

The ensemble sitcom, the film comedy, and narrative comedy: A study on the nature of plotting and comic tension in screen narratives.

A thesis by creative practice following the journey of two characters across three comedy narratives.

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work, and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as References.

The following article is a result of the work arising from the thesis:

‘Caught in the Second Act: The Relationship between Film Comedy and the TV Sitcom’. In *Comunicazioni Sociali Journal of Media, Performing Arts and Cultural Studies*, N3, 2019: 372-388.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis by creative practice critically examines plotting and character behaviour when reworking the TV sitcom to a feature film, and then transposing two of the characters from the film to a half-hour comedy series. It is guided by the question: *How can specific elements of character and plotting be manipulated to generate comic tension in three related forms of screen comedy: the TV sitcom, the feature film and the half-hour narrative comedy?* To that end, three scripts follow two characters as they journey through different, yet related, screen narratives.

Beginning with an examination of the relationship of characters in an ensemble sitcom, both between characters (inter-relational) and between the group and an external ‘reality’ (intra-relational) I find that some comic narratives are best served by a ‘discursive frame.’ I posit that a frame or story ideology maintains a certain degree of entrapment of the group, and which the characters either support, deny, or attempt to demolish, resulting in comic tension. Furthermore, I offer that the collective harbours an echo character who mirrors the fears of the group, as well as a ‘comic antihero,’ aware of the frame and its disempowering effect, yet unable to leave the situation as it affords them some degree of status and identity.

Analysing the nature of the midpoint (MP) in film comedies, this thesis posits that plots dealing with a discordant relationship necessitate that the MP initiate a ‘bind’ for the main character/s between a ‘want’ (often a tangible goal) and their ‘need’ (flaws they must face). By attempting to master the bind, rather than confront their need, the character suffers what I term ‘cognisant dissonance,’ in that they become aware of the incongruity, yet lack the cognition to confront the issue, underpinning the comic tension in the second half of Act Two. These findings are then used to analyse turning points (TPs) in the episodic narrative comedy, illustrating that, of the three TPs which enable the closed narrative structure, the middle TP operates much like a MP, triggering behaviour which alters the direction of the narrative, forcing the plot to return to the emotional stasis; such a response can now be seen as emanating from a form of bind.

Critically examining plotting and related character behaviour in short- and long-form screen comedy and then testing the hypotheses in the scripts, this thesis offers new readings for comedy screenwriters as well as theorists.

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INTRODUCTION

The research question and context

This thesis by creative practice critically examines the nature of comic tension in relation to narrative structure, which in this case uses the transposition of character between three different comedy forms, the TV sitcom, the feature film and the half-hour narrative comedy. The aim is to critically examine character behaviour when reworking a TV sitcom into a feature film and then transposing characters from a film into a half-hour narrative comedy. I set out to answer the question: *How can specific elements of character and plotting be manipulated to generate comic tension in three related forms of screen comedy: the TV sitcom, the feature film and the half-hour narrative comedy?* My objective is to analyse how tension is enabled through the narrative structure in screen comedy, and how that affect, or is affected by, character behaviour, resulting in comic performance. I then evaluate the findings in three screenplays. Craig Batty and Dallas Baker write:

Screenplays as research artefacts ... contribute knowledge in their very fabric and, although accompanying dissertations, exegeses or research statements explicate this research, they do so in conversation with the screenplay itself.¹

Three original scripts are written in response to theoretical arguments centred on narrative structure, genre and character, in order to test the analysis offered in the chapters. In doing so, I seek to understand the needs and affordances of narrative structure in relation to comic tension. By applying those insights as guidelines, the creative practice (CP) screenplays will assist in determining if the principles elucidated are relevant in relation to

¹ Craig Batty and Dallas J. Baker, 'Screenwriting as a Mode of Research, and the Screenplay as a Research Artefact' in *Screen Production Research. Creative Practice as a Mode of Enquiry*, Craig Batty, Susan Kerrigan (eds.) (Switzerland: Springer International, 2018) p.75.

plotting, and if such principles enable comic tension. Extending on the structuralist approach employed in the development of the framework in my book, *Situation Comedy, Character, and Psychoanalysis*,² I apply textual analysis to formalist readings to ascertain plot elements which underscore comic tension. These findings are then put to the service of three scripts –the CP screenplays. To that end, this thesis examines *how* narrative structures underscore character behaviour and change – transformational (as in the film), arrested (as in the sitcom), or evolving over a series (as in narrative comedy/comedy series), explicating consanguinity between narrative-situation and narrative-character.

I have long had an interest in the connection between theory and practice in comedy writing, beginning with how the sitcom, as a comic mode, operates, culminating in the publication of *Situation Comedy*. In addition, I have written four sitcom pilots: *Paternal Instincts*, *Unfinished Business*, *Sandwich*, and *At the Bar*, with three achieving recognition at screenwriting competitions such as the London Film Festival and the Cannes Screenplay Competition.

In 2017 Lionsgate, a major screen distribution company, announced that they were revisiting their film catalogue in search of potential sitcom spin-offs, triggering an academic interest in the approach required when migrating film characters to a half-hour comedy screen text. I began to ruminate on what research or analysis would be required that would assist in developing a comedy series from a film text, and in the process utilise screenwriting as a form of research to test analysis of comic screen narratives.

² The sitcom is better analysed using a structuralist approach in finding the beats that make up the story logic. A formalist approach elucidates form that enables the dénouement. D.T. Klika, *Situation Comedy, Character, and Psychoanalysis: On the Couch with Lucy, Basil and Kimmie* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), Chapter 4, ‘The Tension of the (closed) Narrative.’

In the journal *New Writing* Dallas Baker argues:

Screenwriting research is aimed at producing new knowledge on every level; that of narrative detail, that of story-telling technologies or techniques, that of the social and cultural relevance of the script as text and, most significantly, that of screenwriting practice itself.³

This thesis aims to produce ‘new knowledge’ which enables applications to screenwriting practice and narrative analysis. Batty and Baker further note that “screenplays ... use research to underpin creation (practice-led research); their context and form (research-informed practice); and their industrial and critical contexts (research-led practice).”⁴

Graeme Sullivan connects concepts with practice: “Conceptual practices are at the heart of the thinking and making traditions whereby artists give form to thoughts in creating artefacts that become part of the research process.”⁵ While there is increasing debate and definitions on *script* practice as research, scholarship on how research *informs* practice is more limited, with the Batty and Baker chapter ‘Screenwriting as a Mode of Research, and the Screenplay as a Research Artefact’ as noted, being the most relevant. This may be because of the trend where creative writing in the Academy has embraced the practice of writing *as a form of research*⁶ and thus allowing for the script, traditionally seen as a collegiate or commercial ‘blueprint,’ to now be viewed as an individual artefact, as are other forms of creative writing.⁷

Analysing narrative structures that inform script practice is the central concern of many practitioner-focussed texts on writing the screenplay, yet with limited acknowledgement of theoretical underpinnings. This thesis shifts between research as practice and practice as research in the conversation between the theoretical chapters, the

³ Dallas Baker, ‘The screenplay as text: academic scriptwriting as creative research,’ in *New Writing* (Vol. 13, No. 1, 2016) p.75.

⁴ Baker quoted in Batty and Baker, ‘Screenwriting as a Mode of Research,’ as before, p.71.

⁵ Graeme Sullivan, ‘Making Space: The Purpose and Place of Practice-led Research,’ in *Practice-Led Research, Research-Led Practice in the Creative Arts*, (eds) Hazel Smith & Roger Dean (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009) p.50.

⁶ Baker, ‘The screenplay as text: academic scriptwriting as creative research,’ as before.

⁷ Batty and Baker, ‘Screenwriting as a Mode of Research’ in *Screen Production Research*, as before.

writing of the CPs, and the critical reflections, in turn informing further research.⁸

The key conceptual tools employed are those of screen comedy narrative, specifically the nature of the midpoint (MP) in film comedy and turning points (TPs) in the sitcom/ narrative comedy, alongside critical examinations of ideological story frames, and how each enable comedic behaviour and tension. In doing so, this thesis and the supporting practice-based research offers new insight for comedy screenwriters as well as theorists and is one of the first screen-to-screen studies undertaken.

While the field of adaptation studies covers many aspects such as the adaptation of one form of literature to other forms such as film, television, radio, games and animation, the focus is commonly on the application of character/s and story, both of which remain relatively intact. For example, when adapting the novel to film, or a play to film, the essence of the characters and story are unchanged. This thesis examines the nature of character and narrative structure when transposing characters into a new story and thus different narrative structure. While many characters can be employed when migrating from a film to half-hour text, the narrative structure demands new storylines and, in some cases, new characters (or the loss of some) to ensure comicality as well as repeatability. Recent discourses on ‘fictional migrants’ examines the nature of characters in different fictions yet with similar behaviours, not the nature of character in different narratives within the same mode, as this thesis does.⁹ To that end this thesis extends the boundaries of adaptation studies to now place character in response to story or narrative structure. As such this may allow for the study of characters and their application in new forms of narrative such as games.

⁸ Research as practice can carry various meanings: researching for the practice (historical, medical practices) or applying research (theory) to practice (as in utilising debates that challenge generic expectations) or, as I intend, applying theory to practice which in turn enables new research: research-led practice informing practice-led research.

⁹ Linda Hutcheon, Siobhan O’Flynn, *A Theory of Adaptation* (London, NY: Routledge, 2013). Robert Stam, *Literature through Film. Realism, Magic, and the Art of Adaptation*. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing,

In my book, *Situation Comedy, Character and Psychoanalysis* I examined the psychodynamics that exist between sitcom characters, inter- and intra- relationally within the world they inhabit (the situation) – typically an office, a home environment along with a social site such as pub, restaurant or coffee shop. Theorising the sitcom, I define this form of comedy as “a half-hour comic story involving a small group of characters premised on a struggle,” specifically a triumvirate of characters trapped in a situation (the story world) “wherein at least one character is repeatedly thwarted in achieving their goal by forces unseen and unknown to them.”¹⁰ As such, I argue that in the sitcom there exists three types of character caught in a power struggle. While the book is a theoretical undertaking, it offers a framework to assist in the development of a sitcom pilot.¹¹ However, some critical issues central to this form of comedy remain unexamined.

As a consequence, this thesis expands on aspects developed in my book, specifically the characteristics of the ensemble sitcom, to understand how a group of characters is impacted by an ideological stance that the characters either support, deny, defy or attempt to expose.¹² This ‘ideological world’ is what I describe as the ‘discursive frame.’ Noting how each character responds to the frame assists in determining principal elements of characterisation, especially when (and if) the group is taken out of their original situation

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2005). Joakim Hermansson, ‘Characters as Fictional Migrants: *Atonement*, adaptation and the screenplay process’, in *Journal of Screenwriting* (11.1, 2020) pp. 81-97. More recently Murray Smith has presented on the migration of characters and how they exist in differing environments or texts. Screenwriting Research Network keynote August/Sept 2021, <<https://srn2020.com/keynote-speakers/>>.

¹⁰ Klika, *Situation Comedy*, as before, p.7.

¹¹ The focus of the book was primarily on single characters with the key character existing within a small group of characters. I define such sitcoms as relationship sitcoms and while originally, they were recorded in a studio in front of an audience (example being *I Love Lucy*, 1951-61), since the late nineties there has been a move to recording such forms of comedy as single camera on location, and redefined as narrative comedies such as *Fleabag* (2016-19). *I Love Lucy*, wrs. Jess Oppenheimer, Madelyn Davis, Bob Carroll Jr, Bob Schiller, Bob Weiskopf, prod. Desilu Productions (USA: CBS, 1951–1961). *Fleabag*, creator Phoebe Waller-Bridge, prod. Two Brothers Pictures (UK: BBC, 2016-19). However, in the book I argue that regardless of production, the fundamentals of the relational dynamics remain the same. Klika, as before, p.15.

¹² The drama comedy *M*A*S*H* is a good example of an ensemble framed by a story ideology - war. *M*A*S*H*, creators Larry Gelbart, Gene Reynolds, prod. 20th Century Fox Television (USA: CBS, 1972-1983).

such as going on a trip or holiday.¹³

Discussing *The Inbetweeners Movie* (2011)¹⁴ Marc Blake writes that “[e]ven though it took them out of the sitcom environment of home and school, it did not tinker with the character dynamic.”¹⁵ Furthermore, the question arises: if the characters are relocated to a new situation or environment, how do the dynamics between the characters change or, despite the new situation or story world, will they revert to the same behaviour?¹⁶

I investigate the connection between the repeated struggle in the sitcom and the transformation required in the feature film, to deduce that if the character undergoes some change in the contemporaneous film then there can be no return to the originating situation as was the case in *The Bad Education Movie* (2015).¹⁷ Through the CPs and theoretical analyses, I critically examine the narrative structure to determine both the effect on character behaviour as well as the positioning of any subsequent screen text in relation to the originating text.

Thus, I offer when reworking a sitcom to a film it is essential to know the transformational journey the character/s will undergo and what is the relation to the ‘struggle’ they experience in the sitcom. The focus of this thesis is about how comicality works in the film comedy that has a narrative or subplot centred on a discordant relationship and which is challenged by events in the narrative. In addition, if the dynamics change in response to the

¹³ Not all ensemble sitcoms are framed by a clearly identifiable ideological world, with the British ensemble sitcom *Are You Being Served?* being such an example, *Are You Being Served?*, creators Jeremy Lloyd, David Croft, prod. BBC (UK: BBC, 1972-1985).

¹⁴ *The Inbetweeners Movie*, wrs. Damon Beesley, Iain Morris, dir. Ben Palmer (Entertainment Film Distributors, 2011).

¹⁵ Marc Blake, *Writing the Comedy Movie* (London, New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016) p.121.

¹⁶ The situation in the comedy series is limited to a few sets, whereas the ‘situation’ in a film is a story world.

¹⁷ In *The Bad Education Movie*, the students and teacher Alfie Vickers go to Cornwall, but instead of a completely new situation, it was a trip to his younger days and in doing so the students exposed to him that who he thought were his friends were in fact not. I regard this film example as remaining in the same locale, rather than the same situation as the sitcom. *The Bad Education Movie*, wrs. Freddy Syborn, Jack Whitehall, dir. Elliot Hegarty (Entertainment Film, 2015).

demands of the feature film narrative, can the characters return to the situation? Therefore, it is necessary to understand what change underlies the situational struggle which can then be harnessed and resolved in the related feature.

In the sitcom, the situation challenges the character by way of the narrative and, in refusing to rise to the challenge, they act in ways that alter the direction or structure of the narrative. Whereas, in the (contemporary) feature film, the narrative challenges the character to confront their need, to which they must respond. Furthermore, the narrative comedy, born of the sitcom in terms of character and relational dynamics, has emerged as a term that categorises half-hour screen comedies, often shot single camera, having a story arc which enables, and in some cases demand, sequential viewing. Identifying how the character operates in each form, and their response to the narrative is central to determining the nature of transformation by the character when migrated to film or, alternatively, from film to the half-hour narrative comedy. This thesis examines both processes to find that character and narrative are intrinsically linked by way of plotting and offers that each form affords different narrative demands on the character.

Returning to the theoretical framework in my book; in the sitcom, I argue that there are three types of psychodynamically-charged character: *the narcissist who has power over a main character* (which I label the key character) and who *think they have power* but is *echoed by a character manifesting their unconscious fear*¹⁸ often the one *exposing the powerlessness* of the key character. It is this relational dynamic which enables repeatability. Furthermore, I demonstrated that the key character not only attempts to alter their status or leave the situation (the site of the struggle), they are also unaware of the dynamics which enforce their repeated entrapment. While I argue that comicality in the sitcom is the result

¹⁸ In texts such as Chris Head's *Creating Comedy Narratives for Stage and Screen*. (London: Methuen, 2021) such characters are often referred to as the fool, but I prefer the term echo as that indicates their role – to echo the fear of the key character.

of the comedic gap between the key character and those around them, there is little reference to the dynamics within the ensemble sitcom and, as noted, is the starting point for this undertaking.

Definitions pertaining to this thesis

For the purposes of this thesis, I define the following: the **‘relationship sitcom’** as having two to four characters, while the **ensemble sitcom** is comprised of five or more characters, and which may encompass a relationship. I offer this delineation in terms of the power struggle between characters as noted above:

- **The relationship sitcom explores the power struggle *between* characters,** which is threatened each week by the inciting incident. Examples include *Fawlty Towers* (1975, 1979), *The Young Offenders* (2018), *Gavin & Stacey* (2007), *The Odd Couple* (1970).¹⁹
- **The ensemble sitcom is informed by a ‘frame’ triggering a power struggle inter- and/or intra- relationally.** Examples include *Dad’s Army* (1968), *The Big Bang Theory* (2007), *Bad Education* (2012), *Dinnerladies* (1998).²⁰

Inter- and intra-relational pertains to the relationship between the characters (inter); the intra-relationship occurs between the characters (as a group) and a larger entity such as social expectation or an unseen character that affect the group as a whole.

Narrative comedy is the term commonly used in response to the evolution of the sitcom from traditional multicamera studio-based production to single camera location

¹⁹ *Fawlty Towers*, creators John Cleese, Connie Booth, prod. BBC (UK: BBC, 1975, 1979). *The Young Offenders*, dev. Peter Foott, prods (BBC and Vico Films. UK: RTE, BBC, 2018 – present). *Gavin & Stacey*, creators James Corden, Ruth Jones, prod. Baby Cow Productions (UK: BBC, 2007-2010). *The Odd Couple*, creators Jerry Belson & Garry Marshall, prod. Paramount TV (USA: ABC, 1970-1975).

²⁰ *Are You Being Served?* creators Jeremy Lloyd, David Croft, prod. BBC (UK: BBC, 1972-1985). *Dad’s Army*, creator Jimmy Perry, prod. BBC (UK: BBC, 1968-1977). *Friends*, creators David Crane, Marta Kauffman, prods. Bright/Kaufman/Crane Productions et al. (USA: NBC, 1994-2004). *The Big Bang Theory*, creators Chuck Lorre, Bill Prady, prods. Chuck Lorre Prod. et al. (USA: CBS, 2007-2019). *Bad Education*, creator Jack Whitehall, prod. Tiger Aspect Productions (UK: BBC, 2012-14). *The Inbetweeners*, creators Damon Beesley, Iain Morris, prods. Bwark Productions (UK: E4, 2008-2010). *Dinnerladies*, creator Victoria Wood, prod. BBC (UK: BBC, 1998-2000).

based-production and may involve a story arc over the series and which may demand viewing of episodes in sequential order, which the sitcom traditionally does not.

Seriality: In recent years both the sitcom and narrative comedy have incorporated degrees of seriality which demand viewing in sequential order; such programmes will commonly have a narrative arc across a series with a dramatic question (DQ). Once the DQ is resolved, the series comes to a satisfactory resolution. Hence, the narrative comedy has enveloped both the sitcom (a group of characters connected in some way to each other) and elements of seriality wherein the main characters resolve issues that have prevented relationships coming to fruition. Such programmes could be defined as a sitcom incorporating seriality and a label such as ‘comedy series’ would allow for encapsulating both the sitcom and narrative comedy. Thus, and for the purpose of this thesis, I offer that **the comedy series** is comprised of half-hour episodes within a limited series which may be produced as multicamera studio-based or as single camera on location and **has elements of seriality to varying degrees** (the sitcom less so and the narrative comedy is increasingly determined by a greater degree of seriality).

Repeatability: despite the comedy series having elements of seriality, the half-hour comic narrative demands that **the character/s undergo little to no change in how they see the world, ensuring that they repeatedly respond to challenges brought by the narrative in each episode with the same behaviour.** When the character/s do respond (as in, the DQ is answered) then the series ends.

This thesis utilises the term **film comedy** to encompass those comedies that have a narrative structure which is primarily comic, wherein the character responds to the narrative at the last possible moment (commonly the second turning point/climax), as opposed to the drama narrative wherein the character begins to respond to the narrative at the MP.

Such comedies include the romantic comedy (romcom). However, I discovered in the analysis of a number of screen texts wherein the plot was much like that of a romcom yet was not strictly about a ‘romance’ or romantic relationship. Rather, in many film comedies there is a discordant relationship of some kind (such as friends, parent-child, siblings). I utilise the term **relationship comedy** to describe such texts and expand on generic terms shortly as well as picking up the conversation in the Conclusion. This term is broader and incorporates the **romcom** (wherein the desire for love is the main plot) and the **comedy romance** (wherein the romance is secondary to the comic premise). Hence, I define **the relationship comedy film as a comic narrative which incorporates a plot centred on a discordant relationship that is resolved at the second turning point.**

Screen texts examined

The focus of the texts examined in this thesis is primarily on UK and USA programmes as these markets are the primary sites of development in the half-hour and film comic narrative. While the historical development of the sitcom and film comedy is not the subject of investigation, years of programme production from these countries is referenced after each text as a means of contextualising narrative developments.

Beginning with the ensemble sitcom, I analyse the dynamics both inter- and intra- relationally of the group with a discursive frame. I have argued that in some (relational) sitcoms the frame is defined by a discourse (such as women belong in the home), evident in *I Love Lucy*, (1951-61)²¹ – an ideology which informs either the situation or the character's outlook, or both. By analysing the ensemble in relation to the discursive frame, as well as the role of the echo character, I offer that such characters reflect the fear of the collective, not just the key character as previously argued. I posit that the ensemble sitcom *must* be supported by a discursive frame, particularly as it enables each character to be defined

²¹ Klika, *Situation Comedy*, as before, see Chapters 1 and 5.

by way of a relationship to the frame and which enables comic tension. As such this thesis argues that comedic tension results by way of degrees of incongruity between the character and a discursive frame or between characters.

Further, and noticing the increasing prevalence of characters with morally questionable behaviour (beginning with *Seinfeld*, 1989-98, and more recently *The Young Offenders*, 2018-) this thesis picks up Margrethe Bruun Vaage's text on the antihero in television drama to examine how such a character might exist in the ensemble sitcom and specifically in relation to a frame.²³ Such examination then gives insight into the existence of a comic antihero; in doing so I argue that such characters enable another layer of comedic tension by way of their attempts to expose the frame which both defines and entraps the group.

Ensemble sitcoms reworked as films are common in Britain, however in America the reverse pattern is more prevalent, with examples such as *The Odd Couple* (1968, 1970-75), *M*A*S*H* (1970, 1972-83), *9 to 5* (1980, 1982-83) and *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir* (1947, 1969-70).²² It is interesting to note that there have not been more recent spin-offs and may be the reason why Lionsgate was exploring its archive. Developing a sitcom from a film, I posit, is more difficult as it requires an understanding of how the contemporaneous sitcom enables the ongoing tension between characters in the film. To assist in this developmental process, I offer that such a tension can be found in the second act of the originating film, and other than my article²³ on the association between the film and its

²² See Appendix and list of sitcoms developed as films and films reworked as sitcoms. *The Odd Couple*, wr. Neil Simon, dir. Gene Saks (Paramount Pictures, 1968). *The Odd Couple*, creators Jerry Belson, Garry Marshall, prod. Paramount Television (USA: ABC, 1970-1975). *M*A*S*H*, wr. Ring Lardner Jr., dir. Robert Altman (Twentieth Century Fox, 1970). *M*A*S*H*, creators Larry Gelbart, Gene Reynolds, as before (1972-1983). *9 to 5*, wrs. Colin Higgins, Patricia Resnick, dir. Colin Higgins (20th Century Fox, 1980). *9 to 5*, creators Michael S. Baser & Kim Weiskopf, prods. IPC Film, 20th Century Fox Television (USA: ABC, 1982-1983). *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir*, wr. Philip Dunne, dir. Joseph L. Mankiewicz (20th Century Fox, 1947). *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir*, dev. Jean Holloway, prod. 20th Century Fox (USA: NBC, 1968-1968, ABC, 1969-1970).

²³ Deborah T. Klika, 'Caught in the Second Act: The Relationship between Film Comedy and the TV Sitcom,' in *Comunicazioni Sociali. Journal of Media, Performing Arts and Cultural Studies* (N3, 2019) pp. 372-388.

relational sitcom wherein I critically examine the film *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir* and its associated series, scholarship in this area is mute. To that end, this thesis critically examines the nature of plotting when developing a feature film from the ensemble sitcom, and then to ascertain which characters in the film are best suited to migrate to a half-hour comedy series as a means to assist either form of development.

Academic literature and practice-based texts on the sitcom

I have previously argued that many studies of the sitcom focus on sociological readings,²⁴ and along with Brett Mills' seminal book *TV Sitcom* and David Marc's *Comic Visions*,²⁵ Saul Austerlitz charts similar territory in a more recent study in *Sitcom. A History in 24 Episodes from I Love Lucy to Community*.²⁶ However, other than the discussion in my book, there is little scholarship specifically on the ensemble sitcom, and given the numerous examples, this thesis seeks to redress that gap.²⁷

When coming to write the sitcom pilot or episode, there are various publications aimed at practitioners. Evan Smith's *Writing Television Sitcoms*, Jurgen Wolff's *Successful Sitcom Writing*, Ronald Wolfe's *Writing Comedy*, Tim Ferguson's text on writing the narrative comedy, *The Cheeky Monkey*, and more recently Chris Head's *Creating Comedy Narratives for Stage and Screen* – are all texts that I have consulted when writing my pilot scripts and utilised in the framework for developing a sitcom.²⁸ While such texts detail various approaches to writing the sitcom/narrative comedy, there is no theoretical framework which ensures the dynamics of the form: characters trapped in a situation, be it a family, workplace

²⁴ Klika, *Situation Comedy*, as before, p.6.

²⁵ Brett Mills, *Television Sitcom* (London: BFI Publishing, 2005). David Marc, *Comic Visions* (Massachusetts and Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997).

²⁶ Saul Austerlitz, *Sitcom. A History in 24 Episodes from I Love Lucy to Community* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2014).

²⁷ See Appendices for list of sitcoms developed as films and films reworked as sitcoms.

²⁸ Evan Smith, *Writing Television Sitcoms* (New York: Perigee Books, 1999). Jurgen Wolff, *Successful Sitcom Writing* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996). Ronald Wolfe, *Writing Comedy: A Guide to Scriptwriting for TV, Radio, Film, and Stage* (London: Robert Hale, 2003). Tim Ferguson, *The Cheeky Monkey: Writing Narrative Comedy* (Sydney: Currency Press, 2010). Chris Head, *Creating Comedy Narratives for Stage and Screen*, as before.

or through friendship, wherein one or more characters seek to leave, master the situation or actualise (as in *Friends*), yet fail regardless. My book set out to theorise the sitcom as a way of understanding why such entrapment exists to enable comedy writers a better understanding of the relational dynamics between characters. The texts noted offer various definitions of the type of characters required, such as the boss, striver and fool, or the process in outlining a half-hour script, yet with little or no reference to the minutiae of story beats which form the spine of the script. Pamela Douglas gives insight and guidance to writing the episodic TV Drama, specifically those that encompass the stand-alone episode (as with the original sitcom) and storylines encompassing elements of seriality across episodes.²⁹ I have utilised Douglas in writing a chapter on developing the beats in a sitcom.³⁰

Theoretical studies of film comedy

Murray Smith writes that "...if we wish to understand 'identification,' and how narrative films are 'made intelligible,' then I contend that character is central.... [O]ur 'entry into' narrative structures is mediated by character."³¹ I concur with Smith, that when transposing a character from one form of screen text to another, a focus on character is essential in mediating narrative structures. In *The Comedy of Philosophy*, Lisa Trahair studies the engagement between character and narrative in film comedy. In her analysis, Trahair determines that the character attempts to alter the challenges presented by the narrative as Buster Keaton does in *The General*, and in response the character subverts the narrative.³² Alternatively the character may alter the direction of the plot in their refusal to be affected by the narrative. I discuss this

²⁹ Pamela Douglas, *Writing the TV Drama Series. How to Succeed as a Professional Writer in TV* (USA: Michael Wiese Productions, 2011).

³⁰ D.T. Klika, 'Defining the Beats in the TV Sitcom,' in *Script Development. Critical Approaches. Creative Practices. International Perspectives*, (eds.) Craig Batty and Stacy Taylor (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).

³¹ Murray Smith, *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion, and the Cinema* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) p.18.

³² Lisa Trahair, *The Comedy of Philosophy: Sense and Nonsense in Early Cinematic Slapstick* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007).

in more detail in Chapter Three.

Scholarship pertaining to film comedy covers genres or sub-genres such as the romantic comedy (romcom), the screwball comedy, the comedy of remarriage, the buddy movie, alongside satire and parody, or through theoretical frameworks such as aspects of representation.³³ *Writing and Selling Romantic Comedy Screenplays* by Helen Jacey and Craig Batty further differentiates sub-genres of the romantic comedy such as “gerontocoms.”³⁴ Genre assists in categorising texts according to common tropes, comic behaviour, narrative structure, while also foregrounding mode such as satire, parody or farce. However, I offer that the romantic comedy (romcom) has suffered in being relegated to simplistic narratives focused on a character meeting ‘the one’ only to lose them and in the resolution find them again. Celestino Deleyto writes that “[i]f we accept that there are other dimensions to the [romantic comedy] apart from the happy ending then the recognition of much greater formal and ideological variety will immediately ensue.”³⁵ Roman New Comedy promotes the ‘happy ending’ for the couple in the face of parental or societal obstacles, and the satire of Greek Old Comedy³⁶ attacks the societal norms that prevent personal freedom or

³³ Gerald Mast, *The Comic Mind: Comedy and the Movies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979). Stanley Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness. The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press, 1981). Steve Seidman, *Comedian Comedy: A Tradition in Hollywood Film* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International Research Press, 1981). Jerry Palmer, *The Logic of the Absurd: On Film and Television Comedy* (London: BFI Publishing, 1987). Steve Neale and Frank Krutnik, *Popular Film and Television Comedy* (London: Routledge, 1990). T.G.A Nelson, *Comedy: The Theory of Comedy in Literature, Drama, and Cinema* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990). Kristine Karnick Brunovska and Henry Jenkins, eds. (*Classical Hollywood Comedy*. New York and Oxon: Routledge, 1995). James Harvey, *Romantic Comedy in Hollywood: From Lubitsch to Sturges* (Boston: Da Capo Press, 1998). Wes D. Gehring, *Romantic vs. Screwball Comedy: Charting the Difference* (Lanham: Scarecrow, 2002). T.J. McDonald, *Romantic Comedy: Boy Meets Girls Meets Genre* (London: Wallflower Press, 2007). Stacey Abbott, Deborah Jermyn (eds.) *Falling in Love Again: Romantic Comedy in Contemporary Cinema* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2008). Claire Mortimer, *Romantic Comedy* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010). Leger Grindon, *The Hollywood Romantic Comedy* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011). Andrew Horton and Joanna E Rapf, (eds) *A Companion to Film Comedy* (Chichester: Wiley, 2012).

³⁴ Helen Jacey, Craig Batty, *Writing and Selling Romantic Comedy Screenplays* (Harpenden Herts.: Kamera Books, 2014) p.28.

³⁵ Celestino Deleyto, *The secret life of romantic comedy* (Manchester, New York: Manchester University Press, 2011) p.24.

³⁶ Andrew Horton, *Laughing Out Loud: Writing the Comedy-Centered Screenplay* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

individuation. Blake writes that “[i]t was a social theme that made reconciliation possible and set in motion the happy ending of marriage, festival, feast or dance, which become the *Hollywood Fantasy Model*.”³⁷ Combining both forms of comedy (Old and New) enable the romantic comedy as a genre to encompass, as Leger Grindon argues, ‘related cultural phenomena.’³⁸ Deleyto further notes that “... the genre of romantic comedy has operated and continues to operate in a great variety of filmic texts, including many that cannot be defined as romantic comedies.”³⁹

One challenge of studying film comedy, as Geoff King notes, is that “[a] term such as comedy can be used either as an adjective or as a noun. . . ,”⁴⁰ thus enabling the comedy to take prime position or secondary position to the narrative. For King, the romcom “is a format in which romance is the main and foregrounded element of the narrative, rather than occupying a secondary position.”⁴¹ Grindon argues that more recent film comedies are occupying the ‘margins’⁴² of the romcom genre to include age, background or gender, suggesting it is a metanarrative under which sits a variety of plots which are comic.

Grindon continues:

...*Annie Hall* marks a seismic shift in ... the romantic comedy genre. ... the romance sidesteps marriage and addresses the trials of partnership.... *Annie Hall*'s elaboration of character psychology leads to the internalization of conventional obstacles and the plot focuses on how relationships work – or fail.⁴³

Debates around genre and what defines the romantic comedy continue, including arguments about responses to the failure in the progression of the ‘seismic shift’ offered by *Annie Hall*, specifically the work of Tamar McDonald, Wes Gehring and Deleyto, all of

³⁷ Blake, *Writing the Comedy Movie*, as before, p.63.

³⁸ Leger Grindon, *The Hollywood Romantic Comedy* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011) p.75.

³⁹ Deleyto, *The secret life of romantic comedy*, as before, p.46.

⁴⁰ Geoff King, *Film Comedy* (London: Wallflower Press, 2002) p.3.

⁴¹ King, as before, p.51.

⁴² Grindon, *The Hollywood Romantic Comedy*, as before, p.81.

⁴³ Grindon, as before, p.150.

whom I pick up in Chapter Two. The work by Gehring and Deborah Jermyn interrogates comedies with discordant relationships and as such have assisted in contextualising theory and associated practice. What has become evident is the comedy film's ability (specifically those dealing with relationships) to encompass different types of narratives. I agree with Deleyto and theorists such as McDonald and Jermyn that, within the film comedy 'genre' is a metanarrative that encompasses tropes, and which assist to define sub-genres. I pick up the metanarrative of film comedy in the Conclusion.

If a generic definition is required to situate the film texts I examine, then I offer the term 'relationship comedy,' already mentioned and derived from Jermyn, who notes Nancy Meyer's love of "relationship comedies," yet without defining what she means by such nomenclature.⁴⁴ I posit that such a term allows for a more productive interface with the feature film and the half-hour narrative comedy as both have as their central concern relationships with varying degrees, or not, of resolution. Furthermore, I argue, such a term is more appropriate for numerous film comedies which do not adhere to the standard generic definition or expectation of the ubiquitous 'romcom.' Utilising a broader film genre term such as 'comedies about relationships' ("relcoms") incorporates not only the romcom but those texts with gay relationships, friends with benefits, and even extending to include films such as *Silver Linings Playbook* (2012),⁴⁵ often listed as a comedy.⁴⁶ As stated, the focus of this thesis is about the relationship between character and plotting in film comedy, rather

⁴⁴ Jermyn notes Meyer's love of 'relationship comedies,' *Nancy Meyers*, as before, p. 24.

⁴⁵ The central relationship is that of the father and son, rather than the male and female characters who get together. The healing of the father-son relationship (evident at the MP) enables the other relationship to progress. *Silver Linings Playbook*, wr., dir., David O. Russell, prod. Donna Gigliotti et al. (Weinstein Co., 2012).

⁴⁶ This chimes with Deleyto's and Grindon's view of the broadening of the genre's definition, as well as McDonald's analysis of the romantic comedy. However, I challenge McDonald's view that the romcom has evolved into a neo-traditional genre, and which in her view "...does not take up and twist the concerns of the previous sub-genre's films: instead it acts as if movies like *The Graduate* and *Annie Hall* never existed. Although it keeps up the appearance, inherited from the 1970s films, of being a more realistic type of romantic comedy, it has no use for realism if this means facing up to the actual problems of forming a lasting relationship in contemporary society." McDonald, *Romantic Comedy*, as before, pp.85-6.

than generic similarities or differences. However, if the comedy film encompasses generic differences and tensions, I offer, so too can the short comic narratives of the sitcom and narrative comedy, in particular when they are situated within ideological frames. There is a hinterland on the scholarship and indeed practice of finding consanguinity between a film comedy and a contemporaneous half-hour comedy.

Examining texts that focus on film narrative structure and character development, Linda Seger's seminal text, *How to Make a Good Script Great* articulates the tension and behaviour inherent in strong screen characters having a want (their goal), yet often at odds with an unconscious need or flaw, born of an early developmental wound.⁴⁷ Seger argues that such tension informs behaviour that either arrests or challenges the character. Christopher Vogler dissects the transformational nature of protagonists as 'heroes,' on a journey of twelve stages;⁴⁸ the challenges and obstacles the character faces mirror their own unmet needs and when confronting such wounds, their transformation begins on 'the road back home.' I posit that when migrating characters from one form of comedic screen text to another, the psychological development or arrestment of the character/s in relation to the plotting and narrative structure of the subsequent form must be considered.

David Howard and Edward Mabley, using the fundamentals of screenwriting as posited by Frank Daniel, expand on Seger's analysis in *The Tools of Screenwriting*, to closely examine the nature of the MP, which appears to have been largely unexamined.⁴⁹ Along with John Yorke, Howard, and Mabley posit that the MP is the point, at which new information is delivered⁵⁰ and the midpoint reversal (MPR) is the action by the character responding to the new information or opportunity it offers.

⁴⁷ Linda Seger, *Making a Good Script Great* (Hollywood: Samuel French, 1987, 1994).

⁴⁸ Christopher Vogler, *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers* (London: Pan Books, 1999).

⁴⁹ David Howard, Edward Mabley, *The Tools of Screenwriting. A Writer's Guide to Crafting Elements of a Screenplay* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1993).

⁵⁰ John Yorke, *Into the Woods. How Stories Work and Why We Tell Them* (UK: Penguin, 2013).

Screenwriting author Dara Marks offers that at the MP theme is articulated,⁵¹ and for dramatist Laos Egri theme is related to premise.⁵² Ted Wilkes and Phil Hughes, in their presentation to the 2018 London Screenwriters Festival, posit that the MP is the keystone scene of the film – the one scene the film cannot do without, and which supports the narrative arc.⁵³ While theorists such as Egri, and Daniel through Mabley and Howard, along with practitioners such as Yorke and Marks note the connection between theme and MP, scholarship on the MP, specifically its nature, is extremely limited. Studying various comedy films, I began to note something more was happening than new information being delivered, the scene that bridges the narrative arc, theme articulated, or as Blake notes, “the heart of the picture.”⁵⁴ In practice-based texts there is no framework on how to develop or structure a narrative that enables a specific form of MP, moreover how the MP might underpin the comedic tension. Premise, theme and MP may be interlinked, and could be an area of further study, however this thesis focuses on the role and nature of the MP in film comedy, and which I critically examine in Chapter Two.

Practitioner-focused texts on screenwriting

Turning to texts on film screenwriting, of which there is an unlimited number, and concentrating on those about writing the film comedy, since 2000 the following texts have assisted in developing CP2, a feature film, as practice-based research.

Billy Mernit’s *Writing the Romantic Comedy*, 2000, details approach to theme and character development with useful exercises that assisted in the development of character and structure.⁵⁵ Keith Giglio’s *Writing the Comedy Blockbuster: The Inappropriate Goal*,

⁵¹ Dara Marks, *Inside Story: The Power of the Transformational Arc. The Secret to Crafting Extraordinary Screenplays* (California: Studio City Three Mountains Press, 2007) p.235.

⁵² Lajos Egri, *The Art of Dramatic Writing* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004).

⁵³ Ted Wilkes and Phil Hughes, ‘Mastering the Midpoint,’ *London Screenwriters Festival 365 online*. <<https://www.screenwritersfestival.online/products/london-screenwriters-festival-online-londonswf365/categories/2749882/posts/10529100>>, accessed July 25, 2020.

⁵⁴ Blake, *Writing the Comedy Movie*, as before, p.46.

⁵⁵ Billy Mernit, *Writing the Romantic Comedy: from “cute meet” to “joyous defeat”*: How to write Screenplays that will sell (New York: Harper Perennial, 2000).

2012, notes the shift in emphasis from female protagonists to male protagonists seeking an ‘inappropriate goal’ primarily those of Judd Apatow produced comedies.⁵⁶ This text enabled me to consider both protagonists as having inappropriate goals. Marc Blake’s *Writing the Comedy Movie*, 2016, utilises Giglio’s inappropriate goal and examines how this informs dialogue. Blake further determines that the supporting characters “are extensions of his [the main character’s] central dilemma,”⁵⁷ assisting me to ensure that supporting characters force the main character to confront certain realities. Paul Gulino’s eight sequences in *Screenwriting. The Sequence Approach. The Hidden Structure of Successful Screenplays*, 2018, explicates a framework wherein the narrative is broken down to eight fifteen-minute sequences with a beginning, middle and end, each underlined by a smaller DQ.⁵⁸ Both Giglio and Gulino posit that each sequence has its own tone or subheading, such as Sequence #5, ‘friendship/love is in the air’ and assisted with the development of the script outline for CP2; the different sequence approaches are summarised in the Appendices.⁵⁹ Finally, Steve Kaplan’s *The Comic Hero’s Journey*, 2018, applies the hero’s journey template designed by Vogler to the comic character, with little analysis or thematic approach to the choice of films analysed.⁶⁰ However, this text did assist in further distilling the approach and focus of some of the sequences in CP2. These texts are primarily formalist in approach in that they determine patterns in the plotting and narrative structure of existing texts.

⁵⁶ Keith Giglio, *Writing the Comedy Blockbuster: The Inappropriate Goal*. (CA: Michael Wiese Productions, 2012).

⁵⁷ Blake, as before, p.27.

⁵⁸ Paul Gulino, *Screenwriting. The Sequence Approach. The Hidden Structure of Successful Screenplays* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018).

⁵⁹ See the second section in the Appendices, p. 330.

⁶⁰ Steve Kaplan, *The Comic Hero’s Journey. Serious Story Structure for Fabulously Funny Films* (Studio City CA: Michael Weise Productions, 2018).

Narrative theory encompasses a broad range of study with narratologists developing various approaches with essentially two schools of theory: formalism and structuralism.⁶¹ Formalist analysis studies the form of the work, while a structuralist approach is focused on causality and story logic.⁶² For the purposes of this thesis, I take formalism as pertaining to the patterns of narrative while structuralism is focused on the specificity of narrative structure and plotting, such as TPs and climaxes born of causality.⁶³

In *The Nutshell Technique*, 2016,⁶⁴ Jill Chamberlain utilises Aristotle's *Poetics*⁶⁵ to distil the two forms of feature film narrative commonly cited: 'the comedy' wherein the character confronts their flaw and 'the tragedy' wherein the character denies their flaw. (I posit 'comedy' includes 'drama'). Taking a structuralist approach, Chamberlain ascertains that in each form of narrative (comedy/tragedy) the second TP, also known as the second plot point,⁶⁶ the moment before Act Three, is a high point in tragedy, while in comedy it is a low point. In the tragedy, the protagonist think they have succeeded in getting their want whereas in the comedy it is a low point in that they realise they are about to lose everything and therefore must confront their flaw (which the tragic protagonist never does). Thus, narrative structures are delineated between comedy and tragedy based on the confrontation, or not, of character flaws.

Here, flaw encompasses need, whereas I posit that need enables the flaw, manifesting as behaviour. In the drama the character responds to information at the MP, triggering the MPR. However, I offer that the comic character is in denial of the need to alter their

⁶¹ Klika, *Situation Comedy*, as before, Chapter 4.

⁶² Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1978). Mieke Bal, *Narratology. Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004).

⁶³ I have utilised Chatman's satellites and kernels I and their relationship in plotting the sitcom. Klika, *Situation Comedy*, as before, Chapter 4.

⁶⁴ Jill Chamberlain, *The Nutshell Technique* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016).

⁶⁵ Aristotle, *Poetics* (New York: Dover Publications, 1997). Michael Tierno, *Aristotle's Poetics for Screenwriters* (New York: Hyperion, 2002).

⁶⁶ Syd Field, *Screenplay. The Foundations of Screenwriting* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1984).

behaviour or situation and therefore does not engage a MPR until much later in the narrative. By delineating the 'comic' narrative into drama (there is no funny business) and comedy (there is funny business), gives insight as to how and when the character confronts their need. In Chapter Two I analyse the MP in film comedy to argue that the comic protagonist, while confronted with their need and its associated flaw at the MP, will deny it until the second TP, whereas in drama, the character begins to confront their flaw at the MP, evidenced by their actions at the MPR. Thus, the differentiation between the protagonist in the drama and the protagonist in the comedy is that they confront their need and associated flaws at different points in the narrative.

Furthermore, for Chamberlain, the character's flaw must be caught in a 'catch' which is in play at the beginning of Act Two, culminating in a crisis at the end of the act. While Chamberlain's notion of the catch gives insight as to how tension is enabled in Act Two,⁶⁷ she does not elucidate how comic tension is maintained, specifically in the second half of the act. This text enabled me to reflect on why the tension at the MP, which I sought to prove in CP2, did not play out as expected and I discuss this point in the critical reflection of CP2.

Discussing *Tootsie* (1982),⁶⁸ which I analyse in Chapter Two, Chamberlain marries the main character's flaw with a catch: actor and womaniser Michael Dorsey wants to raise funds for a play written by his housemate as a means of displaying his superior acting skills (his want), but the only job he can get is in a soap opera – as a woman. In doing so, Michael experiences life as a woman, and specifically the same treatment he once engaged in (his catch). When Michael falls for one of the female actors in the soap opera, he wants to stop the masquerade, yet his contract ties him to the role for another year. When Michael can no longer sustain the deceit, at the end of Act Two, he exposes his own masquerade.

⁶⁷ Chamberlain, *The Nutshell Technique*, as before, p.77.

⁶⁸ *Tootsie*, wr. Larry Gelbart et al., dir. Sydney Pollack (Columbia Pictures, 1982).

While having posited that the catch underpins the crisis at the end of the second act, Chamberlain is utilising formalist theory, wherein the plot reaches a climactic point and all the details of the form fall into place in the dénouement. However, in connecting character flaw specifically with a catch, she is utilising structuralism – thus formalist analysis is harnessed to decipher structure.

Critically examining the nature of the MP in various film comedies, this thesis explicates that at the MP, by way of misunderstanding, deception, masquerade, or a lie, the character becomes trapped in a ‘bind,’ enabled by both an attachment to a want (goal) and need (flaw) that they not only deny, they continue to deny in the face of exposition. I contend that the catch creates a bind in the film comedy, and which becomes most intense at the MP, yet the bind also underpins comic tension in the second half of Act Two, giving insight into how comic tension is maintained. I pick up this point up at the end of Chapter Two.

Methodology

In my book I analysed the sitcom narrative utilising a structuralist approach, and I now examine the narrative and plotting of the sitcom, film comedy and narrative comedy series primarily through formalist theory to determine patterns which enable the dénouement. I set out to ascertain if there are specific structuralist elements to consider.⁶⁹ To that end, I employ textual analysis of character behaviour to discern the elements that underpin formalist patterns playing out in the narrative, informing the practice of screenwriting texts by way of research-led practice.

⁶⁹ Klika, *Situation Comedy*, as before, p.168.

Analysing the nature of discursive frames in ensemble comedies, I deduce that such texts enable tension between characters as well as between the group and the frame. The situation challenges the character/s who subvert the narrative, to return to the emotional stasis, known as the re-situation; tension is enabled by way of the relationship between narrative and situation – a formalist pattern. Critically examining the MP in film comedy, I shift to structural analysis and specificity of plotting, that informs character behaviour. As noted, in feature film the narrative challenges the character to confront their need and flaw while a structuralist approach illuminates those difficult moments. Such an approach enables explication of the relationship between plotting, character behaviour and comic tension.

CP1 is informed by reading the effect of the framing discourse on characters in the ensemble sitcom. CP2 set out to apply practice-based frameworks (such as the sequence approach) and textual reading of film comedies (specifically the MP) only to find that in the development of the script outline, informed by research on the MP, the practice then informed the research. In the writing of the first draft of CP3 (a narrative comedy), the scene bearing the middle TP (TP2) was weak and noted as too “*deus ex machina*.”⁷⁰ In re-writing the scene, practice as research (the nature of the MP in film comedy) informed a structural/plotting element of the second TP as being much like a MP, as well as elucidating previous research (as to why the narrative turned at ninety-degrees). Thus, while each of the CPs is underpinned by theoretical approaches – research-led practice – all three texts became examples of practice-led research by attempting to analyse aspects not previously explored: the comic antihero in the ensemble sitcom and their relationship to a framing discourse, the nature of the MP in film comedy, and the TP also being a MP in episodic narrative comedy.

⁷⁰ Feedback from script editor.

Overview of the thesis

The thesis is divided into three sections, each with a theoretical chapter, a CP and a critical reflection of the CP script. The reflection further considers how the CPs inform each other.

