening as she smells traces of an unfamiliar perfume on him. She grills him for an answer and receives what appears to be a legitimate excuse, but tensions are growing. Joe tries to assure her that she is beautiful and without compare, but this is little solace and touches the nerve that she is only valued for her beauty. Their discussion turns to an argument which is abruptly interrupted by a friend of Ramya's. Seeking to save face, Ramya quickly changes her mood and introduces Joe as her partner. Joe's easy charm wins over Ramya's friend and the three of them go to lunch together. Ramya squeezes Joe's hand approvingly, Joe is saved for now.

5. He visits Terry again who is impressed that all the women know the truth and are still committed. That is a victory in his eyes.

2. Another evening spent at Sonia's and Joe appears unduly tired. He sinks into post coital slumber, and Sonia seizes the opportunity to search through his belongings. Her suspicions are confirmed when she finds Joe's little black book.

3. The following morning she confronts him with the name Naomi without revealing she has the book itself. She is a little taken aback when Joe admits to seeing her and then goes on to state his ultimate objective rather coolly, hoping that Sonia will see the sense of it. He is trying to solve a problem and this may be the best way. Sonia is angry demanding to know what exactly he believes is missing from their relationship? Joe can't answer this but claims that Naomi doesn't have an issue with this situation. Sonia says she wants to meet with Naomi to verify this. Joe thinks this is a good idea and gives Sonia her mobile number. When Joe quizzes Sonia about how she found out. Sonia claims he said her name during sex. Joe is placated, but Sonia now has the book in her possession.

3. Amy returns home to apparent marital bliss with a cuckolded husband. She pours herself a large gin and it is clear all is not well for her. Alone in the bedroom she browses her emails. There are many and varied but clearly all romantic in some way. Amy is amused when she receives a text from Joe and decides to agree to a date.

4. Sonia meets up with Naomi who is unfazed by Joe's promiscuity and is able to put Sonia at ease a little in terms of any self-doubt or lack of confidence. Naomi and Sonia decide to investigate further and take it upon themselves to see how many relationships Joe is ensconced in via the little black book. Naomi finds the news amusing but Sonia is a little more put out if not wholly moralistic on the matter.

Naomi enquires why Sonia is bothering to pursue the inevitable and asks whether she still wants Joe. Sonia is taken aback by the question but has to admit she still finds him attractive, maybe even more so. Sonia feels unsteady but calm in the light of the revelation that she wants this relationship as odd as it might be. She admits to Naomi that perhaps because of the anxiety of a new job, the thought of the compartmentalised security of a relationship appeals to her.

3. Meanwhile Carly has had time to compose herself and confronts Joe, who can only hold his hands up to the situation. He has been carrying on with other women but he can sincerely say that he loves Carly too. Carly doesn't know how to take this and says she can't go on with the relationship. She knows that deep down Joe is just using her for the lifestyle and gifts, but she hadn't wanted to admit it until now. She decides it is best if they end it. Joe brushes aside the idea that he loved to be spoiled. He feigns hurt and insists that he did love her, once again in denial. Carly is unsteady in her resolve but manages to hold firm.

4. Joe and Amy's date is far from romantic but it's not awkward either. There is a real chemistry between them and it's not long before the encounter turns sexual. Post coital they are both sanguine about the fact that it wasn't very good and proceed to slag each other off in an intimate way. They are both slightly unsure, as it shouldn't work but it appears to. They aren't resigned about their sexual encounter and Amy admits that she is pretty worn out from all the recent sex she's had. They share an admission that one person is not enough and this only serves to deepen their connection. Joe reveals that his little black book with all his relationship details is missing. She laughs at the cliché of 'A little black book.' and thinks it may just be for the best.

5. Amy is slightly unnerved about her connection to Joe in the cold light of reflection and decides that what she needs is some male company to distract her and put the Joe thing in context.

6. Terry sees Amy as needy and threatening to Joe's masculinity and urges him not to commit.

**3. Joe feels guilty about neglecting Pia and tries to atone by buying her gifts. Pia is gracious and tolerant, but it is also clear that she is losing faith in his commitment and fears what the future may hold. Joe claims he is responsible and will try and get more time off work to spend with her. Pia is placated once more but the cracks are clearly visible.**

6. Amy goes out with various men, but there is a change in her behaviour. She appears more distracted than before and increasingly alcohol serves to dull the monotony.

3. Naomi attends a BDSM club and invites Joe along. Joe is up for the event, but a little out of his depth as they find themselves at and after club swingers party. They each indulge at the party, but Joe is keen to gravitate back to Naomi who reassuringly for him also appears content to do so. As they head home it is fairly obvious that Naomi is fired up from the experience and keen to indulge more in the swinging scene. Joe is less sure about the experience, but doesn't want to alienate Naomi. When she suggests another event he agrees to attend with her.

7. Amy arrives home one evening to find evidence to suggest her husband is cheating. He is slightly meek about it but manages to assert that their relationship is shallow and she is incapable of truly loving anyone. This hits a nerve much more than the cheating itself which she is forced to admit she understands.

**4. Pia is then contacted by Sonia who reveals Joe is involved with at least five other women in a serious capacity. Pia is understandably devastated.**

8. Amy needs some head space and consoles a bottle in a local bar. She is quick to gain attention from a hopeful man and slips easily into his arms for comfort. Their encounter escalates in the car park but Amy catches her reflection in a window and acknowledges her detachment from it all. She begins to cry.

4. The next time Naomi and Joe meet is on the approach to the 'swingers' party where she reveals that she has met many of his partners. She asserts that he is a free spirit like herself and swinging is the best way to indulge your needs without complication. Joe appears to agree, but he is definitely holding back. In respectable suburbia stands a house flanked by pampas grass, the universal code for swingers. The party is full on and intense. Naomi seems in her element whereas Joe is clearly unsure. He drinks plenty of vodka before engaging in the orgy with partners of both sexes. He gives his best but by the early morning, walking home alone, his face reveals this to have been a hollow experience.