Section One considers the ensemble sitcom and the characters that inhabit a world defined by a discursive frame. Section Two considers the bind of the MP in the film comedy, specifically those with discordant relationships, examining what needs to be taken into consideration when developing a feature film from an ensemble sitcom. Section Three analyses the development of a comedy series from a feature film and the nature of TPs in an episode of a half-hour comedy series.

Looking at the detail of each section, Chapter One analyses the ensemble sitcom *Dad's Army* (1968-77)⁷¹ to elucidate a principle that a group of characters is best served by being situated in a world governed by a discursive frame and story ideology (that of fighting WWII). This chapter further examines the echo character within the group to find that such characters mirror the fears of the main character/s as well as the collective, and specifically the role of the antihero, which Bruun Vaage defines as complex characters displaying morally questionable behaviour.⁷² Applying the notion of such characters in the sitcom, I argue that the comic antihero is aware of a frame that seeks to confine the group, yet they, and the gang, remain trapped in its 'gaze.'

This sets up the hypothetical to be explored in CP1: the ensemble sitcom is not only able to harbour the comic antihero, this form of comedy is also best served when the collective is defined and trapped by a frame which disempowers the characters to varying degrees. The critical reflection discusses the challenges of developing a comic antihero to find that they are a marriage of consciousness (of the frame) and unconsciousness (of why

⁷¹ *Dads Army*, creator Jimmy Perry, as before (1968-1977).

⁷² Bruun Vaage, *The Antihero in American Television*, as before.

they remain).⁷³ Furthermore, CP1 explores the principle that the frame assists in delivering comic tension, as well as analysing how the echo character operates in the ensemble.

CP1 is a studio-based ensemble sitcom, *It's Academic* centred on a group of academics framed by the marketisation of Higher Education (HE). The pilot script introduces the main characters who work in a media department of a university desperate to halt its slide down the league table. The comic antihero, Rachel, is echoed by Brianna, the keen new lecturer, with Ben, the key character, an out of work film director who now finds himself in this strange new world. The head of department, Henry, thrives in this world, and along with truth-teller Luciana, these characters complete the ensemble. The critical reflection enabled insight into how the narrative structure in a subsequent film script could incorporate the characters from CP1.

Chapter Two critically examines the comedy film, specifically the MP of such narratives to find that at the MP, the point when the protagonist/s is confronted by their need, in denying it they become caught in a bind. In developing CP2, specifically the outline, the work on the MP in the theoretical chapter informed, and in turn was informed by the practice in the development stage. CP2, a feature film screenplay, sought to test that the MP in a comedy film with a subplot of a discordant relationship, is the point wherein the main character is trapped in a bind between their want and need. I offer that the bind enables the comedic tension in the second half of Act Two. However, at the MP in CP2 the bind shifts from one main character to the other, which weakens the tension in Act Two. The reflection discusses why this might be so, further informing theoretical discussion.

⁷³ This is a different psychological construct of the key character that is unconscious of the frame, underscored by an unconscious echoism – the root of their comic degradation.

CP2, *The Accidental Academic*, explores the relationship between Rachel and Ben, and how he comes to be at the academy and where Rachel teaches. CP2 transposes some characters from CP1, with the main characters, Ben and Rachel undergoing transformation in the face of the narrative. It was the nature of transformation of characters when migrating to a film narrative that was of interest in developing CP2. While secrets are exposed and past decisions confronted, the future between these two characters is inconclusive. This CP was tasked with determining which characters from this story world would subsequently migrate to a situation that triggered unresolved issues, in particular between Ben and Rachel.

Chapter Three analyses the comedy series developed from a feature film, and using two examples from different eras, elucidates a principle that a comedy series often sits within the second act of the feature film; in doing so elucidates a principle that characters transposed from the film must have unresolved issues which arise either in Act Two or remain at the end of the film's narrative. I also find that the second TP in an episode of a series operates much like a MP, yet the character acts in ways that alter the direction of the narrative, subverting it rather than responding to its challenge. This also explains why the closed narrative structure is enabled.

CP3, a comedy series, *Have You Fed the Cat?* is set a few years after the film. As the protagonists from CP2, Ben and Rachel had gone their separate ways, I was confronted with considering what situation would enable dynamics that would force these characters to confront unresolved feelings, and which surfaced in CP2. As noted, narrative comedy has evolved through a combination of seriality and repeatability as found in the sitcom. Thus, it seemed that a comedy series with a DQ which governed the narrative arc (of the series) was the appropriate vehicle. In doing so, CP3 illustrates that a half-hour comedy post the film text requires an understanding of relational issues which will enable repeatability and seriality. Furthermore, CP3 explicates the need for the second TP to contain information which will

prompt one of the characters to act in a way that alters the direction of the narrative and re-establish the emotional stasis. The critical reflection considers practice-based research in the development of the script when writing scenes that encompass both a MP and TP. Finally, and if there is no clear story ideology or frame that governs the ‘situation,’ CP3 validates the principle that the comedy series is best served by a DQ.

The three CPs map the journey and evolution of two characters from one story world and its ideological frame to another narrative structure that demands transformation and onto a new situation wherein unfinished business is challenged. All three CPs explore narrative tension as a means of enabling comicality: the discursive frame in ensemble sitcoms, the bind in relationship comedies, the second TP (of three) in the closed narrative of episodic comedy series, as well as ascertaining the emotional tension in Act Two of the comedy feature film.

To that end, this thesis examines *how* narrative structures underscore character behaviour and change – as transformational (as in the film), arrested, (as in the sitcom) or evolving over a series (as in narrative comedy/comedy series), explicating consanguinity between narrative-situation and narrative-character. Critically examining the nature of plotting and character behaviour in short- and long-form screen comedy, specifically the TV sitcom, the feature film and the half-hour narrative comedy series, this thesis offers new readings and frameworks for the comedy screenwriter as well as theorists.

SECTION ONE

THE ENSEMBLE SITCOM



CHAPTER ONE – THE CHARACTERS AND THEIR ‘FRAME’ IN ENSEMBLE COMEDIES.....	29
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CHAPTER ONE

THE CHARACTERS AND THEIR 'FRAME' IN ENSEMBLE COMEDIES

Umberto Eco writes: “In comedy we laugh at the character, in humor we smile because of the contradiction between the character and the frame the character cannot comply with.”¹ This chapter examines the dynamics between characters trapped in the gaze of a ‘discursive’ frame to offer that the ensemble, as an entity, is a ‘key’ character that attempts to survive *within* a frame and which some characters ‘cannot comply with.’ Jane Feuer writes, “[t]he sitcom has been the perfect format for illustrating current ideological conflicts while entertaining an audience.”² I extend on my work in *Situation Comedy, Character, and Psychoanalysis* to critically examine the ensemble sitcom, commonly those sitcoms which have five or more characters, offering diverse views and experiences of life, as opposed to the ‘relationship’ sitcom which focusses on relationships between characters, commonly of similar age and background. This chapter poses the question: What is the nature of characters in relation to the frame in ensemble comedies?

By closely analysing the frame in the ensemble sitcom, and utilising my screenwriting experience as well as practice-based texts for the short form narrative, I explore how the frame affects individual behaviour within the ensemble, yet how it also defines the group.³ Eco continues “...humor works in the interstices between narrative and discursive structures....”⁴ Based on the analysis undertaken in this chapter, it is my contention that the ensemble sitcom elucidates a trend in which a frame enables another layer of comicality that defines the group

¹ Umberto Eco, ‘The frames of comic ‘freedom’ in *Carnivall!*, ed. Thomas A Sebeok (Berlin: Mouton Publishers, 1984) p. 8.

² Jane Feuer, ‘Situation Comedy Part 2’ in *The Television Genre Book*, ed. Glen Creeber (London: BFI Palgrave Publishing, 2015) p.101.

³ Evan Smith, *Writing Television Sitcoms*, as before. Chris Head, *Creating Comedy Narratives for Stage and Screen*, as before. I attended Chris Head’s course in June and November 2020 and is the basis of his book.

D.T. Klika, ‘Defining the Beats in the TV Sitcom,’ in *Script Development. Critical Approaches. Creative Practices. International Perspectives*, eds. Craig Batty and Stacy Taylor (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).

⁴ Eco, ‘The frames of comic ‘freedom’’, as before, p.8.

beyond the situation; such a principle would enable *both* the inter- and intra-relational dynamics of the collective and is exemplified by the medical personnel based at the remote army hospital in *M*A*S*H* (1972-1983).⁵ Other examples of story ideology framing a collective include *Dad's Army* (1968-1977),⁶ a British sitcom set against the threat of Nazi invasion in WWII and *The Big Bang Theory* (2007-2019) (*TBBT*) situated in the world of scientific research.⁷ These examples exist within a discursive frame which grants to the characters membership of a group as well as status or tension in relation to the frame.

Applying Margrethe Bruun Vaage's notion of the antihero⁸ to the sitcom, this chapter further analyses the existence of a comic antihero within the ensemble. I posit that such characters are aware of the frame yet unable to escape its entrapment. Finally, this chapter interrogates the role of the echo comic character to ascertain their role within the group dynamic.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND APPLICATION

Ensemble comedies

Zara Waldeback and Craig Batty write that

Ensemble films or TV series explore a theme from different perspectives, allowing a world to form where each person's understanding is of roughly equal value. By placing characters in relation to each other in this marked way, the story is told through their alliances and allegiances.⁹

Though Waldeback and Batty do not necessarily apply their insights specifically to the sitcom, the point that the story is told 'through ... alliances and allegiances' underscores examples of sitcoms where "[t]he whole thus created can explore a theme or situation in a different way..."¹⁰

⁵ *M*A*S*H*, creators Larry Gelbart, Gene Reynolds, prod. 20th Century Fox Television(USA: CBS, 1972-1983).

⁶ *Dad's Army*, creator Jimmy Perry, wr. David Croft, prod. BBC (UK: BBC,1968-1977).

⁷ *The Big Bang Theory*, creators Chuck Lorre, Bill Prady, prods. Chuck Lorre Productions, Warner Bros Television (USA: CBS, 2007- 2019).

⁸ Margrethe Bruun Vaage, *The Antihero in American Television* (New York and Oxon: Routledge, 2016).

⁹ Zara Waldeback and Craig Batty, *The Creative Screenwriter. Exercises to expand your craft* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012) p. 66.

¹⁰ Waldeback and Batty, as before, p. 66.

We're Doomed! The Dad's Army Story,¹¹ reimagines the story of the making of *Dad's Army* (1968-1977), in which writer David Croft notes that “the gang must work for the show to survive.” While WWII enables this group to exist, it also gives each character an identity and recognition for individual achievement as well as contribution to the group effort.¹² Thus, the ensemble must work to serve both individual needs as well as work together – often as a means of surviving. As such, I posit that the ensemble sitcom enables greater diversity in exploring characters from different backgrounds and view of their ‘world.’ Having defined the sitcom as “a half-hour comic story involving a small group of characters premised on a struggle,”¹³ (and this struggle centres on what I have labelled as the key character), it would appear that there is little academic work which examines groups of more than four characters in order to “explore a theme from different perspectives.”

Turning now to examples of ensemble sitcoms, from Britain there is *On the Buses* (1969-73), *Dad's Army* (1968-1977), *Are You Being Served?* (1972-1985), *Hi-de- Hi!* (1980-1988), *Drop the Dead Donkey* (1990-1998), *Dinnerladies* (1998-2000), *Bad Education* (2012-14)¹⁴ and from the USA, *Gilligan's Island* (1964-67), *The Addams Family* (1964-66), *Hogan's Heroes* (1965-1971), *M*A*S*H* (1972-1983), *Cheers* (1982-1993), *The Golden Girls* (1985-92), *Murphy Brown* (1988-1998), *Friends* (1994-2004), *That '70s Show* (1998-2006), *How I Met Your Mother* (2005-2014), *The Big Bang Theory* (2007-2019), *Community* (2009-2014), *Modern Family* (2009-present)¹⁵ and from Ireland, Lisa McGee's *The Derry Girls*

¹¹ *We're Doomed! The Dad's Army Story* (UK: BBC, 2015).

¹² Such as to get that next stripe, to be appointed a captain or to be free of a mother's domination.

¹³ D.T. Klika, *Situation Comedy, Character, and Psychoanalysis: On the Couch with Lucy, Basil and Kimmie* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018) p.7.

¹⁴ *On the Buses*, creators Ronald Chesney, Ronald Wolfe, prod. LWT (UK: ITV, 1969-73), *Dad's Army*, as before, *Are You Being Served?*, creators Jeremy Lloyd, David Croft, prod. BBC (UK: BBC, 1972-1985), *Hi-de- Hi!*, creators Jimmy Perry, David Croft, prod. BBC (UK: BBC, 1980-1988), *Drop the Dead Donkey*, creators Andy Hamilton, Guy Jenkin, prods. Hat Trick Productions (UK: Channel 4, 1990-1998), *Dinnerladies*, creator, wr. Victoria Wood, prod. BBC (UK: BBC, 1998-2000), *Bad Education*, creator Jack Whitehall, prod. Tiger Aspect Productions (UK: BBC, 2012-14).

¹⁵ *Gilligan's Island*, creator Sherwood Schwartz, prods. Gladysya Productions et al. (USA: CBS, 1964-67), *The Addams Family*, creator David Levy, prod. Filmways (USA: ABC, 1964-66), *Hogan's Heroes*, creators Bernard Fein, Albert S. Ruddy, prods. Bing Crosby Productions et al. (USA: CBS, 1965-1971), *M*A*S*H*, as before, *Cheers*, creators James Burrows, Glen Charles, Les Charles, prods. Charles/Burrows/Charles

(2018-2022). While these examples cover a fifty-four-year time span, the fundamentals of the operation of the sitcom remain consistent, in that the group seeks to achieve a goal or idealisation, only to repeatedly fail or be undermined by way of a relational dynamic rooted in an ideological tension and which I have argued is the case for a key character. Picking up Waldeback and Batty's point, this chapter establishes that in the ensemble comedy the diversity and range of characters *in relation* to a frame enables inter- and intra-relational tensions, which, it will be argued, underpin the comicality. As such there must be some opposition from the 'outside' for the ensemble to be bound together by a common 'enemy.'

The Frame

Critically examining the notion of containment within a discursive frame, specifically the 1950s policy of 'containment,' Patricia Mellencamp uses psychoanalytic theory to analyse the American sitcom *I Love Lucy* (1951–1961),¹⁶ to argue that comicality emanates from the tension inherent in the social and which then plays out in the personal.¹⁷ Extending on Mellencamp, I analyse how comic performance is enabled to posit that the key character is at odds with a discursive frame; in their failure to master or escape its entrapment, they suffer comic degradation.

However, if the audience is aware of a frame that is limiting, then there must be at least one character who feels those limitations yet is unable to articulate such experiences. I offer that the audience *feels* what the character is acting out, but is unable to articulate the genesis

Productions et al. (USA: NBC, 1982-1993), *The Golden Girls*, creators Susan Harris, Warren Littlefield, prods. Witt/Thomas/Harris Productions, Touchstone Television (USA: NBC, 1985-1992), *Murphy Brown*, creator Diane English, prods. Shukovsky English Entertainment et al. (USA: CBS, 1988-1998), *Friends*, creators David Crane, Marta Kauffman, prods. Bright/Kaufman/ Crane Productions, Warner Bros. Television (USA: NBC, 1994-2004), *That '70s Show*, creators Bonny Turner, Terry Turner, Mark Brazill, prods. Casey-Werner-Mandabach Productions et al. (USA: Fox, 1998-2006), *How I Met Your Mother*, creators Carter Bays, Craig Thomas, prods, 20th Century Fox Television et al. (USA: CBS, 2005-2014), *The Big Bang Theory*, as before, *Community*, creator Dan Harmon, prods. Krasnoff Foster Productions et al. (USA: NBC, 2009-2014, Yahoo Screen! 2015), *Modern Family*, creators Christopher Lloyd, Steven Levitan, prods. Lloyd-Levitan Productions et al. (USA: ABC, 2009-present), *Derry Girls*, creator, wr. Lisa McGee, prod. Hat Trick Productions (UK: Channel 4, 2018-2022).

¹⁶ *I Love Lucy*, wrs. Jess Oppenheimer, Madelyn Davis, Bob Carroll Jr, Bob Schiller, Bob Weiskopf, prod. Desilu Productions (USA: CBS, 1951–1961).

¹⁷ Patricia Mellencamp, 'Situation Comedy, Feminism, and Freud: Discourses of Gracie and Lucy,' *Critiquing the Sitcom*, Joanne Morreale (ed.) (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2003: 41-55). Klika, *Situation Comedy*, as before, pp. 29, 53, 163.

of the feeling. However, when the character is aware of the limitations and rails against such containment (as do the characters in *Seinfeld*, 1989-1998),¹⁸ then I offer that the character is reflecting the audience's desire in a comparable situation. Thus, I contend that sitcoms can both reflect and reveal experiences which may be known and conscious or, alternatively, covertly *felt*, but which I posit are experienced as disempowering. However, as I have argued, what defines the key character in a sitcom is that they are conscious of their goal, while simultaneously unconscious of the disempowering dynamics in which they exist. Furthermore, while the gang is bound by the frame, each character within the collective has a relationship with the frame that results in some degree of psychological tension. In short, some characters are unaware of the frame, and which may be felt as disempowering, while there are those that are conscious of the frame, yet unable to subvert or escape its effects. I offer that the gang, as a form of key character, and in response to having their desires thwarted, repeatedly butts up against a frame or ideology in their refusal to adhere to social conventions, with *Seinfeld* a good example. However, and as I will argue, there are some examples where characters within the frame have different responses. It is the frame and its role in enabling comicality that is of interest, as well as the dynamics within the group, and further each character's relationship to the frame.

The Big Bang Theory (TBBT) (2007-2019)¹⁹ is centred on four male scientists (Leonard, Sheldon, Raj, and Howard) and one female scientist (Amy) working at the prestigious California Institute of Technology (Caltech). Two further characters make up the ensemble: Bernadette (who quickly becomes Howard's wife) and Penny (who becomes Leonard's wife in a later series). The importance of the scientific institution in defining characters' identity and self-worth is brought to the fore by way of competitive colleagues,

¹⁸ *Seinfeld*, creators Larry David, Jerry Seinfeld, prods. West-Shapiro Productions, Castle Rock Entertainment (USA: NBC, 1989-1998).

¹⁹ *The Big Bang Theory*, creators Chuck Lorre, Bill Prady, as before (2007-2019).

sexual rivals, and institutional superiors who explain, particularly to the men, that they cannot own the fruit of their labours (patents) produced within the institution. The setting of Caltech provides the scientists a frame that not only defines them, but it can also trigger fears of irrelevance. In contrast to the rarefied world of academic endeavours, Bernadette's research in a pharmaceutical company reflects the commercialisation of science, along with Penny, having given up her dream of acting and takes up as a pharmaceutical salesperson, both view science as a means to an end. Each character has a relationship to the frame of science – from academic theory and research to the benefits of commercialisation. Thus, this ensemble sitcom, is able to harbour characters with differing relationships to the frame, which is clearly defined.

If the comicality is created by way of the tension within the ensemble and between the ensemble and the frame, within the gang there can reside a character who challenges the frame, even exposes it. In the case of *TBBT* Sheldon plays this role – a character aware of the frame who seeks to have power by way of his superior intellect over what he sees as a limiting discourse. Such characters do not try to achieve personal actualisation, as is the nature of the key character, they know, or unconsciously understand, the frame is disempowering, and rather than seek to leave it, they rail against it in order to preserve their status within the group.

I now offer that in the ensemble comedy there is greater allowance for at least one character to be aware of the disempowering dynamic, yet such characters remain trapped in the situation. While I pick up the notion of the character caught in a bind between 'knowing' and refusal to accept certain realities in the next chapter, I now offer that at least one character in the ensemble sitcom attempts to alter, expose, or defy a frame; their comicality emanating from both an external force, now seen as a 'discursive frame,' and the internal tension it generates in that the frame limits their desires, yet they do not leave the situation. I view such characters as a type of 'comic antihero.'

The Antihero

Jason Mittell writes:

Complex comedies have also embraced antiheroic protagonists, as with Larry David's misanthropic self-portrait on *Curb Your Enthusiasm* or the ensemble of horrid losers populating *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia*. Television features a longer history of comedies centred on unlikable protagonists, including Archie Bunker on *All in the Family*, *Seinfeld*'s core ensemble, ... with even more prominence on British comedies such as *Fawlty Towers*, *Absolutely Fabulous*, *Blackadder*, and *The Office*.²⁰

Mittell's examples all have one thing in common: the characters rail against the world in which they exist. They are frustrated, angry, duplicitous characters, suffering from a false sense of superiority. These characters may even transgress social and moral codes, and in some instances the law, yet these characters are convinced that those around them should accede to their needs and desires. They may be racist, narcissistic, entitled, even emotionally stunted, yet they believe they know how the world works or should work. Tension arises in the situations in which these characters find themselves struggling against the frame in order to try to achieve their desires.

Critically analysing the drama series, Margrethe Bruun Vaage explores the notion of the antihero as those characters which transgress the law, such as Walter White (*Breaking Bad*) and Tony Soprano (*The Sopranos*).²¹ It is my assertion that Bruun Vaage uses the term narrowly as a descriptor for those characters which break legal or specifically moral codes. While transgressions against state or moral authorities may vicariously be enjoyable to the audience, I posit that the antihero's struggle against the frame is more than merely transgressive. Mittell writes: "Antihero narratives regularly invoke relative morality, in which an ethically questionable character is juxtaposed with more explicitly villainous and

²⁰Jason Mittell, *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Storytelling* (New York: NYU Press, 2015) p.143.

²¹ Bruun Vaage, *The Antihero in American Television*, as before.

unsympathetic characters to highlight the antihero's more redeeming qualities."²² Mittell continues, that "[t]he complexity of Walter White's characterisation stems in large part from the disjunction between how we see his actions and how he sees himself."²³ Bruun Vaage makes the point that "[t]he intended effect of engaging with an antihero story is to both like and dislike the antihero."²⁴ Defining the antihero as a protagonist which seeks power by way of transgressing some law that is known, Bruun Vaage also offers a more general definition of the antihero as having "humdrum and all-too-human flaws,"²⁵ citing the example of Carrie Bradshaw in *Sex in the City*. I would argue that Carrie and her friends in *Sex and the City* (1998-2004) do not transgress such laws but rather question and explore the moral codes that govern sex and love in modern times.²⁶ This exploration results in confusion rather than morally questionable behaviour. Maybe it is the shifting of women's expectations and experiences of sex that Bruun Vaage sees as transgressive.

I offer that the depiction of the antihero character as being uniquely talented and highly skilled engenders sympathy and even admiration from the audience and other characters, not their morality or lack of it. As noted, Sheldon (*TBBT*, 2007-2019) epitomises the antihero's skill, despite his awareness of the frame.²⁷ Hence, the antihero character may be amoral, it is their skill, (occasionally undermined by their behavioural traits), when at odds with the frame or the rest of the ensemble that produces tension. Such characters show us the existence of a frame, and in a nod to Freud's theory of humour, for them it is nothing more than a game.²⁸

²² Mittell, *Complex TV*, as before, p.143.

²³ Mittell, as before, p.160.

²⁴ Bruun Vaage, *The Antihero in American Television*, as before, p. 91.

²⁵ Mittell, as before, p.171.

²⁶ *Sex and the City*, creator Darren Star, prod. Darren Star Productions et al (USA: HBO, 1998-2004).

²⁷ *The Big Bang Theory*, creators Chuck Lorre, Bill Prady, as before (2007-2019).

²⁸ Sigmund Freud, 'Humour,' in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud no. XXI*, ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1964) pp.160-166. And Eco, 'The frames of comic 'freedom,' as before.

Characters such as David Brent from *The Office* (2001, 2002), Basil Fawlty (*Fawlty Towers*, 1975, 1979) and George Costanza (*Seinfeld*, 1989-1998),²⁹ while failing to achieve an idealisation, do not break the law, rather it is codes of social behaviour that they believe they have mastered, or which they challenge, and, in doing so, fail. An example is George's attitude to the death of his fiancée by way of poisoning with cheap glue on their wedding invitation envelopes because George is too stingy to buy quality ones, culminating in any lack of empathy at her death.³⁰ George transgresses both moral and social codes while Basil Fawlty seeks to attain social status, and in the process fails because he thinks he knows the codes to be accepted by a certain class of people. Alf Garnett (*Til Death us Do Part*, 1988- 1998) is not deliberately being racist, he is racist and thinks he is right.³¹ David Brent in *The Office* (2001, 2002), on the other hand tries to curry favour with his employees by being cool – or believing he is cool. Such characters are unaware or are in denial of accepted/expected social conventions or how others see them.

Regardless, the antihero in drama (or narrative comedy/drama such as *Sex in the City*) is the one who attempts to break the frame that they believe is containing or restricting their desires. However, I argue that in the sitcom the 'antihero' cannot remain 'morally bad.' In situations where they fail to redeem themselves, they are punished – as was the gang of four in *Seinfeld* (1989-98).³² Giving them "all too human flaws" such as an obsessive-compulsive disorder that Sheldon displays, enables the comedic 'gap'³³ between them and those around

²⁹ *The Office*, creators Ricky Gervais, Stephen Merchant, prod. BBC Comedy-North et al. (UK: BBC, 2001, 2002), *Fawlty Towers*, creators John Cleese, Connie Booth, prod. BBC (UK: BBC, 1975, 1979). *Seinfeld*, as before (1989-1998).

³⁰ "The Invitations," wr. Larry David, S7E24, *Seinfeld*, as before, first transmitted, 16 May, 1996.

³¹ *Til Death Us Do Part*, creator Johnny Speight, prod. BBC (UK: BBC, 1966–1968, 1972-1975).

³² This gives some explanation of the backlash from fans of *Seinfeld* that the final episodes broke their expectations, as described in Saul Austerlitz: "*Seinfeld* is setting up a belated reckoning for its criminally negligent protagonists, allowing the real world to have its revenge on these clinicians of narcissism... Audiences were furious, and Larry David's next series, *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, would devote an entire season to, in effect apologizing for having left fans in the lurch." *Sitcom. A History in 24 Episodes from I Love Lucy to Community* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2014) p. 240.

³³ Steve Kaplan offers that the comedic gap is enabled between characters who are wavy-liners and straight-liners; the latter similar to echo characters who see the world in a different way. *The Hidden Tools of Comedy: The Serious Business of Being Funny* (Studio City CA: Michael Weise Productions, 2013).

them. Thus, the comic antihero can be transgressive, yet their containment is maintained by human flaws (many to which we relate).

I take Bruun Vaage's broader definition of the antihero as fallible humans who may transgress moral codes, to posit that such characters are responding to what they feel is the disempowerment of the world in which they live; they are either passionate about what they do (and achieve their want), or they are in denial of the forces that keep them trapped. While the key character may seek to break from, or shift the frame that defines them, I argue that the comic antihero attempts to defy social codes and behaviour and, for some, as a means to expose the true nature of the (disempowering) frame. The antihero in the sitcom is at odds with some frame (of expectation) – and despite the feelings of disempowerment they remain in the situation as it delivers to them relationships or an identity that they do not have elsewhere. Thus, I offer that the antihero is aware of some frame while the key character is not.

Murphy Brown (1988-1998)³⁴ is a studio-based ensemble sitcom set in a television newsroom, and home to a current affairs programme hosted by the prickly and bombastic investigative journalist, forty-something Murphy Brown, a recovering alcoholic. Murphy is rude, impatient, demanding, patronising, yet she gets the job done, giving the current affairs show, *FYI*, a reputation for 'hard journalism.' The executive producer, Miles, at twenty-five years old, is significantly younger than Murphy, adding to her bad temper with the world. Set in the decade spanning the late eighties to the late nineties, the show is a satirical commentary on politics during the Reagan, Bush, and Clinton presidential years in America. *Murphy* explores the tension between the desire to produce accurate and insightful reporting and the commercial demands of an industry increasingly measured by ratings and sensational reporting. Frank, Jim, Corky and even Miles are Murphy's surrogate family of father, brother, annoying little sister, with an upstart, desperate nerd from down the street attempting to have

³⁴ *Murphy Brown*, creator Diane English, as before (1988-1998).

power over the others. While Murphy may transgress moral codes to achieve an outcome that supports her sense of moral superiority, it is Corky, a former Miss America, who echoes aspects back to Murphy what she denies in herself, such as the need to win – like all good pageant entrants. I analyse Murphy in the textual analysis section of this chapter.

The challenge with the antihero is that they can veer into being negative, demanding, bossy and even manipulative. Characters such as Murphy and Sheldon must have aspects that engender empathy in the viewer; they may want to expose the frame for those who (they believe) are suffering in its entrapment (most commonly themselves). Such characters are complex, in having both light and dark, ambition and humility, and heroic deeds in exposing ideologies which disempower. Codes can be questioned, and disempowering discourses exposed, these characters attempt to do so by believing that “they know best.” Thus, I posit that the comic antihero never breaks the frame that they seek to expose, although they know, at some level, they are trapped in its gaze. It is this tension that I offer enables comicality.

Saul Austerlitz defines the character of Hawkeye in *M*A*S*H* (1972-1983)³⁵ as “...the spirit of the show personified its paragon of waggish, humane cynicism. He is the military hero with no interest whatsoever in military formality.”³⁶ I discuss this programme in more detail shortly but note now that Murphy, Hawkeye, George, Alf, and Archie Bunker from *All in the Family* (1971-79)³⁷ butt up against a frame that limits their political views, desires, or expectations. The humour stems from the incongruity between how these characters see themselves and how they see the world bearing down on them, most commonly at odds with a dominant political ideology.³⁸ Thus, I posit that the ensemble is best served by

³⁵ *M*A*S*H*, creators Larry Gelbart, Gene Reynolds, as before (1972-1983).

³⁶ Austerlitz, *Sitcom. A History in 24 Episodes from I Love Lucy to Community*, as before, p.136.

³⁷ *All in the Family*, creator Johnny Speight, devs. Norman Lear, Bud Yorkin, prod. Tandem Productions (USA: CBS, 1971-79). This programme was a US version of the British *Til Death Us Do Part* (1966–1968, 1972-1975).

³⁸ Commonly the liberal democratic values of the late 60s infused the sitcoms of the 70s and 80s, particularly in America, a point made by David Marc, in *Comic Visions* (Massachusetts and Oxford: Blackwell Pub.,1997).

being situated within a discursive frame wherein each character either supports, challenges, or submits to the frame, and furthermore the antihero within rails the hardest against its limitations. I now ask: Why do such characters seek to expose the frame? Do they wish to save the group from the disempowerment they witness, or to save themselves from being rendered powerless? Before answering such questions, I analyse the character which reflects back to the group what they fear or deny in themselves.

The Echo within

Having argued that the echo character manifests the unconscious fear of the key character I now examine how the echo character might operate in the ensemble sitcom.³⁹

*M*A*S*H* (1972-1983),⁴⁰ a satirical comedy-drama series spawned from the 1970 film of the same name,⁴¹ is set at the time of a war long finished (the 1950s Korean war) to make commentary on a contemporary war (Vietnam). This series satirises the discourse of the warmongering approach by the USA to dominate and influence the ideologies of countries that have a different governing system to its own. Defined as a comedy-drama by Derek Kompare,⁴² this programme has many of the hallmarks of the sitcom, and in particular the ensemble sitcom as a group trapped in a situation in which they must work together for the greater good, yet within the group there resides differing responses to the situation. Pleasure-seeking doctors, Captains Hawkeye, and McIntyre are at odds with patriot Major Frank Burns and his mistress, head nurse Major Margaret Houlihan. Hawkeye and McIntyre uphold liberal democratic values yet transgress the codes of sexual conduct that the sex-crazed Burns and Houlihan hypocritically profess. Attempting to maintain the frame, and the moral conflict it brings, is Lieutenant Colonel Henry Blake with Corporal Radar, voicing the dilemmas faced by Blake. Each character either supports the ideology, opposes it, or behaves in contradiction

³⁹ Klika, *Situation Comedy*, as before, Chapter 3.

⁴⁰ *M*A*S*H*, creators Larry Gelbart, Gene Reynolds, as before (1972-1983).

⁴¹ *M*A*S*H*, wr. Ring Lardner Jr. dir. Robert Altman (Twentieth Century Fox, 1970).

⁴² Derek Kompare, *Rerun Nation. How Repeats Invented American Television* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005) p.134.

to the expectation or declared norms. However, this ensemble has an echo that manifests the psychological tensions between the main characters and the frame, Corporal Klinger. Klinger dresses in women's clothes in an attempt to get discharged for being mad (or at least looking mad). In *Situation Comedy* I argue that:

It is the gap between what Klinger wants ... and the reality of the situation ... where the comedy emerges. ... the echo character needs to personify what the group, or at least one character within the group, denies or represses.⁴³

This character was not in the originating film⁴⁴ and does not make an appearance until episode four in the series.⁴⁵ I argue that it became necessary to introduce a character that may, on the surface, be funny, yet the cleverness lay in creating a character which, by his actions, reflect the fears of the collective: that this war will send them all mad. Each of the characters deal with such a fear in different ways (partying, having affairs, or fooling around in surgery). Thus, the echo character in the ensemble can mirror either the desires of the gang or their fear, or both, as does Stuart, the lonesome struggling comic bookstore owner in *TBBT* (2007-2019). In this ensemble sitcom Howard initially was the echo, and once he coupled with Bernadette,⁴⁶ the focus shifted to Raj, who rides the roller coaster of love in contrast to the stable couples of Howard and Bernadette and then Penny and Leonard followed by Amy and Sheldon. As each potential coupling occurs the focus for comedic tension must shift. Stuart epitomises the collective's fear of failure both commercially as well as in personal relationships and is brought to the fore once Amy and Sheldon marry at the end of season eleven.⁴⁷

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Analysing *Dad's Army* (1968-1977), *Murphy Brown* (1988-1998) and *Dinnerladies* (1998-2000)⁴⁸ assists in determining the nature and relationship between the main characters, the echo

⁴³ Klika, *Situation Comedy*, as before, p.104.

⁴⁴ *M*A*S*H*. wr. Ring Lardner Jr, as before (1970).

⁴⁵ "Chief Surgeon Who?" wr Larry Gelbart, S1E4, *M*A*S*H*, as before, first transmitted October 8, 1972.

⁴⁶ "The Countdown Reflection," story Bill Prady, Eric Kaplan, Steve Holland, wrs. Chuck Lorre, Steven Molaro, Jim Reynolds, S5E24, *The Big Bang Theory*, as before, first transmitted May 10, 2012.

⁴⁷ "The Bow Tie Asymmetry," story Chuck Lorre, Steven Molaro, Maria Ferrari wrs. Steve Holland, Eric Kaplan, Tara Hernandez, S11E24, *The Big Bang Theory*, as before. The finale was transmitted on May 16, 2019.

⁴⁸ *Dad's Army*, creator Jimmy Perry, wr. David Croft, as before (1968-1977), *Dinnerladies*, creator, Victoria Wood, as before (1998-2000), *Murphy Brown*, creator Diane English, as before (1988-1998).

within, and, in two examples, a frame that limits the desires of the gang, enabling certain principles to be derived.

In “The Making of Private Pike,” (*Dad’s Army*, 1977) Captain Mainwaring has been lent a staff car in order that he can umpire an important army cricket match. When Pike borrows the car the night before to take a servicewoman to the cinema, it runs out of petrol and Pike must push the car back to barracks. Having arrived late, and after being admonished by Mainwaring for keeping him waiting, Jones, Mainwaring, Wilson, and Pike set off to the match; on the way Mainwaring parks the car, to check on some detail with Jones, leaving Wilson and Pike alone in the back seat of the car. Wilson lights a cigarette.

WILSON: Oh, sorry Frank would you like one of these?

PIKE: No thank you.

WILSON: Oh.

PIKE: Yeah, why not.

WILSON: Help yourself. (Lighting cigarette for Pike). Fine. Now Frank about last night.

PIKE: I know we shouldn’t have taken it. But we didn’t do the car no harm.

WILSON: Well, I’m not talking about the car. I’m talking about the girl. A lot of people will know that you spent the night together. And a lot of people will tell you that what you did was wrong.

PIKE: I was pushing. She was steering it.

WILSON: (Mumbles) But to my way of thinking what you both did wasn’t evil.

Pike looks bewildered

WILSON: You follow me?

PIKE: It was nine miles!

WILSON: (Mumbles) Our sort of society has a rather rigid framework and if we’d have stayed within it, people point the finger at us.

PIKE: It was hard up Grant’s Hill. Twenty yards at a time.

WILSON: Yes, well just remember this, I understand. Now we haven’t been too close I know just recently but now I feel (pause)

WILSON (cont.): You know what I mean. Kindred spirits ... You know, men of the world.
(Pause) You feel like that too?

PIKE: Yeah ... Kindred spirits ... Men of the world.

WILSON: Good lad (pats Pike on the knee).⁴⁹

Within the subtext of sharing a ‘post-coital’ cigarette, Pike has no idea that Wilson is talking about his relationship with Pike’s mother. Wilson uses Pike’s mishap as a ruse to win Pike over by implying that having illicit sex (in 1940s Britain) is not evil. Pike manifests and reflects back to the gang the fear that they are either impotent or naïve about the rules that govern relationships (at that time) or indeed the war. It is the gap between how Pike sees the world and Wilson’s relationship with Pike’s mother that enables Steve Kaplan’s paradigm of comedy to occur in the gap between the straight- and wavy-line view of the world.⁵⁰ As such, Pike is both the straight-line character and, as an echo character, personifies the gang’s fear of impotence and stupidity in their attempts to stop the Nazis.

Murphy Brown is a comic antihero who simply wants to get on with exposing the truth. To confirm her sense of grandeur, in “It’s How You Play the Game” (*Murphy Brown*, 1989), Murphy has received a message from Walter Cronkite, a famous broadcast journalist:

JIM: ‘morning, troops. Hello, Slugger.

MURPHY: Want to hear something great, Jim? Walter Cronkite called. He said he saw my story on the Greenhouse Effect and he (reading note) “enjoyed it immensely.”

JIM: Wonderful. I hope the ratings are up.

MURPHY: Jim. You, too? They’re just a bunch of meaningless numbers.

JIM: Yes, you’re right. But why don’t they like us in Denver?

⁴⁹ “The Making of Private Pike,” wrs. Jimmy Perry, David Croft, S9E2, *Dad’s Army*, as before, first transmitted October 9, 1977.

⁵⁰ Kaplan, *The Hidden Tools of Comedy*, as before.

Miles enters.

MURPHY: Hi there Miles. Let's have our little meeting so we can get back to writing stories that journalistic giants like Walter Cronkite can "enjoy immensely." (Dangles message). What's wrong with you?

MILES: We took it in the shorts. If the ratings get any lower, I'll be hosing down the produce at Food World.

FRANK: Who got the audience? As if I didn't know.

Frank takes sheet from Miles.

MILES: Jerry Gold and his "Headline News" show.

JIM: News? The man spent an hour exploring the tragic plight of sex-crazed registered nurses.

MILES: Well, it may not be our idea of news, but it sure has the public's attention. We got a thirteen share; Gold pulled a forty-two.

Murphy grabs sheet.

MURPHY: He's stomping us in the cities, it's the third week in a row we've slipped in Denver, and our eighteen to forty-nine demographics dropped right off the page! What's the matter with these people?!

CORKY: Murphy, I thought you said it was the quality of the work that counts.

MURPHY: Didn't you hear him Corky? We're losing!⁵¹

Murphy now wanting to master the game, devises a plan to increase ratings. Predictably, it goes horribly wrong when she attempts to negotiate a debate between Homemakers Against Gratuitous Sex (H.A.G.S) and the Hookers Organization for American Rights (H.O.A.R) which unleashes into a cat fight on live television. Returning home, Murphy's fastidious house painter Eldin attempts to resign because "I mean when you come right down to it, how many really appreciate a well-painted wall... it's probably not your fault. We're surrounded by bad walls. We get numb. And before you know it, visible tape joints are acceptable." The metaphor is not

⁵¹ "It's How You Play the Game," wr. Russ Woody, S1E14, *Murphy Brown*, creator Diane English, as before (1988-1998), first transmitted February 27, 1989.

lost on Murphy. Despite attempting to survive in a world which lives or dies by viewers' fidelities, this ensemble fight to keep their job because it gives them an identity and status, especially with important people. While Murphy butts up against the frame of ratings, she does not leave her job, as Eldin attempts to do. Thus, the echo character can represent or reflect what the comic antihero is afraid to confront in themselves.

Dinnerladies (1998-2000), a BBC comedy written by Victoria Wood, is set in Northern England.⁵² This 'world' is governed by working class life, harking back to a time when factories supported both work and community. However, while this series is set in a milieu, it has no clear frame or story ideology other than the life of northern working class, yet it harbours an echo character that epitomises the fear of the group. The five core characters are canteen workers, Bren, Jean, Dolly, Twinkle and Anita along with Tony (canteen manager), Philippa (the Human Resources manager, providing a middle-class contrast), Petula (Bren's mother, providing the wild mother contrast) and Stan (the handyman). In "Christmas" (1999), a worker waits in queue.

WORKER: Is there no bacon?

ANITA: Bacon? Can you ask me that again?

WORKER: Have you not got any bacon?

ANITA: Have I not got any or have I got any?

WORKER: Look I'm not from the News of the bloody World, I'm only trying to get meself a bit of priggin' protein. (Calls over) Bren, for the love of God have you got any bacon?

BREN: Can you hang on I'm just doing it now.

WORKER: (to Bren) Are you short staffed?

BREN: Yes, Twink's off sick and where's Jean, Dolly?

DOLLY: Still in toilet.

BREN: She's taking a long time.

⁵² *Dinnerladies*, creator Victoria Wood, as before (1998-2000).

DOLLY She's wearing her new all in one body shaper.
It's a complicated gusset when you won't wear specs.

WORKER: Oh, I know.

DOLLY: I'm sure it's very alluring in bedroom but you
can't be fiddling with your crutch when there's a queue
building.

WORKER: Don't look at me. I've got both hands on the
tray.

Jean enters.

WORKER (cont.): You got your underwear sorted then
Jean?

After Jean comes to terms with the fact that, in her absence, her underwear has been discussed, she offers to strip off, "Would that help?" The worker responds: "Not if it's going to hold up the bacon." At which point Anita chips in:

ANITA: You know how you were asking about bacon.
Well, we haven't got any at the moment, but Bren's just
doing some.

WORKER: What are you on, a two-minute delay? She's
just told me that.

ANITA: I was going to say it before, but then I started
thinking about Michael Aspel.⁵³

Anita, whilst delivering the funniest line, also echoes the gang's fear of not being engaged in the real world. Jean and Dolly, fulfil the role of competitive and argumentative friends delivering caustic barbs towards each other, while Bren walks the tightrope between being the leader as well as one of the group, where they support each other no matter how caustic their barbs or messy their lives. Yet the lines of work and private lives begin to blur with the burgeoning relationship between Bren and canteen manager, Tony, creating a meta-narrative governed by a dramatic question (DQ): "Will they get together?" As this relationship develops over the series, the fundamental rule of the sitcom is under challenge,

⁵³ "Christmas," wr. Victoria Wood, S2E6, *Dinnerladies*, as before, first transmitted 24 December 1999.

wherein characters, or their relationships, do not change. Once they do (fall in love or move away), the DQ, which has enabled elements of seriality, has been resolved.⁵⁴ While this ensemble sitcom has an echo character and a mix of relationships, I offer that *Dinnerladies* was limited to two series due to the absence of an overt discursive frame, and having a DQ that governs only one relationship (and which is resolved).

CREATIVE PRACTICE 1

Creative Practice 1 (CP1) is an ensemble sitcom, titled *It's Academic*, set in the world of Higher Education (HE), wherein the frame of marketisation bears down on a group of academics who believe in developing minds rather than just skills and competencies as a neo-liberal agenda demands. CP1 is a pilot script that establishes the ensemble of academics, managers and support staff in a media department (the situation) in a university cascading down the league table. The series is underscored by the tension of HE as a business looking to cut costs, with the lecturers under pressure to deliver higher recruitment, progression, and graduate employability in order to keep their jobs. Like the writer Richard Curtis seeking to have a conversation about women vicars in *The Vicar of Dibley*,⁵⁵ this CP sets out to have a conversation about the effects of marketisation on teaching, learning, and working in HE. The proposal for the series is in the Appendix.

Overview

The pilot episode, “The Kilo Merger,” introduces the characters who inhabit this story world. The narrative structure mirrors traditional multicamera sitcoms, with an inciting incident and turning points which ensure the return to the emotional stasis of the characters.

The character of Rachel, as the comic antihero, is aware of the frame, and while seeking

⁵⁴ *Friends* is a good example of a series ending of a DQ being resolved when Ross and Rachel get together. *Friends*, creators David Crane, Marta Kauffman, as before (1994-2004).

⁵⁵ *British Sitcom: 60 Years of Laughing at Ourselves*, prod. Breid McLoone for BBC Scotland (UK: BBC) transmitted September 12, 2016. *The Vicar of Dibley*, creators Richard Curtis, Paul Mayhew-Archer, prod. Tiger Aspect Productions et al. (Britain: BBC, 1994-2007).

to expose it, does not leave the situation, rather she attempts to ‘save the gang.’ The key character, Ben, is unaware of the disempowering effects of the frame, despite the protestations by Rachel whose own fear of not being respected for her expertise, and when triggered, causes her to act in more extreme measures. The echo character, Brianna, attempts to survive in this world, reflecting to the gang that they are simply pawns in a game of shifting goal posts.

This half-hour script begins the journey of two characters, Ben, and Rachel, across three related screen narratives. The critical reflection discusses the challenges of positioning the comic antihero within a group as well as in relation to the frame.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has offered that the comic antihero is both conscious (of the frame) and unconscious (of why they are trapped), giving insight into comic characters who find themselves caught in a sort of psychological bind, the central concern of Chapter Two. By way of textual analysis and critical examination I have argued that the ensemble is best defined by a discursive frame which entraps characters, reinforcing the collective, as well as the repeated individual struggle for identity. Within the frame each character has a relationship to it – they support it, defy it, or deny it. The textual analysis has explicated the principle that the relationship each of the characters has to the frame and its ‘ideology’ may assist in enabling comic tension, both inter- and intra- relationally. I have argued that one character, the echo, reflects the fear of the group (that they are doomed, impotent, or just off in another world), often in contrast to the comic antihero who attempts to expose the frame as a means to save themselves or others from its disempowering effects, yet such antiheroes find that they too are trapped in its gaze.

It has been said...
if you can't do, then teach...
But if you can't teach then...

IT'S ACADEMIC

A studio-based ensemble sitcom set in a university
sliding down the league table

PILOT

"It's the Kilo Merger"

Written by

Deborah Klika

Creative Practice 1

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents either are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

It's Academic centres on TV lecturer Rachel Kozlowski, recovering from a bad divorce and Ben Baxter, a once successful film director recovering from a breakdown. Running away from life, these two come face to face in the media department of a university struggling to survive the onslaught of marketisation of HE. Rachel and Ben's past relationship now rises like a phoenix from ashes buried long ago. Or so they thought.

Rachel and Ben share an open-plan office with the grumpy and long-term career documentary director Jack, the idealistic novice lecturer Brianna, the passive-aggressive departmental administrator Luciana, and the eccentric Stefan, obsessed with all things technological. The department is overseen by the Machiavellian self-serving head of department, Henry, busy brown-nosing the never seen Dean Fiona Willoughby-Baxter whose shadow hovers over the department like a Ringwraith.

This series is about life in higher education, where dreams are made and lost and where lecturers can behave worse than their students - when survival is the name of the game.

Audience: Anyone who has worked in an open-plan office fraught or survived higher education as a student, academic or administrator.

Characters

Rachel Kozlowski, 52, likes to be needed. Gives a lot to her students, loyal and determined. Closet writer. Dream is to have one of her scripts produced. Hates waste but loves winning more. Documents must have a number of words ending in 0 or 5. Denies her feelings for...

Benjamin (Ben/Benji) Baxter, 48, recovering from a breakdown after a career disaster; fears he is a one-trick pony, his dream is to direct a feature. A dreamer, he avoids conflict - and commitment. One of the 'boys', he is kind, empathetic, knowledgeable, and loved by the students. Looked after by ...

Luciana Fonseca 35, departmental administrator, knows how the game is played and plays some games herself. Dream is to work in marketing. Hard working, yet passive aggressive, the kitchen area is her battle ground and the stationery cupboard she guards like the jewel crowns especially from the stationery addicted...

Henry Upton, 50, Head of Department. Had some success as a playwright in his 30s. His dream is to have a play produced at the national theatre. Drops names like confetti; self-serving and views students as a source of income, much to the consternation of ...

Jack Kerr, 59, Successful TV documentary producer frustrated at washing up on the shores of HE. Dreams of writing a book. Needs to be right, especially about grammar and provenance of programmes. Although constantly grumpy, he goes to extreme lengths to help his students get jobs.

Brianna Williams, 29, Lecturer in Journalism. First real job. Dreams of getting a job in journalism. Idealistic with a love of romcoms and the power of spreadsheets. Always trying new things such as quizzes, team building exercises, apps to inspire the students, much like...

Hans Winkler 39, lecturer in digital media and all that is internet. Eccentric Eastern European from a holocaust surviving family. Loud and abrasive, lives at the cutting edge of digital media. Dream is to win an Ada Lovelace award.

Extra: Angela, cafe worker who rules the cafe like a sergeant major yet constantly gets the orders wrong.

TEASER. INT. CLASSROOM CORRIDOR. DAY.

Students stream out of class. BEN, at the vending machine, looks anxious. RACHEL charges out of the classroom, sees Ben, wearing a caste on his arm. A chocolate bar drops in the machine, Ben struggles to grab it. He scurries off to hide behind a pillar. Peeling off the wrapper with difficulty, he is about to take a bite. Rachel appears.

RACHEL

Ben!

With mouth open, Ben tries to hide the bar in the caste.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

What is that?

BEN

Nothing.

Ben shows one hand, it is clean then the other, it has chocolate on it.

BEN (CONT'D)

See.

The wrapper is on the floor. Rachel picks it up.

RACHEL

You know what I hate Ben.

BEN

Waste?

RACHEL

We are paired in the kilo challenge..and...

BEN

(resigned)

You like to win Rachel.

RACHEL

That's right. I like to win more than I hate waste - of any kind. Can you stick at it Ben?

BEN

Being stuck has become a speciality of mine Rachel.

RACHEL

Good. See you at the meeting. Henry's trying to shave off time in the studio for the TV course. Again. You look better.

BEN

Thanks.

RACHEL

The students missed you. (Beat) I think.

Rachel walks off.

BEN

And I missed...

Ben looks at the chocolate bar. He pauses before taking a bite. A student comes up to him.

OSCAR

Hey Ben. (Beat) You okay?

BEN

Yes Oscar just thinking about a Douglas Sirk film. And waste.

OSCAR

Oh. Never heard of him. Can I show you my film I made over the break.

BEN

Sure Oscar, I'll pop by later.

Oscar saunters off. Ben takes a bite then throws the rest of the chocolate bar into the bin.

BEN (CONT'D)

There. I can say no. To her. But not to Sirk.

CUT TO:

TITLES: *IT'S ACADEMIC*

FADE IN:

INT. MEDIA DEPARTMENT. DAY. LATER.

Luciana is pinning a tree of 'pairs' under the title 'Kilo Challenge'. Rachel storms in followed by the grumpy Jack and cheery Brianna.

RACHEL

What the hell was that about?

JACK

It was an ambush. There goes the television degree. It's the beginning of the end.

RACHEL

Did you know about this Luciana?

LUCIANA

I'm putting together the kilo challenge. You're with..

RACHEL

Yes I know. Ben. (Looking around)
Where is he hiding now?

LUCIANA

And can we please not mention Ben's recent...

RACHEL

Absence.

LUCIANA

Especially you Rachel. After all...We need to be respectful of people with...

RACHEL

Commitment issues.

LUCIANA

And that too. Jack you're with Brianna.

BRIANNA

I'll do a spreadsheet to calculate our daily weights.

JACK

As I said it's the beginning of the end.

RACHEL

A management consultant telling us we need to innovate. Seriously? Why are they all called Nigel?

BRIANNA

I once went out with a Nigel.

JACK

Who no doubt was as irrelevant as that one.

BRIANNA

He didn't use big words like that. Actually he didn't use any words.

JACK

And that ladder about our tolerance for change....

BRIANNA
Sometimes change is good.

JACK
Not if you fall off the ladder. I'm writing to the union.

LUCIANA
It's just a merger. What's the big deal?

JACK
Constructive dismissal is a big deal.

LUCIANA
I think you are being paranoid.

RACHEL
Luciana, did you tidy up that course outline for me?

LUCIANA
I gave it to the new assistant.

RACHEL
Hope the word count ended with a zero or five. You know how I like a tidy document.

LUCIANA
(to herself)
White text is so useful.

Jack goes to his computer and starts bashing it. The eccentric Hans enters with a go pro on his head.

RACHEL
And here comes the human gogglebox.

HANS
It's for my digital immersion class. Giving my students an insight into my life.

BRIANNA
So innovative Hans. That's what Henry was talking about.

RACHEL
No Brianna he was talking about cutting our degree.

JACK
(shouting from his desk)
The only one that gets the students jobs.

(MORE)

JACK (CONT'D)

We've worked so hard to drag TV studies out of the accusation of being...

RACHEL AND JACK

A Donald Duck degree.

BRIANNA

How about I do a spreadsheet that shows options for Henry to consider.

JACK

There's only one option he will consider. Death by a thousand cuts.

LUCIANA

Or quacks.

Hans goes over to Jack's desk and is pointing his camera at Jack's computer.

RACHEL

Luciana did you know a Nigel was called in to bamboozle us into ...

LUCIANA

Hans you are with Henry.

HANS

No I'm with Jack here.

JACK

(turns)

Hans what are you doing?

HANS

Immersive experiential and blended learning.

JACK

I'll blend you if you don't turn that bug eye contraption off.

HANS

It's for the Ada Lovelace award.

JACK

It'll be more like Linda Lovelace.

RACHEL

Watch Henry, Hans. He'll cheat on the kilo count, blame you when you drop down the table and then attempt to merge weights. Luciana I asked about that Nigel.

LUCIANA
 (feigning ignorance)
 I don't have him on the board.

JACK
 (shouting from his desk)
 This is that quack VC's people
 programme.

Jack turns around and realises Hans is still filming him.

JACK (CONT'D)
 Erase that. Now.

Hans does an impression of a Dalek.

HANS
 Eradicate. Eradicate.

Ben wanders in.

RACHEL
 And here is Johnny or rather Ben
 come lately. Where have you been
 hiding this time? It's the end of
 the freaking world and you go ...

BEN
 I went to ask the techs if they
 knew about this merger.

RACHEL
 And what news from the navel-gazing
 kinder pit?

BEN
 Henry had already got to them
 saying it would be ...

Spivvy dressed Henry enters, looks nervous. Goes to Jack's desk.

HENRY
 A very productive meeting don't you
 think Jack?

JACK
 If you mean being shown your own
 noose Henry then it was a roaring
 success.

HENRY
 Ah Hans, I see you are using the go
 pro.

JACK
 So you gave it to him Henry?

RACHEL
Henry, is this merger part of the
VC's efficiency drive?

HENRY
No no, no, (Beat)Not at all.

BEN
The techs said it would save space.

RACHEL
I knew it. The studio.

HENRY
(patting his stomach)
Are we ready for the kilo
challenge?

HANS
Do you want me to film the progress
Henry?

HENRY
(looks at his phone)
Need to go. The VC has asked to
meet me. Probably about having the
third highest recruitment in the
university. Thanks to the film team
and Ben. Good to have you back.

JACK
Film school is what art school was
in the sixties.

BEN
Only they talk.

JACK
Who?

BEN
The pictures.

JACK
We've had the talkies since the
twenties. Has no one read my book?

HENRY
Luciana, thanks for finding Nigel,
he was perfect.

Henry exits.

HANS
Henry can we talk about my
computer.

Hans exits.

LUCIANA

So everyone ready for the kilo challenge?

Rachel mimes 'I've got eyes on you' to Luciana.

BEN

Rachel maybe ... we could discuss the kilo challenge... or something?

RACHEL

Just lose weight Ben. It's simple. Jack. Coffee. Now.

JACK

You're safe Ben, you're the favourite.

BEN

But I want us to do ...

Rachel and Jack exit.

BEN (CONT'D)

Something together?

Luciana looks at Ben who looks bereft.

INT. UNIVERSITY CAFÉ. DAY. LATER.

Rachel and Jack at a table. Jack bashes on the computer.

RACHEL

Do you think saying this is an example of neo-liberalism gone mad is the right phrase? Not sure the union guy would get it. (points at screen) Make sure the word count ends in a zero or a five.

JACK

You need to get over your WCO.

RACHEL

WCO?

JACK

Word count obsession.

RACHEL

My WCO? What about your WCO? Word correct obsession.

Brianna appears with computer in hand and open.

BRIANNA

I've been thinking.

JACK

That's a dangerous thing Brianna.

RACHEL

Ignore him Brianna he's just grumpy. Can't hit the word count.

JACK

Well you would be too if you were standing on the cliff edge of redundancy with a mortgage still to pay off.

BRIANNA

I've done this spreadsheet with some options for the merger.

Brianna flashes the spreadsheet in front of them. Jack looks like 'the scream' and Rachel tries to be diplomatic.

RACHEL

My my Brianna that's a big set of options you have there.

BRIANNA

That's what is so great about spreadsheets they can offer so many options.

JACK

All the better to bamboozle us with...

RACHEL

And all those colours....

BRIANNA

That's to help see a multitude of..

JACK

Ways to shove us off the cliff.

BRIANNA

Not at all. Look here. The number of seminar groups increases ...

JACK

There's some very big words Brianna. Not sure Henry will understand it.

RACHEL

This is very impressive Brianna, but I think you might need to simplify it. Spreadsheets are like using a Ferrari to go to the shops when you only need a Skoda.

BRIANNA
I can't drive.

RACHEL
I think what Mr Subtle here is trying to say is that you need to drive that spreadsheet into something simpler. Think of your audience, unlike Jack here, who can't be bothered to get a well rounded word count.

JACK
Well at least I have a well rounded number of awards.

Jack goes back to bashing the computer. Brianna walks off.

RACHEL
That spreadsheet looks dangerous. You probably shouldn't have called Henry infantile.

JACK
But he is.

RACHEL
Time to use constructive dismissal.

JACK
I'm on it.

INT. MEDIA OFFICE. DAY.

Luciana is putting up a sign on the stationery cupboard: KEEP OUT. REQUEST FORMS AVAILABLE 4-6 PM EACH DAY FOR COLLECTION THE NEXT DAY. Hans is hovering with his go pro. Staff are arriving. Rachel is at her desk. Ben walks in wearing gym clothes, the caste is gone. Ben goes over to Rachel's desk.

RACHEL
Pfuff. What is that smell?

Rachel turns around to see Ben standing there.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
What on earth do you smell like ... I mean dressed like that Ben?

BEN
I've started going to the gym. (He puts up his arm) To strengthen it.

RACHEL
Strong is the word. Stick to Yoga Ben. Less smelly.

BEN

I thought you wanted to win.

RACHEL

I do but not the stinky race.

Rachel leaves. Luciana wanders over to Ben. Hans follows.

LUCIANA

I think it is good you are spending time with Rachel Ben.

BEN

Not sure she likes me.

LUCIANA

That officious manner is a cover. She asked after you every day...

BEN

She did?

Luciana realises Hans is standing behind her.

LUCIANA

Have you not got anything better to do Hans?

HANS

I need to show the fullness of my life. For Ada. And Henry has connections.

LUCIANA

I'm sure he has. I have paired you with ...

BEN

I thought you pulled the names out of a hat.

LUCIANA

Ah yes I do. Hans you got pulled out with Henry. With his Ada Lovelace connections and all. Did you ask him about the computer?

HANS

(to Ben)

You see the last one ...

LUCIANA

He's got a meeting in ten.

Hans is out of the office in a flash.

INT. CORRIDOR OUTSIDE HENRY'S OFFICE. DAY.

Henry is slamming his door as Hans walks up.

HANS

Henry, I need to see you.

HENRY

Can't you see I'm in the middle of something important Hans?

Hans points the camera towards Henry.

HANS

I can see that you have a problem with your door.

Point of view of the camera. Henry looks bug eyed, in wide angle.

HENRY

The lock won't work. I've reported it to facilities weeks ago.

HANS (O.S.)

I was planning on being home marking today and only because my computer needed charging did I come in and decide to hit two tadpoles with one stone.

HENRY

It's two birds Hans.

HANS (O.S.)

Birds fly away. We say two tadpoles. Don't you think it's easier to hit two tadpoles than two birds?

HENRY

Couldn't you do that at home?

HANS (O.S.)

I don't have any tadpoles at home.

HENRY

I meant the marking. Can't you do the marking at home. In fact can't you just stay at home?

At some point we cut to two shot.

HANS

But I left my charger in the office so I came in and decided to film everything I do. You see I'm doing this immersive, blended..

HENRY

What has teaching got to do with the charger, or you filming everything in your life?

HANS

The computer then exploded. And I want to win the Ada Lovelace award.

HENRY

Exploded? But weren't you marking at home? That's my favourite film.

HANS

Yes. The marking is nearly done. It's Ada not Linda.

HENRY

That's good Hans but I'm still not sure why you had to come in.

HANS

To get the charger. And your meeting which you asked me...

Henry looks around nervously.

HENRY

As I said Hans, this project needs to be done on the quiet. That's what my contacts at...

HANS

The Ada Lovelace award.

HENRY

That's right. Let me check what you have done so far.

HANS

But the go pro needs to talk to the computer.

HENRY

Talk to the computer?

Hans takes the go pro off his head.

HANS

See this Bluetooth here, it talks to the ...

Henry takes the go pro.

HENRY

Send me the details of the computer.

HANS

Thank you Henry. I will be happy.
And we are paired on the kilo
challenge. I won't let you down.

Hans leaves.

HENRY

And my life continues down the
rabbit hole.

Henry puts the go pro on his head as he starts slamming the door again as Brianna arrives carrying a basket, inside is a computer.

BRIANNA

Ah Henry. I've got something to
show you.

HENRY

(to himself)
And just when I thought I was out
of the woods.

From POV of Go Pro, bug eyed view of...

BRIANNA

I see you have a problem with your
door. I can go to facilities and
ask them to fix it for you.

HENRY (O.S.)

I've logged it on the system.

BRIANNA

But the guys down there don't look
at the system.

HENRY (O.S.)

They don't?

BRIANNA

That's right no one showed them how
to get the list of requests from
the computer log.

HENRY (O.S.)

So what to do they do all day?

BRIANNA

I'm not sure. But if I go and see
them and take my famous cookies ... I
can do that for you Henry. Here
would you like a cookie now? I've
got something to show you.

Cut to two shot. Henry looks resigned.

HENRY

Thank you Brianna that would be good if you could go to facilities and yes I will have a cookie.

They go into the office.

INT. HENRY'S OFFICE. DAY.

Brianna sits down and opens her computer as Henry eats the cookie with the go pro on his head.

BRIANNA

I've done this spreadsheet with all the options for the merger. You might want to take that go pro off Henry.

HENRY

Yes Brianna.

Henry takes off the go pro and puts it on his desk.

BRIANNA

So what I have done is ...

HENRY

That's very interesting Brianna, can you email it to me. I've got to go and give this to Hans, something about blended and experiential learning.

BRIANNA

Hans is so innovative.

HENRY

Yes. He has redefined innovative.

Brianna sees that Henry has a spreadsheet on his computer.

BRIANNA

Oh Henry you have a spreadsheet!

Henry puts the go pro on the desk.

HENRY

All the better to figure out what's going on.

Henry closes down the spreadsheet.

BRIANNA

Can I show you my spreadsheet?

HENRY
 (resigned)
 If you must. (Looks at his watch).
 Is that the time? I have a meeting.

Henry leaves. Brianna follows. The go pro sits there blinking.

BRIANNA (O.S.)
 So I should email you the spreadsheet?

Close up on the go pro, as we hear

HENRY (O.S.)
 Anything everything Brianna.

INT. MEDIA OFFICE. LATER THAT DAY.

Luciana is at her desk, she keeps looking at the door. Rachel bursts in.

RACHEL
 Those third years will be the end of me.

LUCIANA
 Rachel.

RACHEL
 They've just asked Warwick Thornton if being black has been an advantage in his career. What planet are they living on?

LUCIANA
 Denial. Speaking of which I wanted to chat about...

RACHEL
 How can we teach our privileged white students that being black is anything but an advantage...there's so much unfinished business when it comes to..

LUCIANA
 Ben.

RACHEL
 Sorry?

LUCIANA
 How can you expect anyone to appreciate unfinished business when you run from it like a cat on a hot..

RACHEL
Tin roof. Tennessee Williams. What
are you implying Luciana?

LUCIANA
I think you need to face some
truths. Like Ben.

RACHEL
Ben and I have history. And there
it stays, in the past.

LUCIANA
I think it's out of the cage.

RACHEL
Has something happened? Is there
another Nigel lurking somewhere?

LUCIANA
Will you at least talk to him?

Jack enters and storms to his desk.

JACK
Those second years are too much.
None of them managed to get a guest
for the interview exercise.

RACHEL
Jack I need to talk to you.

Rachel follows Jack.

LUCIANA
Running away won't keep the cage
locked Rachel.

INT. UNIVERSITY CAFÉ. DAY.

Ben and Brianna are waiting for their coffee orders. Brianna
looks despondent.

BEN
You okay Brianna?

BRIANNA
Is this what you imagined teaching
would be like?

BEN
Apparently I imagine too much.
That's what my, I mean... I'm
learning not to be ... too
imaginative.

BRIANNA
If you had your life again would
you do things differently?

BEN
Can't figure my life out as it is
so not sure how to do things
differently.

Angela the café worker plonks two coffees down.

ANGELA
(shouts)
Two hot chocolates. (turns to Ben)
What do you two want?

BEN
Coffee? We ordered it.

ANGELA
Oh that's right.

Angela shouts with the same cups on the bench.

ANGELA (CONT'D)
One flat whit. One Cappuccino.

Ben and Brianna look confused but resigned.

BEN AND BRIANNA
That's mine.

ANGELA
Are you sure?

They take the coffees. They take a sip. Both screw up their
noses.

BEN AND BRIANNA
I've got yours.

They swap coffees. There is a moment (for Brianna).

BRIANNA
You had me at coffee.

BEN
Jerry Maguire.

BRIANNA
You like Rom coms?

BEN
I like anything that is
interesting. Cameron Crowe
challenged the form. Not sure
Jerry Maguire is a romcom.

(MORE)

BEN (CONT'D)

I like melodramas. Douglas Sirk is the master.

BRIANNA

Oh I love him.

BEN

Imitation of Life. Amazing isn't it.

BRIANNA

(pretending she has seen it)

Yes you, I mean it is amazing. How they ... imitate life.

BEN

Who'd have thought that melodrama could deal with race so subtlety.

BRIANNA

Can I show you something?

BEN

Sure.

They sit and Brianna opens the computer. They are peering at the computer when Rachel appears.

RACHEL

Ben.

BEN

Yes Rachel.

RACHEL

What are you doing?

BEN

Brianna was showing me her spreadsheet.

RACHEL

I mean what are you drinking?

BEN

Flat white.

RACHEL

No sugar?

BEN

No Rachel.

RACHEL

Good. Hope the spreadsheet doesn't drive you to sugar.

Rachel leaves.

BEN

It won't Rachel. (turns to Brianna). I think this is very good Brianna, you should show Henry.

BRIANNA

I did. I mean I will...Ben.

Ben walks off.

BRIANNA (CONT'D)

(swooning)

He likes my spreadsheet. You had me at good. Very Good.

INT. MEDIA DEPARTMENT. DAY.

Luciana, is pinning up results of the kilo challenge on the tally board. Ben and Rachel are top of the table.

Brianna skips into the office.

LUCIANA

Well look who is full of beans today.

BRIANNA

It's a beautiful day Luciana.

LUCIANA

It always is Brianna.

BRIANNA

But today is especially beautiful. Do you believe in signs Luciana?

LUCIANA

What's happened?

BRIANNA

I think someone is keen on me. It was straight out of a rom com. The meet cute moment, when eyes meet and there is...

LUCIANA

Oh and who might that be this week. Not that student. You know it's not good to fraternise with...

Brianna points to Ben's photo on the wall.

LUCIANA (CONT'D)

(starts coughing)

Ben! The one who has just had a ...

(MORE)

LUCIANA (CONT'D)

I mean come back from... leave.
Special leave.

BRIANNA

I think he sees me differently
after his ...

LUCIANA

Break ... me ... down.

Ben enters with a dog, sashays up to his desk.

BEN

Good morning Ladies.

LUCIANA

Ben we have fought two feminist
wars not to be called ladies. We
are women.

BRIANNA

(flirting)

I don't mind being called a lady
Ben. After all that's what Adam
Sandler called Drew Barrymore in...

BEN

Sandler doesn't understand the
genre. He manipulates his plot
around the character.

BRIANNA

Oh I agree. (to Luciana) See? We
speak the same language.

LUCIANA

Oh look Brianna, Ben's brought his
dog. Aren't you afraid of dogs?

BRIANNA

Oh no. I love dogs. I grew up on a
farm.

LUCIANA

Wasn't it a fruit farm?

Brianna goes to pat the dog which growls at her.

BEN

I also grew up on a farm.

Ben goes to his desk. Brianna looks at Luciana as if to say
'see!'. Rachel enters and goes straight to the league table.

RACHEL

Good. Number one. Only another two
weeks to go. Oh Morning Luciana.

LUCIANA
Morning Rachel. Ben's brought...

RACHEL
Not chocolate I hope.

LUCIANA
No. It's... Never mind.

Rachel goes over to Ben's desk, she spies a chocolate bar on his desk. As she gets close she screams. Rachel jumps on a chair.

RACHEL
What is that?

BEN
Oscar. He was feeling lonely at home. I thought it might help us exercise this week.

RACHEL
We don't need a dog to lose weight Ben. There's jogging,

BEN
Which you can do with a dog.

RACHEL
Well there's swimming, which you can't do with a dog.

Oscar begins chewing a sock under Ben's desk.

BEN
Isn't that just adorable. He likes to litter all my socks around the flat, so I brought this in for him as a comforter.

RACHEL
Chewing socks? No fear of him getting fat on that diet. And don't you dare touch that chocolate bar for another week, remember fat lag takes a week and we need to keep that weight down,

BEN
I got it because Angela gave me the wrong lunch and I was too scared to tell her. I promise I won't touch it, till...

Ben goes off to the photocopier. Rachel is still on the chair with her feet up on the seat. Oscar starts to lick her feet. Rachel tries to stop Oscar licking her, takes out a piece of chocolate from Ben's desk and gives it to the dog.

RACHEL

Now Shoo.

BRIANNA

Luciana what should I do?

LUCIANA

About what Brianna?

BRIANNA

This connection.

LUCIANA

It's not a connection Brianna, I can assure you.

BRIANNA

Oh but it is.

LUCIANA

I've got bigger problems Brianna. For one, Henry seems to have intel on Jack's letter to the union.

BRIANNA

Probably the go pro.

LUCIANA

You mean that go proey thing on Stefan's head.

BRIANNA

I saw it in Henry's office.

LUCIANA

Well we need to get that thing back.

BRIANNA

But how?

LUCIANA

(pretending to think aloud)

How could we get the go pro back? I wonder. That reminds me I need to report Henry's broken door lock. Again.

BRIANNA

Facilities need to have it logged before they will come up. (beat) I've just had an idea Luciana.

LUCIANA

Have you?

BRIANNA

I could go to Henry's office and get the go pro. Before you book facilities.

LUCIANA

What a good idea Brianna.

BRIANNA

But you need to tell me when Henry won't be in the office.

LUCIANA

Let me look at his diary. (pretends to look) Oh yes today he has his hair appointment, I mean appointment with the Dean. He is leaving early.

BRIANNA

I could go in then. Aren't we a great team Luciana.

LUCIANA

Yes. Brilliant. Don't know what I would do without you Brianna.

BRIANNA

You're my sidekick in the romcom that is my life.

LUCIANA

Lucky me. A role I've always wanted.

INT. UNIVERSITY CAFÉ. DAY.

Rachel is walking through the café. Jack has just picked up his coffee, holding an open computer, sees Rachel and rushes towards her trying to balance coffee and computer.

JACK

Rachel I need to speak to you.

RACHEL

Speak great one.

JACK

Luciana just told me that Henry knows about the letter to the union. And even what it says.

RACHEL

I told you not to write that Henry is a sociopath who gets his kicks out of making everyone miserable.

JACK
She said something about
incriminating footage.

RACHEL
What footage?

JACK AND RACHEL
The go pro! Hans!

JACK
Where is that Springtime prancer.
I'll kill the little Hitler.

RACHEL
Don't think you can call him that.
Besides it won't solve anything.
Henry has his weekly meeting with
the dean this afternoon.

JACK
What has that to do with anything?

RACHEL
It's probably on his desk.

JACK
What if he has backed up the
footage?

RACHEL
That would require intelligence
Jack.

INT. HENRY'S OFFICE. LATER THAT DAY. INTERCUT WITH NEXT
SCENE AS HENRY COMES INTO THE MEDIA OFFICE.

The Go Pro sits on Henry's desk. A fishing line drops down
from the window. Pan up to the window and we see Rachel's
face peering in as she tries to get the fishing line to catch
on the go pro. She begins to climb in through the window and
is half way in when Brianna walks into the room.

BRIANNA
Rachel.

Rachel is stuck in the window.

RACHEL
Oh hello Brianna.

BRIANNA AND RACHEL
What are you doing here?

BRIANNA

Why are you coming in through the window.

RACHEL

I was going to ask you the same thing Brianna.

BRIANNA

But I came in through the door.

RACHEL

And who gave you permission to come into Henry's office?

BRIANNA

The lock on the door ...

RACHEL

Oh really. The lock gave you permission?

BRIANNA

Well if you must know, but only if you can keep a secret.

Rachel is still hanging in through the window.

RACHEL

You can trust me Brianna.

BRIANNA

(conspiratorial)

Well. Henry has footage of ...

RACHEL

I've got an idea Brianna.

BRIANNA

Yes Rachel?

RACHEL

Why don't you take the go pro to Luciana.

BRIANNA

Oh I can do that Rachel. But do you need help getting out?

Rachel has managed to get in through the window. She crashes down onto the floor.

RACHEL

No I'm fine. Thanks Brianna, just take the evide.. I mean go pro.

Brianna leaves with the go pro.

INT. MEDIA OFFICE. SAME TIME.

Luciana is at her desk. Henry walks in.

LUCIANA
(screaming)
Ahhhh. Henry.

HENRY
Yes Luciana. It's me.

LUCIANA
Wha wha what are you doing here?

HENRY
I need some stationery.

LUCIANA
What for?

HENRY
To do some work. I promise only to
take what I need.

LUCIANA
Let me get that for you. (gets key
from drawer) What exactly would you
like?

HENRY
(looking at the sign)
Pencils. I like the sign. Very ...
catching.

Luciana walks slowly towards the cupboard.

LUCIANA
It's for my marketing assignment.
Would you like some rubbers with
that?

HENRY
You mean erasers?

LUCIANA
Yes erasers.

HENRY
No I don't think so.

LUCIANA
I think you should take some.

HENRY
If I've gone over my monthly
allocation Luciana I am sure I have
some in my office.

LUCIANA

NO! Here I have pencils for you.
Lots of them. And rubbers.

HENRY

I don't need the rubb, I mean
erasers. Thanks now I'll put them
in my ...

LUCIANA

Wait. I think you need some pencil
sharpeners.

HENRY

Do I?

LUCIANA

Yes to keep you on ... point.. so to
speak.

HENRY

(looks at his watch)
I'm running late. And I need to get
something from my ...

LUCIANA

Fa... fa...

Brianna walks in with go pro under her coat. She makes a sign
to Luciana.

LUCIANA (CONT'D)

Fa... fa...cilities. I've logged
your door with facilities.

HENRY

Brianna what is that you have under
your coat?

BRIANNA

A ... a.... New....

LUCIANA

Game console. Brianna managed to
get it from UCS.

HENRY

Well done Brianna. Let me see.

LUCIANA

Aren't you late Henry?

HENRY

Oh yes.

Rachel enters covered in bush leaves as Henry opens the door.

HENRY (CONT'D)
 Rachel you look like you've been
 rolling around in the bushes.

RACHEL
 Testing out a new writing exercise
 for the second years Henry. It's
 called ...

BRIANNA
 Fishing for... ideas... in...
 nature.

EXT. UNIVERSITY GROUNDS. A FEW DAYS LATER.

Ben sits alone in contemplation. Rachel walks up, he sees her
 and puts something under him, we see it is a chocolate
 wrapper.

RACHEL
 Ben.

BEN
 (avoiding eye contact)
 Yes Rachel.

RACHEL
 You okay?

BEN
 (he shuffles)
 Umm. Yes.

RACHEL
 Are you sitting on something?

BEN
 No. Nothing.

RACHEL
 You haven't broken our fast?

BEN
 No. No. Definitely not.

RACHEL
 Only three days to go till fat lag
 can begin.

Ben sniffs. Rachel sits down next to him.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
 Three days isn't that long Ben.
 We're kilo challenge pals.

BEN
 It's Oscar.

RACHEL

The second year who never goes to class? I reckon he is still smoking joints behind the studio. Remember when we...

BEN

Not that Oscar.

RACHEL

(thinking aloud)

That reminds me I might need to write to progression and support about him.

BEN

(sniffing)

It's... my dog ... Oscar.

RACHEL

Oh that's a relief, I thought it was a progression issue..

BEN

He passed.

RACHEL

Passed what? The sock?

BEN

He died.

RACHEL

From the sock?

BEN

The vet said it was chocolate poisoning. Who would give a dog chocolate?

RACHEL

(anxious)

Someone who thinks the dog would go away?

BEN

Everyone knows that chocolate is poison for dogs.

RACHEL

Do they?

BEN

He was my best friend.

RACHEL

Yes they say that about dogs. Never got it myself.

BEN

I'm not sure what I will do without him.

RACHEL

Well just don't be tempted by the chocolate - it's the devil's food you know. Look what it did to Oscar. Could be poison for us, I mean you. (Struggling) Maybe you could frame a photo of him. A memory that gives you comfort.

Rachel gives Ben a chocolate bar.

BEN

You're a good friend Rachel.

INT. MEDIA DEPARTMENT. DAY. A FEW DAYS LATER.

Ben enters with a stuffed dog on wheels. He goes up to Rachel. Rachel turns from her desk.

RACHEL

What is that?

BEN

Oscar.

RACHEL

I thought he was...

BEN

I wasn't ready to let go. I thought it would help both of us. Help you get over your fear of dogs.

RACHEL

Thanks Ben but I can deal with my fears all by myself, it's my own little world of Monsters Inc.

BEN

As your partner Rachel I want to help you (beat) ... as you helped me.

Rachel shuffles, looking uncomfortable.

RACHEL

Oh that is very very very I mean very sweet of you Ben.

Oscar the stuffed dog has a weird expression on his face.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

What is that look?

BEN

The taxidermist asked what expression I wanted, and I said something to remind me of him with a sock in his mouth.

RACHEL

It looks like something bigger than a sock. Like an arm.

BEN

Come let's take Oscar for a walk. See he has wheels.

RACHEL

(looking mortified)
Yes. I see.

EXT. UNIVERSITY GROUNDS. DAY.

Ben and Rachel are walking with Oscar being pulled along.

RACHEL

It happened when I was in third grade. And I've never really got over it.

BEN

Well maybe the dog was as scared of you as you were of it.

RACHEL

It bit me!

BEN

Maybe he didn't like witches.

RACHEL

Or that I was the lead in the school play. I think he was sent by the Delaney dogs. They hated me. Called me a wog.

Rachel begins to tear up. Ben lets go of the lead on which he has been pulling stuffed dog and goes to hug Rachel. In the background we see a large dog approach stuffed Oscar, which it begins to maul. Rachel sees it.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

Um Ben...

BEN

Yes Rachel?

RACHEL

I think...

BEN
We should take it easy. I agree.

RACHEL
What? No. The dog.

BEN
Still a bad memory?

Ben hugs her again.

RACHEL
It's a new one actually.

Ben pulls back. Rachel motions to look in the direction of the dog now mauling Oscar.

BEN
(screaming)
Oh my God. Stop you beast.

Ben grabs the lead and a tug of war begins between the big dog and Ben with Oscar being ripped into pieces.

BEN (CONT'D)
(yelling)
Oscar. Oscar. Oscar.

A lanky, unkempt student rushes out from behind the building holding a spliff.

OSCAR
What? (Seeing the carnage) Man
that's strong.

RACHEL
Oscar. I knew you were still at it.

The big dog has run off and stuffed Oscar is in pieces. Ben goes to pick them up.

BEN
How am I going to live without you?

OSCAR
(holding out the joint)
Here. You look like you could do
with it.

RACHEL
Ben! Oscar is still smoking weed.

Ben is sobbing. Rachel softens.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Ben, get a grip.

BEN
He was my best friend.

RACHEL
Weeell. Technically he was a ...
stuffed.... friend.

Oscar hands Ben a chocolate bar.

OSCAR
Would you like this. I keep it for
the ...

RACHEL
I think you should go inside Oscar
before I report you.

Ben takes the chocolate bar.

BEN
Thanks Oscar.

RACHEL
Ben, remember I gave you a choco..

BEN
I've just lost my best friend.
Twice. Once when...

RACHEL
Yes, yes, I know but one more
day...

OSCAR
Jeez its guts are all over the
place.

Ben sobs more and begins to eat the chocolate bar.

RACHEL
(panicked)
Ben, want to go for a run later
today? To lose... I mean get over
the tragic loss of Oscar.

BEN
Thanks Rachel. That might help. For
now I'll just pick up ...

Ben picks up what is left of Oscar the dog, holding his
collar, taking a bite of the chocolate.

RACHEL
(resigned)
Oh well, losing isn't everything.

OSCAR
I think you mean winning isn't
everything Rachel.

RACHEL
Says the student with a joint. Get
inside Oscar.

Rachel helps pick up the pieces. Oscar the student goes
inside.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
He was a good friend. (Beat) As are
you Ben.

TAG. INT. UNIVERSITY CAFE. DAY.

Ben is sitting at a table watching something on a computer
and laughing. Rachel appears.

RACHEL
Nice to see you laughing. I wish I
could.

BEN
Sorry that we didn't win.

RACHEL
Winning isn't everything.

BEN
To you it is.

RACHEL
I can lose in a fair fight. But
Henry doesn't play fair. What are
you laughing at?

BEN
(crying with laughter)
Stefan's day in the life video ...

He turns the computer around. We see Rachel climbing in
through the window.

BEN (CONT'D)
He uploaded it to his YouTube
channel.

RACHEL
Wait till I get my hands on that
little...Hitler.

Ben hands her a chocolate bar.

BEN
Maybe I can have a word to Hans.

Rachel rips into the chocolate bar.

RACHEL
Okay what will it cost me?

BEN
To clean the slate?

RACHEL
Yes. To clean the slate. And get
that video taken down.

BEN
I was using subtext.

RACHEL
Yes I know Ben. I teach the stuff.
Just do it.

Rachel leaves. Ben smiles to himself. He takes out the USB
stick from the computer and pockets it.

FADE OUT.

END OF EPISODE

CRITICAL REFLECTION ON CREATIVE PRACTICE 1:

IT'S ACADEMIC – A STUDIO-BASED ENSEMBLE SITUATION COMEDY

The aim of this creative practice

Drawing on the analyses and ideas pertaining to the ensemble sitcom, the aim of Creative Practice 1 (CP1) was to explore the principle that an ensemble comedy is best served by a story ideology that frames and entraps certain characters in behaviour which undermines their goals. While the frame is the marketisation of Higher Education (HE) (and which Henry supports as the Head of Department) the gang is trapped by the fear of being rendered irrelevant or unemployed. The objective was to explore the comic tension both inter- and intra- relationally of the characters within this frame, including the comic antihero and the echo within.

Developing this creative practice

Each of the characters in CP1 has a different relationship to the frame. Ben attempts to attain status in this world, whilst unaware of the dynamics that prevent him succeeding. Rachel, as the comic antihero, is aware of the frame, yet she does not leave it; instead, this character attempts to expose the frame in a misguided attempt to 'rescue' those who suffer under its weight and expose its impact on values that once defined academia. Jack, senior lecturer and documentary warhorse, is Rachel's father figure and though frustrated by the frame and its neo-liberal effects or those who represent it, such as Henry, does not take action to demolish it. Henry thrives in such a world and uses its tools to manipulate and exploit those under his management. Fergal and Brianna, junior accolades, are unaware of the effects of this ideology and its agenda, which ensures they remain subservient to its demands. Hans, the pedantic technology wizard, simply operates on a different level, completely unaware of the dynamics at play, and along with Fergal and Brianna these characters echo the fears of Rachel, Ben, and Jack. Luciana, the departmental administrator, is the truth-teller who knows how the games are played and plays some herself.

Considering the “most” of each of the main characters in *It's Academic*, I sought to explore the potential comedic gap between the characters:

- Rachel is the most vociferous in exposing the hypocrisy and exploitation of the marketisation of HE whilst also being the most competitive teacher; her integrity is often undermined by her competitiveness.
- Ben is the most fearful of commitment whilst also the most knowledgeable film director.
- Henry is the most Machiavellian Head of Department looking out for his career.
- Brianna is the most social media savvy wannabe academic.
- Jack is the most cynical ex-documentarian warhorse, yet is impotent in acting to expose the frame.
- Luciana is the most conscientious administrator who speaks her mind.
- Fergal is the most naïve graduate academic assistant.
- Angela is the most dictatorial café owner.
- Hans is the most pedantic teacher.

From this exercise I was able to discern that the nature of the relationship each character has with the frame; it enables power, it disempowers, or it simply refuses to yield power. The underlying tension is driven by unconscious fears that these characters will fail in mastering the oppressive effects of the frame and its story ideology. CP1 demonstrates the principle that the ensemble comedy works best when the gang is framed by a story ideology, and which underscore intra- and inter-relational tension.

Defining the ensemble, their frame and the story ideology, along with the echo, I had great difficulty in finding the essence of the comic antihero. This was because I initially thought Rachel was the key character as well as the comic antihero, but it soon became apparent that the antihero cannot be a key character if they are conscious of the frame, which I had previously argued that the key character is not.

Insights gleaned from this creative practice

Reflecting on the analysis of the antihero in Chapter One, I realised that such comic characters are aware of those that thwart their goals, even if those goals contravene legal, moral and social laws (as discussed with the characters of Walter White and Tony Soprano). I posit that while the comic antihero may not challenge social laws and expectations, they are antiheroes in that they challenge structures that limit what they see as the greater good; in the case of CP1, Rachel wants to teach students how to think and not simply treat them as a number. Thus, the comicality of the comic antihero arises in the failure of such characters in attempting to shift the limitations of the frame. As such the comic antihero is caught between consciousness (of the frame) and some degree of unconsciousness about the power dynamics in play. As noted, and argued in *Situation Comedy*,⁵⁶ the key character is conscious of the goal yet unconscious of any frame that prevents them achieving their goal, typically by way of fears that ultimately trigger their comic degradation. This may have been the reason I not only thought the comic antihero was a form of key character, but why I had difficulty in manifesting the comicality of Rachel; her conscious goal is socially focused, yet she is unconscious of the power dynamics at play. Summarising how each character represents/reflects an attitude to the frame by way of power gives insight to how they respond when their sense of self, status or identity is under threat:

- Jack is afraid he will never have power again.
- Rachel believes she is empowered, yet despite three waves of feminism finds herself in a patriarchy operating by different rules which still disempower.
- Ben is confused as to what happened to his power, and while he abhors the business model of HE, it gives him an identity in the social.
- Luciana, as truth-teller, is the Black woman no longer putting up with bad behaviour or abuse of power.
- Henry, on the other hand, has achieved power and seeks to maintain it by any means.

⁵⁶ D.T. Klika, *Situation Comedy, Character, and Psychoanalysis* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018).

- Brianna has no power and does not know it.
- Fergal is afraid he is not seen in this world, needs to be liked and will do anything to achieve some power, yet is unaware that he has no power.

Once I realised that Ben was the (only) key character, and Rachel's characteristics are more akin to that of an antihero in that she is fully aware of the frame, I was then able to position each character in relation to the frame. Considering the analysis in Chapter One along with the characteristics of echoism within the key character, it needs to be asked why Rachel, not being a key character, stays in a situation she knows is disempowering. Furthermore, developing Rachel became challenging in another way: by being too aggressive the character is not likeable, by being too nice the character has little agency.

Reflecting on this point and the analysis of characters in Chapter One, it became evident that Rachel has a sense of loyalty to the gang (a characteristic of echoism as discussed in my book) alongside her role, as a senior lecturer, which gives her status (a characteristic of narcissism). I have argued that the key character harbours both echoistic and narcissistic characteristics and this would be the reason I initially thought Rachel was a key character. Reflecting on the discussion of the antihero, I realised Rachel's echoism and narcissism play out in different ways: Rachel harbours a conscious fear of being disempowered by the frame, coupled with an unconscious loyalty to a gang that is unwilling or unable to challenge the frame that entraps them. The analysis enabled me to develop this character in relation to the frame as aware of its effects but unaware to its entrapment (of her). Rachel is attempting to alter a situation in which the participants are not fully engaged with her project. As such in attempting to position Rachel in relation to the frame, practice was informed by the research undertaken, while the resulting practice further informed research.

Implications for practice

Summarising the role of each of the character/s in terms of aspects explicated in Chapter One:

- The academic teaching team represents the gang that is defined and contained by the marketisation of HE.
- The frame of HE as a business is represented by Henry the Head of department.
- The echoes are represented by Fergal (echoing Ben), Hans (echoing Jack) and Brianna (echoing Rachel). Luciana is the truth-teller.
- Rachel is the comic antihero – her need to save the gang stems from her desire to be recognised as the most competent in this struggle.

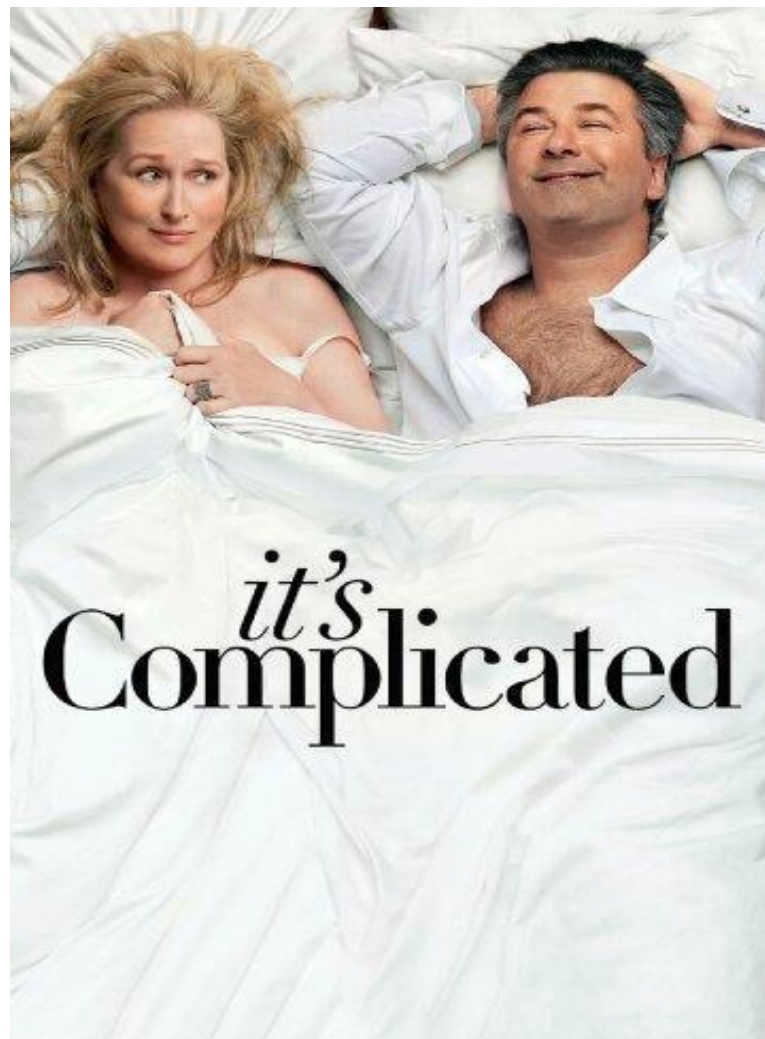
Each aspect and character role are developed by way of understanding the relation between each character and the frame in terms of power dynamics. Furthermore, the nature and degree of tension between conscious goals and unconscious behaviour assists in developing and positioning the comic antihero in relation to a discursive frame.

What are the implications of insights gained from the theoretical chapter and writing creative practice 1 to be applied to creative practice 2?

CP1 presents characters who exist in the gaze of a frame, enabling an opportunity to choose characters who will “escape” the entrapment or at the least actualise in a way where they are no longer “trapped.” CP2 is tasked with enabling some characters to escape that entrapment by way of actualisation. CP2 will be a feature film which sets out to explore the elements that need to be considered when reworking a short form narrative, such as the episodic sitcom series, to a feature film, wherein the character/s undergo some consciousness about who they are or the world around them. To that end, it needs to be ascertained which character/s and which aspects of their behaviour will undergo transformation in the long form narrative of the feature film. In short, which character/s are best suited to undertake the transformational journey? CP2 bridges the period of CP1, beginning with Ben first arriving at the media department, only to find that Rachel, his one-time love, works there. Ben and Rachel will undergo a journey that exposes the misunderstandings in their previous relationship. Further, CP2 explores the notion that a related sitcom or comedy series can be found within the second act of a film, a point I expand on in Chapter Three.

SECTION TWO

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CHAPTER TWO

THE MIDPOINT AND ITS BIND IN FILM COMEDIES

Picking up from the last chapter, I now consider the narrative structure and its impact on character behaviour when a sitcom is reworked to a feature film. I analyse plot structure, and in particular the midpoint (MP), wherein the character is confronted with a need that will enable change. This chapter asks: What is the role of the MP in film comedies? While I discuss and analyse primarily film comedies that focus on relationships, I closely examine the two films based on the sitcom, *Dad's Army*,¹ discussed in Chapter One. To that end, I explore the challenge of determining which protagonist/s in the ensemble comedy are best suited in the migration to an associated film, and the transformation that its narrative demands.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND APPLICATION

Implications for character and narrative structure when reworking an ensemble sitcom to film

In *Situation Comedy, Character, and Psychoanalysis*, I argue that, in the sitcom, the key character never faces their need, born of an unconscious fear, the root of repeated comic degradation.² While the sitcom character may have a goal that is prompted by an episodic incident, their super objective (idealisation) is undermined by an unconscious fear, manifesting as behavioural flaws and which underpin their comic degradation.

By considering the elements required for the long form narrative film, screenwriting theorists David Howard and Edward Mabley write: “The most rudimentary plan for a screenplay should contain the following elements: who the central character is (if the unity of action is used...) and what he or she wants; who the other principle characters are and what

¹ *Dad's Army: The Movie*, wrs. Jerry Perry, David Croft, dir. Norman Cohen (Columbia Pictures, 1971). *Dad's Army*, wr. Hamish McColl, dir. Oliver Parker (Universal Pictures, 2016).

² D.T. Klika, *Situation Comedy, Character, and Psychoanalysis: On the Couch with Lucy, Basil and Kimmie* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018) see Chapter 2.

they each want...”³ Thus, it is the interrelation between character and plot which enables unity of action. Further distilling character motivation, Howard and Mabley write that “[i]t was Frank Daniel who first formulated a deceptively simple delineation of the basic dramatic circumstance: Somebody wants something badly and is having difficulty getting it.”⁴ Daniel developed a framework, expanded by Howard and Mabley, to offer that the long form film narrative is shaped by a character’s wants, needs, wound/fear and associated fatal flaw. The need is what the character must do to nullify the flaw.⁵ Script analysts Paul Gulino and Linda Seger⁶ further observe that while the (physical) goal is not always achieved, the character must confront their need for there to be the transformation that the film narrative demands.⁷ Christopher Vogler⁸ also advocates in his twelve stages of the ‘hero’s journey’ that screen narratives are shaped by a character’s wants, needs, wound/fear and fatal flaw (behaviour) – all backgrounded by motivation.

However, in the sitcom, the character never faces their need; they might have a super objective, and while each episode brings a new goal that may progress that idealisation, when their unconscious fear is triggered, they fail in both the immediate goal and the super objective. Hence, the key character is shaped by conscious desires/wants coupled with unconscious fears.⁹ While it is not possible to reveal the unconscious of the fictional character, psychoanalytic theory enables an examination of behaviour by fictional characters, elucidating the gap between their conscious goal and behaviour. It is essential to know the character’s (unconscious) motivation and the resultant behaviour that drives them to achieve an external,

³ David Howard and Edward Mabley. *The Tools of Screenwriting. A Writer’s Guide to the Craft and Elements of a Screenplay* (New York: St Martin’s Griffin, 1993), p.77.