2. Ramya is contacted by **5. Sonia armed with the little black book.** With the lie revealed Ramya states that she wants nothing more to do with Joe, but the statement is short lived as she confesses to having a similar book of her own in which Joe annoyingly ranks as her most impressive suitor.

4. Carly meets up with **5. Nadia, 6. Sonia 5. Pia and 3. Ramya.** It is a strange club to be members of and it is startling how divergent these women are. They acknowledge this and there is a clear sense of

camaraderie from their shared experience. They all promise to meet up again.

4. Left alone Ramya determines to contact another man from her own little book, but when faced with the decision chooses to uphold the status quo and remain with Joe.

9. At home, Amy finally has a sanguine heart to heart with her husband. She apologises for the hurt and humiliation and wishes him well in his new relationship stating “Don’t let her walk all over you like you let me do.” Her husband in turn hopes she does eventually find someone who she can love.

**6. Pia confronts Joe and surprises him by stating that she has agreed to love him despite his faults and can accept his philandering as she believes he will come round in the end. Joe is touched by Pia’s decision and believes it will work out. They book a scan for the impending baby. Joe and Pia seem euphoric.**

10. Joe and Amy meet up. He has come through the fire of the revelations and is apparently on the up. All the women bar one are happy to maintain the status quo. He has achieved what very few men have achieved, romantic relationship bliss. Amy is happy for him but has another proposition. She has never met anyone like Joe and she is willing to lay her heart on the table and make a go of it, “With my eyes wide open, I know I love you.” Joe knows this is serious but has just secured the continued affections of five women. His defence mechanism kicks in and the security of five appears to be more appealing than risking the unknown with one. Joe declines Amy’s offer of monogamy but offers to see her as well as the rest. She asserts that rightly or wrongly she is not for sharing anymore. Amy wants one man in her life and is happy to bide her time until she meets him. She knows

they complement each other, but understands if he is not yet ready to take the risk. Joe shrugs off the offer and bathes in his apparent fortune. Amy asserts that she will wait for him, but not for long.

11. Amy is committed to her new decision and we see the steady but assured development of her wellbeing as she reclaims a little of herself resisting the easy fix of a quick lay.

7. The partners agree to attend Sonia's leaving party which Carly graciously offers to host.

5. Carly sees it as a way to prove she has moved on from Joe with no hard feelings.

**7. Pia is invited by Sonia to attend and whilst understandably reticent, she ultimately agrees and embraces the truth of her decision and relationship with Joe whilst still deluding herself that he will eventually reserve his loyalty for her alone. She asserts that he will attend the ultrasound scan.**

6. The party is an empowering event for most of the women and Carly in particular who feels she has gained friends and is now comfortable in relation to Joe. Joe Attends the party and realises it is a hollow affair. He accepts a small gift from Carly which verifies for her his insincerity.

6. Naomi is happy to continue to see Joe if he is happy to meet at the parties she attends. She has found a way to compartmentalise her own needs in the parties and does not really have time for time with individuals. Joe declines the offer of attending more swinger's parties and he prefers a more monogamous polygamy with known multiple partners rather than outright strangers. For him it's not all about sex, but a real need to connect with someone. He just can't seem to commit

to one person in order to experience this. Joe appears jubilant at the party but the cracks are clearly visible. He confides in Naomi that despite everything being out in the open he is strangely more mistrustful of people than before. She suggests he expects too much and should just enjoy what he has, whatever form it takes.

8. In the end most of them get what they want from the relationship and are content with this, whilst Joe, stripped of the secrecy and danger, is locked into a life that seems prosaic and hollow.

5. Ramya also acknowledges that their relationship is ultimately shallow and a façade. She makes the comment to Naomi who is clearly more comfortable with the situation. She suggests Ramya do the same as herself and Joe and play the field especially given her beauty. Ramya confides that she couldn't risk her reputation or let it slide. Joe will have to suffice for now.

7. Terry is found dead in his home. It was four days before he was found. No next of kin, nothing.

8. Joe realises he has made a mistake and now wants to prove himself to Amy and commit to her.

**8. Pia at the hospital awaiting the scan. No sign of Joe. She puts on a brave face for the nurse. The baby on the screen.**

12. Joe has had his cake and eaten it until the point of nausea. The women are using him and he acknowledges that selfishness and self-indulgence is a hollow experience. He decides to break it off with everyone and prove to Amy that she was right and that their time is now. With renewed enthusiasm and a sense of accomplishment Joe locates Amy alone at a music festival, and lays his heart on the line. He



has been selfish and disrespectful. He sees the offer from Amy for what it is, a chance for love and he wants to risk it with her. Amy is slightly stunned by the admission and is not entirely convinced. Joe reveals that he has ended all the other relationships and knows that no one compares to Amy. He loves her and knows she loves him to, as she has clearly waited for him like she said. Amy is moved by this and believes he is telling the truth, but they are then interrupted by her new partner. The mood instantly sours and Joe is forced to play the role of an old friend. Later, in a brief moment alone, Joe mocks Amy suggesting her desires for monogamy and a loving relationship with him are just bankrupt lies. Angered by this, Amy wonders how long Joe will last before he cheats again. It is achingly clear that they should abandon all for each other, but suspicions are aroused and Joe's pride is bruised. Amy takes the plunge a final time and admits she loves him, but she also thinks they missed their chance. Joe said no to her offer and she can't be blamed for wanting to move on. They are probably better off apart, how could their relationship survive if neither of them has ever believed in love. Joe left alone with his thoughts is clearly devastated.