⁴ Howard and Mabley, as before, p.22.

⁵ For example, if a character needs to see through people’s charm and see true intentions, their flaw might be that they are seduced/blinded by charm.

⁶ Linda Seger, *Making a Good Script Great* (Hollywood: Samuel French, 1987).

⁷ While transformation is essentially a western, even Hollywood approach to screenwriting, story demands some form of change through the narrative in order to maintain audience engagement.

⁸ Christopher Vogler, *The Writer’s Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers* (London: Pan Books, 1999).

⁹ Klika, *Situation Comedy*, as before, Chapter 2.

conscious, goal, causing them to fail week after week. I argue that the gap between the key character’s conscious goal and unconscious entrapment enables the struggle (in the sitcom), and which underpins the comic performance.¹⁰ However, commercial film narratives demand that the character must confront their need and/or fear to enable the transformation of their view of the world and themselves. Tabling each form of narrative assists in ascertaining character goals and behaviours:

SITCOM	FILM
Super objective (series) with a lesser goal triggered in each episode by an inciting incident	Wants – goal – often stated in response to a feeling of lack or loss
Need – avoided (unconscious)	Need – to transform (brought to consciousness)
Entrapment – situation developed by relational dynamics sited in a physical, confined setting	Fear, born of ego wounding that will be brought to consciousness through the course of the narrative
Behaviour/incident that triggers the fear and, as long as it remains unconscious, enables repeatability	Fatal Flaw/behaviour undermines the goal/want that, when brought to consciousness, enables transformation

Table 2.1: The comic character in the sitcom and the film.

Table 2.1 shows that then reworking a sitcom to film the character/s must learn something about themselves in order to undergo some degree of psychological transformation. Thus, in the migration of characters from the sitcom to the film it is necessary to understand which characters harbour fears and flaws that are able to be affected by the narrative and will enable their transformation of how they see the world.

Sara Khalili¹¹ uses Syd Field’s three act structure to demonstrate that the climax of a film narrative is the turning point (TP) into Act Three, rather than the MP which has become

¹⁰ Klika, *Situation Comedy*, as before, Chapter 5.

¹¹ Sara Khalili, ‘Analysing the advantages of Aristotle’s two-act structure in comparison with Syd Field’s three-act structure in short comedic animation scriptwriting,’ in *Journal of Screenwriting* (9:3, 2018) pp. 265-277.

regarded as the climax by practitioner theorists such as Howard and Mabley.¹² Noting the discussion so far, I posit that, in drama, the protagonist faces their need at the MP, triggering the midpoint reversal (MPR), whereas in comedy they deny it until the last possible moment. Hence, I agree with Khalili's positioning of the climax occurring at the end of Act Two – when all seems lost. However, I ascertain that the MP is affecting the comic character in different ways to the dramatic character.

The comedy character is comic precisely because they are at odds with the world around them and they utilise certain behaviours, such as lying, masquerade, or deceit, to achieve a goal or maintain an idealisation that gives them some degree of power or status. I offer that in the comedy film the protagonists refuse to accept or even acknowledge their need (they remain stubborn or unconscious) until the stakes are too high for them to continue in their denial. As such, the *comic* character attempts to maintain both their want and need, creating the tension that drives the comicality, and which becomes evident at the MP. Hence, it is essential to understand the nature of the tension that drives the comicality, whilst also understanding if the main character/s will change in the face of the narrative, or if the narrative is subverted – by way of a change of direction in which the character does not confront the need to change – as Lisa Trahair argues with Buster Keaton's *The General*¹³ – or if both character and narrative are subverted, as in *Some Like It Hot* (1959),¹⁴ where the guy gets the girl but because of deception – narrative put to the service of the goal in order that the character does not have to change.

As discussed in the last chapter, the ensemble sitcom operates more effectively by having both inter- and intra-relationships with the frame. Picking up Chapter One, when the

¹² Howard and Mabley, *The Tools of Screenwriting*, as before. David Howard, *How to Build a Great Screenplay* (St. Martin's Griffin: New York, 2004) p.329. Linda Seger only mentions the midpoint in her 1994 revised text, and albeit briefly, *Making a Good Script Great*, as before, 1994.

¹³ Lisa Trahair, *The Comedy of Philosophy: Sense and Nonsense in Early Cinematic Slapstick* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007). Trahair analyses Buster Keaton's *The General* to demonstrate that in pursuit of a goal (the pleasure principle) by denying the reality (principle) the character subverts the narrative.

¹⁴ *Some Like It Hot*, wrs. Billy Wilder, I.A.L Diamond, dir. Billy Wilder (United Artists, 1959).

ensemble is taken out of the situation the frame is altered, while also consolidating the dynamics at play. When the sitcom is reworked as a film, where the gang go on holiday or to a new destination, as is common in Britain,¹⁶ their environment both challenges and fortifies the group dynamic, yet they do not change in any significant manner. Examples include *Are You Being Served?* (1977) (AYBS) and *On the Buses* (1971),¹⁷ wherein the characters respond to the environment in sometimes more extreme ways than they would ‘back home,’ yet do not undergo any significant change in how they see and engage with the world. This may be because such films are made at the same time the series is going to air. However, and central to this argument if, and when, transformation does occur (as in the film *The Bad Education Movie*, 2015),¹⁸ a return to the originating sitcom and premise is not possible. *Dad’s Army*, an ensemble sitcom that spawned two films, one in 1971 and one in 2016, each with different narrative structures and, more significantly, differing relationships to the sitcom. I critically analyse the narrative structure of each iteration in the textual analysis but note here that, in terms of story, the 1971 film is a prequel to the series, while the latter film (2016), and set in the same milieu as the sitcom, offers little change in the characters or their situation and as such is neither a prequel nor a resolution to the world of the series.¹⁵

Categorising ensemble sitcoms, such as *Are You Being Served?* (AYBS), *Dad’s Army* and *Bad Education*,¹⁹ reworked to film narratives, and delineating between those that undergo change elucidates the following:

¹⁵ *Dad’s Army*, wrs. Jerry Perry, David Croft, as before (1971). *Dad’s Army*, wr. Hamish McColl, as before (2016).

¹⁶ See Appendix with list of sitcoms developed as films and films reworked as sitcoms and the countries produced.

¹⁷ *Are You Being Served?* wrs. David Croft, Jeremy Lloyd, dir. Bob Kellett (EMI, 1977). *On the Buses*, wrs., prods, Ronald Chesney, Ronald Wolfe, dir. Harry Booth (MGM-EMI, 1971).

¹⁸ The main character’s view of his friends is radically altered by the group of students, thus transforming how he sees the world *The Bad Education Movie*, wrs. Freddy Syborn, Jack Whitehall, dir. Elliot Hegarty (Entertainment Film, 2015).

¹⁹ *Are You Being Served?*, creators Jeremy Lloyd, David Croft, prod. BBC (UK: BBC, 1972-1985), *Dad’s Army*, creator Jimmy Perry, wr. David Croft, prod. BBC (UK: BBC, 1968-1977). *Bad Education*, creator Jack Whitehall, prod. Tiger Aspect Productions (UK: BBC, 2012-14).

- I. **No change in character** in the ensemble sitcom or film
 - a. change in situation, *AYBS* (1977) film²⁰
 - b. same situation *Dad's Army* (1971)²¹
- II. **(Some) Change in character**, in the film.
 - a. No change in situation, *Dad's Army* (2016)²²
 - b. Change in situation, *The Bad Education Movie* (2015)

Or to put it another way:

- III. **No change in situation** from ensemble sitcom to film
 - a. No change in characters *Dad's Army* (1971)
 - b. Desired/promised change in character/s *Dad's Army* (2016)
- IV. **Change in situation** from ensemble sitcom to film
 - a. no change in character, *AYBS* film (1977)
 - b. change in character, *The Bad Education Movie* (2015).

It is evident that character and situation are intrinsically linked – the narrative either supports change or reinforces established behaviour in a new situation. As such, I posit that it is necessary to understand which characters undergo change, and why, or if, the characters do not change, determine how the narrative reinforces the dynamics at play in the originating situation. Hence, it is useful to know how the narrative of the film will enable, or not, transformation in those character/s. If the characters do not change, as in the case of *AYBS* (1977) and *On the Buses* (1971), I suggest that those characters subvert the narrative in denying the reality that challenges them and their view of the world, as I will discuss occurs in *Some Like It Hot* (1959). I now examine the comedy film in order to determine how its generic tropes inform narrative and plot.

²⁰ *Are You Being Served?* wrs. David Croft, Jeremy Lloyd, as before (1977).

²¹ *Dad's Army*, wrs. Jerry Perry, David Croft, as before (1971).

²² *Dad's Army*, wr. Hamish McColl, as before (2016). I will argue in the textual analysis that this film did not succeed in character transformation.

The comedy film: its conventions in terms of narrative and character

For Stuart Voytilla and Scott Petri there are two types of romantic comedy narratives:

1. The search for one's true love (sweet romance) – the hero and/or heroine are wounded without love ...
2. The recommitment to love (marriage comedy) – a relationship (marriage, engagement, or other promise of commitment) is fractured, and the lovers part seeking new love only to come back and recommit to the original relationship ...²³

In both these examples Voytilla and Petri cover relationships which undergo some degree of discord – ‘wounded without love’ or ‘fractured.’ They further note that *Sleepless in Seattle* (1993)²⁴ use both structures, writing that “Annie’s story is a search for true love. Sam’s story is a recommitment to the power of love.”²⁵ For Marc Blake, the comedy in romantic comedy “comes in the gap between image and reality, between hope and expectation and between fear and commitment.”²⁶ Further differentiating between a romantic comedy (romcom) and comedy romances in the romcom, the character primarily wants/desires love and is conscious of that desire by the end of Act One, whereas in the comedy romance the character *needs* love and this remains so at the end of Act One. In other words, the character’s need for love is unconscious and at some point, this comes to consciousness. While the romantic comedy is governed by the pursuit for ‘the one’ – where love will fulfil some lack – the need is centred on some change in the character in order for them to recognise, accept or find that love. The comedy romance character discovers love accidentally, but I offer that the ‘discovery’ is related to their need.

²³ Stuart Voytilla & Scott Petri, *Writing the Comedy Film. Make ‘Em Laugh* (Studio City, CA: Michael Weise Productions, 2003) p.96.

²⁴ *Sleepless in Seattle*, wrs. Nora Ephron, David S. Ward, Jeff Arch, dir. Nora Ephron (TriStar Pictures, 1993).

²⁵ Voytilla & Petri, as before, p.96. However not all romantic comedies, including *Sleepless*, begin with the search for love (Annie is already engaged).

²⁶ Marc Blake, *Writing the Comedy Movie* (London, New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016) p. 68.

Turning now to generic debates centred on the romantic comedy, Tamar Jeffers McDonald critically examines the ‘radical’ comedies of the 70s, such as *Annie Hall*(1977), writing that

Whereas both screwball and sex comedy made use of ideas of disguise and masquerade, and inversions of the norm, the radical romantic comedies choose to inflect these more literally However, when a character does make use of masquerade, it is generally the male, as in sex comedy, but the radical romantic comedy withholds the exploding of the scheming male’s plot which was such a necessary part of the sex comedy’s narrative structure and humour. By withholding the revelation of the man’s deceit, the radical romantic comedy can be seen as suggesting both that everyone lives a lie, and that the liar, in the end, is the one who suffers most.²⁷

Deborah Jermyn delineates between those (radical) comedies where the protagonists do not end up coupling, with examples such as *Annie Hall*, *500 days of Summer* and *The Break-Up*.²⁸ Jermyn argues that

...if this cultural hierarchy is to be challenged, a more constructive and flexible approach to understanding the territory occupied by romantic comedy is needed to revise our enduringly simplistic notions of how genre works and what romcom actually is.²⁹

Jermyn further notes that the films of Nancy Meyers offer a hopeful future to the older woman, with examples of her films, *It's Complicated* (2009) and *Something's Gotta Give* (2003), while Celestino Deleyto broadens the definition and application of the genre as “the intersection of three, closely interrelated elements: a narrative that articulates historically and culturally specific views of love, desire, sexuality and gender relationships...”³⁰; as such I offer that the radicalness of the 1970s offerings have shifted focus. *It's Complicated* (2009) and

²⁷ Tamar Jeffers McDonald, *Romantic Comedy. Boy Meets Girl Meets Genre* (London and NY: Wallflower, 2007) p. 65.

²⁸ *Annie Hall*, wrs. Woody Allen, Marshall Brickman, dir. Woody Allen (United Artists, 1977). *500 days of Summer*, wrs. Scott Neustadter, Michael H. Webb, dir. Marc Weber (Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2009). *The Break-Up*, wrs. Jeremy Garelick, Jay Lavender, dir. Peyton Reed (Universal Pictures, 2006).

²⁹ Deborah Jermyn, *Nancy Meyers* (London, New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017) pp.104-5.

³⁰ Celestino Deleyto, *The secret life of romantic comedy* (Manchester, New York: Manchester University Press, 2011) p. 45.

indeed, comedy films such as *Bridesmaids* (2011) and *Tootsie* (1982), with their overt discussion of sex, bodily fluids and gender issues are ripe examples of McDonald's radical comedies.

Deleyto further attempts to broaden the limitations of the genre to include those comedies, often seen as what Leger Grindon defines as 'marginal,'³¹ as explorations of the discourse of love and relationships rather than edicts in the search for 'love.' Deleyto continues:

It has been my contention that only a more flexible and less deterministic approach to the genre's main characteristics, one that moves beyond compulsory heterosexuality and monogamy and the happy ending, ...³²

Such a view underpins Jermyn's analysis of Meyers' *It's Complicated*:³³

[the] romcom had to keep bringing new inflections to bear to avoid becoming stale, and that *It's Complicated* (Meyers, 2009) was a good example of this for the way it had centred on an older 'love-triangle', where a middle-aged divorced couple rekindle their relationship and have an affair.³⁴

Hiding within the debates of genre is the exploration of relationships – regardless of background, gender, race, age, or sexuality – and as such I offer that film comedies are essentially narratives about relationships – of all kinds, not just about heterogeneous love, and sex. I argue that the narrative drive in such comedies is underpinned by conflict and confusion, as opposed to coupling. Thus, it could be said that the narratives of both the comedy romance and the romantic comedy are related by the dramatic question (DQ): will they accept each other? However, while this study is concerned with how comicality works in film comedy rather than the delineation in the various genres of comedy, generic debates assist to contextualise the type of film comedy I seek to analyse – those with a discordant relationship as a central plot.

³¹ Leger Grindon, *The Hollywood Romantic Comedy. Conventions, Histories, Controversies* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2011) p. 81.

³² Deleyto, as before, p.175.

³³ *It's Complicated*, wr., dir. Nancy Meyers (Universal Pictures, 2009).

³⁴ Jermyn, *Nancy Meyers*, as before, p. xii.

Analysing the plotting of film comedies, Steve Kaplan appropriates Vogler's twelve stages of the Hero's Journey to comic film narrative, shoehorning them into seven plot points:

1. The Normal World – with the protagonist unaware that they are “damaged, broken people living in a damaged, broken world. Only they don't know it.”
2. WTF? – chaos breaks loose and there is a desperate attempt to return to the normal world.
3. Reactions – tries to put the world back together.
4. Connections – new friends taking the protagonist off in ...
5. New Directions – this leads to Discovered Goals, which is an important step as it may change the protagonist's want to a realisation of their need, and thus transformation.
6. Disconnection – when all looks lost the protagonist becomes “recommitted to achieving the discovered goal...”
7. Race to the Finish – the girl chases the guy...³⁵

Kaplan's analysis elucidates that the comic hero realises the old world is not coming back, when all looks lost (Vogler's 'Ordeal'), and they must now commit to changing. Dara Marks³⁶ stretches out the circular Hero's Journey apropos Vogler, in *Inside Story*, illustrating the transformational arc as a linear narrative in three acts delivering a visual connection between the circular 'journey' and the sequential plot.

Keith Giglio turns his focus to the character: “Comedy is inherently a fool's journey to discovery or growth. Someone is foolish or misguided in his inappropriate goal, goes on a journey, and matures, or discovers who he really is.”³⁷ Howard and Mabley write: “[i]n dramatic writing, the very essence of character is *change*. The character at the end is not the same as he was at the beginning. He's changed – psychologically, maybe even physically.”³⁸

³⁵ Steve Kaplan, *The Comic Hero's Journey* (Studio City CA: Michael Weise Productions, 2018).

³⁶ Dara Marks, *Inside Story: The Power of the Transformational Arc. The Secret to Crafting Extraordinary Screenplays* (Three Mountains Press. California: Studio City. 2007).

³⁷ Keith Giglio, *Writing the Comedy Blockbuster*, (CA: Michael Wiese Productions, 2012) p.51.

³⁸ Howard and Mabley, *The Tools of Screenwriting*, as before, quoting Robert Towne, p. 52. My italics.

Returning to Kaplan, in closely examining *The 40-Year-Old Virgin* (2005) and *Groundhog Day* (1993),³⁹ he determines that the character's *forced acceptance of change* has made the(ir) world better by facing a need (to grow up, to commit, to leave, to confront a situation, to change). Having defined the hero as someone who confronts their fatal flaw, Kaplan offers that "though there is growth, the personal growth that happens is accidental, inadvertent, or unheroic."⁴⁰ The world is not necessarily saved, the protagonist is not necessarily a superhero or even a great person, they are still flawed individuals – "the reason for that is the simple fact that no one is perfect."⁴¹ Thus, Kaplan determines that such transformation is not as absolute in the comic hero as we find in the traditional heroic journey. Furthermore, while the character's transformation may be incidental to their flaws, such change offers the audience promise of "a more hopeful world,"⁴² they are non-heroes, or possibly antiheroes.⁴³

Wes D. Gehring cites certain films as having antiheroes: *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (1994), *Notting Hill* (1999), *Bridget Jones' Diary* (2001) and *A Fish Called Wanda* (1988).⁴⁴ However, Gehring never fully defines what he means by an antihero other than to say that "[w]hile Cleese is the most tightly wound of the three male principals addressed here, the other two (befuddled Hugh Grant of *Four Weddings*, and the ever-so-rigid Colin Firth of

³⁹ *The 40-Year-Old Virgin*, wr. Judd Apatow, Steve Carrell, dir. Judd Apatow (Universal, 2005). *Groundhog Day*, wrs. Danny Rubin, Harold Ramis, dir. Harold Ramis (Columbia Pictures 1993).

⁴⁰ Kaplan, *The Comic Hero's Journey*, as before, p.131.

⁴¹ Kaplan, as before, p. 132.

⁴² Kaplan, as before, p. 138.

⁴³ Miranda Priestley in *The Devil Wears Prada* could be an antihero. While she treats her staff with disdain, she awakens in Andie, the protagonist, the realisation that she does not want to be like Miranda or Miranda's assistant, Emily. Despite Andie leaving the hallowed halls of the fashion magazine, *Runway*, Miranda writes a begrudging reference for Andie's dream job, a journalist at a paper that does 'issue' based stories. Thus, while the antihero may (or may not) have moral misgiving, they can force change for other characters. *The Devil Wears Prada*, wr. Aline Brosh McKenna, dir. David Frankel (20th Century Fox, 2006).

⁴⁴ *Four Weddings and A Funeral*, wr. Richard Curtis, dir. Mike Newell (Rank Film Distributors, 1994). *Notting Hill*, wr. Richard Curtis, dir. Roger Michell. (Polygram/Universal/Spinal, 1999). *Bridget Jones' Diary*, wrs. Richard Curtis, Andrew Davis, Helen Fielding, dir. Sharon Maguire (Universal Pictures, Miramax Films, 2001). *A Fish Called Wanda*, wr. John Cleese, dir. Charles Crichton (MGM/UA Communications Co., 1988).

Bridget) are both in need of screwball revitalization.”⁴⁵ What means would such revitalization take? Gehring goes on: “...Renee Zellweger playing even more of an antihero than the aforementioned Colin Firth,”⁴⁶ without saying how. One can only assume that, in this context, the antihero is portrayed as not being ‘heroic’ – that is, they do not rescue an ‘other,’ rather it is *they* that needs rescuing – and often by their own actions. This notion resonates with the comic antihero discussed in Chapter One, wherein the character, in an attempt to alter the frame for the other (as they are conscious of the frame) yet needs to find a way to leave the frame for their own sake. Further, it can be deduced that such characters, while not necessarily *active* protagonists, might change in response to other characters, as Bridget triggers in Mark Darcy.

When the character’s need is based on love (of self, or other), and in denying such a need, the character attempts to cling to *both* need and want, thus precipitating a tension between opposing outcomes. I offer that in those film comedies that have a narrative focused on the nature of relationships, the protagonist is seeking to fulfil some lack, and, regardless of the initial goal, find themselves in a psychological tension between an external want and an internal need and lack that may be fulfilled by way of a relationship.⁴⁷ As with the comic antihero, such characters are caught between a conscious want and an unconscious need.

Jason Mittell posits that there is a requirement (by the writer) to not only understand the need of the character but how their resultant fatal flaw is resolved.⁴⁸ Thus the nature of the comic protagonist as not only unheroic, they can also be an accidental hero – they did not set out on a journey of transformation, often they avoid it until confronted with some truth or reality that they can no longer deny, resulting in some change in them or others– but not

⁴⁵ Wes Gehring, *Romantic vs. Screwball Comedy: Charting the Difference* (Lanham: Scarecrow, 2002) p.146.

⁴⁶ Gehring, as before, p.146.

⁴⁷ It may be that the comedy romance offers greater opportunity for tension between the initial goal, and the need for love as these aspects of character have greater opportunity to be at odds with each other.

⁴⁸ Jason Mittell, *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Storytelling* (New York: NYU Press, 2015).

completely as ‘they are still flawed.’ Blake notes: “... the action and plots come from these flawed characters.”⁴⁹

Tootsie (1982)⁵⁰ has a protagonist, Michael Dorsey, a womaniser, and self-described “serious” actor, wants to raise \$8000 to produce a play written by his housemate, and promising a role to his friend, Sandy, an actress on the roller coaster ride of auditions. Giglio writes: “[i]n *Tootsie*, the “something that happens” moment happens when Michael learns about Sandy’s audition for the role of Emily Brewster... Michael agrees to accompany her to the audition. Going to that audition changes his life forever.”⁵¹ Having helped Sandy prepare for a role on the soap opera, Michael is incensed that she does not get an audition, and more so when he discovers that another actor has been given a part and which he claims to be his in the upcoming play *The Iceman Cometh*.

Now determined to raise the funds for the play, Michael auditions for the part of hospital administrator Emily Brewster as Dorothy Michaels and lands the role; no one can know Dorothy’s identity other than his housemate along with his long-suffering agent. Winning the role over Sandy sets up the first layer of deceit. The complications increase when Michael meets and slowly falls in love with Julie, one of the stars on the soap, and who believes Dorothy/ Michael is a woman. The character of Michael is caught between the need to respect women while also masquerading as a woman. Success with the character of Emily Brewster brings Michael a stream of mail and a legion of fans, sharing their secrets and desires. Michael now believes he has something to say to women (“you have nothing to say” retorts his agent).

In *The Nutshell Technique* Jill Chamberlain developed a framework in delineating the character's flaw with a catch. Chamberlain writes that enabling “a catch . . . can provide a relentless assault against your protagonist due to their Flaw...”⁵² Chamberlain determines

⁴⁹ Blake, *Writing the Comedy Movie*, as before, p.67.

⁵⁰ *Tootsie*, wr. Larry Gelbart et al., dir. Sydney Pollack (Columbia Pictures, 1982).

⁵¹ Giglio, *Writing the Comedy Blockbuster*, as before, p.126.

⁵² Jill Chamberlain, *The Nutshell Technique* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016) p.78.

that Michael Dorsey's flaw is that he needs to respect women and is challenged in that by having to pretend to be a woman. Paul Gulino notes that "[m]idway through *Tootsie* (1982), Michael Dorsey reaches a pinnacle of career success, but he is living a lie and doesn't have a romantic relationship with Julie...."⁵³ Undeterred, Michael takes a chance when he bumps into her at a party he repeats the line that she has told Dorothy, in wishing men were honest with what they want: "You know, I could lay a big line on you, and we could do a lot of role-playing, but the simple truth is that I find you very interesting and I'd really like to make love to you," whereupon Julie throws a drink in his face. Michael's want (to showcase his talents as a serious actor) has shifted from the play to dating Julie. Blake writes: "[The protagonist] is moving toward the girl, the job, the new life and here, by the midpoint, there will also be a hint of that ending."⁵⁴ For the character of Michael his want is at odds with his need and as such I posit that some degree of tension between the want and need must occur at the MP in the comedy film.

The Midpoint and its 'Bind' in film comedies

Giglio writes "... at the midpoint of the story something will happen ... that is going to get [the character] on the path to becoming whole, and repairing whatever is really wrong with them emotionally, inside."⁵⁵ Marks offers that the MP is when the protagonist begins to face their obstacle, be it an internal or external fatal flaw:

At the midpoint of the A story something happens that shifts the external action out of resistance and points the protagonist toward resolving the conflict of the plot...It is not the physical action but the internal reaction to the midpoint that opens up the new idea or new thought that allows the protagonist to move forward toward resolving the conflict....This new self- awareness, or enlightenment, comes about because the protagonist has begun to see how his or her own behaviour (fatal flaw) impacts resolving the conflict.⁵⁶

⁵³ Paul Gulino, *Screenwriting. The Sequence Approach* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2004) p.16.

⁵⁴ Blake, *Writing the Comedy Movie*, as before, p. 45.

⁵⁵ Giglio, *Writing the Comedy Blockbuster*, as before, pp. 157-8.

⁵⁶ Marks, *Inside Story*, as before, p. 235.

Ted Wilkes and Phil Hughes define the MP as the ‘keystone’ scene – the scene that the film cannot do without. It may be the high point or the low point, it may reveal some information or emotional truth, but it is the scene around which the film hinges; often there is an admission or revelation that enables the second half of Act Two to be sustained.⁵⁷ The keystone scene in *Tootsie* is when Michael uses the very line on Julie that she had confided to Dorothy as it challenges Michael to stop the masquerade, and which he finds increasingly difficult to do.

John Yorke posits that the MP “... is the moment when each protagonist embraces for the first time the quality they will need to become complete in order to finish their story.”⁵⁸ Furthermore, Yorke writes: “the midpoint is when the character’s need will overcome their want for the first time.”⁵⁹ As we have seen, the MP is the point when the protagonist thinks they are close to getting their want (the girl in Michael Dorsey’s case), yet in the scenes surrounding this moment the characters may also be presented with their need; it is by attempting to hold both aspects that a form of ‘bind’ is created. The attempt to hold onto the want (to raise funds or have the girl) while simultaneously denying the need (to be honest, or to respect women truthfully), results in actions that impair behaviour, prompting the character to act in more extreme measures until the inevitable demise at the end of Act Two.

Script consultant Marks writes “[s]ince the fatal flaw of character comes directly out of the writer’s thematic point of view, it is that thematic content that is specifically expressed at the midpoint. This is the *truth* that the protagonist begins to understand.”⁶⁰ Closely examining the relationship between tension and theme, Mabley and Howard offer that the theme of *Some*

⁵⁷ Ted Wilkes and Phil Hughes, ‘Mastering the Midpoint,’ *London Screenwriters Festival 365 online* <<https://www.screenwritersfestival.online/products/londonswf-online-spring-2020/categories/2749882/posts/10529100>> (Accessed 25.7.20).

⁵⁸ John Yorke, *Into the Woods. How Stories Work and Why We Tell Them* (UK: Penguin, 2013) p.70.

⁵⁹ Yorke, as before, p.138.

⁶⁰ Marks, *Inside Story*, as before, p. 235.

Like It Hot (1959) is masquerade where the protagonists (Joe and Gerry) dress as girls to “hide” in an all-female band enroute to Florida. Claire Mortimer writes that “[t]he nature of incongruity of the situation, the exaggerated nature of the mix-up, hinging on the narrative devices of coincidence and misunderstandings, add resonance to the comedy.”⁶¹

Returning to *Tootsie* (1982), the high point of the film is the celebrity status of “Tootsie,” the diminutive name for Dorothy Michaels. The photo shoot for the cover of *Time* brings Michael/Dorothy fame and wealth, the original goal (money for the play). Masquerading as a woman in a TV Soap is also a subversion of being a serious actor, thus creating both comic discrepancy and dramatic irony. Michael’s secondary need is to stop living a lie and until he faces his flaw (to love another without deceit) whilst harbouring feelings for Julie, he is caught in a bind of ironic tension. Utilising the sequence approach, in sequence #5 (labelled as ‘friendship or love is in the air’),⁶² Dorothy/Michael accepts an invitation to spend Thanksgiving weekend at Julie’s father’s farm. Instead of facing up to his need, Dorothy/Michael not only becomes closer to Julie (and therefore falling more in love with her as Michael), but Julie’s father also falls for Dorothy. The bind is now operating on multiple levels. Gulino notes that the “resolution at the end of [*Tootsie*], [Michael’s] situation is the mirror opposite: he has lost his career but is no longer living a lie and has a tentative romantic relationship with Julie.”⁶³ The resolution plays out the irony that Michael became a better man by being a woman.

In *Some Like It Hot*, at the MP, Joe has adopted a new disguise as the wealthy son of an oil baron to attract Sugar, one of the band members, who in turn lies about her family history to secure what she believes is a millionaire. Deceit and masquerade underscore the scene as they each try to impress the other – he with his ‘wealth’ and boat and she with her

⁶¹ Claire Mortimer, *Romantic Comedy* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), p.73.

⁶² Gulino, *Screenwriting. The Sequence Approach*, as before. Giglio, *Writing the Comedy Blockbuster*, as before.

⁶³ Gulino, as before, p. 16.

musical attributes – culminating with the film’s title:

EXT. BEACH. DAY.

JOE: Does that mean you play that very fast music...
Jazz?

SUGAR: Yeah. Real Hot.

JOE: Oh. I guess some like it hot....⁶⁴

Both characters are being deceptive to get what they want. Taking Frank Daniel’s approach that theme is reflected at the MP, I posit that the theme of *Some Like it Hot* is ‘nobody’s perfect’ – none of the characters are who they say they are except for Osgood the ageing tycoon. The narrative utilises masquerade as a mean to an end. This film is a good example of a comedy wherein the goal shifts from needing money to escaping the mob after witnessing the Valentine’s Day Massacre to love – in its various guises. By the time the masquerade is exposed, Sugar has fallen in love with the ‘wealthy’ Joe, and his buddy, Gerry, has captured the heart of an ageing tycoon; the guy gets his girl, the deceit is exposed, and the fool has completed their journey. As Joe has subverted the narrative, he also has been subverted in his masquerade, in not being who he really is, whereas Gerry has been subverted by the narrative – his masquerade entrapped him in Osgood’s gaze.

Consider now the Nancy Meyers film *It’s Complicated* (2009).⁶⁵ A night of passion occurs between two ex-partners after they both get drunk while visiting New York to attend their son’s graduation. Jane, the ex-wife of Jake Adler, needs assurance as to whether to continue with the affair and consults her therapist who encourages her to “let go.”⁶⁶ The next sequence begins with Jake at the fertility clinic (under pressure from his younger wife to produce more productive semen), when Jane calls to invite him for lunch and “room service” at an upmarket hotel – the theme of *complication* is established. By the conclusion of the

⁶⁴ *Some Like It Hot*, as before, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I0EUKDhQ7vk> (accessed 26.10.21).

⁶⁵ *It’s Complicated*, wr., dir. Nancy Meyers (Universal Pictures, 2009).

⁶⁶ Because of her curiosity Jane is receptive to Jake’s advances after the first night and is the keystone scene as it delivers information that the narrative post that point is dependent on.

keystone scenes, Jake has fainted from taking too much Flomax, a doctor is called, and it is revealed that he is taking another medication to increase his sperm count. The doctor, looking quizzically at Jane, and presuming she is the wife, responds with a shrug: “I like a lot of semen.” Interspersed in these scenes is their future son-in-law, Harley, in the hotel lobby with his bride for wedding consultations, witnessing each of the lovers entering the hotel, kissing in the lift, a doctor arriving, asking for Mr. Adler, then leaving, indicating to the receptionist that all is well. During this sequence the hapless Harley is in a state of anxiety about whether to tell the bride-to-be that he has just witnessed the possible death of one of her parents.

Jake’s health scare brings the adulterous couple closer and though Jake had left their marriage ten years before, Jane confesses that she believes he had never given up on them. The confession (the MP) exposes Jane’s curiosity as to whether there is some unfinished business, in addition to foreshadowing the final scene between the two protagonists where they resolve past and current misdemeanours. The affair becomes established at the MPR when Jane turns down an invitation from her architect, and potential love-interest, to have dinner with Jake who then fails to attend due to his wife’s change of plans. By the MPR both Jane and her future son-in-law are caught in a bind, creating a double layer of ironic tension. The scenes that set up the MP, the actual MP and MPR together comprise the keystone/bridge scenes. As such, I take the view, and supporting Wilkes and Hughes, that the MP forms part of the keystone scenes that hold up the narrative.⁶⁷ The MP tells us much about the character’s fatal flaws and the needs they must face as well as the behaviour that will dictate the falling action of Act Two. To face the MPR is for the character to become aware of the need which now confronts them, as such the MP is the scene that exposes the truth about something, either by the protagonist, or as a result of an event that happens to them. The MPR triggers the falling action, whilst giving insight to the flaw that the protagonist must face, yet which I posit they deny.

⁶⁷ Ted Wilkes and Phil Hughes, ‘Mastering the Midpoint’, as before.

In *The Proposal* (2009),⁶⁸ Andrew, the co-protagonist, a put-upon assistant to an alpha female head editor, Margaret, has a goal to become an editor, and in a deal with Margaret agrees to marry her as her Canadian visa has expired. The couple are in a self-imposed bind of faking their relationship as they go to visit Andrew's family in Alaska for his grandmother's 90th birthday. Towards the MP an eagle swoops down in the manicured lawn when Margaret is taking a call on her phone and takes the new family puppy which Margaret has accidentally let out of the house; she saves the dog, but the eagle takes her phone, wherein she offers up the dog in exchange for the phone – to no avail. At the MP Andrew is challenged by his father to give up his dream of writing and come back to their town and run the numerous businesses that the family own. Margaret's MP is when she sees Andrew with his ex-girlfriend and realises he is a good person and how much Andrew's family love him. In the sequence following the MP, after a series of misadventures around the bathroom, they run into each other naked and 'love is in the air.'⁶⁹ However, as the wedding is about to take place, Margaret exposes the deception – the bind for them both (how to lie about love) now becomes his (how to face his family when the lie is exposed) and which he is forced to confront, while Margaret accepts that she will be deported back to Canada. The twist is that Andrew realises he actually does love Margaret and she realises he and his family have opened up feelings in her, long repressed after the loss of her parents at sixteen. While both characters have clear goals, Andrew's need is to stand up to his father and pursue his dream of writing, and Margaret's need is to tap into emotions that have been dormant for many years as well as let go of her original goal of getting a visa – which she does and in doing so undergoes a greater transformation.

However, in *When Harry Met Sally* (1989),⁷⁰ another text with two protagonists where both characters have a want, only one character, Harry, must face his need – that he is in

⁶⁸ *The Proposal*, wr. Peter Chiarelli, dir. Anne Fletcher (Walt Disney Studios, 2009).

⁶⁹ Sequence #5 is labelled as the 'love' sequence in romantic comedies and 'friendship sequence' in comedy romances. See Appendix for summary of sequences.

⁷⁰ *When Harry Met Sally...*, wr. Nora Ephron, dir. Rob Reiner (Columbia Pictures, 1989).

love with the woman who is also his best friend. This relationship tests Harry's own assumption (and the film's theme), that women and men cannot be friends "as sex always gets in the way," which is exactly what happens. At the MP, Sally's performs an orgasm in the diner to prove to Harry that women 'fake it.' This humiliating display exposes, in a very public way, Harry's own confidence in his ability to satisfy a woman; his flaw is his hubris in believing he always gives women what they want (not what they need, and in this case, friendship). The MP is the point when the bind of the main character is at its most intense and threatens to expose the character's deepest fears. While Sally and Harry both confront their fears, only Harry is caught in a bind between his want (to satisfy women) and need to love a woman fully, who is also his best friend.

While in relationship comedies there is a need for both parties to undergo some change to find that 'happy' middle ground, yet one or both characters are caught in a bind between their want and need. I now argue that the bind is not only the result of a want and need at odds with each other, but also made more intense when the want shifts from a tangible goal to a relationship.

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

By critically examining and comparing two different feature length versions of *Dad's Army* I find that the unity of action, wherein character and plot are intertwined, is maintained in the first version but split in the latter film resulting in there not being a bind for the protagonist at the MP. First, I discuss various film comedies and the bind.

In *The 40-Year-Old Virgin* (2005),⁷¹ Andy, the protagonist, has been discovered by his co-workers at a Tech store that he is a virgin. The MP comes when Andy asks Trish, the e-bay store owner across the street, out on a date after his colleagues set him up with a transvestite

⁷¹ *The 40-Year-Old Virgin*, wrs. Judd Apatow, Steve Carrell, as before (2005).

prostitute which horrifies him. Andy and Trish go on a date and later that night they are in a passionate embrace when Trish says she will go to the bathroom and for Andy to help himself to the condoms in the side drawer. Anxiety sets in as Andy has not learnt how to put on a condom, let alone master sex. While Trish is in the bathroom, Andy attempts to practice the slip on when Trish's daughter bursts into the room and sees the multiple condoms strewn across the bed, bringing the (potential) events to a screaming and embarrassing halt. Andy is now confronted by both his want (to have sex with the woman he loves) and his need (to admit his virginal state). Trish throws Andy a lifeline at the MPR about sex not being the most important thing in a relationship and she would be happy to take it slow. This is when Andy should confront his secret (flaw) yet does not. The couple agree on dating for twenty dates with no sex. During that time, Andy attempts to address his lack of experience by offering to take Trish's daughter to a sex education class, resulting in more comical moments and exposing his lack of knowledge about basic human anatomy. Having spent time with Andy and seeing that he makes her mother happy, the daughter has figured out Andy is a virgin and confronts him; he begs her not to tell Trish – the bind is verbalised. Here the need for Andy to admit he is a virgin manifests as behavioural flaws exposed in the sex education class and subsequent events when Trish finds a stack of pornographic videos in his flat (on loan from one of his co-workers trying to educate him). Trish now thinks Andy is some sort of sexual deviant and drives off. Andy pursues Trish on his bicycle, resulting in a collision with a billboard (advertising 'Eruption' perfume). Trish, sees the crash, is panicked and rushes to help Andy; lying on the road Andy finally confesses that he is a virgin. This is the crisis (when the comic protagonist fears he will lose all) and the TP into Act Three. By not verbalising his need to admit he is a virgin when he had the chance at the MPR, Andy's bind drives the comic tension in the second half of Act Two.

Critically examining the ensemble film comedy *Bridesmaids* (2011),⁷² the bridal party are forced off a flight due to the chief bridesmaid, Annie's antics. In the bus back home, Lillian, the bride, tells Annie that maybe Helen (Annie's antagonist) should now organise the bridal shower and pre-wedding events. The truth-teller, often portrayed as best-friend, sibling, or mentor, forces the protagonist to face a truth and is often the flashpoint of the emotional tension for the protagonist. Without this scene the falling action in the second half of Act Two cannot happen. While I have argued that the echo character is essential for the comedy in the sitcom, the truth-teller (such as Lillian) is essential for giving the audience a moral centre from which all the other characters deviate. When Helen throws a Parisian-themed bridal shower (a suggestion by Annie in the opening scenes) along with the gift of a trip to Paris for Lillian's dress fitting, Annie trashes the party in a fit of jealous rage. While this MPR is Annie's response to the MP, it also manifests her anger at losing her friendship, yet without any remorse or acceptance of her actions in causing the situation. Annie not only denies accepting or responding to the moment of truth, but she falls into a slump and treats the love-interest (local policeman) with disdain, despite indicating the desire for a relationship with an ill-suited lothario; her bind and its cognitive dissonance affects her relationship with both Lillian and a potential suitor.⁷³

In the Australian film, *Muriel's Wedding* (1994)⁷⁴ Muriel's friend, Rhonda, discovers she has a tumour after a fall fooling around with a guy. Rhonda asks Muriel to promise that she will not be sent back to Porpoise Spit in small town Queensland, a state in northern Australia. Muriel, convinced Rhonda will walk again, confesses that since moving to Sydney from

⁷² *Bridesmaids*, wrs. Annie Mumolo, Kristen Wiig, dir. Paul Feig, prod. Judd Apatow et al. (Universal Pictures, 2011).

⁷³ The sitcom character suffers cognitive dissonance because the MPR never appears and if it does (as in the on-off relationship of Rachel and Ross in *Friends*) then it is avoided or side-tracked by events, thus enabling repeatability. *Friends*, creators David Crane, Marta Kauffman, prods. Bright/Kaufman/Crane Productions, Warner Bros. Television (USA: NBC, 1994-2004).

⁷⁴ *Muriel's Wedding*, wr., dir. P.J. Hogan (Miramax Films, 1994).

Porpoise Spit and living with Rhonda, she no longer listens to ABBA songs because her life is as good as *Dancing Queen*, declaring that she will not let Rhonda go back to Porpoise Spit. However, Muriel continues in an addiction to wedding attire as a means of fantasy-based escapism; she visits different bridal shops with stories of sick or dying relatives so that she can have her photo taken in her wedding dress of choice. In the scenes leading up to the MP, Muriel is in another bridal shop delivering a new lie, intercut with wheelchair bound Rhonda discovering a photo album displaying Muriel's array of bridal outfits. Muriel's bind is her conviction that Rhonda will walk (thereby absolving her of any responsibility if Rhonda does not walk again) with a dream (goal) to get married. This character denies any responsibility to her friend, Rhonda or herself as to who is suitable to marry. Muriel's flaw is that she denies the truth about herself and her life; the manifestation of this flaw is set up at the end of Act One when she cashes a blank cheque given to her by her hapless mother in an effort to get Muriel a 'real job' selling beauty products.

Rhonda goes to the bridal shop and confronts Muriel, demanding why Muriel has kept her impending wedding to Tim Sims secret (Muriel's first lie of being engaged). Rhonda mistakenly believes this is the reason for the photo album stuffed with polaroid photos. Muriel, trapped in the fitting room like a caged animal, declares that there is no Tim Sims. Rhonda asks: "Why the wedding album?" Muriel decries "Because I want to get married. I've always wanted to get married, if I can get married, it means I've changed, I'm a new person." "How?" asks Rhonda. "Because who'd want to marry me?" wails Muriel, going on "...in Porpoise Spit no one would even look at me, but when I came to Sydney and became Marial [her new name], Bryce asked me out and that proves that I'm already different than who I was, and if someone wants to marry me, I'm not her anymore, I'm me."⁷⁵ This character believes that by getting married she will be a new person – her goal is clear. Muriel's need is to accept who she is and

⁷⁵ *Muriel's Wedding*, as before (1994) 52'30".

not force change by way of her name, stealing, lying or by getting married and to acknowledge that she has a good and loyal friend staring at her in the form of the wheelchair bound Rhonda. Refusing to acknowledge her need, Muriel agrees to marry a South African swimmer who requires Australian citizenship to compete in the next Olympics. Muriel gets married with the local girls from Porpoise Spit who made her life hell, now sycophantic bridesmaids; she loses the friendship with Rhonda, who is now forced back to Porpoise Spit to be cared for by her mother. When Muriel's mother dies (suspected suicide), at the funeral Muriel realises she has become like her father, an attention-seeking fake; she leaves the sham marriage and rescues Rhonda from the clutches of her mother and false friends.

Turning now to a sitcom reworked as a film to closely examine the nature of the MP. *Dad's Army: The Movie*, produced in 1971 during the series,⁷⁶ maintains the same characters and actors; the narrative is the backstory for the series and how each of these characters came to join the Home Guard. The story is a traditional three act structure with the inciting incident triggered by a government call to sign up; these scenes are intercut with the German plan to invade England, underpinned by the incongruity of the capabilities of this band of men underpinned by music signalling that the film is a comedy. After a series of mishaps which include driving a steam roller through the training camp, flattening the tents and cooking utensils, this bunch of comic fools still manage to rescue the local mayor who has been kidnapped by the Germans. In the 1971 film, at the MP Wilson and Mainwaring are silhouetted in a wide shot of a sunset:

WILSON: It's a beautiful sunset Sir.

MAINWARING: It's a beautiful land Wilson. They're not going to get it, you know. They're not going to get their hands on it. We shall fight to the last. We'll keep firing until we have one round each. We shall then save that for ourselves. By the way how much ammunition have we got?

WILSON: One round each Sir.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ *Dad's Army*, wrs. Jerry Perry, David Croft, as before (1971).

⁷⁷ *Dad's Army*, as before (1971), 47'02."

This last line epitomises both the comic incongruity of what the group can achieve and the theme of the film: the odds are stacked against this band of delusional fools – an army of dads.

In the scene prior to the MP, the men build a barricade of household furniture in response to the bell ringing from the church that is mistaken for an invasion warning. The comedy emerges from the character's motivation, in opposition to the reality of the situation: they want to save the country but are incapable of even gathering simple intelligence, such as the Vicar wanting to have 'one last ring.' This ensemble's desire to serve their country overrides any acceptance of reality in their capacity to do so, in turn denying their ability, skill and even age to achieve their goal of defeating the enemy. Their real need – to accept their limitations – remains unconscious. Furthermore, as the 1971 film of *Dad's Army* was produced during the series run (1968-77), the characters did not, and could not, undergo any significant transformation as that would alter how the audience subsequently viewed the characters in the sitcom. However, the group's bind between a desire to defeat the Germans and their capacity to do so becomes evident at the MP (with one last round). By the conclusion, the ensemble is established and their transformation from individuals feeling impotent to a collective ready to fight is complete – however incapable.

In 2016 a new film based on *Dad's Army*,⁷⁸ was released, almost forty years after the series concluded, and offers a different narrative and character arc. This film has new actors playing the roles, each introduced in the title sequence as to which characters they are emulating from the original series. As the ensemble is already established, the plot centres on the men becoming enamoured by the arrival of the beautiful Rose Winters, an ex-tutee of Wilson and, little do we know (initially), is a German spy. The 1971 film asks the question:

⁷⁸ *Dad's Army*, wr. Hamish McColl, as before (2016).

‘How did this band of misfits come to be?’, whereas the 2016 film asks the question: ‘Can this group detect a German spy, and one in the attractive form of Catherine Zeta-Jones as Rose Winters’? The enemy was, until now, external, and very visible in German uniforms, but now is hiding in plain sight. However, while it is clear who the main characters are, it is not evident which characters are the protagonists and which affect the plot or be affected by the narrative.

Closely analysing the MP, Sissy and Dolly, Mr. Godfrey’s sisters, with their “wild” imaginations and keen ability to solve puzzles, are suspicious that the new arrival is not who she says she is. The sisters confront Miss Rose Winters about her intentions. While Rose is taken aback she manages to divert the outwardly dotty women by confiding that she is doing a story for the fashion magazine *Vanity Fair*. Dolly and Sissy are not so easily deterred; they discover that Rose lives in Berlin, orders expensive clothes, and her story does not stack up. The men, on the other hand, are, by now, smitten, with Wilson falling the hardest, as the two have history. While the MP indicates the theme of the 2016 film – ‘beauty hides the truth’ – it does not create a bind for any of the main characters, instead it prompts Sissy and Dolly, as supporting characters, to solve the mystery.

Gulino writes that “[s]killful storytellers employ hierarchies of knowledge in the use of dramatic irony, between not only the audience and the characters but between the characters themselves.”⁷⁹ Each of the love-struck men try to ‘court’ Rose in the most bumbling of ways, like little boys showing off to mummy their cleverness, but she has the upper hand at every turn. While comic, such actions do not reveal any truth about the characters other than their fragile ego in the face of a beautiful woman. The wives and girlfriends, on the other hand, are not so blind; they see the effect Rose is having on the men and storm an evening meeting where they know Rose is in attendance. The formidable Mrs. Mainwaring stares Rose down: “I

⁷⁹ Gulino, *The Sequence Approach*, as before, p.9.

believe in crushing the enemy underfoot.” This scene is not only ironic, as the men are incredulous that the women do not like Rose, it also foreshadows the climax. While the 2016 film uses dramatic irony for the comedy, the tension is driven by the supporting characters, not any protagonist/s with a specific objective. The super objective of the ensemble is to defeat the Germans, and this is made ironic by the men’s continued blind attraction to Rose and delusion that they are in charge.

At the climax, the men are outnumbered on the beach by Germans. The women, atop the cliff, shoot a barrage of gunfire at the U-Boats floating offshore, forcing the invaders to retreat. While Jones shoots a man for the first time: “cometh the hour, cometh the man” and Walker, the chancer, finds the courage to “be crazy” drives a truck into the Germans on the beach, Mainwaring and Wilson do not change. Although Mainwaring sees that Mavis might be an equal and Wilson realises that his life is with Mavis and Frank, these two characters have not changed in any significant way. In the final scene Wilson and Mainwaring march down the high street along with the women officers:

MAINWARING: Had my suspicions about Miss Winters from the start.

Wilson looks at him.

MAINWARING: I couldn’t tell anyone of course. Price of leadership.

.....

Mid shot of Mainwaring and Wilson.

MAINWARING: Touch and go for a while, old friend, but we got there in the end.

WILSON: Friend, sir?

MAINWARING: Eyes, front, shoulders back. Sergeant in the Home Guard, not a sack of potatoes.

WILSON: Thank you, sir. You really are most awfully kind.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ *Dad’s Army*, wr. Hamish McColl, as before (2016).

Wide shot of the parade. Roll credits.

This final scene taps into the incongruity of the men's actual ability and the reality of the events that occurred, whilst the dialogue is both inter- and intra-ironic. The 2016 film of *Dad's Army* is torn between trying to remain true to the sitcom form (the characters do not change) and create a narrative that has some transformative aspect. The characters may develop new respect for the women and possibly each other but the closing line reasserts the emotional stasis of the series. As this 'fighting machine' group of men unwittingly accept that love and friendship is what is important they still march on in their delusion. This lack of significant change in any of the characters (including Sissy and Dolly) results in both a sense of unfulfillment and confusion as to where this film sits in relation to the originating series.

Further, I offer that the 2016 *Dad's Army* felt incomplete because the unity of action has been split between protagonists and supporting characters, raising the question as to the premise of the film, which currently reads as 'women see women for who they really are while men are blind to beauty.' Additionally, the film restricts opportunity for further 'repeatable' episodes as the Germans (the frame) have been well and truly expelled, Pike has 'grown up' (as the echo within the group) and while the relational dynamics within the gang have changed, the main characters of Wilson and Mainwaring have not. The 2016 film fails in carrying any emotional tension for the main characters, which is the task of the protagonist/s, and as such I argue that the unity of action has been split – plot points related by cause and effect. To maintain the unity of action in a comedy film I argue that *the protagonist/s* must be caught in a bind by the MP. Thus, when reworking a sitcom to film, understanding the journey of the characters (literally or figuratively) will inform the narrative structure and plotting, including the nature of (permanent) transformative change and their relationships.

A note about the bind and its catch

The focus of this chapter is the MP and its bind in film comedies. Looking briefly at Chamberlain's framework which posits the protagonist must be placed in a situation wherein they find themselves in a 'catch' at the beginning of Act Two, I posit that this is what puts pressure on the character's need, and therefore enables the bind. While Chamberlain's technique is useful as a diagnostic tool rather than a theoretical approach, I argue that if the protagonist/s want and need are not clearly defined then enabling a catch becomes more difficult. In doing so, it is essential to know character motivation, their goal (want), as well as the flaws that prevent the goal being attained, which are then tested by a catch at the beginning of Act Two.

Considering the examples in the textual analysis, the catch for Muriel (*Muriel's Wedding*) is that she has stolen money to flee to Sydney – her life in Sydney is based on theft and lies which will inevitably be exposed. The bind comes when she is confronted with the first lie and its subsequent actions, which she denies until the funeral of her mother. The catch for Andy (*40-Year-Old Virgin*) is that his friends have discovered he is a virgin and set about getting him some action, but he only wants to have sex with the woman he loves – except he does not know how to do that. The catch for Annie (*Bridesmaids*) is that broke and single, she is afraid that she has been replaced by (wealthy and beautiful) Helen as best friend, creating a bind centred on giving up on her love of baking (and which gave her an income) and a fear of being single and friendless, all put under pressure by Helen. The catch for Michael Dorsey (*Tootsie*) is that he is in love with a woman while masquerading as a woman; his flaw, his lack of respect towards women, is tested in the first half of Act Two, and his bind (the masquerade and lie), increases the comic tension after the MP. In the 1976 film of *Dad's Army* the catch is that a disparate group of men must protect England from the Germans but do not have the skill or equipment to fight. In the 2016 film, the catch is delivered by way of dramatic irony – the

sisters have discovered the true nature of Rose – and as such does not test the flaws of the men, in particular the main characters, other than their lack of intelligence in determining when there is an actual invasion. And while the men are blind to Rose as a spy (which may be viewed as a form of bind), there is no catch that tests a flaw of any of the characters. Thus, the catch (and its associated bind) must be related to the flaw and need of the protagonist/s – the catch puts the need under pressure, culminating in a bind.

CREATIVE PRACTICE 2

Creative Practice 2 (CP2) is set in the same world as CP1 and illustrates that when reworking an ensemble sitcom to a film it must be clear as to where the film sits in relation to the sitcom – as a prequel, sequel or span the time of the “situation.” CP2 bridges the timeline of CP1 and as such gives credence to the principle that the sitcom often sits in the second act of the film, where it replays the refusal by the main characters to confront their need. CP2 aims to explore the principle of the bind and how it plays out in a narrative centred on a discordant relationship. The focus of CP2 is to apply the principle elucidated in the analysis by writing a script that intentionally creates a bind. CP2 tests the nature of the MP, as a means of developing the comedic tension in the second half of Act Two. However, and considering Deleyto seeking to broaden the limitations of the romantic comedy, he writes that the genre must move “... beyond compulsory heterosexuality and monogamy and the happy ending”,⁸¹ I decided to apply such a challenge by not having the ‘happy ending.’

Overview

CP2 is a feature film titled *The Accidental Academic*, and begins before CP1, concluding after the period in which CP1 is set. CP2 validates that some sitcoms such as CP1 sit within Act Two of the associated film.

Many of the characters from CP1 remain with some additions such as the Dean, Fiona

⁸¹ Celestino Deleyto, *The secret life of romantic comedy* (Manchester, New York: Manchester University Press, 2011) as before, p.175.

Willoughby-Baxter, while Henry (Head of Department) is on sabbatical. Henry plays the role in substantiating the frame in CP1, whereas in the feature film the antagonist primarily plays such roles.⁸² Thus, Fiona as the ex-wife of Ben's brother Simon, enables both a relational as well as the work-based antagonist, particularly in relation to the gang from CP1, and in the end to Ben.

When considering transposing characters from a short form narrative such as the sitcom defined by its narrative entrapment, to the long form narrative such as the feature film, it is necessary to consider the 'need' of each of the characters that can undergo emotional transformation:

- Rachel (needs to face her competitiveness),
- Ben (needs to learn to handle relationships),
- Jack (needs to be less cynical),
- Brianna (needs to be less naïve) and
- Hans (needs to be less pedantic)

I used Paul Gulino's sequence approach and mapping Daniel's eight sequences along with Giglio's, and Mernit's seven key beats I was able to develop and edit the early drafts of the outline.⁸³ In addition, I created subcategories in the framework, 'the keystone scenes,' that hold up the narrative arc within sequence #4 and #5 as per Wilkes and Hughes.⁸⁴ The sequences are labelled in the script and relate to those headings in the list of sequences in the Appendix. Considering Chapter Two and the discussion on film comedies about relationships, I felt the protagonists most suited to such a narrative would be Ben and Rachel, as these two have history and needs that can undergo transformation in more overt ways.

⁸² This is the reason why antagonists in comedy series do not work, as their role is to maintain a frame not simply be an antagonist to the main character/s.

⁸³ See Appendix and list of comparison between sequences and stages and the tone/focus of each approach. David Howard and Edward Mabley. *The Tools of Screenwriting. A Writer's Guide to the Craft and Elements of a Screenplay* (New York: St Martin's Griffin, 1993). Paul Gulino, *Screenwriting. The Sequence Approach* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2004). Keith Giglio, *Writing the Comedy Blockbuster*, (CA: Michael Wiese Productions, 2012). Billy Mernit, *Writing the Romantic Comedy: from "cute meet" to "joyous defeat": How to write Screenplays that will sell* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2000).

⁸⁴ Ted Wilkes and Phil Hughes, 'Mastering the Midpoint,' *London Screenwriters Festival 365 online* <<https://www.screenwritersfestival.online/products/londonswf-online-spring-2020/categories/2749882/posts/10529100>> (Accessed 25.7.20).

CONCLUSION

This chapter has determined, by way of elucidating a trend in film comedies, the existence of a bind at the MP for the protagonist/s.⁸⁵ The bind is born of a tension that exists between a desired goal (want), a need at odds with the goal, and is manifested by an associated flaw triggering cognitive and narrative tension. Such tension is maintained by some form of lie, deception, misunderstanding, secret, or extreme denial; it is not unlike that created by the frame in the ensemble sitcom. I argue that the bind is evident at the MP to either the protagonist(s), the audience (creating dramatic irony) or both.

Further, it has been argued that if the film is set in the same environment as the sitcom, then it must be situated either before the sitcom (a prequel), as a sequel that resolves the emotional or psychological arrestment or span the sitcom's time frame by employing the set up for the situation and resolution for some characters, in which case it becomes difficult to return to the originating situation.

However, when developing a feature film from a sitcom (regardless of the amount of time that has passed since the original programme) it assists in knowing which characters undergo transformation over the course of the narrative, and in what way. Finally, this chapter has elucidated a principle that the bind in some film comedies becomes clear by the MP, enabling the comic tension in the second half of Act Two, and must be in play by way of a catch at the beginning of the Act; these plot points appear most evident in comedies with a storyline focussed on a relationship. As such, the bind is an essential plot point in the narrative structure of film comedies, specifically those comedies with a discordant relationship or one that is yet to be realised.

⁸⁵ In contrast to farcical comedies such as *Meet the Parents*, where relationships are established, the characters are put under pressure yet survive. There has been no split. *Meet the Parents*, wrs. Jim Herzfeld, John Hamburg, dir. Jay Roach, prods. Nancy Tenenbaum, Jay Roach, et al. (DreamWorks Pictures, 2000).

THE ACCIDENTAL ACADEMIC

A comedy about accidents, love and confusion in
middle age.

Written by

Deborah Klika

Creative practice 2

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places
and incidents either are products of the author's imagination
or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or
locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Supervisors and
Script Editors:
Simon van der Borgh
Kristyn Gorton

CHARACTERS

BENJAMIN BAXTER, 48

RACHEL KOZLOWSKI, 52

SIMON BAXTER, 54

FIONA WILLOUGHBY-BAXTER, 50

LUCIANA FONSECA, 35

MERYL STREET, 55

FERGAL DEMPSEY, 32

JACK KERR, 59

BRIANNA WILLIAMS, 28

CHELSEA CHUNG-BAXTER, 39

LANDLADY, GILLIAN PATERSON, 65

NEIGHBOUR, LINDSAY LONG, 45

MAX, STUDENT, 19

ANGELA, CAFE OWNER, 60+

STUDENTS

FILM TECHNICIANS (IN THE CLUB)

ACT ONE

SEQUENCE #1 (THE (COMEDIC) WORLD)

Opening titles: A sweeping shot of the Sydney coastline. On the ocean:

The Accidental Academic

Pull out from image of ocean, morphs to what looks like a set (green screen) with Lego figures. A hand begins to move the figures as the shot widens to...

INT. APARTMENT. DAY

BEN BAXTER, 48, moves Lego figures around on the 'set'. There is a script with notes and shots on it. Pan around the room the bookshelf is stacked with books about emotional intelligence, directing actors. There are awards on the walls. Back to the 'set' and a Lego character sits hunched over. Sound of whimpering can be heard.

BEN gets up. Whimpering sound continues. BEN opens the door. A DOG stands there looking up at him.

BEN

So Toby we meet again.

LINDSAY, 44, appears.

LINDSAY

I just can't keep him away.

INT. APARTMENT. DAY. A SHORT TIME LATER.

TOBY the dog looks up to see LINDSAY and BEN beginning to embrace.

LINDSAY

(looking at a piece of furniture)

I like that dresser, very retro.
Might borrow it for my next film.

BEN

From my father's estate.

LINDSAY leaves. BEN looks at the DOG. The DOG looks towards the kitchen. BEN feeds the DOG.

INT. CLUB. NIGHT

BEN saunters into the club. Lots of people from the film industry, mainly men, some with grey hair in ponytails, leather jackets. SIMON BAXTER, 54, is at the bar chatting to a weathered film person, RUSSELL, (DoP) in his fifties and as BEN approaches SIMON cuts the conversation.

SIMON
I'll be in touch Rus.

RUSSELL
Sounds like a great gig.

SIMON
Not certain yet.

RUSSELL wanders off.

BEN
Why is Russell talking to you?

SIMON
Catch up I guess.

BEN
Russell does not catch up. Russell only comes over when a gig is confirmed. Till then you go to him. Since he got the Oscar.

SIMON
Well people change.

BEN
Not in this industry. You got the gig?

SIMON
No. I mean yes. Sort of. Dates not confirmed.

RUSSELL waddles over.

RUSSELL
My agent's locked in the dates. I'll start crewing.

SIMON
Thanks.

BEN
Got the director?

SIMON

No. I mean...sort of. Drink?

SIMON signals to the bartender who nods back. BEN fidgets with his keys. Another film tech type wanders past, DEAN, on his way to the toilet.

DEAN

Well done Simon.

SIMON

(to BEN)

There's a lot of green screen.

BEN

I don't want to do that anymore.

SIMON

You're the best in the business Ben.

BEN

I'm not in that business anymore. I want to depict authentic experiences, real emotions like Sirk.

SIMON

Well here in the real world, Fiona needs someone to teach green screen at the academy. They're real people. The Future of the industry.

BEN

What a bleak future when even fiction stops portraying reality.

The door flies open and a woman stands there silhouetted. CHELSEA CHANG-BAXTER, 41, flicks her hair and strolls in like a model on a catwalk.

SIMON

On cue.

CHELSEA

Benjamin.

SIMON

Cat woman on the loose.

BEN straightens up.

BEN

Hello Chelsea.

CHELSEA

Simon, you going to get me a drink.
It's the least you could do after
what I did.

SIMON

Of course Chelsea. (Signals to
barman) A bowl of cream (beat)
sour.

CHELSEA

Benjamin we need to discuss the
settlement.

BEN

Yes Chelsea.

CHELSEA

I think seventy per cent is fair.

BEN

I don't agree.

CHELSEA

I hear you are off your meds.

BEN

I'm glad medical records are
confidential.

CHELSEA

Not in the family court.

BEN

Or any family it seems.

CHELSEA switches her gaze to SIMON.

CHELSEA

The board needs a timeline Simon.

SIMON shifts uncomfortably. CHELSEA looks from SIMON to BEN.

CHELSEA (CONT'D)

Simon has managed to get the
fastest grant approval at Screen
Oz. (Beat) Always beating the odds
your brother.

SIMON tries to stop her going on.

CHELSEA (CONT'D)

It was the director that got it
over the line. T.J. Good choice.

BEN stares into his drink.

CHELSEA (CONT'D)
Another family secret comes out?

SIMON
Stop it Chelsea.

CHELSEA
Why because it might hurt your
brother's feelings. I have needs
too you know.

SIMON
Aplenty.

BEN
You both do. Remember?

SIMON
(to CHELSEA)
If you had any feelings you would
stop this.

CHELSEA
(to BEN)
Still getting your brother to
protect you?

BEN is fidgeting hard with the keys. His knee is shaking. He is trying hard to control himself.

BEN
I have emotional dys...

CHELSEA
What you have is a fear of intimacy
Ben and you deal with it by ...

SIMON
Chelsea. Stop.

CHELSEA
Settle now Ben or we go to court.

CHELSEA storms off. Film tech DEAN, walks past.

DEAN
(looking after Chelsea)
She is one hell of a producer.

BEN
Hell is the word for it.

DEAN

Looking forward to it Simon. I hear it's an actual location, not stuck in...

BEN looks bereft.

SIMON

Thanks ... We'll be in touch. (To BEN) Chelsea will come after dad's estate. Then you'll have nothing.

BEN

Have I ever?

GILLIAN, LANDLADY, 65, an ex production designer, treated like a queen in this club sashays into the club and up to SIMON and BEN.

GILLIAN

Ben.

BEN jumps.

GILLIAN (CONT'D)

You're late. Again.

SIMON

Hello Gillian.

GILLIAN

I thought I could smell a rat.
Hello Simon.

BEN

I've got funds coming soon Gillian.

GILLIAN

Did I hear a dog barking?

BEN

No.

GILLIAN

Your lease says no pets.

BEN

I know.

GILLIAN

If you don't pay before the fifteenth I'll have to evict you.
That's my super Ben.

GILLIAN leaves, courteous to the GUYS who look at her in awe as she leaves.

SIMON

Are you mad. The estate may take six months if not more.

BEN

Then give me the directing gig.

SIMON

They would only accept a director... who....

BEN

... Hasn't had a ...

SIMON

No, no not at all. All the best people have breakdowns.

BEN

Name one.

SIMON

Well there's.... And then there's What's wrong with the green screen gig?

BEN

I told you, I'm done with that. I need to learn how to deal with emotions. That's what directors do. Real directors. I've been working on this with Meryl.

SIMON

Okay. I'll see what I can do, but only if you go and see Fiona about the teaching gig. Gives me leverage that you are back.

BEN

In the real world? Academia is not the real world Simon. Look at our father.

SIMON

Precisely anyone can be an academic.

BEN

Precisely. It's become a sheltered workshop for industry types who have...

SIMON

It's only for a short time. Besides you're not a has been, just an expert on a ...

BEN

Break?

SIMON

Look taking the job gives me leverage to put your name forward.

BEN

It's a world of petty arse suckers.

SIMON

Fiona will have your back. Till then I'll pay the rent.

BEN thinks. SIMON gestures to the BARMAN for two more drinks. The drinks arrive. BEN takes a sip.

BEN

Thanks. I'll pay you back.

SIMON

Just take the bull by the horns, and remember you know more than them.

INT. PUB. NIGHT

RACHEL KOZLOWSKI, 52 is sitting with JACK KERR, 60. He is clearly enamoured of her.

RACHEL

I've decided to take the bull by the horns.

JACK

And apply for the deputy dean position.

RACHEL

Good god no.

JACK

But you'd be great.

RACHEL
I'm not a manager Jack.

RACHEL imitates Fiona (the Dean) and JACK chips in as Henry (head of the department).

RACHEL (CONT'D)
(as Fiona)
Moving Forward we have some
exciting news.

JACK
(in a high pitched voice
as HENRY)
Yes very exciting Fiona.

RACHEL
(as Fiona)
We've decided to take out all
theory from the bachelor degrees.

JACK
(as HENRY)
Yes who reads anymore.

RACHEL
(as Fiona)
This is a practice led faculty...

JACK
(as HENRY)
Oh very practice led, great leader.

RACHEL
(as Fiona)
So anyone with a PhD will be
offered redundancy.

JACK
(as Henry)
Who needs a PhD anyway. That's for
chumps.

RACHEL
(as Fiona)
And if you don't take redundancy
then... then...

JACK
(as HENRY)
I'll spank you.

RACHEL
 (as Fiona)
 I love a good spanking.

JACK and RACHEL fall about laughing. JACK takes a sip of wine, pauses then...

JACK
 Rachel, that's why we need you.

RACHEL
 What to save you from having to do the spanking or getting spanked? Besides I'm sick of working so hard and getting no recognition. I'm going to apply for the commissioning editor's job at the ABC.

JACK
 (panicked)
 Nooooo body could be better suited.

RACHEL
 I knew you'd say that. You know the Head of Television don't you?

JACK
 No. I mean yes. Sort of. Did. Not anymore.

RACHEL
 Didn't you have dinner with him last week?

JACK
 No. I mean yes. Sort of.

RACHEL
 Well you did or you didn't have dinner.

JACK
 I did.

RACHEL
 So I can put you down as a referee?

JACK
 No. I mean yes.

RACHEL
 Besides, I need more industry
 experience if I am to progress in
 this world of...

JACK
 Industry has beens.

INT. APARTMENT. NIGHT

BEN watches a Douglas Sirk film, *Imitation of Life*, takes notes. A text arrives. It is from CHELSEA: Court has sent subpoena to that shrink.

There is a knock at the door. BEN stops the film. BEN and the dog go to the door. It is LINDSAY. She looks at the dog, then at BEN.

INT. APARTMENT. BEDROOM. NIGHT.

LINDSAY is getting dressed as BEN lies on the bed. The DOG is sitting by the bed looking up.

LINDSAY
 Come on Toby. He doesn't do
 sleepovers.

BEN
 See you Lindsay. Bye Toby.

LINDSAY exits with the DOG.

INT. APARTMENT. NIGHT

BEN turns on the Douglas Sirk film, *Imitation of Life*, takes notes.

INT. APARTMENT. NEXT MORNING

BEN, asleep on the couch. Knocking at the door. The DOG looks at him forlornly.

BEN
 Food better at my place? How'd you
 get in? She got a key?

BEN opens the door.

GILLIAN
 I said no pets.

BEN
He's visiting.

GILLIAN
I don't care. If it's not gone by
the weekend I'll have to evict you.

TOBY sniffs GILLIAN.

BEN
He doesn't like to be called It.

BEN shuts the door.

EXT. UNIVERSITY. DAY.

BEN stands at a map of the campus. He wears dark glasses and a peaked cap, looks around with suspicion. STUDENTS pour onto the campus, girls giggling, guys on skateboards, some doing high fives.

INT. UNIVERSITY. DAY

THE DEAN, FIONA WILLOUGHBY-BAXTER, 50, conservatively dressed, slim and fit, shows BEN around the faculty from the kit hub to the cafe to the open plan office. They clearly know each other.

FIONA
How's Simon?

BEN
You know Simon. On the hunt.

FIONA
Got the film through I hear.

BEN
So he told you?

FIONA
It's a small industry Ben. Moving
Forward.

INT STUDIO. DAY.

FERGAL, 32, technical tutor, fiddles with equipment. BEN and FIONA enter.

FIONA
Fergal this is Ben Baxter.

FERGAL
Oh my gosh. Oh my gosh.

FIONA
What is it Fergal.

FERGAL
It's Ben Baxter.

FIONA
Yes Fergal I just said that.

FERGAL
Oh my gosh.

FIONA
Will you stop saying that Fergal.

FERGAL
It's it's....

FIONA
What is it Fergal?

FERGAL
(like a shy schoolgirl)
He's the green screen queen. I mean
king.

BEN is obviously flattered. FIONA is irritated.

FIONA
He's here to teach the second years
film craft, green screen and the
last classes in International
Cinema as we move to a fully
practice led degree.

FERGAL
Oh. Oh. Oh.

FIONA
For heaven's sake Fergal will you
get a grip.

FERGAL
I'll be your technical tutor.

BEN
I'm only here for one term.

FIONA
Moving Forward.

FIONA sashays out of the studio followed by BEN leaving FERGAL in a state of rapture.

EXT. STUDIO. DAY.

BEN

I suppose you know about Chelsea.

FIONA

Everyone knows about Chelsea. She makes sure of that Ben.

INT. THERAPIST OFFICE. DAY

MERYL, 40, the therapist sits looking bored. She is a ballsy woman who has no patience for pity parties.

BEN

I'm getting my life in order.

MERYL

I've heard that before.

BEN

So I've come off my meds.

MERYL

Heard that too. Look Ben you are wasting my time and your money if you keep going off your meds.

BEN

But I'm better.

MERYL

No you are not.

BEN

Yes I am

MERYL

Not.

BEN

Am.

MERYL

Not.

BEN

Am.

MERYL
On meds

BEN
On meds. I mean not on meds.

MERYL
Am.

BEN
Not.

MERYL
Am. Not.

BEN
Am.

MERYL
Suffering disorder.

BEN
Suffering No no. You are
tricking me.

MERYL
Just getting you to be honest.

BEN
I am honest.

MERYL
With yourself.

BEN
I want to be normal.

MERYL
Normal is boring Ben. Who wants to
be normal. You are interesting.

BEN
Well interesting hasn't helped me
much. No career, no marriage...

MERYL
Careers are nothing but a fancy way
of describing work.

BEN shuffles in his chair.

BEN
(confessing)
Chelsea wants seventy per cent.

MERYL
Never one to shy away that Chelsea.

BEN
She's going to subpoena my records.

MERYL
Only by a court order.

BEN
That's what she's doing.

MERYL
How does that make you feel?

BEN
(angry)
What do you think Meryl?

MERYL
You need to own your feelings Ben.

BEN
I've got a sea full of feelings
Meryl.

MERYL
Well Chelsea is just one drop in
the ocean. You can do this Ben. But
only if you stay on your meds.

BEN
They make me feel like a failure.

MERYL
You are not a failure Ben. You are
sensitive and you had a childhood
that didn't support that.

BEN
Can we not talk about my mother.

MERYL
It's not the mother Ben.

BEN
Then who?

MERYL
(looks at the clock)
That's it for today. See you next
week.

BEN
I can't I'm starting a new job.
Teaching.

MERYL
Oh. Really?

BEN
My father was an academic.

MERYL
There we have it.

BEN
Can't be that hard.

MERYL
Into the abyss.

SEQUENCE #2 (YOU'RE GOING TO DO WHAT?)

INT. UNIVERSITY CLASSROOM. DAY.

BEN walks into a class full of confidence.

BEN
Good morning. I'm Ben Baxter and
I'm taking International Cinema
until the end of term.

STUDENT
(putting her hand up)
Sir,

BEN
You can call me Ben.

STUDENT
Sir I mean Ben.

BEN writes on the whiteboard. BEN BAXTER. FILMMAKER.

BEN
And yes I did work in Hollywood.

The students roll their eyes. Some take out their phones.

BEN (CONT'D)
No phones in class. So let's get
into groups.

STUDENT
Did you make 'Shattered Glass'?

BEN

I did. Now let's get into groups.

JACK appears in the doorway.

JACK

Hello.

BEN

Ben Baxter.

JACK

I know who you are. A blow in and this is my class.

BEN

But the timetable says...

JACK

Timetabling couldn't organise a shag in a brothel.

BEN

Is this room 126?

JACK

It is.

BEN

126 Williams building.

JACK

It's room 126 in the College Building. Students. What is the first rule of documentary?

STUDENT 1

That you have the camera?

JACK

Have you learnt nothing from me?

STUDENT 2

That documentary is the greatest film form there is. Like you.

JACK

That you are in the right place at the right time. So while Ben is at the right time.... he is in...

The students start laughing.

STUDENT 2
the wrong place.

JACK
 You might very well say that Corey.
 I couldn't possibly comment.

BEN gathers up his things and runs out.

INT. UNIVERSITY CLASSROOM. DAY

BEN rushes into the classroom. A handful of STUDENTS are there.

HOLLIE
 We thought the class was cancelled.

BEN
 Well it's not. I'm here now.

COURTNEY
 Should you get a late note.

RACHEL appears in the doorway. BEN gasps.

RACHEL
 I heard you were here.

BEN
 (to the few students)
 That's it for today. I'll pick up
 tomorrow. Class dismissed.

HOLLIE
 But we didn't start.

BEN
 We will... nextweek.

GRAHAM
 But you said tomorrow.

BEN
 Yes, yes I meant that, if I'm here.

RACHEL
 And I want your essays by the end
 of the week.

The STUDENTS leave, mumbling "who is this guy?".

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Just one of the best green screen
directors in the business.

NICK
(as they leave)
Hey I think he made 'Shattered
Glass'.

BEN
(to RACHEL)
I, ah,... need to ... get to a...
meeting.

RACHEL
Meetings, the bane of my life, I do
anything to get out of them.

BEN rushes out.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Still running away.

INT. UNIVERSITY TOILET. DAY

BEN splashes water on his face. JACK comes out of the toilet.
BEN flees.

JACK
(doing up his fly)
Academia's not what it's cracked up
to be.

JACK exits. BEN sticks his head in the sink full of water and
blows bubbles. He looks up into the mirror.

BEN
One term. She can't get to me in
one term.

INT. CLUB. NIGHT. (BEN'S CATCH)

SIMON is chatting to film guys. There aren't many in the club
as it is early. BEN rushes in.

SCOTTY
Hi Ben.

BEN
Hi Scotty. (He turns on SIMON) You
knew.

SIMON
Knew what?

BEN
That she worked there.

SIMON
Who? Fiona? Well she is my...

BEN
...ice queen of an ex-wife. Not
her. Rachel.

SIMON
Fiona might have mentioned that.

BEN
Mention. Mention. Mention. That's
my Achilles heal. And you know it.

SIMON
I thought you were over Kozlowski.

BEN
I am. But that doesn't mean I want
to work with her. How could you?

SIMON
I was more concerned about getting
you out of the clutches of Cat
woman.

BEN
I'll do the green screen gig.

SIMON
Ahhh. Sorry Bro I gave it away.

BEN
(angry)
To Who? No one is better than me.

SIMON
Well Sergio seems keen.

BEN
Do you want keen or good?

SIMON
I want someone I can rely on.

BEN
What do you mean by that?

SIMON
Well you would know.

BEN
I'm better.

SIMON
When you are on your meds.

BEN
That's not for you to say.

SIMON
It is for Screen Australia.

BEN
How do they know?

SIMON looks at him with a knowing look.

BEN (CONT'D)
Chelsea. (Beat) No one sets traps better than her. (BEN tries to control his leg shaking) I am not going back.... To that time.... You have to get me out of there.

SIMON
Bro, see this as a challenge.

A WOMAN looks at them, BEN smiles back.

SIMON (CONT'D)
Still got feelings for her then?

BEN
No!

BEN looks back at the WOMAN. Dissolve to flashback.

FLASHBACK EARLY 2000S. INT. CLUB. NIGHT.

BEN, sitting at the bar, looks across and sees RACHEL animatedly telling FRIENDS a story. BEN begins to walk over

GILLIAN
(younger)
Hey Ben, I hear we are working together. Just like old times.

BEN
Hi Gillian, yes good isn't.

RACHEL looks at BEN. The image rips like a green screen.

INT. CLUB. NIGHT. CONT.

Sound of text beep. BEN looks at the phone. It is from CHELSEA: 'Solicitor subpoenaed records. Have a good night'.

BEN
How does she do that?

SIMON
What?

BEN
Know where I am.

SIMON
You need to prove to Chelsea you are okay.

BEN gets up.

BEN
I am okay. And I will prove it.

BEN leaves.

SIMON
(to himself)
Yeah and I'm the drover's dog. Or Bryan Brown whichever shits first.

INT. UNIVERSITY CLASSROOM. DAY

A faculty meeting with FIONA in the chair. BRIANNA, young and keen lecturer, is there and FERGAL tries to sit next to her. She gets up and sits next to BEN. LUCIANA, departmental administrator, takes notes.

FIONA
Top of today's agenda is recruitment. The numbers for next year are not good

JACK
Could that be because we have given up anything that resembles academic inquiry?

FIONA
So we need to find ways to attract students.

BEN

We could offer more practice based courses.

BRIANNA

I agree with Ben.

JACK

(sarcastically)

That will bring them in droves.
Like dogs to the cannery.

BEN

People these days want to know how things work.

BRIANNA

Ben's right.

JACK

Not why stories work.

RACHEL

I think we need a balance of both.
Applying ideas to technology.

FIONA

Back to the agenda.

JACK

If you don't have the idea in the first place what use is the technology?

BEN

Sometimes the technology gives you the idea.

JACK

Poppycock.

FIONA

Thank you Jack.

JACK

My pleasure.

FIONA

Moving forward. The deputy dean position will go live this week so spread the word. The VC wants more women. With industry experience.

JACK looks at RACHEL.

INT. UNIVERSITY CAFE. DAY.

RACHEL
Moving forward.

JACK
Into the abyss of practice based
courses.

RACHEL
Why are they so afraid of ideas?

JACK
Probably because they have none of
their own.

RACHEL
I didn't get an interview.

JACK
(not surprised)
Sorry to hear that.

RACHEL
How did you know?

LUCIANA sidles up to them.

LUCIANA
Well that was a fun meeting.

JACK
Barrel of laughs. God where does
she get off?

JACK and RACHEL riff about the Dean.

LUCIANA
I think you need to get out more
Rachel. Time to start dating.

RACHEL
(scoffs)
Men in their 50s want women in
their 30s and men in their 60s want
women in their 40s and men in their
70s want a nurse maid. Not that I'd
know.

JACK
Not if you are the deputy dean.
Some men like women with power.

ACT TWO**SEQUENCE #3 (IT'S A MAD MAD WORLD)**

EXT. UNIVERSITY. DAY

RACHEL arriving at the university carrying numerous bags. Ben sees her and tries to catch up. Students start merging towards RACHEL, she turns and BEN hides behind a building.

INT. UNIVERSITY CLASSROOM. DAY

RACHEL packing up at the end of class. BEN appears in the doorway. RACHEL catches sight of him as he disappears.

INT. UNIVERSITY CLASSROOM CORRIDOR. DAY

RACHEL charges out of the classroom. BEN is standing by the vending machine and watches as she sashays past. STUDENTS scurry to catch up to her and she is giving them her attention.

INT. RACHEL'S HOUSE. NIGHT.

A nice house with tasteful furnishings. Photos of grown children on the sideboard. She lives alone. Rachel is at the kitchen table furiously marking. She gets up and exits the kitchen, as she closes the door we see a dart board on the back of the door with a photo of a man and lots of darts in his face.

INT. MEDIA DEPARTMENT. DAY

BEN is standing by LUCIANA who helps him enter grades.

LUCIANA

Then you have to go to 'my students' and the list of classes you teach should come up.

BEN

I couldn't see it.

RACHEL rushes in.

RACHEL

Up till midnight entering in those grades.

BEN
Oh hi Rachel.

LUCIANA looks at him then her as if to say 'This will be interesting'

RACHEL
Luciana can you book a pod for me to do tutorials. I've got students coming out of my ears.

LUCIANA taps away at her computer.

BEN
Can I help?

RACHEL
Teach them to think.

LUCIANA
Done. Don't forget the faculty meeting at four.

RACHEL
Who has time for faculty meetings?

BEN
I do.

RACHEL
Wait till you're doing a fulltime load.

JACK enters

JACK
Coming to the faculty meeting later?

RACHEL
Doesn't anyone teach around here?

JACK
Good for you to show your face. Deputy Dean position.

RACHEL
Told you. Not interested.

JACK
They want more women.

RACHEL
 To apply so they can say they
 tried. It's a game Jack, you of all
 people should know that.

There is a buzzer. LUCIANA answers.

LUCIANA
 Media department. (pause then looks
 at Rachel). Yes she's in.

RACHEL looks horrified.

LUCIANA (CONT'D)
 It's Max. He needs to talk.

RACHEL opens the door. MAX stands there.

RACHEL
 Max! Lovely to see you.

MAX
 Sorry to bother you. Are you busy?

RACHEL
 Only with tedious faculty meetings.
 Let's go to the pods.

RACHEL exits. LUCIANA looks at BEN who is staring at the
 door.

EXT. UNIVERSITY. DAY.

People including students going about their business, eating,
 walking, chatting on benches, grass patches.

INT. STUDIO. DAY.

BEN sets up the equipment with FERGAL.

FERGAL
 Ben, can I ask you something?

BEN
 Sure - fire away.

FERGAL
 I've... I've... I've ...

BEN
 Spit it out Fergal, the students
 are due.

FERGAL
Well. It's about...

BEN
About?

FERGAL
A girl. I mean a woman.

BEN
Ah so love has taken hold.

FERGAL
I don't know how to... how to...

BEN
To ask her out?

FERGAL
Yes. I'm so scared she will say no.

BEN
The secret is to capture her gaze.

FERGAL
Like a camera?

BEN
And like a camera you need to know
the lens to use.

BEN moves close to FERGAL. FERGAL straightens up.

BEN (CONT'D)
Once you've got her in your gaze,
then you need to lean in, like a
close up, put your hand in the
middle of her back.

BEN leans in. FERGAL tries to relax.

BEN (CONT'D)
Then look into her eyes. And this
is the most important part. Listen
to every word she says.

FERGAL
But what if I don't understand what
she is saying? Like it's too
intellectual.

BEN
Then beforehand you google her and
find everything you can about her.

(MORE)

BEN (CONT'D)

Have one thing to say to her you know she is good at or keen to develop. (Beat) Like writing the best script ever.

FERGAL

But what if it's not a script.

BEN

(slightly irritated)
Whatever you think she is interested in.

FERGAL

I don't know what she's interested in.

BEN

(irritated)
There must be something.

FERGAL

I heard her mention she likes romcoms.

BEN

Then watch some of those. Especially the most popular one.

FERGAL

She mentioned someone called Nancy Meyers.

BEN

Never heard of her.

FERGAL

That she was the most successful director in Hollywood and no one has heard of her.

BEN

Well find out all about her.

FERGAL

Then what.

BEN

What?

FERGAL

Then what do I do, once I googled, watched, found out about this Nancy person.

BEN
I think that's enough for you to be
getting on with Fergal.

As BEN takes FERGAL out the door, the students stand in the doorway looking in awe. MAX is one of them. He blushes.

INT. THERAPIST OFFICE. DAY.

BEN
I came back and she was married.

MERYL
And ... that prompted the...

BEN
Incident. But I'm over her.

MERYL
Are you?

BEN
Yes. I have to be. She's married.

MERYL
For now. How's it going with Jack?

BEN
Him? Fine. He's just unhappy with
life.

MERYL
And Chelsea?

BEN
The poacher. Stole my life.

MERYL
Who else stole your life?

BEN
What?

MERYL
You need to stop living in La La
Land and face these issues head on.
Like a steam train.

INT. UNIVERSITY CLASSROOM. DAY.

Sound of a steam train. Close up on bags and papers. RACHEL arrives in the classroom and sets up. STUDENTS wander in.

RACHEL
Good morning. Nice to see you all.

BEN appears in the doorway.

NICK
Ben can you look at my film.

BEN
I'd be happy to Nick.

RACHEL
So today we are going to learn about turning points and the importance to the story.

COURTNEY
Ben I think I have corrupted my files.

NICK
Like you Courtney.

COURTNEY
Shut up Nick. Ben can you help?

BEN
I'll be in the edit suites after lunch why don't you pop round then.

RACHEL
(in a loud voice)
After lunch we have the writing workshop.

COURTNEY
Thanks Ben.

NICK
(to another student)
Is that Ben Baxter? The green screen guy?

MAX
He made Shattered Glass. It won the Palme d'or for short film.

RACHEL
Ben do you mind?

BEN
Not at all.

BEN walks into the class.

RACHEL
I've got a class. On screenwriting.
And I've brought biscuits.

The students all perk up as BEN walks to the front of the class.

HOLLIE
Yeah I googled him. He's famous.

GRAHAM
Famous isn't the only thing Hollie.

BEN
So who can tell me what a beat is.

RACHEL
(mumbling to herself)
A hit.

MAX
The moment the emotion changes.

BEN
Very good Max.

RACHEL
That's right Max. I'll take it from here Ben. In your essays - due this week - find an example of a beat in a scene from a film you admire and analyse why it works.

BEN
Or not.

RACHEL
Yes. Or not.

BEN
And some scenes have more than one beat.

RACHEL
(mumbling)
All the better to hit you with. (To the class). Okay I'm going to have tutorials with each of you and you have to tell me what scene and what film you have chosen.

HOLLIE
Will that help get us a good mark?

RACHEL

Hollie this is not about getting good grades. This is about learning and applying that learning.

HOLLIE

Yes but my mum wants me to get a first.

RACHEL

Well tell your mum...that...

GRAHAM

You are a pain the arse.

RACHEL

That's enough Graham. I will not tolerate disrespect in this class.

BEN

Hollie tell your mum that you are working to realise your potential. The first will come if you apply yourself.

HOLLIE

Thanks Ben.

RACHEL

Yes thank you Ben.

RACHEL starts packing her bag.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

That's all for today.

RACHEL leaves. BEN stands looking bewildered.

INT. CLUB. NIGHT

BEN

She avoids me but that's a good thing. (Beat) Isn't it?

SIMON

She's smart. She'll know to leave you alone.

BEN

That's what I always liked about her. She's smart and can read people.

SIMON
Have to confess bro, I always had a
thing for her.

BEN begins to shake.

BEN
I need to go. (Beat) And... and...
prepare a lesson. Catch you Si.

BEN leaves. SIMON smiles to himself as he picks up BEN's half
glass of beer and drinks it.

INT. APARTMENT. NIGHT

BEN directs the Lego characters, and the DOG looks on. There
is a bowl next to the DOG. And a lead.

INT. MEDIA DEPARTMENT. DAY

BEN arrives. RACHEL is at her desk. LUCIANA watches on. BEN
goes over to RACHEL and stands by her desk.

RACHEL
(annoyed)
Yes?

BEN
Just wondering if you had any
information on running orders.

RACHEL
What?

BEN
I have to teach that today. I'm
doing a studio green screen
exercise.

RACHEL
Well just get them to deconstruct a
show.

BEN
Deconstruct?

RACHEL
Yes. You know break it down into
segments. I wrote my thesis on
formats.

LUCIANA
 (under her breath)
 That no one reads.

BEN
 Oh. Yes. I remember that.

RACHEL
 Do you?

BEN walks off. LUCIANA gets up from her desk and goes over to BEN's desk.

LUCIANA
 Here's an example of a running
 order. It's from her thesis. That
 no one reads.

BEN
 Thanks Luciana, I owe you one.

INT. CLASSROOM. DAY

BEN is teaching and has an example of a format on the screen.
 RACHEL walks past, sees it and stops.

BEN
 So when looking at a show you need
 to break it down into segments.
 This is important so we know if the
 green screen and lighting or shot
 need to change perspective.

BEN then reads part of RACHEL's thesis. RACHEL storms in.

RACHEL
 Did you give me credit for that
 piece.

BEN
 Sorry?

RACHEL
 I wrote that. And you are passing
 it off as your own.

BEN
 No. I told the class when we began
 that your thesis is significant
 contribution to the study of
 television formats.

RACHEL
Oh. Well yes it is.

GRAHAM
Has it been published?

RACHEL
Well. Not quite.

BEN
But it will be.

RACHEL
Carry on.

RACHEL exits. BEN smiles to himself.

BEN
So for homework I want you to look at a chat show and break it down into segments and apply the Kozlowski theoretical framework to deduce if it works which will enable us to develop the backgrounds.

INT. MEDIA DEPARTMENT. DAY

RACHEL enters and goes over to LUCIANA. JACK is at his desk bashing on his keyboard.

RACHEL
He used part of my thesis. And tried to pass it off as his.

LUCIANA
Did he?

RACHEL
Well. He would have if I hadn't caught him.

The media department buzzer goes. LUCIANA answers it.

LUCIANA
Rachel it's the first years they want to see...

RACHEL
I don't teach the first years.

LUCIANA
They asked for you.

RACHEL
 (to Jack)
 Why do they do that?

JACK
 Because you are the best.

INT. MEDIA DEPARTMENT/UNIVERSITY CORRIDOR. DAY

A group of eager YOUNG STUDENTS stand there.

RACHEL
 Yes what do you want?

STUDENT
 We're doing a music show tomorrow
 and Ben wants the script but he
 hasn't...

RACHEL
 Let me guess. Taught you how to
 write one.

STUDENT
 How did you know?

RACHEL
 My brilliant teaching radar. Okay
 let's go and find a classroom.

INT. STUDIO. GALLERY. DAY.

The end of the show with the band. It looks great. BEN stands
 there with pride. FIONA comes in.

FIONA
 (pointing to a monitor)
 That looks amazing.

FERGAL
 That's coming from an outside
 source.

FIONA
 Oh.

FERGAL
 (pointing to a monitor)
 This is what we did today.

FIONA
Wow that looks amazing. Ben you
have done an amazing job.

BEN
Thanks. You've got a good green
screen here.

FERGAL looks chuffed. RACHEL enters.

RACHEL
Hi Fiona.

BEN
Hi Rachel. Nice to see you. I was
telling Fiona that...

FIONA
Need to go.

FIONA leaves.

RACHEL
Wanted to see how the script went.

BEN
Oh great. I gave them an example to
copy.

RACHEL
You? I think you will find that I
did. And taught them how to write a
script.

INT. MEDIA DEPARTMENT OFFICE. DAY.

RACHEL and JACK at the Kitchenette.

RACHEL
Who does he think he is?

JACK
A failed director.

RACHEL
Well he wasn't - at one time.

JACK
Well he is now. This is where we
all come to die.

RACHEL
But I like it here.

JACK

Do you?

RACHEL

Yes. (beat) I think so.

JACK

Good for you.

RACHEL

I'm an academic. Isn't this where I am meant to be?

JACK

Are you?

RACHEL

(irritated)

Anyway he's taken all the credit for the studio show. I helped them write the script, reduce the band to a manageable size, prepped the techs and..

JACK

Yes you are amazing.

RACHEL

What is he doing here?

JACK

Clearly to irritate you. And me.

BEN enters the office.

BEN

That went really well. Fiona was impressed.

JACK looks at RACHEL 'see I told you he was a fake'.

SEQUENCE #4 (IT GETS WORSE)

INT. UNIVERSITY. VARIOUS. DAY

Montage of BEN trying to impress RACHEL and he fails and she 'wins' every time.

INT. BEN'S APARTMENT. NIGHT

BEN acts out a scene with Lego RACHEL where they are walking in a park with her.

BEN
So how's the writing?

INT. RACHEL'S HOUSE. NIGHT.

RACHEL is on the phone.

RACHEL
It's a nightmare.

INT. BEN'S APARTMENT. NIGHT

BEN
When will you finish it?

INT. RACHEL'S HOUSE. NIGHT.

RACHEL
I'm tied up till the end of term.

INT. BEN'S APARTMENT. NIGHT

BEN
And then?

INT. RACHEL'S HOUSE. NIGHT.

RACHEL
The new guy is sending me crazy.

INT. BEN'S APARTMENT. NIGHT

BEN
Bet he will love it.

INT. RACHEL'S HOUSE. NIGHT.

RACHEL
I'm not being competitive.

INT. BEN'S APARTMENT. NIGHT

BEN
It feels right.

INT. RACHEL'S HOUSE. NIGHT.

RACHEL
No. Something's not right.

INT. MEDIA DEPARTMENT OFFICE. DAY.

BRIANNA sashays into the office wearing a similar top to RACHEL who is at her desk. BEN is at his desk. BRIANNA sidles up.

BRIANNA
Ben, lovely to see you. Wondering if you could help me.

BEN
Sure Bri.

RACHEL's cocks an eyebrow.

BRIANNA
I'm teaching video essay this term and need to show the students how to use premiere. Any chance you could...

RACHEL walks past on her way out.

RACHEL
I'm sure Ben would love to show you Brianna. He loves showing off... his hardware. (to LUCIANA) You coming for coffee?

We see that LUCIANA is doing Rachel's dating profile.

LUCIANA
Sure. Just closing this dating app...I mean the app on academic dates.

RACHEL
What the university has the dates on an app?

LUCIANA
Yes. Very appy.

INT. DEAN'S OFFICE. DAY. (RACHEL'S CATCH)

A large office with a bookshelf and not many books on it. A conference table. A desk and a window with a view.

FIONA
So how is it going?

RACHEL
Fine. Except Ben can't teach.

FIONA
Well I'm here to help.

RACHEL
For a start he doesn't have lesson plans. He doesn't follow the learning planner and I doubt he has even read the handbook.

FIONA
He's finding his feet.

RACHEL
What has academia become? A sheltered workshop for industry professionals who can't make it?

FIONA
You are a valued member of this faculty Rachel. You work hard and you deliver results. (Beat) For the students.

RACHEL
Well the students are what I love most. I did get nominated for teacher of the year.

FIONA
Sorry to hear about the commissioner's job.

RACHEL
How did you know? (Beat) Oh yes it's a small industry.

FIONA
Have you thought about applying for the deputy dean position?

RACHEL
Won't Henry be applying?

FIONA
I doubt it. He's having too much fun on sabbatical - got a new play up. Besides the VC wants to see more women in leadership positions.

FIONA gets up and comes around to Rachel's side of the table.

RACHEL
Why was Ben hired?

FIONA
Are you accusing me of not following due process?

RACHEL
No. I simply asked why was he hired? Did Simon have something to do with this.

FIONA
Oh. Simon. Yes he asked for...

RACHEL
A favour? Thought so.

FIONA
But we followed due process.

RACHEL
What? Advertised the job on the same day applications closed?

FIONA
Are you accusing me of doing something wrong?

RACHEL
Just asking.

FIONA
(changing tack)
I wish more staff could be mentored by you.

RACHEL
I haven't got time. I'm trying to write a...

FIONA
I'm working at making this faculty a collegiate environment. I'd like you'd to apply for the deputy dean position. I'm on the committee so I'm sure you'd get shortlisted.

RACHEL
I have to be short listed. I'm staff.

FIONA

Well you'd have a friendly face at the interview.

RACHEL

Thank you Fiona. I have enough friends.

FIONA

As I said the VC wants more women in leadership positions and he was very impressed with the studio show. I told him it was all you.

RACHEL

It was.

FIONA

I know.

RACHEL

I'll think about it.

FIONA

I should mention that mentoring is a criteria.

RACHEL

I don't have time to babysit people.

FIONA

You are a senior lecturer it's expected.

RACHEL

Like who?

FIONA

I think Brianna would benefit from your ... your ... your experience.

RACHEL

She's an idiot.

FIONA

Well how about Fergal?

RACHEL

He's a technician. That's Daniel's territory.

FIONA

Well there must be someone you can mentor. Show your leadership potential. (beat) Age is not on your side.

RACHEL

I am fully aware of my age. What about Ben?

FIONA

Now there's a thought. Do you think you could help him.

RACHEL

If anyone can I can.

FIONA

I couldn't agree more.

RACHEL leaves. FIONA smiles to herself.

INT. CLUB. NIGHT.

SIMON is with the BOYS and regaling them with funny stories. There is much laughter. BEN enters.

BEN

Bro can I have a word?

The GROUP, clearly drunk call for BEN to join them. SIMON is in the full throes.

SIMON

And then he demanded a bucket ice. I know where I want to put that bucket.

The GROUP laughs. SIMON looks over at Ben at the bar and motions to the guys he needs to go over.

BEN is at the bar.

SIMON (CONT'D)

What's up Doc?

BEN

This isn't working.

SIMON

What?

BEN

Her. She treats me like crap.

SIMON

Well show her who you've become.

BEN

I can tell you, I've not become a teacher.

SIMON

Don't worry about that. Just schmooze with the powers that be.

BEN

What, like with your ex?

SIMON

She does hold some sway.

BEN

I'm not into game playing.

SIMON

Well that's why you...

BEN

I what?

SIMON

Nothing.

BEN

Go on say it.

SIMON

Just get through the year and then let's take stock.

BEN

Year? I said I'd do it for a term. Is that why Rachel's observing me?

SIMON

Just keeping you on track. In case...

BEN

In case what?

SIMON

Does she know?

BEN

No!

SIMON

I think she should. If you want to show her who you really are.

BEN

I am not defined by That.

SIMON

No. But it is part of you.

BEN

It's not. And I can prove it.

INT. CAFÉ. DAY

BEN at the counter. RACHEL is sitting at a table working on her computer.

ANGELA

(shouting)

Two Americanas.

BEN

Thanks.

BEN goes to RACHEL's table.

BEN (CONT'D)

Here. I wanted to apologise for you having to mentor me.

RACHEL

I'm allergic to coffee Ben. You know that. Or did. You could have asked.

BEN

That's one thing I'm not good at - asking.

RACHEL

Clearly and now I have to mentor you. Lucky me.

Student arrives. RACHEL is all smiles.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

Take a seat Hollie.

BEN stands looking like a lost boy holding the two coffees.

INT. MEDIA DEPARTMENT OFFICE. DAY

RACHEL arrives dressed in jogging clothes. BEN comes into the office, hair in a top knot, looking fresh, wearing dark glasses, he arrives at the same time as BRIANNA, wearing jogging clothes, opens door for her with a flourish.

RACHEL
Ben can I have your lesson plan?

BRIANNA
I see you got the memo.

RACHEL
What memo?

BRIANNA
The staff lunch time jog!

RACHEL
Ben I need that lesson plan for your observation that Fiona asked me to do.

BRIANNA
You applying for the deputy dean position Rachel?

RACHEL
No. And I'm not going to jog either.

BEN
(searching his desk)
I did it, it's here somewhere.
(Beat) maybe I left it at home.

FLASHBACK. FILM SET. DAY

POV RACHEL watching BEN on set, lots of technical equipment surrounded by technicians. YOUNG RACHEL walks onto the set.

YOUNG RACHEL
(yelling)
You forgot. Again...

The screen rips.

YOUNG RACHEL (CONT'D)
You know how much that meant to me...

INT. UNIVERSITY CAFÉ. DAY

RACHEL and LUCIANA are standing in queue.

LUCIANA

My shout.

RACHEL

Well I can't have chai latte, too much sugar, can't have a hot chocolate too much..

LUCIANA

Sugar. Stop it. What do you feel like?

RACHEL

I feel invisible.

LUCIANA

I meant to drink.

RACHEL

The 50s are shit.

LUCIANA

Everyone lies on their dating profile.

RACHEL

Chai Latte then.

LUCIANA

Some see you even if you don't. (To Angela) Two chai lattes please.

RACHEL

Thanks.

LUCIANA

He's just trying to be friends.

RACHEL

With friends like that...

ANGELA

Two chai lattes.

LUCIANA

Thanks Angela they're for the pity party over here.

EXT. UNIVERSITY. DAY.

Students and staff arriving for another day.

INT. CLASSROOM. DAY.

BEN stands in front of the class, fidgeting. RACHEL stands at the back holding the lesson plan, which is a copy of a hastily written outline. BEN has a copy of the rough lesson plan on the desk at the front and glances at it intermittently in the hope it will save him.

BEN

What's the main job of the director.

STUDENT

To hold the camera?

BEN

Ahh. Not quite. That's the ... the ...the cameraman's job.

STUDENT

To have a vision?

BEN

Yes that's part of their job.
(glances at the desk).

STUDENT

To edit the film?

BEN

Well that's the editor's job and the director does sit in on the edit. Think about what happens before the filming starts.

MAX

Is it to do with subtext?

BEN

Well yes that is very important Max. Can anyone tell me what subtext is.

RACHEL

(mumbling)

It tells us what is really going on.

MAX
What is really going on?

RACHEL
(mumbling)
Something that's lacking here.

BEN
(steeling himself)
No. The main job of the director is casting.

RACHEL
Finally.

The class turns around to look at RACHEL.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
(stumbling over her words)
And if you get the casting right
you have a good chance of ...

BEN
Winning...

RACHEL
Making a good film. Now think of a
film you like and the casting - why
does it work?

Lots of hands go up.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
I think my work here is done. I'll
leave you to it Ben.

RACHEL leaves. BEN is ashen. He looks at the desk and the crumpled piece of paper and takes a deep breath.

FLASHBACK. FILM SET. DAY

POV BEN as he sees (young) RACHEL storm off.

ANDY (CHIPPY)
Ben I've nearly finished the
standing desk.

BEN
(looking in the direction
of Rachel)
Thanks Andy, don't think I need it
anymore.

A young GILLIAN is nearby watching.

GILLIAN
Andrew, we'll use it in the office scene.

INT. MEDIA DEPARTMENT OFFICE. DAY

Beginning of the day. Staff coming in, dropping bags, saying hi to each other. BRIANNA arrives with RACHEL. They are wearing the same outfit.

BRIANNA
Snap!

RACHEL
Brianna stop before I snap you.

BRIANNA
Rachel you are so funny. Can I ask you something?

RACHEL
How not to be a pain in the arse?

BRIANNA
(sort of laughing at the insult)
I wanted to ask if you ever get that feeling that someone is keen but they don't know how to tell you?

RACHEL
At my age feelings are a rare thing Brianna.

BRIANNA
I think I scare people Rachel.

RACHEL
What with? A wet hanky? The only thing you scare Brianna is your shadow.

BRIANNA
So I should just take Ben by the horns so to speak.

RACHEL stops in her tracks.

BRIANNA (CONT'D)
You two go back away don't you?

RACHEL
Just friends.

BRIANNA
Is he seeing anyone? You know in a
...

RACHEL
Romantic sense? Ben doesn't see
anyone. (Beat) Including himself.
Isn't Fergal more your age Brianna.

BRIANNA
I've always been attracted to older
men.

RACHEL
(mumbling to herself)
Daddy's girl then.

BEN arrives.

BRIANNA
Ben I'm still having problems with
premiere.

LUCIANA
Ben Max is looking for you.

BEN
Thanks I'll catch him later.

LUCIANA
Not sure later will work.

INT. UNIVERSITY CLASSROOM. DAY.

RACHEL'S class ends and STUDENTS pack up their things. MAX
hangs back. He goes up to RACHEL.

MAX
You have a son don't you?

RACHEL
Yes Max. Bit older than you. You
two would get along.

MAX
Would he ever tell you something
that he was ashamed of?

RACHEL

Dan tells me way too much. I've made it a rule for him not to tell me about any girlfriends until he's been with them for at least three months.

MAX

What if he told you something that you didn't expect?

RACHEL

Max, what are you saying?

MAX

Nothing. Just something with Ben.

RACHEL

Then I'm sure he would be only too happy to help.

MAX

Would he?

RACHEL

He's a good listener. That's one thing he excels at.

INT. THERAPIST OFFICE. DAY.

BEN

Shattered Glass is part of a retrospective.

MERYL

How does that make you feel?

BEN

I wanted to direct a feature.

MERYL

Did you?

BEN

I thought they would...

MERYL

Would what?

BEN

I don't know.

MERYL
You do Ben.

BEN
That they would ... would...

MERYL
Would what?

BEN
See me. Love me.

MERYL
Is it love?

BEN
I thought it was.

MERYL
And?

BEN
I felt a failure.

MERYL
But you've got a film in an
important retrospective.

BEN
It's not a feature.

MERYL
Would that change things?

BEN
No. But...

MERYL sits quietly. BEN stares into the floor.

BEN (CONT'D)
Is that why ... I have these
extreme feelings?

MERYL
See you next week.

INT. BEN'S APARTMENT. NIGHT

Close up on BEN.

BEN
I've got something to tell you.

INT. RACHEL'S HOUSE. NIGHT.

Close up on RACHEL.

RACHEL
Miss you too.

Shot widens to see RACHEL on the phone.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Miss you too.

EXT. UNIVERSITY DAY.

STUDENTS stream onto campus.

INT. EDITING SUITE CORRIDOR. DAY

RACHEL is sauntering down the corridor. As she passes one of the suites she stops. She sneaks back.

BEN is leaning over BRIANNA (close up her shoes) RACHEL looks at her shoes - the same! As she looks up, BEN turns and sees her. BEN stands up. RACHEL gives a knowing look. BEN opens the door and looks down the corridor as he is about to say something but she is gone. FERGAL walks down the corridor.

FERGAL
Hey Ben, need help?

BEN
Ah, (he looks inside) ah no. Fancy a drink?

INT. PUB. NIGHT

BEN is in a good mood at the bar, his hair is loose and long. He is having fun with the students. They are raptured by him. MAX sits in the corner alone.

BEN
Yes, so when I worked with Bill we had the wildest wrap party.

STUDENT 2
Do you mean Bill Murray?

BEN
He is one wild dude.

The STUDENTS are in awe.

GRAHAM
My dad was taught by your dad.

BEN stops for a moment.

BEN
Is that so?

GRAHAM
He said he was inspiring.

BEN
Is that so?

BEN sees MAX sitting alone and looking forlorn.

BEN (CONT'D)
Excuse me.

BEN gets up and goes over to Max.

BEN (CONT'D)
Hey Max you okay?

JACK and BRIANNA walks in and sees them. They wave to the group. BEN waves back. BRIANNA looks flattered. Focus on BEN and MAX.

MAX
I don't know what to do.

BEN
Well maybe I can help.

MAX
There's someone.

BEN
And?

MAX
I feel like jelly every time I see them.

BEN
Are they here at the university?

MAX
Yes.

BEN
That's tough. Do they know how you feel.

MAX

Oh god no. I would die if they did.

BEN

Dying is over rated. Take it slowly.

MAX

Like how?

BEN

Well just be in their orbit, so you can bump into them.

MAX

Doesn't that look obvious?

BEN

Not if you have to give them something, like a USB or SD card that you think belongs to them. Shows you care.

MAX

I think someone else is in love with them.

BEN

Well you need to take it easy and show that you are better than them. Let's catch up later in the week.

INT. EDITING SUITES CORRIDOR. DAY

FERGAL is walking down the corridor. BRIANNA pops her head out of one of the edit suites.

BRIANNA

Hi Fergal. Do you know where Ben is?

FERGAL stops when he hears Ben's name.

FERGAL

Why?

BRIANNA

I need help with premiere. I can't edit this scene of Casablanca for my class.

FERGAL

I can help with that.

INT. EDIT SUITE. DAY.

FERGAL is tapping away at the computer looking at the screen.

BRIANNA
Did Ben ask about me?

FERGAL
Why would he?

BRIANNA
Well you seem to spend a lot of
time with him. Did he teach you how
to master this?

FERGAL
No. I am self taught.

FERGAL presses lots of buttons,

FERGAL (CONT'D)
So what are you trying to do?

BRIANNA
I want the final scene from
Casablanca. The one where...

FERGAL
Ilsa thinks she is staying with
Rick and Victor is going. Rick has
done a deal with Victor.

FERGAL looks intently at BRIANNA.

BRIANNA
Yes that one. Ben is going to do
that one in his camera class.

FERGAL
I could teach that class.

FERGAL moves closer to BRIANNA, who is uncomfortable.

BRIANNA
Fergal what are you doing?

FERGAL
Nothing. Nothing.

FERGAL goes back to tapping on the computer. The scene from
Casablanca begins to play.

BRIANNA
Thanks Fergal. That's it. Airbridge
it to me.

BRIANNA flees.

INT. CAFE. DAY

RACHEL stands in line with LUCIANA.

RACHEL
My shout.

LUCIANA
What do you want?

RACHEL
Nothing. Why would I want
something?

LUCIANA
You only give to get Rachel.

RACHEL looks shocked.

RACHEL
Do I?

LUCIANA
We all do, you're just bad at
covering it.

RACHEL
Am I?

LUCIANA
You have no idea how transparent
you are. (imitating Rachel). I am
not competitive.

RACHEL
I am not.

LUCIANA
And the denial continues. That
lesson plan you gave Ben.

RACHEL
It helped him.

LUCIANA
Did it?

RACHEL
Not my fault that he didn't
understand the basics of teaching.

LUCIANA
Not your fault! And when you took
over the class, not your fault?

RACHEL
I was helping out.

LUCIANA
Were you?

RACHEL
I am the better teacher.

LUCIANA
Finally confessions of a
narcissist.

RACHEL
I did get nominated for teacher of
the year.

LUCIANA
After you knocked everyone else out
of the park.

RACHEL
What are you getting at Luciana?

LUCIANA
Did you apply for the deputy dean
position?

RACHEL
I might have.

LUCIANA
And what about that writing
fellowship I gave you.

RACHEL
I'm too old for that.

LUCIANA
But not to create havoc in your
life?

RACHEL
I like it here.

LUCIANA
Do you? When did you last see Dan?

RACHEL
Who?

LUCIANA
Your son.

RACHEL
What are you doing Luciana?

LUCIANA
Getting you to see that you have
another life to live.

RACHEL
I'm in my 50s, menopause is
knocking, and women in my age
bracket are the fastest demographic
of homelessness in this country.

LUCIANA
You own your home.

RACHEL
And I need to feed myself.

LUCIANA
But not your soul?

RACHEL
Stop it Luciana. I am happy.

LUCIANA
Are you? Flat white please.

RACHEL
(to Angela)
One white, one black.

ANGELA
Which?

LUCIANA
One flat white and one flat life.

INT. THERAPIST OFFICE. DAY.

BEN
I'm on top of it.

MERYL
On top of who.

BEN
The teaching, dealing with people.

MERYL
Able to turn women down?

BEN
Yes Meryl. Even Rachel. In a
strange way she's helping me.

MERYL
You told her that you have...

BEN
No. But can if I want to. I am top
of my feelings.

MERYL
Which feelings might they be?

BEN
Those swirling around me.

MERYL
Still in denial then.

INT. STUDIO. DAY.

BEN teaching directing. STUDENTS are acting out a scene from
a script. RACHEL sits at the back, focussing on an
application for a fellowship.

The scene finishes. BEN turns to the students.

BEN
So can you see the difference in
the performance from that small
adjustment?

Students are rapped. RACHEL is smiling to herself. BEN looks
at Rachel.

BEN (CONT'D)
So now we will try the same scene
as if the characters are falling in
love.

The door flies open and BRIANNA stands there, in a rage.

BEN (CONT'D)
 Sorry Brianna is there something
 you need.

BRIANNA
 What I need I can't have. (beat)
 You.

The class stops. Everyone looks at BEN. RACHEL looks up from
 her papers.

BRIANNA (CONT'D)
 I know what your problem is Ben.

RACHEL puts her papers aside and gets up and goes over to
 BRIANNA.

RACHEL
 Can we take this outside Brianna?

BRIANNA
 I suppose you know he has dys...

BEN, now shaking, comes over to them.

BEN
 Ladies, can you take this...

BRIANNA AND RACHEL
 Don't call us ladies.

BEN
 Girls?

BRIANNA
 Is that how you see me Ben - as a
 girl?

BEN
 Of course not.

BRIANNA
 Then why do you treat me like one?
 You don't reply to my emails or my
 texts. What is wrong with you?

BEN starts to shake.

BEN
 I'm I'm ... sorry Brianna. I
 don't know what you mean.

BRIANNA

You can't just flirt with someone
and then not follow through.

RACHEL

Okay we need to take this outside.
Students please do the scene again
this time with an adjustment.
(glaring at BEN). Try as if the
characters hate each other.

JACK appears in the doorway.

JACK

So this is the great directing
class.

RACHEL is at the doorway pushing BRIANNA out.

RACHEL

Not now Jack. We have a problem.
Maybe you could help by observing
this scene and Try to
guess.... What the Adjustment
is that I just gave them.

RACHEL looks nervous. One Student starts filming.

BRIANNA sticks her head around the door.

BRIANNA

And what about me Ben? Or am I
irrelevant? Like you?

The class is stumped. RACHEL looks at BEN.

RACHEL

(imploring)
Jack?

JACK

Okay guys show me what you have.

FERGAL appears in the doorway, dishevelled. BEN flees.

RACHEL

And here's the next instalment.

FERGAL

I have to

BRIANNA flees. FERGAL follows BRIANNA.

JACK
Exit stage left pursued by an
Irishman.

The STUDENTS look at the footage.

STUDENT
Rachel we have some great stuff.

RACHEL
You should call it Groundhog Day.

STUDENT
What an awesome title.

JACK
Yes awesome.

EXT. UNIVERSITY DAY.

STUDENTS hanging around. People going about their business.

INT. MEDIA DEPARTMENT. DAY.

RACHEL arrives looking worried and goes straight to LUCIANA.

RACHEL
Suppose you heard about the other
day.

LUCIANA
Oh everyone's heard. What is wrong
with you?

RACHEL
Me? Brianna was the ... the...

LUCIANA
The what? The crazy one?

RACHEL
Well she was a bit over the top.

LUCIANA
Does it ever occur to you there
might be a reason why women act
that way? Look at yourself always
yelling about incompetent
management, toxic cultures, and you
can't even manage a few tears.

RACHEL
It was more like a nuclear attack.

LUCIANA
That are now the grounds for a grievance.

RACHEL
Against me?

LUCIANA
It's not always about you Rachel.
No. Ben.

RACHEL
Oh well yes it was his class she burst in on.

LUCIANA
As his mentor you need to fix this.
Or Fiona will come down on you like...

BEN arrives looking ashen.

RACHEL
Ben we need to talk. Shall we go for a walk?

EXT. UNIVERSITY GROUNDS. DAY. **(MIDPOINT)**

RACHEL and BEN walk.

RACHEL
How's it going?

BEN
Okay. Some days are less good than...

RACHEL
That event with Brianna?

BEN
No idea what brought that on.

RACHEL
Ben, you must have done something to lead her on.

BEN
You know she can be a little crazy.

RACHEL

Okay. I'm not buying into the notion that a woman is crazy because she gets emotional.

BEN

Well you find her irritating.

RACHEL

Irritating is not the same as crazy Ben. When someone, anyone reacts that way something has triggered it.

BEN

Well it wasn't me.

RACHEL

Ben you don't realise the effect you have on people.

BEN

And people, some people don't realise the effect they have on...

RACHEL

We all have to take responsibility for our actions and ...

BEN

Our emotions?

RACHEL

Yes. Look the reason Luciana has asked me to talk to you is Brianna...

BEN

Is crazy.

RACHEL

Stop with the crazy Ben. She is not crazy... she's ...

BEN

Emotional?

RACHEL

Yes. Anyway she's lodged a grievance.

BEN

Against who?

RACHEL
Okay. I didn't think this would be so hard.

BEN
What me?

RACHEL
And the penny drops.

BEN
But I haven't done anything. If anything I didn't let the situation escalate.

RACHEL
Yes I know. But she has a right to ...

BEN
Be crazy!

RACHEL
Yes.

BEN
See you think she is crazy too.

RACHEL
I didn't say that.

BEN
So what's the deal?

RACHEL
Well the regulations state that...

BEN
Regulations?

RACHEL
Yes the university regulations.

BEN
What about dysregulation?

RACHEL
There's no such thing.

BEN
There might be.

RACHEL
Sounds like a dystopian form of
regulation.

BEN
And how would you feel about that?

RACHEL
Being dystopian?

BEN
No. Having some form of
dysregulation.

RACHEL
I don't. There's no such thing.

BEN
What if you did.

RACHEL
Then I guess I would get regulated.
What has this to do with the
grievance? Against you I might add.

BEN
There might be a reason for certain
behaviours.

RACHEL
What behaviours?

BEN
Ahh. Well.

RACHEL
Spit it out Ben. Is there something
you need to tell me?

BEN
No. No. No.

RACHEL
If the grievance proceeds then you
and Brianna will be in ...

BEN
In what Rachel?

RACHEL
Mediation.

BEN
What's that?

RACHEL
A form of counselling.

BEN looks panicked.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
So we need to nip it in the...

BEN
Bud.

RACHEL
I'm applying for the deputy dean
position and I need a clean slate.

BEN
So do I.

INT. PUB. NIGHT. (MIDPOINT REVERSAL)

BEN is drinking alone - his hair is dishevelled. STUDENTS
come in, including MAX.

STUDENT
Hey Ben, we got some great footage
the other day.

BEN
Great.

STUDENT
We've put the background as a
castle - it looks like a Harry
Potter scene.

BEN
My life as magical fantasy. Great.

STUDENT
To demonstrate green screen effect?

BEN
Keep up the fakery that is this
industry.

MAX looks upset.

STUDENT
But you worked in the industry.

BEN

And I was a failure. It's dog eat dog out there. And you are all puppies.

The STUDENTS looked shocked.

MAX

Ben you pretend you understand people but you don't even know yourself.

BEN exits.

INT. CLUB. NIGHT. (MPR FOR RACHEL)

SIMON is at the bar. RACHEL charges in.

RACHEL

Thought I'd find you here.

SIMON

Most people say hello.

RACHEL

Still the keeper of secrets I see.

SIMON

Followed by how are you.

RACHEL

What's he hiding?

SIMON

Or nice to see you.

RACHEL

Stop avoiding the question Simon.

SIMON motions to the BARTENDER.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

He's hiding something. What is it?

BEN can be seen in background, with peak cap and dark glasses.

SIMON

Not for me to say.

The drinks arrive.

SIMON (CONT'D)

Cheers.

BEN gets under the table and moves the table closer.

RACHEL

Is this about me?

SIMON

It's not always about you Rachel.

The table appears to be moving on its own. RACHEL sees it, shakes her head, and gulps down her drink.

RACHEL

Well he won't last in the cesspit.
There's echoes of ...

SIMON

A previous time?

RACHEL

Yes. It feels all too familiar. We
get on. Then we don't. He's there.
Then...

SIMON

He's not.

RACHEL

And now I wonder if...

SIMON

He's going to dis

The table crashes into SIMON. BEN jumps out.

SIMON (CONT'D)

... appear.

BEN

Oh hi. Didn't see you two there.

The three of them stand there not knowing what to say.

BEN (CONT'D)

Glad I bumped into you Rach, I need
some advice. On that issue we spoke
about...

SIMON and RACHEL look uncomfortable.

BEN (CONT'D)

Sorry, have I interrupted you guys?

SIMON

No bro, just shooting the breeze.

BEN

Oh good. So not talking about anything personal.

SIMON AND RACHEL

No. Not at all.

BEN

Good. Because I need your help with Max. I think he is suffering from mental health issues.

SIMON

Is that so?

BEN

Yes and he needs someone he can talk to, someone he can trust.

SIMON

What about Rachel?

BEN

Funny you should say that Si. I thought the same thing. She is someone people trust.

RACHEL

I'm right here Ben.

BEN

And someone that doesn't snoop.

RACHEL

Hello.

SIMON

That's right Ben she is someone you can trust. With anything.

RACHEL

Guys to earth. I am right here. What is it you aren't telling me.

BEN

I need...

SIMON

Spit it out Ben.

BEN
Did I get the gig?

SIMON
I tried. Sorry Bro.

BEN
Not as sorry as I am.

SIMON
Time she knew.

BEN
Rachel I need help.

SIMON
Finally.

BEN
With Max.

RACHEL
Max? Tell progression and support.

BEN
But he needs you.

SIMON
He does.

BEN
He does. Will you help?

SIMON
Sounds like a cry for help.

RACHEL
Aren't you his personal tutor?

BEN
Yes. But I'm not getting through to him. I think he's confused... about something.

SIMON
He's not the only one.

RACHEL
He has difficulty relating to people.

SIMON
He's not the only one.

CHELSEA appears. No one sees her. SIMON sees CHELSEA.

SIMON (CONT'D)
Warning warning. The wicked witch
from the east.

CHELSEA
And what about our relationship
Ben?

BEN
That wasn't a relationship it was a
syndrome. In Sweden.

CHELSEA
I've been reading your medical...

BEN looks at RACHEL then CHELSEA.

CHELSEA (CONT'D)
We need to talk Ben.

BEN grabs CHELSEA by the hand and walks out.

BEN
Okay Chelsea, let's talk.

BEN looks at RACHEL.

EXT. OCEAN. SUNRISE.

INT. APARTMENT. BEDROOM. MORNING

BEN wakes and sees the dog, looks relieved. CHELSEA appears
with coffee. BEN is horrified.

CHELSEA
Benji, I need to go to work, but
I'll be back and we can make plans.

CHELSEA goes to kiss BEN. BEN pulls back.

CHELSEA (CONT'D)
For a new life.

BEN
I need to.. to..

CHELSEA
Pee. (beat) I know you so well
Benji.

CHELSEA blows BEN a kiss. Exits.

BEN
No (beat) you don't.

INT. APARTMENT. MORNING. LATER

BEN feeds TOBY and then picks up the lead, looks at the door, gets a rope and ties it to the door then gets a chair. He writes a note.

BEN
Sorry Toby I'm checking out.

TOBY goes to the kitchen area. BEN gets on the chair. TOBY stands there with the lead in his mouth. BEN looks defeated.

BEN (CONT'D)
At least I can make you happy. One last time.

BEN puts the lead on the dog and leaves the apartment. The noose is swinging from the door.

INT. MEDIA DEPARTMENT. DAY

RACHEL arrives. LUCIANA is at her desk.

LUCIANA
Thought about

RACHEL
I've filled it out okay, and sent it off. Before the closing date.

LUCIANA
Not the fellowship. A date. Have you thought about dating.

RACHEL
I told you I'm not interested.

LUCIANA
He's nice.

RACHEL
Sure he is. Not interested.

LUCIANA
He's my cousin.

RACHEL
Oh then you should give him to
someone more suitable.

LUCIANA
His name is Ernie. And Ben's in
hospital.

RACHEL
What? Which one?

LUCIANA
St Vincent's.

RACHEL is out of the door in a flash.

LUCIANA (CONT'D)
Sure I'll find someone to do your
class. Brianna I need you to cover
for...

BRIANNA is a mess.

BRIANNA
Sure Luciana. As long as it doesn't
require being with Ben.

LUCIANA
He's tied up.

BRIANNA
I keep falling for the wrong guys.

LUCIANA
We all do Brianna. And sometimes we
have to be offered something to
realise what it is we need.

BRIANNA looks confused.

INT. HOSPITAL. DAY.

SEQUENCE #5 (LOVE IS IN THE AIR/FRIENDSHIP)

Close up on TOBY going crazy. Widen to see MERYL, the
therapist, by the bed. BEN wakes, groggy.

MERYL
Got anything to say?

BEN
Don't give me a hard time Meryl.

BEN begins to cry. CHELSEA arrives waving the note from the apartment. BEN cries harder.

MERYL
Chelsea I think we need to give him
a moment.

CHELSEA
He's had plenty of moments. And he
does this to me (waving the note).

MERYL
(conspiratorially)
Chelsea I need to have a private
word.

CHELSEA looks at MERYL, then at BEN.

CHELSEA
I've been reading some books.

MERYL
I'm sure you have Chelsea.

CHELSEA
Benji don't worry we can work this
out.

MERYL
Come Chelsea we need to talk. You
rest Benji.

MERYL and CHELSEA leave. BEN tears up. RACHEL appears in the doorway.

RACHEL
Hi.

BEN
Hi.

RACHEL
I heard you were here.

BEN
It's not what you think.

RACHEL
What did I think?

BEN
That everything everyone says about
me is true.

RACHEL
I don't listen to other people. You should know that.

BEN
(laughing)
Yes. I forgot that... everyone else is a...

RACHEL
Fool.

There is a quiet moment between them.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Simon told me ... everything.

BEN
I wanted to tell you.

RACHEL
Why couldn't you.

MERYL returns.

MERYL
(looking out the door - in direction of Chelsea)
That's her dealt with. (Looks ready to take on another) And this must be Rachel.

BEN
Can you give us a moment Meryl?

MERYL
Well miss what do you have to say for yourself?

BEN
Not now Meryl.

RACHEL
Me? What's this got to do with me.

BEN
It doesn't.

MERYL
Still in denial then. So tell me about how this started.

RACHEL
 (looking at BEN - who is
 this?)
 Sorry?

MERYL
 The relationship. Even you two must
 realise ...

RACHEL
 Realise what?

MERYL
 (to BEN)
 I thought you said she was smart.

BEN
 She is. I'm the dumb one.

MERYL
 Okay. At least humour me. How on
 earth did you two meet? Cupid must
 have been having an off day.

BEN and RACHEL look at each other.

FLASHBACKS - SPLIT SCREEN - SIMULTANEOUS HIS STORY AND HER
 STORY

RACHEL'S STORY. INT. PARTY. NIGHT. (STYLE OF HORROR)

RACHEL (V.O.)
 I was dragged to a party by a
 friend of mine who wanted to get
 Simon.

Image of YOUNG SIMON holding court. BEN flirting with a
 woman.

RACHEL (V.O.)
 What she saw in him was beyond me.
 I was in a foul mood and it was the
 last place I wanted to be.

She turns and walks away.

RACHEL (V.O.)
 Until some idiot trips me.

RACHEL begins to fall.

BEN'S STORY. INT. PARTY. NIGHT.

BEN chatting to a woman, and he turns and sees RACHEL standing there like a Botticelli vision (Miranda in *Picnic at Hanging Rock*). The image is foggy and dreamy as opposed to RACHEL's almost black and white vision of the party. He approaches her, she turns and moves away. As she falls he catches her in an embrace.

RACHEL'S STORY. INT. PARTY. NIGHT.

RACHEL in BEN's arms.

RACHEL (V.O.)
He caught me.

RACHEL throws her wine in his face.

BEN'S STORY. INT. PARTY. NIGHT.

Holding RACHEL with wine over his face.

BEN (V.O.)
It was a perfect meeting of minds.

INT. HOSPITAL. DAY.

BEN and RACHEL look at each other.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM. DAY. CONT.

RACHEL
But there was a problem.

BEN
I'm the one with the problem.

MERYL
(impatient)
I'll see you next week Ben for your regular session. (Turns to RACHEL) and you need to see someone now. You have issues.

RACHEL
I don't have issues.

MERYL
(shakes her head)
Also in denial. Tragic.

MERYL leaves.

BEN
And Simon?

RACHEL
I just wanted to find out what was
wrong. (Beat) Between

BEN
Us. (Beat) Me too.

FLASHBACK - FLAT. DAY. SPLIT SCREEN

BEN and RACHEL have the same flashback from their own
perspective.

RACHEL is unpacking boxes, putting books on the bookshelves.
Books about writing.

BEN bursts into the room with flowers. They dance in joy. He
opens champagne.

BEN
I got it.

RACHEL
Got what?

BEN
The directing gig.

RACHEL does a dance.

BEN (CONT'D)
L.A. will be great.

RACHEL stops dancing.

RACHEL
L.A? I thought it was here. In
Sydney.

BEN
The actors don't want to do it
here.

RACHEL
What act?

BEN
No. The green screen stuff.

RACHEL
But you hate green screen.

BEN
It's what they offered. To test me out.

RACHEL
Well I'm not going to L.A. I hate those people.

BEN
But this is my chance. To do it..

RACHEL
Your chance! Always about you.

RACHEL storms out.

The screen widens to BEN alone in the room.

BEN
For you. To prove to you ... I am something.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM. DAY. CONT.

There is a moment between BEN and RACHEL.

RACHEL
I was never committed. (beat) To teaching.

BEN
But you give so much to it. (beat) Too much. To teaching.

RACHEL
But not unconditionally. I think I compete with everyone.

BEN laughs.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Including the students.

BEN
But they know you have their back. I have difficulty committing too. (beat) To teaching.

RACHEL
But I (beat)... they love you.

BEN

Who? You?

RACHEL

Yes. No. I mean the students.

BEN

Maybe I

RACHEL

Everyone in the office thinks you had a breakdown.

BEN

Maybe I just need a break.

NURSE comes in.

RACHEL

Me too. I need to go.

BEN

So soon?

RACHEL leaves. We can see her talking to a staff member through the window to the corridor.

NURSE

Time to get that caste on Ben.
Lucky the cyclist didn't take the dog out.

BEN

Where is Toby?

NURSE

That woman who just left took him.

BEN smiles.

INT. MEDIA OFFICE. DAY

BEN arrives looking fresh and clean cut, hair is shorter. On crutches with a caste on his arm and hobbles towards RACHEL who is at her desk.

BEN

How many grandmothers died this week?

RACHEL
 (laughing)
 About half the class. Guess dogs
 can't eat computers.

BEN
 You are too soft on them.

RACHEL
 At least they don't swoon over me.
 Or tell me their briefs are too
 tight.

BEN
 You're just jealous.

RACHEL
 Of what? Mr. Green Screen?

BEN begins to walk through the office. As he passes JACK'S
 desk he says

BEN
 I fixed Nick's problem. It was in
 the editing software.

JACK looks stumped. BEN goes to the printer where he picks up
 a freshly printed Lesson Plan and exits the office.

INT. DEPARTMENT STORE MAKE UP COUNTER. NIGHT.

RACHEL wanders through the cosmetic department trying to look
 like she isn't looking at expensive creams. A sales assistant
 has clocked her.

SALES ASSISTANT
 Can I help?

RACHEL
 No. Not really. Just looking.

SALES ASSISTANT
 I could sell you the most expensive
 cream on the market but I don't
 believe in doing that.

RACHEL
 Oh what a relief. I just want to
 get a good cream for....

SALES ASSISTANT
 Anti-ageing?

RACHEL

Yes, no I mean to keep my skin looking...

SALES ASSISTANT

Young?

RACHEL

Not so ... saggy.

SALES ASSISTANT

Well these are good creams but this one, well what can I say, it's a miracle cream.

RACHEL

Miracle? Isn't that a bit of an overstatement?

SALES ASSISTANT

Well they have spent a decade researching and testing its effects.

RACHEL

A decade. That's impressive.

SALES ASSISTANT

Why don't you try a small jar.

RACHEL

That's probably a good idea.

SALES ASSISTANT

Can I suggest you try these eyelashes, to bring the focus of your face to your beautiful eyes.

RACHEL

I have beautiful eyes?

SALES ASSISTANT

Has no one told you that?

RACHEL

Well years ago, someone did. But sadly not since.

SALES ASSISTANT

Well I think it's time they took notice again. They need to be seen.

RACHEL
Well I am finding that I am
invisible. Oh OK, why not give them
a try.

SALES ASSISTANT
Shall I charge them?

RACHEL hands over her credit card.

SALES ASSISTANT (CONT'D)
That's a nice dress you have on.

RACHEL
Thank you. It's from a brand in
Surrey Hills. She used to work in
the film industry. Sark you should
have a look.

SALES ASSISTANT
I will.

She rings up the purchases. And hands RACHEL the POS
terminal. RACHEL gasps when she sees the price. Swallows hard
and enters her pin. She takes the parcel and hurries out of
the store. The sales assistant smiles to herself.

INT. MEDIA DEPARTMENT. DAY.

A full day in the office. The phone rings. LUCIANA picks up
as RACHEL sashays into the office. LUCIANA looking at
Rachel's new 'face.'

LUCIANA
Yes I will get onto it right away.
(Puts phone down). Rachel.

RACHEL
I'll get to those marks today
Luciana.

LUCIANA
It's not the marks. Rachel. It's
Max.

RACHEL
I'll see him in class later today.

INT. CLASSROOM. DAY

STUDENTS sit in groups on their phones, some are sleeping.

RACHEL

Okay so today we are looking at mid points. Can anyone tell me what happens at the mid point.

No one answers.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

(tries harder)

Think of a film and its midpoint.
I'll give you five minutes.

No one does anything much. A few STUDENTS google on their phones/laptops.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

So last week I defined the mid point. Can anyone tell me what happens at the mid point.

COREY

It's the half way point of the film.

RACHEL

Yes that's right Corey. And what happens in terms of the story at that point?

Silence around the room and RACHEL becomes frustrated.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

We just did this.

BEN appears in the doorway.

BEN

Think about the beat.

NICK

Is it the moment when the character realises some need.

BEN

Think about what the character feels at that moment.

NICK

Fear they might lose something?

BEN

Yes. So what does the narrative do at that point?

HOLLIE
It shifts.

MAX
Because they are afraid of not
getting the one thing or person
they want...

BEN looks at RACHEL.

RACHEL
And what does the character do?

BEN
They deny the truth.

NICK
Is that the turning point?

RACHEL
No. It's a moment...

BEN
Of recognition.

BEN smiles and hobbles away.

INT. UNIVERSITY CLASSROOM. DAY

RACHEL sits with MAX. BEN passes by and stops. MAX looks at
BEN. RACHEL looks unsure. BEN steps in.

BEN
Hi. Okay if I sit?

MAX
I thought you were going to call.

RACHEL goes to speak but motions to BEN to speak to MAX.

BEN
You okay Max?

MAX
My life is shit. I feel like I'm
not living the life I should be.

BEN
Well growing up can be tough.

MAX

I'm not going through a growth spurt Ben.

BEN

I know. You are confused as to what you should be doing. I get that.

MAX

Ben I'm gay.

RACHEL

And that's fine Max.

MAX

But I don't think they are. There's someone...

BEN

What?

MAX

Who's... Gay.

RACHEL

Well they may not know how they feel...

MAX

I'm thinking of changing gender.

BEN and RACHEL take a deep breath in.

RACHEL

That's a big step Max.

MAX

My dad always wanted a girl, got three boys instead.

BEN has a reaction.

BEN

(slowly)

That's not a good reason to change gender Max.

RACHEL

Not that there's anything wrong with it.

BEN

But you need to be sure.

RACHEL
That it's the right thing for you.

BEN
This is your father's problem not yours.

RACHEL
Changing your gender is not the answer.

BEN
You need to know thyself Max.

MAX's face lights up.

MAX
I knew you would understand Ben.

BEN and RACHEL look perplexed. RACHEL looks quizzically at BEN.

MAX (CONT'D)
Being gay in this industry can't be easy.

MAX gets up and leaves. RACHEL and BEN look stumped.

INT. CLASSROOM. DAY.

BEN starts the class. RACHEL appears and sits at the back.

BEN
So now we are going to look at green screen which increasingly has become a necessary aspect of filmmaking. Can anyone tell me why?

MAX
To replace location shooting?

BEN
That's right Max. Green screen, if done correctly it can open up places and back drops that might be difficult to take a full crew. Any production designer worth their salt knows this and has green screen as part of their tool kit.

MAX

Is that what you did in Shattered Glass with that scene in the hospital?

There is a long pause. BEN looks at RACHEL.

BEN

Um. Yes.

MAX

So when the main guy staggers to the hospital as the image begins to shatter, was that VFX or green screen?

BEN

It was....

INT. HOSPITAL. DAY.

A YOUNG BEN (28) is walking through hospital corridors. As the image begins to shatter, walls begin to crack and fall. YOUNG BEN runs towards the corridor that is not breaking where the walls are not crumbling.

INT. CLASSROOM. DAY.

BEN

It was green screen.

One of RACHEL's eyelashes falls onto the page. She quickly hides it. BEN looks at RACHEL who is trying to pull the second eyelash off. She stops and looks up.

MAX

Was the external a reflection of the internal?

BEN

It was a form of...

RACHEL continues to pull at the eyelash.

MAX

Is it to do with subtext?

BEN

Yes Max. It was all about the subtext.

RACHEL is really tugging at the eyelash.

RACHEL finally gets the eyelash off.

RACHEL
Oh. That's better.

The class turns around to her.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Yes. The subtext

BEN
Find an example of subtext for me.

The STUDENTS get out their phones to search films. BEN goes up to RACHEL who now has pink eye.

BEN (CONT'D)
You okay?

RACHEL
Yes fine. Thanks.

RACHEL gets up. Her notes fall on the floor and the first eyelash with it. She gets flustered and tries to pick things up. RACHEL rushes out of the classroom.

INT. APARTMENT. EARLY MORNING.

Alarm goes off. TOBY is by the bed. BEN wakes.

BEN
(talking to the dog)
Well Toby. It's you and me mate.
Another day finding bits to put
together.

SFX text. BEN picks up the phone. Text from RACHEL: 'Max in hospital'. BEN rushes out. TOBY looks quizzical. There are Lego pieces everywhere.

EXT. HOSPITAL. SUNRISE.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM. DAY

BEN rushes in. Widen to see RACHEL then MAX. MAX's face brightens up when he sees BEN. RACHEL is dressed in very grey leisure wear. She looks like she has been there all night.

BEN walks to the bed, takes a chair.

RACHEL
Bashed in the Cross.

BEN
(to RACHEL)
Why don't you take a break. You
look like you need a strong cup
of... tea.

RACHEL exits.

EXT. HOSPITAL. DAY.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM. DAY. LATER

RACHEL stands in the doorway looking at BEN talking to MAX
holding a cup of tea.

MAX
I just want to find love. But my
emotions take over.

BEN
Yes emotions can be overwhelming.
But only we can own them Max. No
one else can. What happened to you
is not the fault of your emotions
Max.

MAX
I just want to be with someone I
love.

BEN
I get it. Not the guy thing. But
wanting to be loved. And not
rejecting those you ...

MAX
Rejection feels like you will crack
into a thousand pieces. In this
case literally.

BEN
(smiles)
Yes. (beat) Putting them back
together is the tricky bit.

BEN has flashback.

FLASHBACK. INT. APARTMENT. DAY

BEN arrives home and finds CHELSEA in bed with SIMON. BEN is a glass figure that begins to crack. BEN is putting tape on the cracks until the figure collapses. This morphs into real action in the hospital.

INT. HOSPITAL DAY. CONT.

BEN

And sometimes it is easier to do it all yourself than think someone else will do it for you.

MAX

Exactly.

BEN

But that's not the answer Max.

MAX

What is?

BEN

Listening to yourself. Your true self. (Pause) Be kind to yourself. Time to get some rest now.

INT. HOSPITAL CAFE. DAY

RACHEL and BEN sit opposite each other silently. There are posters everywhere about Mental health, Suicide. They drink coffee/tea.

RACHEL

You were very good with him.

BEN

I know what he is going through.

RACHEL

And that is?

BEN looks at the posters around the cafe.

A GOOD SAMARITAN (a la Magda Szubanski) comes to the table, looks sympathetically at RACHEL.

GOOD SAMARITAN

(handing them flyers)

I know this can be a difficult time.

BEN
We are fine. Thanks

GOOD SAMARITAN
Accepting reality is the first
step.

BEN
I said we are fine.

RACHEL
(playing the game)
Tell me what is on your mind.

BEN pauses and suddenly gets RACHEL is playing as if they are
in therapy.

BEN
Well Dr. Kozlowski,

RACHEL
(slumped)
I never wanted to be an academic.

The GOOD SAMARITAN doesn't know what to do.

BEN
What was it that you wanted to be.

RACHEL
A writer.

The GOOD SAMARITAN tries to intercept.

BEN
And what stopped you?

RACHEL
You. No. I mean me. And now you
come along and you're a better
teacher than me.

BEN
And I wanted to be a painter and
one day it was gone. VFX and green
screen became a digital version of
painting.

RACHEL
And now you are your father.

GOOD SAMARITAN

Well if you need to chat or some
advice for your wife you know where
to find me.

RACHEL

I'm not ...

BEN

She is... not.

GOOD SAMARITAN

As I said the first step.

GOOD SAMARITAN leaves. RACHEL and BEN smile. There is a look
of understanding between them.

RACHEL

I should have trusted you. Us.

BEN

Rach, do you think...

RACHEL

I need to trust me.

BEN

I wish I was more normal.

RACHEL

Normal people hurt others. Look
what normal did to Max.

BEN

They are afraid.

RACHEL

You have a positive effect on
people Ben.

BEN

I only ever see it as bad.

RACHEL

But you tell the truth.

BEN

Not to me I don't. And not to you.

INT. CAFÉ. DAY

BEN

So I was doing the pitches with the third years and in listing what they need Cleo was struggling to remember a certain piece of equipment.

RACHEL

Like a Zoom corder?

BEN

No. (Imitating the student) Like, like you know that thing... a camera.

They both fall about laughing. MAX appears.

RACHEL

Hey Max. How are you? Since...

MAX

Good. I've got my life back in order.

BEN

Good on you Max.

FIONA rushes over to them. FIONA is looking imperious. And impatient.

FIONA

Ben. Ben. Hi Rachel. (To Max) and you are?

MAX

I'm in your cinema aesthetics class.

FIONA

Oh yes. Good on you. (She turns to BEN) Ben you're on the shortlist for teacher of the year.

RACHEL smirks. BEN shrugs his shoulders.

EXT. UNIVERSITY. DAY.

INT. CLASSROOM. DAY

The class is sleepy. RACHEL looks frustrated.

RACHEL
So today we will review the
midpoint.

STUDENTS look sleepy.

RACHEL looks at the clock. It is 9.10 am.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Can anyone tell me what it is.

No response.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
You all know this. Come on.

No response. Some STUDENTS are on their phones.

RACHEL is about to speak when she has a thought.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Think about the beat. What does it
say to you?

Class not listening.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
So who watched Groundhog Day.

No one puts their hand up.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Anyone?

Rachel is a bit thrown.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Ah okay.

Just as RACHEL is about to give up.

COREY
Is it the moment when the character
realises some need.

RACHEL
That's right Corey. Facing our need
is one of life's challenges.

HOLLIE
We learnt that from Ben.

RACHEL
I'm sure you did.

Rachel looks through her bag/finds a scene from The Piano.
She starts to show the clip.

EXT. UNIVERSITY. DAY

Shots of university students going about their day.

INT. CLASSROOM. DAY

Rachel turns on the lights. She is facing the class.

RACHEL
Okay in that clip when did the main
character act?

HOLLIE
When they went to get the guy to
help with the piano.

RACHEL
Good Hollie. What do you think the
character felt at that moment.

NICK
Anxiety?

RACHEL
Why?

HOLLIE
Because she needs the piano and not
having it makes her anxious.

RACHEL
Good. Let's expand on the anxiety.

COREY
The piano gives her voice and not
having it makes her anxious.

RACHEL
Excellent. So what does the
narrative do at that point?

HOLLIE
It shifts.

NICK
It's the turning point.

RACHEL
And what guides the turning point?

HOLLIE

The theme?

RACHEL

That's right. Theme and narrative structure inform each other.

HOLLIE

Like in Ben's film the character with the disorder, he finds life too much to bear.

RACHEL is stumped.

EXT. UNIVERSITY. DAY

Shots of university students going about their day.

INT. EDITING SUITE. DAY.

RACHEL is watching 'Shattered Glass'. BEN comes in. RACHEL tries to hide she has been crying.

RACHEL

Is that where you went?

BEN

I wanted to tell you.

RACHEL

No instead you deleted me.

BEN

I just couldn't.

RACHEL

This is me Ben. Me. What part of me did you think would not understand.

BEN

It was me who didn't understand.
(tries to make a joke) Welcome to me. I can't tell you how good it feels to tell you.

RACHEL

Good? Good! Do you know what this means?

BEN

That we can finally be fully honest with each other.

RACHEL

No Ben. It means I took a decision all those years ago based on what you did. Or rather what you didn't do.

BEN

And? You became a successful academic.

RACHEL

But it wasn't my plan. I thought you rejected me because I hadn't made it as a writer. So I went down the theory path. Not what I planned. An accident.

BEN

My life is the accident.

RACHEL

You always land on your feet Ben.

BEN

No I don't.

RACHEL

You only act when your back is up against the wall. Do you even know what you want in life?

BEN

How can anyone want something when they don't know who they are?

RACHEL

This always happens in my life. I find myself at crossroads, choices to make and I never know which path to take. I take the path that I think other people will want me to take. (beat) To admire me.

BEN

I admire you.

RACHEL

For what?

BEN

Being brave. Taking no shit. From anyone.

RACHEL
And you have done that so
successfully haven't you?

RACHEL gets up and leaves.

INT. CLUB. NIGHT.

BEN sits alone. SIMON swaggers in, being acknowledged and acknowledging others in the club. He pulls up next to Ben, gives a nod to the BARTENDER.

SIMON
Hey Bro. Why the long face?

BEN
Why did I decide to go to film
school?

SIMON
To get away. No idea. But glad you
did.

BEN
Yes everyone seemed glad I did.

SIMON
You did well.

BEN
Until... I didn't.

SIMON
These things happen bro. We all
make mistakes.

BEN
Yes you did.

SIMON
She wasn't good for you bro.

BEN
But my career was good for you.

SIMON
Isn't that what brothers do?

BEN
Help themselves to each other's
lives? Not to mention their wives.

SIMON
Don't blame me for what happened.

BEN
I'm not blaming anyone.

SIMON
Really? Remember the first ...
time?

BEN
How can I forget.

SIMON
You were full of blame.

BEN
And then Chelsea came on the scene.

SIMON
And that's when your life took ...

BEN
A wrong turn.

SIMON
Take responsibility for your ...

BEN
What? My disorder?

SIMON
Your mistakes. We all make them.

EXT. PUB. NIGHT.

LUCIANA stands having a smoke.

INT. PUB. NIGHT

BRIANNA is sitting in the corner. BEN approaches.

BEN
Brianna. I'm sorry.

BRIANNA
For what Ben? Breaking my heart.

BEN
Come on Brianna, I never had your
heart.

BRIANNA
I thought you were special.

BEN
I'm not. I'm confused.

BRIANNA
I never seem to find the right guy.

BEN
I think he is right here.

BRIANNA
I told you Ben it's over.

BEN
Yes Brianna. And maybe someone else, someone better will come along.

RACHEL enters the pub and sees BEN and BRIANNA.

BRIANNA
You need to be honest Ben. With everyone.

BEN
Yes I know.

RACHEL leaves as FERGAL enters.

EXT. PUB. NIGHT.

LUCIANA stands there having a smoke. RACHEL exits the pub.

LUCIANA
Running away?

RACHEL
I can't seem to time anything right.

LUCIANA
Or see what is right in front of you.

RACHEL
There's nothing Luciana. He's a player and I'm...

LUCIANA
Yes very clever we all know.

RACHEL
Getting a proper PhD is no walk in
the park you know.

LUCIANA
Yeah. All the degrees, books and
clever articles in the world
doesn't mean you know how to read
people.

RACHEL
I can read people Luciana. I teach
screenwriting after all.

LUCIANA
Not yourself you can't. Stop
analysing everything and give him a
chance.

EXT. UNIVERSITY. DAY

Shots of students streaming into the university.

INT. CAFE. DAY

RACHEL
Do you miss it?

BEN
Directing? I thought I would but I
miss...

JACK appears.

JACK
I've got two tickets to an advance
screening at the Chauvel. (Pause)
Rachel would you like to ...?

RACHEL holds her breath as she looks at BEN. BEN shrugs his
shoulders.

JACK (CONT'D)
It's the sequel to our film - how
marriage has survived.

RACHEL
Thanks Jack that seems like it
would be okay.

JACK
Great. I'll meet you at the front
at six?

RACHEL
Yes. See you then.

JACK walks off. RACHEL looks at BEN. He smiles. And drinks his coffee. She smiles and drinks her tea.

EXT. CINEMA. NIGHT.

INT. CAFE FOYER BAR. CINEMA. NIGHT.

RACHEL
That was interesting.

JACK
They don't know what they are
doing.

RACHEL
We have to let the next generation
tell it like they see it.

JACK
But they don't see anything.

RACHEL
They do. We just don't like it. Or
let them.

JACK
But stories are what connect us.

RACHEL
They still come back each year to
your graduate session. That shows
they know you know something.

JACK
You applied for the deputy dean
position?

RACHEL
Reluctantly.

JACK
Good we still have you.

JACK smiles. RACHEL is touched.

INT. MEDIA DEPARTMENT OFFICE. DAY

There is a cake with STAFF hanging around. RACHEL enters.

RACHEL
What's all this then?

LUCIANA
For Ben. He won teacher of the year.

RACHEL
He's a good teacher.

LUCIANA
Fiona has nominated him for the deputy dean position.

RACHEL
Sorry what?

LUCIANA
The deputy dean position.

BEN walks into the office, full of confidence. People cheer and say congratulations.

RACHEL
So you planned it all along then?

BEN
Planned what?

RACHEL
The deputy dean position.

BEN
I don't know what you are talking about.

RACHEL
Again the lies. I should have known you only ever think about yourself.

FLASHBACK. AWARD CEREMONY.

REPEAT OF FLASHBACK OF AWARDS CEREMONY AND BEN IS FLIRTING WITH CHELSEA. SCREEN RIPS.

RACHEL'S POV. She sees another man -the man we have seen on the dart board. RACHEL stops.

BEN
No. (beat) I'm working on
understanding my feelings...

RACHEL flees.

BEN (CONT'D)
... for you.

LUCIANA has been watching this intently and she turns to
JACK.

LUCIANA
Just so you know. Henry is going to
apply even though he is on
sabbatical. Someone told him about
it. Can't imagine who.

JACK
Still calling mummy then.

BEN
I don't care about the job, or
Henry.

SEQUENCE #6 (WHAT WAS I THINKING?)

INT. MEDIA DEPARTMENT OFFICE. DAY.

LUCIANA is putting mail into the mail trays for the staff.
RACHEL enters - looking forlorn.

RACHEL
Anything for me?

LUCIANA
Let me check. (taking a pair of
glasses around her neck) Oh yes
these glasses.

RACHEL
I don't need glasses Luciana.

RACHEL walks off.

LUCIANA
Still can't see what's really
important.

INT. UNIVERSITY CLASSROOM. DAY

MAX, confident, doing a pitch to BEN, RACHEL and JACK.

MAX

So instead of Rick betraying his love for Ilsa he follows his heart to go with Victor.

RACHEL

So he is in love with Victor?

MAX

That's what is not spelled out.

BEN

True love never is.

MAX

Rick decides his heart is in defeating the Nazis and not just stuck in ...

BEN AND RACHEL

Teaching.

BEN and RACHEL look at each other.

RACHEL

Had you thought about Ilsa staying with her true love ... Rick.

JACK who has been typing on his computer suddenly perks up.

JACK

After all he is the one who gave her a life.

BEN

But Rick and Ilsa had..

RACHEL

Dreams... I mean Paris.

MAX

It's a queer reading of Casablanca.

BEN AND RACHEL

Good good, very innovative Max.

JACK

Queer is certainly the word.

RACHEL

What made you decide that Rick needs to be with Victor.

JACK

I think you have misread Casablanca. It's about winning.

BEN

I think it goes to core of what love is.

RACHEL

It's about loyalty. To the cause and to others who help the cause.

MAX

It's about being with the person who makes you feel alive. Like you are Rachel with Ben.

RACHEL looks uncomfortable.

MAX (CONT'D)

I think we spend our lives being with someone who is safe, not who makes us feel...

RACHEL

Thank you Max. We'll send you feedback at the end of the day.

MAX exits. JACK and BEN perk up looking at RACHEL.

JACK

Do you still want me to help with the directing class Rachel?

RACHEL

(looking like a betrayer)
Thanks Jack that would be most...

JACK

Helpful. That's me helpful Jack.

BEN leaves. RACHEL looks after him.

JACK (CONT'D)

You know he still holds a candle for the wife.

INT. TOILET. DAY.

RACHEL rushes into the toilet.

INT. CLASSROOM CORRIDOR. DAY.

Students start to gather around the toilet door. MAX is one of them.

INT. TOILET. DAY.

RACHEL washes her hands and as she is wiping them with a paper towel she hears his name.

MAX (O.S.)
Ben tells me the opposite of what
Rachel tells me.

RACHEL straightens up. She goes to the door to listen.

INT. UNIVERSITY CORRIDOR. DAY.

MAX
She says to forget those who hurt
us.

INT. TOILET. DAY.

RACHEL

RACHEL
That's right Max.

INT. UNIVERSITY CORRIDOR. DAY.

MAX
Ben says we need to own up to our
feelings.

INT. TOILET. DAY.

RACHEL at the door.

RACHEL
That's the pot calling the kettle
black.

INT. UNIVERSITY CORRIDOR. DAY.

MAX
But I think she's the one who
denies feelings.

INT. TOILET. DAY.

RACHEL straightens up.

RACHEL
Is that so?

INT. UNIVERSITY CORRIDOR. DAY.

STUDENT
My step dad works in the industry
and tells me Ben had a breakdown.

INT. TOILET. DAY.

RACHEL looks shocked. She goes to the door.

INT. UNIVERSITY CORRIDOR. DAY.

STUDENT
Over some woman.

MAX
Who?

INT. TOILET. DAY.

RACHEL straightens up. At this point the camera is looking from the top of the two areas with RACHEL on one side of the wall and the STUDENTS on the other.

INT. UNIVERSITY CORRIDOR. DAY.

STUDENT
Don't know but Dean says no one
mentions it. All he knows is he
came back from L.A. and found
her...

INT. TOILET. DAY.

RACHEL strains to try to hear but the toilet flushes and someone comes out from the cubicle.

WOMAN
(washing her hands)
You okay?

RACHEL
Yes. Yes. Just, checking ... the door, the lock wasn't working the other day.

INT. CLASSROOM CORRIDOR. DAY.

MAX
That would hurt him.

INT. TOILET. DAY.

RACHEL straightens up. The WOMAN is drying her hands, watching RACHEL.

RACHEL
I did not hurt him.

WOMAN looks at RACHEL.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
I mean I wonder who hurt I mean broke the lock.

INT. CLASSROOM CORRIDOR. DAY.

MAX
Do you think he's still in love with her?

STUDENT
Don't know. Don't care.

INT. TOILET. DAY.

RACHEL
I'm sure you ... don't care.

WOMAN
Sorry?

RACHEL
I'm sure you do care about the
lock.

WOMAN looks at her strangely as she tries to get past RACHEL
at the door and exits.

STUDENT
That sucks.

MAX
Yeah. And I think he is still in
love with her.

The students wander off to the classroom. And we hear:

STUDENT
Anyone know where Rachel is?

EXT. APARTMENT. DAY.

RACHEL stands outside the apartment. She sees CHELSEA arrive.
BEN opens the door. BEN sees RACHEL. RACHEL turns and leaves.

BEN
Rachel.

RACHEL looks back, looks at CHELSEA and then walks away.

BEN (CONT'D)
I have ...something to tell you.

RACHEL stops. She looks again and then continues walking. BEN
runs after her. Then stops.

BEN (CONT'D)
I've got

CHELSEA
A disorder Ben. Time to own up.

RACHEL is out of range.

BEN
Ice cuts like a knife.

INT. APARTMENT. DAY

BEN
I want out of the marriage Chelsea.

CHELSEA

But we were, I mean are, such a good team.

BEN

It's not a team I want to play on any more. It costs me too much.

CHELSEA

Now we can have those dreams

BEN

What does that mean?

CHELSEA

With the settlement we can go to L.A. chase those dreams - your dreams, our dreams.

BEN

What are my dreams Chelsea?

CHELSEA

To .. To.. make it in Hollywood.

BEN

No. That's your dream. I thought it was that, but in reality it was to ... to prove something to...

CHELSEA

He's dead Ben.

BEN

Not to me. Is that your game Chelsea? To get your share?

CHELSEA

(angry)

No. Not at all.

BEN

You make out that you are helping me Chelsea but in reality it is you you are looking after. I lost track of who I was or meant to be. I want out.

CHELSEA stands there fuming.

CHELSEA

You act out of fear of rejection
Ben, and reject others to feel in
control. (beat) She won't give it
to you.

CHELSEA leaves.

BEN

I know.

ACT THREE

SEQUENCE #7 (NEW ME BEGINS TO EMERGE)

INT. DEAN'S OFFICE. DAY

Close up on BEN with caste.

BEN

So there I was on the chair. I mean
on the chair.

Shot widens to see that we are in the Dean's office. FIONA
looks aghast.

BEN (CONT'D)

And everyone thinks I tried. You
know. But I didn't.

FIONA

I heard you and Rachel are looking
after Max.

BEN

Yes. He's fine.

FIONA

I think you should report it to
cause for concern.

BEN

He doesn't want us to.

FIONA

But for your own protection Ben.
You don't want to be liable.

BEN

Liable. Me? He doesn't want it
Fiona.

(MORE)

BEN (CONT'D)

Is that what education is now - avoiding liability - from managing expectations to certificates to prove you can climb a ladder. What about the lies we tell them that they will be directors, writers who can change the world? When did teaching become a business? And a snake oil one at that.

FIONA shifts uncomfortably in her chair. She fiddles with the pen she has in her hand. Close up on her notebook, on which she has apparently been taking notes, and there is a page of doodling.

INT. RACHEL'S HOUSE. DAY

Rachel is packing up the house. The dart board is in a box of rubbish.

INT. UNIVERSITY EDIT SUITES CORRIDOR. DAY

BEN is walking down the corridor of edit suites. He comes across BRIANNA and FERGAL in a passionate embrace. RACHEL appears in the corridor.

BEN

Don't go in there. Fergal finally made his cut.

MAX appears from one of the suites and ushers them.

MAX

(smirking)

Hey got something to show you.

INT. UNIVERSITY EDIT SUITE. DAY. LATER.

BEN and RACHEL are alone.

BEN

I need you to know....

RACHEL

I think I already do Ben.

BEN

I didn't apply for the job.

RACHEL
Oh. That. Another of Fiona's way to stir application frenzy.

BEN
I hear Henry got it. Sorry.

RACHEL
No surprises there really. Pale male and stale - that's the criteria.

BEN
(laughing)
That's me.

RACHEL
Pale and male yes. Stale no. You've brought new energy to the department. We needed shaking up.

BEN
Maybe we could...I could...

RACHEL gets up to leave.

RACHEL
Ben I've got something to tell you.

BEN begins fidgeting. RACHEL is also fidgeting with the door handle. They speak simultaneously.

BEN
I have a disorder.

RACHEL
I have a fellowship.

The moment hangs in the air.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Gives an opportunity to reconnect with Dan.

BEN
Yes.

RACHEL
After the divorce.

MAX enters the suite.

MAX
So what did you think?

BEN
Best news. I mean ... best... video
essay.

MAX
(beaming)
If it wasn't for you two I'd...

BEN
Be better off?

MAX
You both believed in me.

RACHEL
Yes believing in yourself is
important.

MAX
I'm proud and out. And no longer in
love with Fergal.

RACHEL AND BEN
Fergal!

SEQUENCE #8 (THE NEW ME ARRIVES)

INT. APARTMENT. DAY

SIMON stands nervously watching BEN as he packs up the Lego
people.

SIMON
You okay?

BEN
I was always okay. It was how other
people saw me that I had a problem.
Normal in this world is a lie.

SIMON
I've got something to ...

BEN
Tell me? I'm all ears.

SIMON
I was wondering if you would like
the directing gig.

At this moment BEN is holding the book 'An Actor Prepares'.
He looks at it.

BEN
 Why? The prodigal TJ not PC enough
 for Screen Oz?

SIMON
 No. Screen Australia thinks it
 needs a director with an
 understanding of ...

BEN
 What Simon?

SIMON
 Emotions.

There is a long pause.

BEN
 I went to L.A. to run away from my
 emotions. But I found out that
 emotions always catch up with you.
 No matter what mistakes you make.

FLASHBACK APARTMENT. DAY

BEN and RACHEL look at each other.

BEN
 So will you come?

RACHEL
 (begins to tear up)
 I just got this writing gig.

BEN
 I know. Maybe you can do it from
 there?

RACHEL
 Are you running to a career or from
 us? I need to be here.

INT. APARTMENT. DAY

SIMON
 So? The directing gig?

BEN
 Thanks Simon but I finally found
 where I belong. I like teaching. It
 suits me. I'm more like Dad than I
 like to admit.

SIMON
He wasn't that bad.

BEN
No. But by the time I came along he
wanted a daughter. I had to play
rebel.

There is a moment of recognition in BEN's face.

SIMON
You could always read the lie of
the land better than anyone I know.
Remember Amsterdam.

BEN
(reflecting)
Yes Good times.

SIMON
Going into that bar. You knew what
was coming.

BEN
Well they did look hungry for a
fight.

SIMON
Whatever the scrape, you always had
my back. And the students know it
too.

BEN
Maybe. But I am lucky to have them
too.

SIMON
I should have had your back more.

TEXT arrives. BEN reads it.

BEN
She's agreed to the settlement.
Fifty fifty. And dad's estate is
not included.

SIMON
What changed?

BEN
Probably some deal where she needs
the money now. You know producers.
They'll screw anyone.

SIMON

I do. About that Ben....

BEN

You shouldn't have done it Simon.

SIMON

I'm sorry.

BEN

About what? Having it off with my wife? About the breakdown that I suffered? Or about the loss of my career?

SIMON

All of it.

BEN

You're my brother. Brothers are meant to look out for each other.

SIMON

Give me a break Ben.

BEN

It was me that had the breakdown. I was rejected, then betrayed and people wonder why I went off the rails. I blamed the wrong woman because (beat) I didn't want to lose you.

SIMON

As they say nobody's perfect.

BEN

Trying to be is the problem. And by the way lose the fancy watches and shoes - you look like a bad copy of Harvey Weinstein.

INT. APARTMENT. DAY. LATER

BEN sorts through books. Packs up the Lego men. The apartment exudes a sense of calm. BEN comes across a script by RACHEL, dated 2000. There is a knock at the door. BEN goes to answer it. LINDSAY stands there with the dog and a bag in her hand.

LINDSAY

Hi Ben.

BEN
Hi. (sees bag) Everything alright?

LINDSAY
It's my son. He's... he's ... not well.

BEN
I am sorry to hear that Lindsay.

LINDSAY
I need to take care of him for a while.

BEN
Yes. Just give him time. It's the best healer.

LINDSAY looks at TOBY. TOBY looks at BEN.

LINDSAY
He's allergic to dogs.

BEN
Happy to.

LINDSAY
It will be only until he gets better.

BEN
(looking at the dog)
I think he belongs here Lindsay.

LINDSAY
Thanks Ben. You are a good soul.

LINDSAY leaves. BEN looks at TOBY.

BEN
I don't think we are in Kansas anymore Toto. And you're going to win over the witch from the Eastern Suburbs.

TOBY barks.

EXT. APARTMENT BLOCK. DAY.

RACHEL stands outside the apartment block.

FLASHBACK - TWENTY YEARS AGO. DAY

RACHEL outside BEN's apartment. LINDSAY (20 years younger) comes out of the building next door.

LINDSAY
He left last week.

EXT. APARTMENT BLOCK. DAY. CONT.

RACHEL looks up, sees BEN on the balcony smoking and reading the script. She tries to hide but he has seen her.

INT. APARTMENT. DAY

RACHEL stands nervously in front of BEN. He holds her script.

BEN
It's good.

RACHEL
It's another Australian coming of age tale.

BEN
But in this one they grow up. Funny how truth can only be found in fiction.

RACHEL
I have to do this.

BEN
I know.

RACHEL
There's something I've always wanted to ask.

BEN
Shoot. It's a day of revelations.

RACHEL
Did you leave because...

BEN AND RACHEL
I am too much.

There is moment between them.

BEN
My turn to say sorry.

RACHEL

For what?

BEN

For not seeing you. Ironic really.

RACHEL

Why don't you come visit.

BEN

I might just do that. For now I
need to look after Toto.

TOTO goes and gets his lead.

EXT. CLIFF TOPS. DAY

BEN walks TOTO as the shot rises to see them on the path and
the ocean beyond. A plane flies in the distance.

EXT. UNIVERSITY. VARIOUS. DAY

BEN walks into campus. He looks confident, students stream
pass and say hi. FIONA passes him and there is a moment of
acknowledgement.

INT. MEDIA DEPARTMENT OFFICE. DAY.

LUCIANA and BEN arrive at the door at the same time. They
look at each other and burst through the door together.

LUCIANA AND BEN

Bring it on.

THE END

CRITICAL REFLECTION ON CREATIVE PRACTICE 2:

A FILM, TITLED *THE ACCIDENTAL ACADEMIC* DEVELOPED FROM CREATIVE PRACTICE 1, AN ENSEMBLE SITCOM, *IT'S ACADEMIC*.

The aim of this creative practice

The aim of Creative Practice 2 (CP2) was to apply the theoretical approaches discussed in Chapter Two. The objective was to explore that the MP enables or exposes information, creating a bind in one or more of the characters with a resolution that challenges generic expectations to demonstrate that CP1 is related to CP2. By writing a feature film set in the same world as CP1 and with some of the same characters, I set out to write a film script that has a bind at the midpoint (MP) and challenge the 'happily ever after' of the romcom.

Developing this creative practice

Choosing Ben and Rachel as the protagonists was the first task, in order to subject these characters to some degree of transformation, yet not couple up at the end.

The catalyst for CP1, the ensemble sitcom, is Ben's return to the media department. In demonstrating the relationship between CP1 and CP2, Ben's absence must be explained in the film (the bicycle accident that lands him in hospital) while in CP1 his colleagues believe it is a breakdown. Further, I wanted to explore that CP1 sits within Act Two of the film, the basis for the theoretical framework in Chapter Three.

I developed the logline, synopsis, one page story and outline of the script. It was during the outline phase that I realised the MP operates differently in some comedies about relationships. Here research was informing practice in real time and was a contributing factor to the discussion in Chapter Two.

Insights gleaned from this creative practice

Ben's want is to direct actors (in live action) but then it shifts to wanting to have a relationship with Rachel (a goal), undermined by his need to accept he suffers from emotional dysregulation which prevents him having stable and sustainable relationships (or so he believes). Rachel's bind is less clear. First she wants to work in the industry, then decides to

apply for the Deputy Dean position. In this draft, for both protagonists the bind is not strong, and I offer that the reason is because the want+need is not clearly established for Ben or for Rachel. Furthermore, the flaw (or behaviour) of each protagonist is not directly connected to their need and thus not at odds with their want, which I argue is essential. Currently, the MP in CP2 is a series of moments from which Ben flees rather than confront or become trapped by the (emotional) tension. While Ben's want is clear (to direct real people), it is his bind (undermined by his need to be honest about his emotional dysregulation) that must be evident at the MP and, in this draft, it is not. This suggests that I have not established a connection between Ben's want and need/flaw that will drive the tension towards the MP, culminating in a bind.

While I argue that the bind enables comic tension in the second half of Act Two, I surmise that the reason the bind is not strong in this draft is because the catch has not been established at the beginning of Act Two. And while there is a catch – that Ben must teach at the same place as Rachel – this does not test his flaw of commitment issues. In fact, his need is not clear. Is it fear of relationships or commitment or a need to own his disorder? Rather than confronting this script problem, I moved the focus to Rachel becoming aware that she is 'an accidental academic' and I suspect I did this instinctively because of the failure of Ben's bind at the MP. While I recognise this is a weakness in the script, I contend that it is possible to have the bind shift or affect two characters, but it should not be a solution to a problem. However, the dramatic question (DQ) (will these two protagonists face their need that have resulted in misunderstandings), is answered by the resolution (if not by comic tension as intended, arising from the theoretical discussion); this leaves space for other questions unanswered, such as the relationship between Ben and Rachel.

In *The Nutshell Technique*⁸⁶ Jill Chamberlain offers that at the end of Act One the protagonist's want must be clear, yet there must be a catch which then tests their flaw. But if Ben's flaw is changed to having a fear of relationships (stemming from his disorder, rather than to hide his disorder), then the catch that tests his flaw is being in the same world as Rachel, whom he blames for his breakdown.

Chamberlain posits that the flaw is tested at the crisis point, the second TP. However, in this draft Ben's crisis, at the end of Act Two, is realising Chelsea, his soon to be ex-wife, uses their relationship to exploit him – this would then be a direct connection to the reason for the flaw – his fear of commitment arising from a fear of exploitation. This framework enabled me to see that the catch for each protagonist is not in play by the beginning of Act Two and is one possible reason for a weak bind. Similarly, while Rachel's catch is mentoring Ben, this needs to come earlier and be related to her flaw of competitiveness. As such I offer that the current plotting does not build in tension because there is no catch for Ben or Rachel – her flaw (competitiveness in her belief she is the best teacher) is not tied to her current want (to work in the industry). If I shifted Rachel's want to covet the Deputy Dean position, and to succeed in getting the job she must mentor Ben (delivered by the Dean) with whom she competes as the best teacher – her flaw would then be tested, as per Chamberlain, by a catch. This change in story and plotting would give Rachel more to lose when she discovers Ben is being nominated by the Dean for the position of Deputy Dean, forcing her to a crisis point at second turning point (TP2). I further offer that maybe the lack of comedy is because of the absence of a catch for either character. I offer that developing a plot point related to a catch for each character would increase the comic tension, as their flaw is tested by the narrative.

⁸⁶ Jill Chamberlain, *The Nutshell Technique* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016).

Implications for practice

The one-page synopsis in the Appendix concludes with:

The Accidental Academic is a comedy about the accidents we make in life and the opportunity to correct them when given a second chance.

The theme of ‘accidents’ in the film is evidenced by Ben becoming a good teacher by accident, yet the twist is that Rachel realises that she has become ‘the accidental academic,’ resulting from a decision made twenty years ago. While Ben is currently caught in a bind centred on a secret that he attempts to hide, in sequence #6 Rachel is the one now in a bind, having given up a dream and realising that she is trapped in the comfort of academia. It is the revelation of the disorder in CP2 and the immediate actions resulting from Ben’s initial breakdown that changes how Rachel views her life and indeed him. Revelation of significant information is related to character transformation and should be considered when reworking texts where change is either enabled through the narrative or entrapped by it. CP2 is about what happens when we do not ‘know thyself’ – and may give insight into how to increase comic tension. Articulating this might have helped in connecting motivation and goal when structuring the plot. *The Accidental Academic* has a story, but in reordering the events by way of testing each of the protagonists’ flaws, I hope will enable the bind and thus the tension in Act Two. On reflection to date, for each character there must be a strong connection between their need and their change (transformation) underpinned by the catch.

What are the implications of insights gained from the theoretical chapter and the writing of the film script to be applied to creative practice 3?

The Accidental Academic is a “backstory” film which incorporates the following:

- Theme: misunderstanding resulting in choices that became accidental.
- A MP which attempts to explore the bind of the main character.

- Evidence that the bind can shift to another protagonist (but not as a solution).
- Transformational change in the protagonists yet challenging the traditional genre definition of the romcom.

For any text post-transformation of the main characters, the writer needs to ask what questions remain unanswered which can then be explored in a subsequent text, particularly a comedy series where character relations play out differently to that of the feature film.

CP2 concludes with each character realising that their lives have taken a different course based on a misunderstanding, and while one leaves, the other stays behind to continue their healing, yet both offer a “hopeful future.” Given that the situation and characters from CP1 (the sitcom) are now employed in CP2, CP1 is defined by unresolved histories between the two protagonists. When those histories are resolved (if not the relationship) at the conclusion of CP2, CP1 therefore sits within the second act of CP2 – where the unresolved history drives the tension and struggle between these two, before the TP into Act Three – with Rachel’s departure. CP2 testifies to many of the observations and propositions discussed in Chapter Two as well as Chapter One, however it fails in demonstrating the nature of the bind in the relationship comedy because, as noted, the bind moved from one character to another, and the flaw was not tested by a catch for either protagonist.

As the relationship between Ben and Rachel was not resolved in CP2 (or CP1), and with both CPs in the same locale (the university) I posit that the relationship can only be resolved in another environment (situation), allowing for new (untested) flaws to be triggered. CP3, *Have You Fed the Cat?* is a narrative comedy series that places the main characters, Ben and Rachel, in a new environment a few years after the film. Picking up from CP2, CP3 is governed by a DQ (will they get together?). I argue in Chapter Three that a series governed by a DQ can enable seriality.

SECTION THREE

NARRATIVE COMEDY



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CHAPTER THREE

THE SERIAL TENSION OF NARRATIVE COMEDY AND ITS TURNING POINTS

This thesis began with an examination of the ensemble comedy and then turned to the film comedy and character transformation. I now examine the episodic narrative comedy to ascertain what elements need to be considered when developing a series from a feature length film. The narrative comedy, born of the sitcom in terms of character and relational dynamics, has emerged as a term that categorises those screen comedies, often shot single camera, having a story arc which enables, and in some cases demands, sequential viewing. Examples include, from the UK, *Fleabag* (2016-19), and *Gavin and Stacey* (2007-2010)¹, and from Australia *Kath & Kim* (2002-4), which I analyse extensively in *Situation Comedy, Character, and Psychoanalysis*.² I argue that what defines both the sitcom and narrative comedy is the relational dynamics which result in repeated entrapment underpinning the re-situation³ – the return to the emotional stasis – not the form of production (studio or location filming) or order of viewing.

In *Situation Comedy*, I determined that the closed narrative structure of the sitcom has three turning points (TPs), each forcing a ninety-degree turn, creating a rectangular shape that represents the plot, and which enables the emotional stasis to be re-established.⁴ What has perplexed me since elucidating that shape is the relationship between the three TPs and the traditional three act structure, wherein the TP is the point when the narrative shifts gears and a new act begins. This thesis has established that in film comedy the midpoints (MPs) and

¹ *Fleabag*, creator Phoebe Waller-Bridge, prod. Two Brothers Pictures (UK: BBC, 2016-19). *Gavin & Stacey*, creators James Corden, Ruth Jones, prod. Baby Cow Productions (UK: BBC, 2007-2010).

² *Kath & Kim*, wrs. Gina Riley & Jane Turner, prods. ABCTV, Riley Turner Productions (Australia: ABC, 2002-2004, ATN7 2007). D.T. Klika, *Situation Comedy, Character, and Psychoanalysis: On the Couch with Lucy, Basil and Kimmie* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018).

³ Barry Curtis, 'Aspects of Sitcom,' in *Television Sitcom: BFI Dossier no. 17*, edited by Jim Cook (London: British Film Institute, 1982) pp. 4-12.

⁴ Klika, as before, Chapter 4, 'The Tension of the (Closed) Narrative,' p.147 and figure 4.3.

TPs act in different ways to those in drama. As such, this analysis seeks to explain *why* the narrative turns at each of the TPs in an episode, as opposed to *how*. This chapter asks: What is the nature of the TP in the episodic narrative structure of comedy?

In Chapter Two, I determined that the MP in relationship film comedies delivers to the main character a bind and rather than the character responding to their need, they attempt to subvert the narrative, until the second TP into Act Three (that is they deny the challenge offered by the narrative and instead attempt to shape it to serve their goal). If the sitcom/narrative comedy episode has three TPs, then I posit that one of those is doing more than simply being a TP. If so, then I offer that the second TP has the greatest impact on the rectangular shape of the plot. In this chapter I interrogate the middle TP to find that the character acts in ways that both progress the narrative, whilst actively denying information that has been delivered, thus enabling the right-angled turn in the middle of the episode. In doing so, in the Textual Analysis I deconstruct an episode of *The Young Offenders* (2018-present)⁵ to argue that the second TP operates in much the same way as the midpoint (MP) discussed in Chapter Two.

Critically analysing two films, *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir* (1947) and *The Young Offenders* (2016),⁶ both of which have been developed as half-hour comedy series, I find that each harbours some elements of seriality centred on a relationship.⁷ The first is a romantic relationship and the latter centred on relationships between friends, overshadowed by the romantic involvement of one of the character's mother with the friends' antagonist, the local police officer.⁸

⁵ *The Young Offenders*, dev. Peter Foott, prods BBC and Vico Films (UK: RTE, BBC, 2018 – present).

⁶ *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir*, wr. Philip Dunne, dir. Joseph Mankiewicz (20th Fox, 1947). *The Young Offenders*, wr., dir. Peter Foott (Wildcard Distribution, 2016).

⁷ This thesis spawned an article exploring the relationship between the film and subsequent series.

Deborah T. Klika, 'Caught in the Second Act: The Relationship between Film Comedy and the TV Sitcom,' in *Comunicazioni Sociali. Journal of Media, Performing Arts and Cultural Studies* (N3, 2019) pp. 372-388.

⁸ *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir*, dev. Jean Holloway, prod. 20th Century Fox Television (USA: NBC, 1968, ABC, 1969-1970). *The Young Offenders*, dev. Peter Foott, as before (2018 – present).

Further, I reflect that the MP in the film might be a pointer to the sitcom, or comedies with some degree of closed narrative. To that end, this chapter critically examines the relationship between character and narrative to offer that when developing a comedy series (be it narrative comedy or sitcom) from a film, it is essential to know which characters migrate from the film, what issues remain unresolved and how might those tensions/flaws be triggered.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND APPLICATION

As stated in the Introduction, Murray Smith writes that "...our 'entry into' narrative structures is mediated by character."⁹ While Smith is arguing for a conception of character that straddles humanist and structuralist conceptions, he explicates that it is the character which engages us with the narrative. Critically examining the character in a series, Radha O'Meara writes that "[c]haracter change seems to be an essential ingredient of narrative, so television series require frequent character changes to sustain their stories..."¹⁰ My argument centres on characters refusing to undergo any change. Sol Austerlitz writes:

[*Friends*] success, then is the product of two competing urges: to melodrama and to comedy. Emotion is delicately balanced by laughs, but at peak moments, comedy is scuppered entirely in favor of sentiment... Ross and Rachel's saga is the through-line of *Friends*, their decade-long, winding paths to happiness the emotional heart of the show.¹¹

It is the delineation between melodrama and comedy as noted by Austerlitz that is of interest, specifically in the narrative comedy where there is a series arc governed by some DQ. O'Meara further writes "... character change in sitcom series is often treated comically or flippantly, whereas character change in serials is conventionally treated dramatically."¹² The

⁹ Murray Smith, *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion, and the Cinema* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) p.18.

¹⁰ Radha O'Meara, 'Changing the way we think about character change in episodic television series,' in *Journal of Screenwriting* (6:2, 2015: 189-98) p.198.

¹¹ Saul Austerlitz, *Sitcom. A History in 24 Episodes from I Love Lucy to Community* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2014) p.265.

¹² O'Meara, as before, p.197.

point is echoed by Austerlitz, in that character change in narrative comedy veers towards melodrama and is played out over the series, whereas the lack of change in a character – or rather their refusal to change – is treated comically. In other words, the refusal to change by the character in the sitcom underscores the comicality. I add, and referring to O’Meara’s analysis, that should any change occur, it does so *within* the episode’s narrative. Analysing the soap or drama series with elements of seriality, O’Meara also notes that

There are three key types of character action observable in television narrative, each of which imply an internal, psychological change: the **experience of significant life events**, such as births, deaths, marriages, moving house and getting or losing a job; the experience of **intense emotions** and especially their physical manifestations, such as screaming with terror, raging in anger or kissing passionately; and **observable contrasts in behaviour**, as when a former miser squanders money or a former killjoy throws a party.¹³ (My bolding).

TV writer and script consultant Ellen Sandler offers that in a (drama) series the DQ contains a dilemma, wherein the main character is caught between different value codes, often between public duty and private life or behaviour.¹⁴ This is not dissimilar to the bind as discussed in relation to film comedy as well as the comic antihero in their persistence to deny certain realities. Steve Kaplan writes that “[a] film features a problem that can be solved (or not) within two hours. In a sitcom, there is an ongoing dilemma that can never be solved, because it is the basic premise of the series.”¹⁵ While Greg Smith notes that “[in serial television the needs of the arc and of the episode are often at odds with each other.”¹⁶ Whilst Smith is analysing the British one-hour comedy-drama, *Cold Feet* (1997-present), and applying analysis from both the traditional serial and the limited six-episode series, he raises issues not just about the merging of such narratives but how they are developed. Smith

¹³ O’Meara, ‘Changing the way we think about character change in episodic television series,’ as before, p.190.

¹⁴ Open Program Course, AFTRS, Sydney, 2013.

¹⁵ Steve Kaplan, *The Comic Hero’s Journey. Serious Story Structure for Fabulously Funny Films* (Studio City CA: Michael Weise Productions, 2018) p.57.

¹⁶ Greg M. Smith, ‘A Case of *Cold Feet*: Serial Narration and the Character Arc,’ in *Journal of British Cinema and Television* (3:1, 2006: 82-94) p. 83.

continues: “The pacing of a serial depends on the close coordination of arc and episode, providing some narrative events whose impact is primarily local, while others move the character forwards towards turning points.”¹⁷ Here turning points are related to the character’s arc over the series.¹⁸ Thus, the series narrative arc of the characters reflect bigger changes in the character’s view and engagement with the world, whereas the episodic narrative raises an issue that enables us to see more layers of the character, informing behaviour in light of the larger narrative arc. Smith puts it succinctly: “these plot events give us *resolution without progress* in the serial narrative;”¹⁹ in doing so, Smith makes the point that each episode of *Cold Feet* ends on a cliff-hanger. This is less so with the narrative comedy/sitcom, where the demand to return to the emotional stasis (or only slightly moved on) is a defining element. Thus, characters in the narrative comedy have neither progression nor resolution until the concluding episode (if there is one). The second series of *Fleabag* (2019)²⁰ is a good example of the narrative comedy series with a DQ – allowing for elements of seriality as well as resolution within each episode as well as in the concluding episode.

Furthermore, in the Textual Analysis I critically analyse the 1960s sitcom, *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir*, (1968-70)²¹ to find that the MP of the originating film gives insight into the potential for both repeatability (the ghost and Mrs. Muir never consummate their relationship) and seriality (they slowly begin to accept that time separates them, but love does not). The emotional struggle is often found at the MP, and I offer is a good starting point in developing a series, specifically one that has a narrative arc and DQ centred on a relationship, pregnant with potential.

¹⁷ G. Smith, ‘Serial Narration and the Character Arc,’ as before, p.84.

¹⁸ My use of the TPs are those moments in the episode that changes direction of the plot, as opposed to being either a beat or emotional shift within a scene.

¹⁹ G. Smith, as before, p.84.

²⁰ *Fleabag*, creator, Phoebe Waller-Bridge, as before (2016-19).

²¹ *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir*, wr. Philip Dunne, as before (1947). *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir*, dev. Jean Holloway, as before (NBC, 1968, ABC, 1969-1970).

Having defined the situation comedy as “a half-hour comic story involving a small group of characters premised on a struggle,”²² the narrative comedy could now be defined as: *a half-hour comic story involving a group of characters premised on a struggle that may have elements of seriality by way of a narrative arc and a dramatic question which is resolved in the final episode*. Regardless of the seriality or episodic nature of the narrative, such comedies follow the same fundamental principles as the sitcom, in that they must resolve the question posed by the inciting incident in the episode even if there is some degree of transformation by the character/s responding to the *series* DQ. Consequently, it needs to be determined which narrative arc is affecting change in the character/s and how is the return to the emotional stasis enabled within a half-hour episodic series (and which may have elements of seriality).

The point of difference between the sitcom/narrative comedy and the film is that in the sitcom the characters never change, they remain stuck in a loop of fear, desire, and repeated comic degradation; psychoanalytically they never actualise, face their flaw, or bring to consciousness their need or wounding that has kept them ‘stuck.’ When they fall in love or bring to consciousness the power struggle that has kept them in the situation (including within the dynamics of the gang), the series ends.

As mentioned, in Chapter Two I examined the nature of the MP in the film comedy to find that the MP delivers information to the main character, triggering a bind; this is determined by the character’s need, now conscious, and/or exposed, and which may be at odds with the want or goal and thus impact the narrative trajectory. Creative Practice 2 (CP2) found that the bind works best when the main character has a want at odds with their need, made intense by a catch that triggers extreme behaviour in their flaws. The bind may shift from one character to another character, but, as has been found through the analysis of CP2, the bind must be in play by way of a catch at the beginning of Act Two. Thus, when deciding which characters to

²² Klika, *Situation Comedy*, as before, p.7.

migrate from a film to a series, it is necessary to define the character's struggle; it is this tension which I have argued underpins comic performance.

Relationship between the film and a subsequent series

If the film narrative is transformative of the characters, then there is little room for the subsequent (unconscious) struggle that is at the heart of the sitcom and narrative comedy.

Therefore, when migrating characters from film to series there needs to be the suggestion of some endeavour which will be repeated in the series. If the new endeavour is to be a relationship sitcom, then it needs to be asked which characters have unresolved issues, and at what point are these still unresolved in the film narrative?

Further, and noting the categorisations listed in Chapter Two, it must be determined if the situation remains the same or if the characters are situated in a new environment. If the situation remains the same, then I argue that the ongoing tension driving the series is to be found in the second act of the film, but the situation must be 'entrapping,' either by its physical nature (such as a prison or school) or by a discourse that reinforces the situation (the frame), and which may be evident in the film. Thus, it is not only essential to clarify which characters are best suited to migrate from a film to a series, but also if the situation is a new environment or the same as the film, and importantly which unresolved needs and associated flaws are triggered and how.

Sitcoms centred on relationships such as *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir* (1968-70), *The Odd Couple* (1970-75), *As Time Goes By* (1992-2005), and *Gavin and Stacey* (2007-2010)²³ are focussed on the *differences between* characters, whether status, outlook, class, or different

²³ *The Odd Couple*, creators Jerry Belson, Garry Marshall, prod. Paramount Television (USA: ABC, 1970-1975). *As Time Goes By*, creator Colin Bostock-Smith, prod. Sydney Lotterby (UK: BBC, 1992-2005). *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir*, dev. Jean Holloway, as before (1968-70). *Gavin & Stacey*, creators James Corden, Ruth Jones, as before (2007-2010).

eras. They are commonly set in domestic situations and once the conflict, separation or misunderstanding in the relationship is resolved, the series ends. On the other hand, and as discussed in Chapter One, ensemble sitcoms explore the tension both inter and intra a group, with examples such as *Friends* (1994-2004), *Frasier* (1993-2004), and *How I Met Your Mother* (2005-14).²⁴ As such the pursuit of love or resolution of a discordant relationship enables the narrative arc, whilst each episode has its own form of closed narrative that either hinders or progresses one or more of the relationships.

While it is not essential to incorporate seriality, I do propose that if characters have unresolved relationship issues in the film narrative, then those characters are best placed to migrate to a series with a narrative arc and DQ. As such, and picking up Chapter Two, when transposing a character or characters to a comedy series it needs to be ascertained if there remains an untested flaw that is repeatedly tested and denied through various pressures brought to bear by way of a weekly inciting incident. In other words, it needs to be asked, what issues remain unresolved, either as a flaw or in a relationship, which will drive the comic tension within the episode and possibly the narrative arc of the series. I now ask: At what point in the narrative can such tension be found?

In the film narrative the MP precipitates the character to act, triggering the midpoint return (MPR) – yet such action does not alter the direction of the narrative, it heightens the character's desire to achieve their goal (even if it is misguided in their denial). They are determined to achieve their goal. In the comedy series, the character attempts to subvert the narrative by way of denying information or responding to information that is at odds with their view of the world and idealised goals. If the TPs in the sitcom are an attempt by the *narrative* to subvert the character's desire, then I posit that the middle TP must be a combined MP-TP;

²⁴ *Friends*, creators David Crane, Marta Kauffman, prods. Bright/Kaufman/Crane Productions et al. (USA: NBC, 1994-2004). *Frasier*, creators David Angell, Peter Casey, David Lee, prods. Grubstreet Productions, Grammmnet Productions, Paramount Television (USA: NBC, 1993-2004). *How I Met Your Mother*, creators Carter Bays, Craig Thomas, prods. 20th Century Fox Television, et al. (USA: CBS, 2005-2014).

information is revealed, yet the character acts to change or deny the information, resulting in the narrative to ‘turn.’ Further, if the second TP in episodic comedy series is also a MP, then the character must be acting on, or in response to, the narrative that delivers an expectation or some information and which challenges their need. In other words, the character *denies* any ‘reality’ that may explicate their need; they not only deny the information, but they must also act to maintain that denial as well as progress the goal, triggered by an inciting incident.

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Turning now to critically examine *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir* (1947), a romance drama about the obstacles of love – death and time. I find that the MP gives insight to the seriality of the subsequent narrative comedy.²⁵ This is followed by the deconstruction and analysis of the narrative structure of Episode 1 of *The Young Offenders* (2018-) and assists in determining the nature of the second TP.²⁶

*The Ghost and Mrs. Muir*²⁷

The Ghost and Mrs. Muir is a 1945 romance novel of the same title adapted to film in 1947 starring Rex Harrison and Gene Tierney. Twenty years later (1968-70) it is developed as a sitcom, garnering cult status on YouTube.²⁸ The narrative arc of the series is centred on unrequited love, specifically a love at odds with time and death. The fifty episodes of the series which span two seasons are framed by a narrative that underscore the slow and clear realisation in the main character, Mrs. Muir, of her feelings for Captain Daniel Gregg (The Ghost), whose own desire to be her partner make any coupling difficult to achieve. Captain Gregg hails from the Victorian era, (mid- to late-1800s), and remains so in both the film and

²⁵ *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir*, wr. Philip Dunne, as before (1947). *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir*, dev. Jean Holloway, as before (1968-70).

²⁶ *The Young Offenders*, dev. Peter Foott, as before (2018 – present), first transmitted February 1, 2018.

²⁷ This section is based on an article arising from a conference paper at SRN, 2018: ‘Caught in the Second Act: The Relationship between Film Comedy and the TV Sitcom,’ in *Journal of Media, Performing Arts and Cultural Studies* (N3, 2019) pp. 372-388.

²⁸ *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir*, pilot, wr. Jean Holloway, as before (1968-70).

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k8YDacElh0&list=PL0i5g_YmVrZxe2pI5ML4H66XipOU10bog

TV series. Table 3.1 gives a timeline of the adaptation of the novel to film and the development of the series. However, there are two different Mrs. Muirs in the screen texts, each born in different social periods and as such have different views on how they should live their life, as opposed to that of the Victorian era sea-faring adventurer Captain.

<i>Text</i>	Novel by R. A. Dick	Film written by Philip Dunne. Dur: 99'	TV series created by Jean Holloway. Dur: 22'-25' Series 1 26 eps Series 2 24 eps
<i>Produced</i>	1945	1947	1968-1970
<i>Era</i>	Set in 1900s England	Set in 1900s beginning in Victorian era London, moving to English seaside and concludes in post war England.	Set in 1960s New England, USA

Table 3.1: Overview of the evolution of *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir*.

With reference to Table 3.1, by transposing the main characters from the film to a series, the location moves from Victorian coastal England to seaside New England, USA, with some additions to the cast. In the 1947 film, Lucy Muir, a widow with an income derived from the mining shares of her deceased husband, seeks independence from her suffocating in-laws; when the mine is closed, she is suddenly forced to find an income – the character's motivation becomes goal. In the 1968 TV series, Mrs. Muir becomes Carolyn Muir, a widow and established writer with depleted resources; goal is established yet motivation remains unclear, other than needing to increase her existing income. The new Carolyn Muir, having realised the house is haunted, becomes concerned about the effects of a ghost on her children, whilst also wanting to stay at the charming seaside house, Gull Cottage; the goal is now at odds with a desire to protect her children – the character is conflicted between the motivation of need (income) as well as a place to write (as a means of generating income), yet she has concerns for her children. In addition, the realtor (estate agent) in the 1947 film, the stodgy

Mr. Coombs becomes Claymore Gregg, the grand-nephew, or so he believes, of Captain Gregg. Claymore is an anxious comic character, an archetypal fool – an important addition as it enables the comic gap between Claymore and the domineering Captain. The daughter, Anna, from 1947, is renamed Candice (Candy) and a son has been added to the family, Jonathan, who, it is revealed, can see the Captain and converses with him and in doing so expands the Captain's interaction with other 'beings.' Martha, the housekeeper, and Scruffy the dog survive the migration. In the series the situation remains the same (Gull Cottage), and the comedic gap is increased by situating the new Mrs. Muir in a new era (and country) along with the introduction of Claymore Gregg as an echo to The Captain.

While there have been some changes to the characters, the essence of the story remains the same: a widowed (initially independent) woman, along with her child/ren and housekeeper, take up residence in Gull Cottage, which is haunted by its owner, an old-fashioned, yet dashing, sea Captain. While goals remain the same in both narratives, motivation in the film is clearer than in the series. However, as has been posited, if theme is evident at the MP of the film, critically examining the MP of the film (specifically the keystone scene) elucidates both the theme and the nature of the relationship between the main characters: The Ghost and Mrs. Muir.

At the MP of the film, the two protagonists have just finished writing the Captain's memoirs that will (and does) enable Lucy Muir to have an income and stay in Gull Cottage.

EXT BALCONY. NIGHT.

Lucy Muir enters the balcony followed by the Captain.

CAPTAIN: Ship out there. Too close by the sound.

LUCY: It's a lonely sound. Like a child lost, crying in the dark.

CAPTAIN: He's lost alright. With the Captain cursing a blue streak wondering why he ever went to the sea instead of opening a grocer's shop like a sensible man.

CAPTAIN (cont.): A fog in the channel is treacherous.
I'd rather face a north easter.

LUCY: Still, it's honest, the sea. It makes you face things
honestly doesn't it.

CAPTAIN: Something on your mind?

LUCY: Yes. What's to become of us Daniel? Of you and
me.

CAPTAIN: Nothing can become of me. Everything's
happened that can happen.

LUCY: But not to me. When we were writing the book, I
was happy, we were accomplishing something together.
Now when I try to think about the future it's ... it's all
dark ... and confused. Like trying to see into the fog.

CAPTAIN: You've been working too hard. Cooped up in
the house too long. You need a change of scene.

LUCY: But I love it here.

CAPTAIN: You should be out in the world more,
meeting people. (Pause) Seeing men.

LUCY: I have no desire to see men.

CAPTAIN: You should Lucia. You're a confoundedly
attractive woman. Or hadn't you noticed. Really my dear
you owe it to yourself.

LUCY: Yes, Daniel. Goodnight.

CAPTAIN: Goodnight.

Lucy exits the balcony.

CAPTAIN: My dear.

INT ROOM. NIGHT

Lucy enters the room and sits in the armchair and sighs.

LUCY: Oh, Daniel I'm afraid we've got ourselves into an
awful fix.²⁹

²⁹*The Ghost and Mrs. Muir*, 1947, as before, 52'.

Lucy has relished writing the Captain's story of sea-faring adventures which will give her an income and enable her to stay at Gull Cottage. However, Lucy begins to realise that she will now lose the close working relationship she has had with the Captain, which gave her purpose and meaning, in turn igniting feelings for him. The theme of the film, the need to face the truth of stormy feelings, is evident at the MP; the haunting sound of being lost gives subtext to the scene. The Captain has also come to a realisation that he cannot keep Lucy tied to him, urging her to go and live among the living. This film asks the question: What happens when a ghost falls in love with someone still living? The difficulty with writing about ghosts is that a ghost has nothing to lose if they fail in their goal, in this case to have a relationship with a living person. The ghost's goal must be achieved through the characters who have something to lose and the biggest thing we can lose is life.

Time passes, depicted by a disintegrating wooden post, slowly submitting to the sea. Lucy, now an elderly lady, dies in the chair where she sighed at the MP, which is also often the site and/or indication of the resolution. The Captain returns and takes Lucy as a young woman to his realm. At the film's resolution the central protagonist has changed physically, as well as emotionally post MP, yet both characters have faced their need: that they love each other solely and the obstacle that has kept them apart, time, now no longer exists. Furthermore, the question has been answered: The Ghost waits for his love to join him and for Mrs. Muir to experience love she must wait for death.

However, when reworking the film narrative of *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir* (1947) to a half-hour comedy series, the first question that arises is what keeps these two characters bound to each other week after week? Leger Grindon writes: "Memory shapes our present but the present can also alter our memories."³⁰ The character of Lucy Muir is stuck between a want (to

³⁰ Leger Grindon, 'Taking Romantic Comedy Seriously in *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004) and *Before Sunset* (2004),' in Andrew Horton and Joanna E Rapf. (eds), *A Companion to*

have an income and to love again) and her need (to realise that for her love exists in another realm); the memory of having a happy marriage informs and entraps her present. Thus, we need to ask: what keeps these two characters, a ghost, and a widow, bound to each other?³¹

The bind, as I explored in Chapter Two, comes about from not only want+need but also from the attempt to re-shape the present (and the narrative) in the face of obstacles triggered by flaws that are refuted. The MP of *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir* gives a clue to the emotional tension that then plays out in the (relational) comedy series. If a comedy series such as this one sits in the second act of the film, we need to ask: What is the obstacle that prevents the character/s from changing? We know the Captain loves Mrs. Muir and his cottage, and as such his fear would be of losing both. The series explores scenarios in which the Captain puts up obstacles to incidents that may threaten change to either the house, such as renovations, or any ‘relationship’ that Carolyn, may have from potential suitors. Thus, a relationship sitcom or narrative comedy must be centred on unresolved feelings – which can be found at either the MP of a film or at its resolution, which I discuss in the development of creative practice 3 (CP3) from CP2, the film.

*The Young Offenders*³²

The Young Offenders is a 2016 film redeveloped as a narrative comedy in 2018 about two lads in Cork, Ireland. In the film the boys learn that a large amount of cocaine has come ashore from a shipwreck and set out to make some money. Loading the illicit drug onto their bicycle, they accidentally puncture the wrapping; as they cycle home, they leave a long trail of white powder, finishing with an empty sack. While miscreants, these characters are examples of the

Film Comedy (Chichester: Wiley, 2012) p. 206.

³¹ Being the only relationship in the story limits the series’ life, as opposed to the multitude of relationships underscored by the need to ‘grow up’ that the six characters in *Friends* confront, specifically the two with issues of commitment, Rachel, and Ross. *Friends*, creators David Crane, Marta Kauffman, as before (1994-2004).

³² *The Young Offenders*, wr., dir. Peter Foott, as before (2016). *The Young Offenders*, dev. Peter Foott, as before (2018 – present).

comic antiheroes discussed in Chapter One; being aware of the frame that undermines their desires (the law) and rather than play by its rules, they attempt to push its limits. The series sits firmly before Act Three of the film, as the two Irish lads, Conor and Jock, egg each other on in a series of dares, antagonising the local policeman, Sergeant Healey. This series plays more like a sitcom in that there is no overarching DQ that indicates potential change to the lads or their relationship. Furthermore, the law as a 'frame' is less evident as containing the lads, unlike the frames discussed in Chapter One. Therefore, something else needs to be in play which ensures comic tension.

In the film Jock lives with an abusive father and for the series to explore intra-relational dynamics, a few episodes into the series he comes to live with Conor and his widowed mother, Mairead, now dating Sergeant Healy. While the lads are the main characters, Mairead is the key character as she attempts to raise the boys while trying to have some kind of love life. Mairead finds herself in a dilemma between love for her fatherless son, his miscreant behaviour influenced by his 'loser' friend, and her relationship with the local policeman. Thus, it is not so much about characters in a series of comic situations (many of those in the film are then repeated in the first episodes of the series) but to have those characters exist within a situation that creates a power dynamic centred on a key character caught in a struggle between their want (to raise good citizens) and need (to have love). Jock is more akin to being a comic antihero rather than a key character as he is aware of the frame (the law) which he attempts to demolish, taking his sidekick Conor along for the ride. However, it is the local wild boy, the unstable Billy Murphy, who manifests the unconscious fear of this town's collective – that in this world of non opportunity, they will become the crazy fellow.

The first episode of the series, narrated by Conor, (re)introduces the main characters from the film: his best friend, Jock, school principal Walsh, Sergeant Healey, Conor's mother, Mairead MacSweeney and crazy Billy Murphy as well as the daughters of principal Walsh,

one of whom is black.

This episode begins with the lads stealing lead from the roof of a building as a way of buying irrelevant stuff such as blow-up dolls. When the police come looking, the boys jump off the building and fall into some trash piled up in an alleyway. Wearing masks to cover their identity (a Billy Murphy mask, fashioned from a photo and ordered online, and a mask of a girl – “It’s all they had in the Halloween store” says Jock when Conor complains). Spotted by the two daughters of the school principal, the boys ditch the stolen lead, and are pursued through the local food market; they fall foul of some painters, with their uniforms now covered in yellow paint. Back in school and wearing stolen uniforms the boys realise they need to win over the girls to stop them squealing. While Jock wins over the white sister, Conor's fear of girls is exposed with Linda:

CONOR: What’s it like ...erm... being adopted?

LINDA: I’m not adopted.

CONOR: Hmm. Is?...Er okay.

LINDA: Why what makes you think I’m adopted?

CONOR: No, like I don’t think you are, it’s just ... er... you look adopted.

LINDA: How do I look adopted?

CONOR: Your hair is really.... Black.

LINDA: You trying to say I’m Black?

CONOR: You’re you’re Black?

LINDA: Yeah.

CONOR: I didn’t even notice.

LINDA: You serious?

CONOR: Oh, it’s..... like I see past pigment.³³

³³ *The Young Offenders*, dev. Peter Foott, as before (2018 – present), S1E1, first transmitted February 1, 2018.

Questioned by Sergeant Healey and Principal Walsh (the girls' father) about the stolen lead, the lads lie as to their whereabouts on the day in question, saying they were with Conor's mother. This is the second TP with shades of a MP as lying is afoot. When Mairead confronts the boys about the theft, they deny it (MPR); the narrative is forced to turn and in doing so focusses on the relationship between Mairead and Conor, the loss of his father and feelings about his friendship with his closest friend Jock. Thus, when a plot point does not resolve or confront the issue triggered by the inciting incident (through lying or deceit), it is forced to focus on something else.

Arriving at the school for the day of interrogation, Mairead is met by Sergeant Healy who flirts with her (hints of the relationship that may come) until she asks what he is doing at the school, to which he responds, "I've come to question a couple of scumbags about a robbery." Mairead retorts: "My son is not a scumbag." Mairead's demeanour shifts from suspecting her son to defending him, and then lying herself when questioned as to where the boys were, colluding with them by saying they were with her at the cinema. This is followed by confusion between Mairead and the boys when she is questioned as to what film and which cinema. The yellow painted jumper with Conor's name sewn inside is then produced as evidence; it appears the gig is up and Mairead knows it. While the adults confer outside the classroom, the lads mention there is a plan. When the interrogation team return, Sergeant Healey attempts to make Conor confess in order to have the charge laid on Jock, but Conor refuses to hand in his best friend. As Conor is about to be handcuffed, the school alarm rings and as they all rush outside, there are two similar sized lads with the same masks as earlier, attacking the weathervane on the roof of the school. Sergeant Healey takes chase, and Principal Walsh apologises to Mairead and Conor about the 'misunderstanding.' The TPs reveal the rectangular shape which I determined in my book:

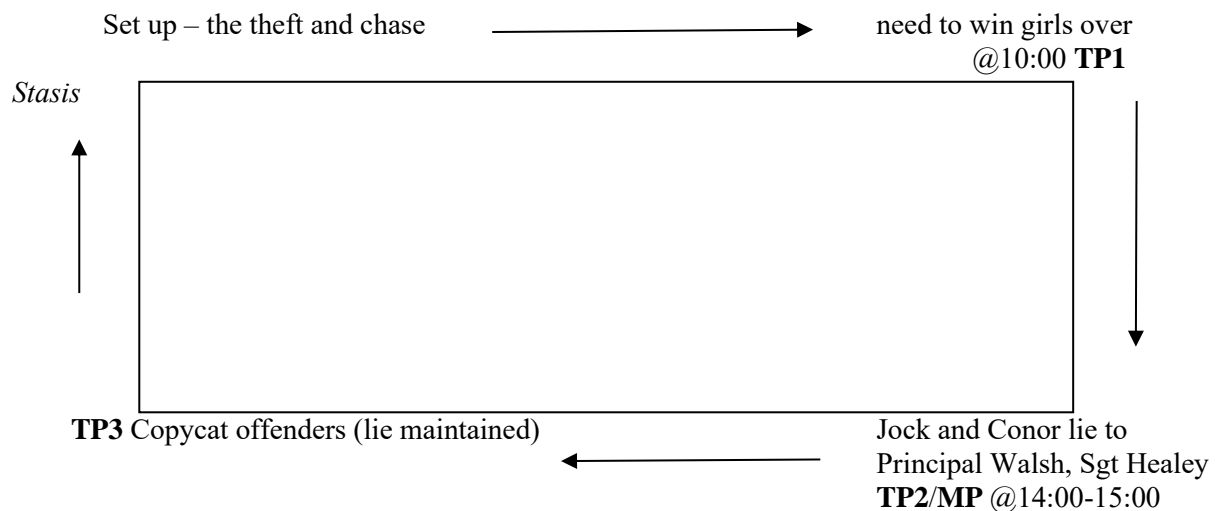


Figure 3.1: The closed narrative of Episode 1, *The Young Offenders*.³⁴

In this example tension is maintained through the fear of the lie being exposed, while the plan of having copycat offenders forces the narrative to turn again and reset the emotional stasis of the main characters underscoring the theme of the series: best friends no matter what.

However, if it is decided to develop a series post the resolution of the film, then it is essential to consider what issues remain which could be the basis for a comedy series. The character must finally and comically face their need (in film), yet they refuse to do so in the sitcom or with incremental steps in the narrative comedy series.

CREATIVE PRACTICE 3

CP1, the ensemble sitcom, essentially sits within Act Two of the film, CP2, and therefore CP3 is developed as a post-film comedy series with a DQ. As CP1 and CP2 are located in the same milieu, CP3 has transposed the characters to a new situation. Set a few years after the film, CP3 picks up the relational potential evident in sequence #5 of Act Two between Ben and Rachel which was not resolved at the conclusion of the film; it applies a DQ centred on the unresolved nature of their relationship. To that end, CP3 aims to demonstrate the principle that a series with a DQ centred on a relationship enables seriality. Further, CP3 sets out to

³⁴ *The Young Offenders*, dev. Peter Foott, as before (2018 – present), S1E1, first transmitted February 1, 2018.

validate the principle that relationship sitcoms require strong TPs, specifically at the MP, in order to enable comic tension and the return to the emotional stasis at the conclusion of each episode.

Overview

CP3 *Have You Fed the Cat?* is a half-hour narrative comedy that picks up after the film *The Accidental Academic* (CP2). The question that remains at the conclusion of the film: will the main characters see each other again? This comedy series places the main characters, Ben and Rachel, in a new situation a few years after the film in order to test that question. Further, this CP explores the nature of TPs in the half-hour narrative comedy/comedy series to determine if the middle TP operates in the same way as the MP, as was elucidated in the film comedies analysed in Chapter Two.

CONCLUSION

In Chapter Two I argued that that the bind, triggered at the MP, is a harbinger to comic tension in the latter part of the second act. Here, I extend on that proposition to posit that the MP in a film can also be an indicator of the emotional tension and struggle between the main characters, elucidating the nature of the (emotional/physical/relational) struggle in a subsequent series. I posit that discordant relationships with a DQ enable both a comic struggle within the episode and seriality across the series. If the series sits post the film narrative timeline (less common), and considering the analysis of CP2, then it needs to be determined which unresolved issues remain and whether the situation is the same or different to enable new tensions. If there is no discordant relationship, or at the least a DQ, then I offer that the new site must have a discursive frame through which comic tension is enabled.

Further, deconstructing the TPs of an episode in a series, I have elucidated the principle that the second TP in the narrative comedy/sitcom is a form of MP that reveals information as well as reinforces the comic tension for the second half of the episode.

Thus, this chapter has offered principles to be considered when transposing characters from a film to a comedy series; the MP or Act Two is the prime site in which to find the struggle that could enable repeatability, or the conclusion has some unresolved questions which could engender repeated confusion. I further posit that it needs to be considered if comic tension can be enabled by a discursive frame; what that frame might be, and how nebulous its limits is another point to consider. As such, I argue that the comedy series (be it sitcom or narrative comedy) is best suited for seriality when it is centred on a discordant relationship; if there is no discursive frame or a story ideology which is not overtly restrictive, then it should be considered that the narrative arc be governed by a DQ.

HAVE YOU FED THE CAT?

A comedy about divorce across the generations.

Pilot episode

"On the Market"

Written by

Deborah Klika

Creative Practice 3

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents either are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Have You Fed the Cat?

A comedy set in a shared house in North London. It centres on Rachel, Kat, and Jeremy all divorced and wondering if they will ever find love again.

When a new lodger, Ben, moves in, Clover the talking cat, discovers there is history between this interloper and Rachel.

A magic-realist comedy about loss, middle-age, and unrequited love. It picks up two years after the film, *The Accidental Academic* when Ben and Rachel last saw each other.

MAIN CHARACTERS

RACHEL, 54, came from Australia to work on a soap but things haven't turned out as she hoped. Messy, like her relationships, she pursued other areas and was determined to make it work, even buying a house that she has renovated with the help of Kat whose focus is getting Rachel to go online dating with Bumble, Tindr, Okay Cupid, but Rachel prefers eHarmony because she likes taking surveys.

KATHERINE (KAT), 44, Journalist. Loves to organise people and their lives. One son, George, whom she loves to death. Always on dating apps. Dream is to work for a charity but the income won't support her lifestyle. Avid entertainer, and owner of ...

CLOVER the talking cat. Runs the house like it's her kingdom, has firm views on why the women in this house are failing in their lives. In love with...

JEREMY, 35, writer and lodger. Works in publishing. Pines for his ex-wife, Ashley. Fussy, tidy, and clean. Likes to boss Kat's son...

GEORGE, 15, Mixed race. Behaves like a cat, which triggers sibling rivalry in Clover. Extreme conservative; rejects Kat's liberal views as hypocritical. Befriended by ...

BENJAMIN (Ben), 50, Australian filmmaker in London on a teaching exchange at the NFTS, hoping to get a big break. A dreamer, still recovering from the departure of the woman who has rekindled his flame ... Rachel.

TEASER: INT. KITCHEN. DAY.

CLOVER, the cat, is watching TV and changing the channels. She turns off the TV and goes to her climbing frame; suddenly realises the camera is on her.

CLOVER

(to camera)

Oh hello. Thanks for joining us and welcome to my world and our house, technically owned by Rachel, (whispers to camera) she's Australian. Came here thinking she'd make it as a writer. (holds in a laugh). Those colonials. Got to laugh at their naivete. Bought this house out of her property settlement. Brave. Or stupid. Kat, technically, my owner, lodges here to save money, along with the love of my life, Jeremy - a true writer who just needs someone to understand him. Sadly there is no one - but he has me. (she swoons). I digress. They are all single wives/husbands. My story is simple: get needs and wants met. You know the drill, the character has a goal, and they must face their needs, and then they are changed. Then what? No one asks that question do they? As Freud ruminated we cats give nothing back - complete narcissism. 100 years later and not many people have cottoned on. They keep thinking we understand them. (laughs) And worse that we love them. Misguided fools. Have you seen Cats and Dogs? Not the wimpy romcom The Truth about Cats and Dogs, a misleading title if ever there was one, no, Cats and Dogs demonstrated the intellectual superiority of cats - they rule the world. Stick around and I'll show you how to have power without the responsibility.

Sound of door opening.

CLOVER (CONT'D)

Looks like someone's home.

Clover exits.

INT. KITCHEN. DAY

RACHEL, 54, enters and looks at Clover who is sitting beside the bowl. Rachel texts, we see the name 'Kat'.

CUT TO:

Titles: Have you Fed the Cat?

INT. KITCHEN. DAY

Rachel feeds Clover. Opens computer and emails.

RACHEL
Another dodgy lodger. Delete.

Clover sits in the corner shaking her head.

INT. KITCHEN. DAY.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Delete.

INT. LOUNGE ROOM. DAY.

MALE LODGER
Will you be doing the laundry? My
mother always did my laundry.

MALE LODGER begins to cry.

INT. KITCHEN. DAY.

RACHEL
Delete.

INT. LOUNGE ROOM. DAY.

PARANOID WOMAN
Have the aliens been to visit?

INT. KITCHEN. DAY.

RACHEL
Delete.

INT. LOUNGE ROOM. DAY.

OCD MALE wiping all the surfaces.

INT. KITCHEN. DAY.

RACHEL
Delete.

INT. LOUNGE ROOM. DAY.

OLDER MALE stares at Rachel's cleavage.

INT. KITCHEN. DAY.

RACHEL

Delete.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN. DAY.

Rachel stops scrolling through her emails.

RACHEL

Oh. Clover.

Clover looks up, then to camera and shakes her head. She keeps eating.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

An invitation to apply for a job.

Clover slows down eating.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

Back home. (Beat) Oh I wonder.

Clover looks in horror at the camera.

CLOVER

(to camera)

Australia? Where spiders lie in wait on toilet seats? Stop wondering lady.

Rachel looks around the kitchen.

RACHEL

I'd probably get a good price for this place.

Clover looks to camera in horror.

CLOVER

(to camera)

Whoa Lady. From no lodger to selling the house? Slow down. We can figure this out. This is my home. There's a lodger for everyone I promise. Let's look on match.com Or spareroom.com, Any dot com.

Clover meows that sounds like a shriek of horror.

Sound of front door open. JEREMY, 35 walks into the kitchen and Clover jumps into his arms.

JEREMY
Hello beautiful. That's a warm
welcome.

Clover looks to camera.

CLOVER
(to camera)
Poor guy confuses my fear with
love.

JEREMY
Has she not been fed?

RACHEL
(distracted, focussed on
the computer)
What. Yes.

JEREMY
Normally she's purring after a
meal.

Clover scratches Jeremy. He winces.

RACHEL
Should never have allowed it to
come with Kat. The son is enough.

JEREMY
She doesn't like to be called it.
She's special (looks at Clover)
aren't you Clover.

Jeremy opens the kitchen cupboard and there is a shelf
labelled 'Clover's special food' Jeremy gets a packet of food
and waves it in front of Clover's face.

CLOVER
(to camera)
See what I have to put up with to
get food?

RACHEL
I've been invited to apply for a
job.

Jeremy fusses around the kitchen getting Clover's food ready.

JEREMY
Good. Where?

RACHEL
Home.

JEREMY
Working from home? You'd like that.

RACHEL
No. Back home, in Australia.

Jeremy, stops, looks quizzically.

CLOVER
(to camera)
Not the quickest read on the shelf.

RACHEL
Can't find another lodger to cover
the mortgage. And besides the
writing gig hasn't worked out.
Can't get an agent.

JEREMY
I'll help you find an agent.

RACHEL
I've decided to sell.

JEREMY
Selling out is not so bad. It
brings in the big bucks. Albert
Square needs more diversity. And
you are

RACHEL
White and middle class.

JEREMY
Yes exactly they need middle class
perspective.

RACHEL
I'm selling it.

JEREMY
You don't need to sell out.

CLOVER
As I said not the fastest...

RACHEL
I can.

CLOVER
You can't.

RACHEL
I'm selling the house.

JEREMY
But it's my... I mean our home.

CLOVER
That's right Jeremy.

RACHEL
Well my home is not here.

Sound of front door closing. Jeremy runs out.

INT. HALLWAY. DAY.

KAT, 44, is taking off her coat, scarf and shoes.

JEREMY
Kat, thank goodness you're home.
You have to stop her. She's gone
crazy.

KAT
I told you to stop seeing Ashley.
She's not good for you.

JEREMY
It's not Ashley - besides she's now
seeing some posh guy. Apparently he
looks like me.

KAT
Back to the point Jeremy.

JEREMY
It's Rachel. She wants to sell the
house.

KAT
It's her house. She can do what she
wants.

JEREMY
But, but... We'll be homeless.

KAT
See it as an opportunity Jeremy.

JEREMY
Opportunity to sleep with other
homeless people?

KAT
Good opportunity to find somewhere
cheaper.

JEREMY
What, so you can pay your way
through more dodgy dates?

KAT
I'm sick of being single. I want to
share my life with someone.

Kat exits.

JEREMY
(to Clover)
Always confusing sex with love.

MONTAGE OF KAT MEETING DODGY LANDLORDS. ONE TRIES TO HIT ON
HER. ONE ASKS HOW OLD SHE IS. ONE SHOWS HER HIS BASEMENT OF
FUN (IT'S A SEX PLAYGROUND). ONE IS A PARANOID WOMAN.

INT. LIVING ROOM. DAY

Jeremy is watching TV with Clover who keeps changing the
channel and Jeremy can't figure out why. Kat enters holding
one of the For Sale signs.

KAT
We have to stop this.

Jeremy is trying to change the channel back.

JEREMY
Yes, it's driving me nuts.

KAT
The sale.

Jeremy looks at her. He smiles. Clover smiles and then
changes the channel behind Jeremy's back.

KAT (CONT'D)
We need to find her a lodger. And I
need to change my dating profile.

Kat puts her phone down. Clover smiles to camera.

INT. HALLWAY TOILET.

Clover in Kat's dating app and she pauses a while on a man,
who we recognise as Ben from the film.

CLOVER
He's more her type. But he'll have
to wait.

Close up on Spareroom.com. We see Clover typing.

Suddenly the door opens and Rachel stands there looking
suspicious.

RACHEL
Clover? What are you doing in the
loo?

Clover puts on sweet face and hides the phone behind the
toilet brush. She rushes out.

EXT. HOUSE/STREET. DAY.

GEORGE, 15, saunters up the road drinking. Arrives at the
house, goes to hide the bottle and sees the For Sale signs
behind the bins. He gets one and starts hammering with the
bottle. Jeremy appears at the door with Clover at his feet.

JEREMY
George! What is that?

George hides the bottle behind his back.

GEORGE
Nothing.

JEREMY
I'll tell your mother.

CLOVER
(to camera)
Kat's son. Only comes round when he
is hungry.

GEORGE
And I'll let Amazon know who wrote
those reviews for your latest book.

JEREMY
You're skating on thin ice young
man.

CLOVER
(to camera)
That's my man. I love him when he
talks like that.

JEREMY
Put that sign back.

GEORGE
But isn't she selling?

JEREMY
She's holding fire until we, I mean
she, can figure something out.

George reluctantly puts the sign behind the bin and throws
the bottle into the bin.

INT. TOILET. DAY

Rachel sitting on the loo, finds the phone behind the toilet brush. The screen is lit up, we see photo of Ben as phone shuts down.

RACHEL
(to herself)
And another one bites the dust.

INT. HOUSE. DAY

Open day at the house. Rachel is showing POTENTIAL BUYERS the house. Jeremy pulls one aside.

JEREMY
What do you think about the rising damp?

WOMAN BUYER - PHILIPPA
Is there rising damp?

JEREMY
Well I'm not sure but...

Jeremy pulls the sofa away from the wall and there is a big black mark.

WOMAN BUYER - PHILIPPA
Rupert. Have you seen this?

RUPERT - HUSBAND OF WOMAN BUYER
What is it Philippa?

PHILIPPA
(points to wall)
This.

RUPERT - HUSBAND OF WOMAN BUYER
I told you it was too good a price.
That will cost ten grand at least.

Rachel comes over. Jeremy shoves the sofa back.

RACHEL
Any questions? Ahhhh.

Clover has attached herself to Rachel's foot as Rachel tries to look composed.

PHILIPPA
It's a lovely house.
It's...it's....

RACHEL
Ahhhh. Ahhh.

PHILIPPA

Yes. Ahhh.

RUPERT

It's not for us. Thank you.

Jeremy shows them out with a smile on his face. There is ANOTHER BUYER at the door.

JEREMY

Hello. Can I help?

WOMAN BUYER

I'm here about the house.

At that moment a NEIGHBOUR comes out. Jeremy hushes in the buyer.

JEREMY

(whispering)

You don't want to be on the porch when Voldemort, I mean Vonda comes out.

WOMAN BUYER

Why?

JEREMY

Well let's just say she's off her meds.

WOMAN BUYER

Meds?

JEREMY

Yes they help stop the screaming.

WOMAN BUYER

Screaming?

JEREMY

You get used to it after a while. Besides three a.m. is a good time to write.

WOMAN BUYER

Three a.m.?

JEREMY

Like an alarm clock. Lately it's a black car at nine a.m. and then we don't see her all day (beat) or night.

WOMAN BUYER

Black car?

JEREMY
I think it's her pimp.

WOMAN BUYER
Pimp?

Rachel comes to the door.

RACHEL
Oh hello. Are you here to see the house?

Clover rushes out and bites the woman buyer on the foot.

WOMAN BUYER
Ahhhhhh.

RACHEL
Clover get off.

Jeremy peels Clover off the buyer's foot.

JEREMY
Clover you naughty girl.

WOMAN BUYER
Thanks. I... I.... Don't think this area is for me.

RACHEL
But you haven't seen the house. And what do you mean by this area isn't for you?

The woman buyer runs off. Jeremy holds Clover, smiling, which turns to disapproval as he turns to Rachel.

JEREMY
Some people are such snobs. It's not Chelsea.

A STREAM OF WOMEN WITH CATS on leads and in baskets start arriving.

CAT WOMAN 1
This is it. Number 109. Are you Rachel?

RACHEL
Err. Yes. Why?

CAT WOMAN 2
I'm here about the room.

CAT WOMAN 1
I was here first.

CAT WOMAN 2

How rude. It's not the first that counts cats...

CLOVER

It's the cat that counts first.
(shouts) which of you can count?

Sound of cat sounds saying 'I can. Pick me. I play chess'.
Clover jumps down from Jeremy's arms.

CLOVER (CONT'D)

Come to mama.

CAT WOMAN 2

Can we see the room?

RACHEL

I'm not looking for a lodger. (points to For Sale sign)
I'm selling.

CAT WOMAN 1

I told you it was a mistake. Who'd ask for a lodger with cats.

CLOVER

(singing with the other cats)

I would. Who'd want to be a millionaire, I would. Who'd want to be... (stops suddenly) I digress.
Back to the issue at hand.

Kat comes to the porch.

KAT

What is going on here? And what's all that screeching?

CLOVER

It's not screeching. It's singing.

RACHEL

These women seem to think that I need a lodger ... with a cat. Lots of cats.

CLOVER

(to camera, swooning)
Heaven.

Rachel looks at Jeremy and Kat.

RACHEL

Did either of you have anything to do with this?

KAT
Honestly Rachel I had nothing to do
(she starts laughing) with this. My
goodness look at all those cats.

RACHEL
You have a cat.

George appears at the front of the house.

KAT
(shifting the blame)
I saw Jeremy on spareroom.com.

RACHEL
Jeremy did you post an ad for a
lodger?

CAT WOMAN 1
So you don't need a lodger?

Simultaneously they answer:

RACHEL
No.

JEREMY
Yes.

KAT
Maybe.

GEORGE
Careful Jeremy.

CAT WOMAN 2
Told you it was a mistake. I'm
always right.

CAT WOMAN 1
That's what you think.

The women start walking away.

CLOVER
(shouting)
Hey guys. Come visit. Anytime. I
have the place to myself.

Kat and Rachel go inside. Jeremy picks up Clover and stands
there stroking Clover. BEN walks up to the house next door
and knocks on the door.

JEREMY
She's not awake.

BENJAMIN
Sorry?

JEREMY

It's only two p.m., she's not up yet.

BENJAMIN

But I've got an appointment to see the room.

JEREMY

You looking for a room?

CLOVER

(to camera)

Looks familiar? Yes I thought so too. Maybe our fortunes have changed.

Clover meows into Jeremy's ear, jumps down from Jeremy's arms and runs off.

CLOVER (CONT'D)

(to camera)

Planted the seed. Now to see what the freeloader is eating.

INT. KITCHEN. DAY.

George is rummaging through the fridge. Kat is standing there. Clover enters.

CLOVER

(to camera)

See? Only comes here for the food. Who does he think he is? A cat?

KAT

George I need to talk to you.

George turns from the fridge with food in his mouth.

GEORGE

You need to talk to me?

George puts food down in a slow measured way.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

I think you need to explain yourself young lady. Posting ads without the owner's permission. I think that's illegal.

KAT

I don't know where they came from.

GEORGE

And blaming Jeremy. Tch Tch.

George gets more food into his mouth.

CLOVER
 (to camera)
 There goes my special dinner. Back
 to the issue at hand.

Clover runs off.

EXT. HOUSE. DAY (**MP THAT BECOMES A TP**)

Clover jumps into Ben's arms. He pats her.

JEREMY
 Do you like animals.

BENJAMIN
 Yes, grew up on a farm.

JEREMY
 So you won't mind the rats then.

Jeremy points to the house.

BENJAMIN
 Rats?

JEREMY
 Well there's only three left I
 think.

BENJAMIN
 Three? Rats?

JEREMY
 The council has given her notice.

BENJAMIN
 All I wanted was a simple room.
 There's so many dodgy landlords in
 this city.

MONTAGE OF BENJAMIN MEETING DODGY LANDLORDS. THEY ARE THE
 SAME ONES THAT KAT HAS MET EARLIER. THEN THERE IS ONE WHO IS
 THE SAME AS A LODGER THAT RACHEL INTERVIEWED ASKING BEN IF HE
 LIKES TO PLAY IN BASEMENTS.

JEREMY
 And they lie. And have weird
 tastes.

BENJAMIN
 Yes.

Benjamin starts to leave.

JEREMY

We have a room. And we are not weird. Or lie.

Benjamin looks at the For Sale sign.

BENJAMIN

But aren't you selling.

JEREMY

What made you think that?

Ben points to the For Sale sign.

JEREMY (CONT'D)

Oh that.

BENJAMIN

Is this your house?

JEREMY

Yes. Well technically not mine, but ... The owner is desperate...

BENJAMIN

I don't want desperate.

JEREMY

I mean desperate to find someone. Like you. And when she couldn't she rashly made the decision to...

CLOVER

(to camera)

This will be interesting. What was that about lying?

BENJAMIN

What's the rate?

JEREMY

What can you afford?

BENJAMIN

Eight, I mean seven hundred a...

JEREMY

Perfect. Six hundred a month it is.

BENJAMIN

But I said....

JEREMY

All that is needed is the bond and my home is safe... I mean the room is safely yours.

BENJAMIN

Shouldn't I meet the owner?

JEREMY

Rachel will love you. I just know. Lovely woman. Makes rash decisions but we are able to get her back on track. Don't we Clover?

Clover meows. And then winks to camera.

BENJAMIN

Her name is Rachel? I knew someone..

JEREMY

Bit too *Friends* if you ask me. Back to the business at hand. I can show you the nearest ATM.

BENJAMIN

Shouldn't I see the room?

Jeremy gets out his phone and scrolls to the ad on spareroom. Com.

JEREMY

See? Great room. South facing. Ensuite. What more could you want?

BENJAMIN

To see the room?

JEREMY

If you want it you will have to give me a bond. It's got a lot of interest. We've got three, I mean five, people coming tonight and if I have your bond I can tell her, I mean them it's taken.

BENJAMIN

I'm not sure. I think I should at least meet...

JEREMY

It'll be gone by the time you get back with the bond. Now have you got your card?

Jeremy leads Ben off. Clover sits on the porch looking pleased with herself.

INT. PUB. NIGHT.

Kat is sitting at the bar looking at men coming in. Ben walks in. Kat looks at her dating app, sees photo is same as Ben. She waves.

BENJAMIN

Hello, Kat?

KAT

Yes. So pleased you look like, I mean, to meet you.

BENJAMIN

Drink?

KAT

Thanks that would be nice. You Australian?

BENJAMIN

Yes. Just arrived.

KAT

And what do you do?

BENJAMIN

Filmmaker. On a teaching exchange with the National Film School. But hoping...

Kat is very impressed.

KAT

Oh worked on anything I might have seen?

BENJAMIN

Muriel's Wedding.

KAT

Oh I love Muriel's wedding. So insightful about family dynamics.

BENJAMIN

I think you might be thinking about Margot After The Wedding. With Nicole.

KAT

Oh I love Nicole. Do you know her.

BENJAMIN

I've worked with her - years ago before she became famous. Anyway enough about me. What about you?

KAT

You are cute... I mean you are curious. I.. I.. I.. work as a journalist and and and want to get into charity work. Are you here long? And where are you staying?

BENJAMIN

I went to look at a room and the neighbour told me terrible stories about the landlady and then told me he had a spare room. So I'm going to meet them tonight. So, I'm sorry, but I can only stay for a drink. Maybe we could do dinner later in the week.

KAT

Oh yes. That would be lovely.

Kat looks away and clinches a fist with 'yes'.

INT. LIVING ROOM. NIGHT

Kat is watching TV. Jeremy rushes in. Clover follows.

JEREMY

Kat I found him.

CLOVER

(to camera)
This should be fun.

KAT

Who?

JEREMY

A guy. For the room.

KAT

Shouldn't Rachel meet him?

JEREMY

She will. Tonight. He's coming here. And he's Purrfect.

CLOVER

(to camera)
Seriously?

JEREMY

Have you fed the cat?

KAT

She wasn't here.

CLOVER
 (to camera)
 Liar.

Rachel enters.

JEREMY
 Clover! Daddy's got your special
 dinner.

RACHEL
 I fed her earlier. Then she
 scratched me.

CLOVER
 (to camera)
 Another lie. It was a tickle.

JEREMY
 She must have wanted her special
 food.

KAT
 Rachel, Jeremy's got something to
 tell you.

JEREMY
 Yes Rachel, I found someone who is
 interested in the room. And he's
 coming over to meet you tonight.

RACHEL
 Don't know if you noticed. The
 house is for sale. I'm going back
 home. Sorry guys. You need to tell
 the lodger he's not lodging here.
 And I've got an interview for that
 job tomorrow. Looks like I'm a shoe-
 in.

Rachel exits. Clover looks to camera stunned. And mouths
 'oops'. Clover dashes out.

JEREMY
 (desperately)
 But I've invited him... tonight.

KAT
 Well you'll just have to uninvite
 your new brofriend.

JEREMY
 He's cute.

KAT
 And?

JEREMY

You might like him.

KAT

I've met someone actually. And I think it has long term potential.

JEREMY

Well do you want him to see you living in a hovel or in a nice house like this one?

KAT

She is determined to go back home and sell this house. She's not going to like having a lodger shoved down her throat.

JEREMY

I'll get him to come over on Saturday. After the open house.

INT. KITCHEN. DAY. A FEW DAYS LATER.

Rachel is drinking brandy. Kat comes in.

KAT

Bit early isn't it?

RACHEL

Rejection doesn't know time.

KAT

Another agent?

RACHEL

The job.

Clover winks to camera.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

Apparently I'm on the wrong side of fifty. They were so nice in the interview then at the end something happened, they asked a really weird question about commitment issues.

CLOVER

(to camera,
conspiratorially)
Film research....

Rachel takes another gulp of brandy. Jeremy comes in. He looks at Kat and mouths 'what's going on?'

KAT
 (trying to sound sad)
 Jeremy, Rachel has had some bad news. (beat) She didn't get the job in Australia.

Jeremy has to hide his happiness behind Rachel's back. Rachel turns and Jeremy puts on a fake sad face.

KAT (CONT'D)
 And what about selling?

RACHEL
 What's the point? Stuck here.

JEREMY
 Well I've got someone coming for afternoon tea. Maybe you could join us.

RACHEL
 I'm already having my afternoon tea.

KAT
 I think it would be good for you to socialise.

RACHEL
 I think it's better if I am out of the way. It seems I am invisible anyway.

KAT
 I'd love it if you could make your cheesecake.

JEREMY
 That's one way to kill the ... cat.

Clover looks to camera shocked.

CLOVER
 (to camera)
 He really does love me.

RACHEL
 I thought you didn't like my cheesecake.

KAT
 (gulping)
 I love it. It's.... It's...

JEREMY
 A perfect blend of ... sweet with sour.

RACHEL

If I'd known you both liked it so much I would have made it more often.

JEREMY AND KAT

Nooooo. It would be too much.... To ask.

RACHEL

Okay. I'll make it. Take me off my misery. Who's coming?

JEREMY AND KAT

Benjamin.

RACHEL

(drunkenly)
I knew a Ben. Once.

EXT. HOUSE. DAY

George is hiding bottles behind the bin. Ben arrives.

BENJAMIN

You need to take the labels off first.

George looks at him suspiciously.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

So she doesn't know what you're drinking.

GEORGE

She never knows what I'm doing.

BENJAMIN

Oh she does. They always do.

The front door opens. Jeremy stands there. George is holding a bottle behind his back.

JEREMY

George don't you have somewhere else to go. Like home. Nice to see you again Benjamin.

INT. LIVING ROOM. DAY

Ben and Jeremy enter the Living Room. Clover purrs at his leg. On the table is the cheesecake. Kat enters the room and stops. She and Ben stare at each other.

RACHEL (O.S.)
 What does everyone want? Coffee?
 Tea?

KAT
 You?

Ben has recognised the voice.

BENJAMIN
 I think I should go.

JEREMY
 But you haven't met Rachel.

BENJAMIN
 I have... I mean I have another

KAT
 Date?

BENJAMIN
 No. No. Not at all.

Kat looks confused. And conflicted. But then looks decisive.

RACHEL (O.S.)
 So what will it be?

Ben is shaking.

KAT
 A herbal tea for me.

JEREMY
 A coffee for me. (looks to Ben)
 And?

BENJAMIN
 Is that cheesecake?

JEREMY
 (shouting towards the
 kitchen)
 The new lodger will have a flat
 white.

RACHEL (O.S.)
 Like an Australian!

Clover jumps on the table and stares at the cake.

JEREMY
 (panicked)
 Clover. Don't. I mean don't you
 dare.

KAT
One piece might kill ... her...

JEREMY
... appetite for... dinner.

George enters carrying the For Sale sign.

GEORGE
Is the house for sale or not?

BENJAMIN
I think I need to go.

Rachel enters carrying a tray full of tea pot and cup, coffees. She sees Ben and drops the tray. Rachel runs from the room. Kat and Jeremy follow.

GEORGE
Is that cheesecake?

INT. KITCHEN. DAY

Rachel is having an anxiety attack. Jeremy pours a brandy.

KAT
Do you know that guy?

RACHEL
Where did you find him? On one of your dating sites?

Jeremy hands Kat a brandy.

KAT
Well um um...

JEREMY
He found us.

RACHEL
What?

JEREMY
He was next door and about to meet Voldemort when I saved him.

KAT
Yes that's right. I didn't have a date with him.

RACHEL
You had a date with him?

KAT
It's over. Besides he is perfect ... for the room.

(MORE)

KAT (CONT'D)

And we love this house don't we
Jeremy. He's in the film industry
Rachel.

RACHEL

I am fully aware of what industry
he is in. What the hell is he doing
here?

KAT

On an exchange with the NFTS,
Which he just told us.

JEREMY

Did he?

KAT

You must have missed it.

RACHEL

Well he can't live here.

JEREMY

Why not? He's not weird, he doesn't
have mother issues, he...

RACHEL

He has to go.

KAT

We love this house Rachel. You have
done so much with it.

JEREMY

And we love you. (beat) In a
platonic way.

CLOVER

(to camera)
It better be.

JEREMY

Besides I've taken the bond. So you
have to at least show him the room.

Rachel takes a gulp of brandy. Clover looks curious.

INT. LIVING ROOM. DAY

Ben sits there looking at the door, legs shaking. Looks at
his phone. George is gouging on the cheesecake. Ben is about
to get up when Rachel walks in. Clover jumps on the sofa and
scratches George.

BENJAMIN

Should I go?

RACHEL

No. I mean yes. I mean no. I mean stay. Sit.

Ben sits. Jeremy and Kat sneak back into the room. Rachel tries to be cool.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

So ... how long have you been in London?

BENJAMIN

Not long. A week. I was next door...when

JEREMY

He was saved from a fate worse than death. You know she who lives next door...

RACHEL

Yes Jeremy I am fully aware of who lives next door. And you thought you could just offer him a room in my house?

JEREMY

(to himself)

And I thought you were kind.

RACHEL

Sorry Jeremy did you say something?

JEREMY

That you were kind enough to at least let Benjamin look at the room.

RACHEL

Benjamin. Is that what you are calling yourself these days?

Jeremy stands there motionless.

CLOVER

(to camera)

He needs help.

Clover goes to Ben and purrs all over him.

JEREMY

Clover likes you.

KAT

Benjamin would you like more coffee?

GEORGE
 (with mouthful of food)
 He's cool Rachel.

BENJAMIN
 If I could just have the bond back.

JEREMY
 Ahh. Yes. The bond. (thinking) I
 used it to help Rachel ...

RACHEL
 Help Rachel?

JEREMY
 Get... get... An Agent.

CLOVER
 (to camera)
 Liar liar pants on fire.

BENJAMIN
 Six hundred quid to find an agent?

JEREMY
 It's London.

RACHEL
 Six hundred? But the room is seven
 hundred.

JEREMY
 Commonwealth discount?

KAT
 No bond. No sale. I think we need
 to give Benjamin a chance.

Rachel stands there. A long pause.

RACHEL
 Okay. He can stay.

BENJAMIN
 I am right here.

RACHEL
 He can stay for a month..

BENJAMIN
 I am right here.

RACHEL
 ...and then I am putting the house
 back on the market. No more finding
 lodgers at discount prices, or
 hiding signs behind the bins
 Jeremy.

GEORGE

Yeah Jeremy. Who's skating on thin ice now?

Jeremy is about to respond when he sees that Rachel and Ben are having a moment. Jeremy looks bereft. Kat looks panicked.

KAT

Maybe selling isn't so bad Rachel.

RACHEL

It's only a month.

Another moment between Rachel and Ben.

CLOVER

(to camera)

Now that's something I can work with.

THE END

CRITICAL REFLECTION ON CREATIVE PRACTICE 3:

HAVE YOU FED THE CAT? A COMEDY SERIES FEATURING THE MAIN CHARACTERS FROM THE FILM THE ACCIDENTAL ACADEMIC

The aim of this creative practice

I set out to create a half-hour narrative comedy series which continues the unresolved issues between Rachel and Ben. The aim was to write a pilot episode where the main characters meet again, and establish a dramatic question (DQ): Will they get together? The objective of Creative Practice 3 (CP3) was to find a balance between the melodrama³⁵ of the unrequited relationship in the film and a new situation which has inherent comic situations.

However, when reworking a film to sitcom/narrative comedy, it is necessary to consider what ‘struggle’ or tension drives the repeatability. As discussed in Chapter Three, and applying that analysis to this CP, I needed to determine to what degree the DQ will govern the narrative arc of the series and if there will be some resolution in the concluding episode. Further, that the second TP must carry elements of a MP in that information is delivered, and which alters the direction of the narrative from being in the descent to turning at ninety degrees.

Developing this creative practice

With Rachel’s move overseas, it seemed logical to continue the unresolved relationship between Rachel and Ben. Being a comedy series about post-divorce love, Rachel and Ben would be the key characters, and as such Rachel cannot be a comic antihero, as I argued she is in CP1 (see Critical Reflection 1); thus in this CP she is not aware of the dynamics at play that keeps her in a situation where she repeatedly makes the same mistakes.

³⁵ Saul Austerlitz, *Sitcom. A History in 24 Episodes from I Love Lucy to Community* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2014) p.265.

The pilot episode has a catalyst which introduces the main characters, the four divorced singletons, Rachel, Ben, Jeremy, Kat, along with Clover the talking cat, and Kat's son George. The echo characters are Jeremy and Kat, with Clover and George fulfilling the role of truth-tellers. Rachel and Ben are now key characters, caught in a struggle to define their feelings for each other. Each of the characters and finding themselves divorced (some having left the previous relationship, while others did the leaving), they fear that they will not find love again. This theme is triggered in each episode.

Thus, when reworking a film narrative to a half-hour episodic comedy, I found it necessary to clarify the following:

- Which characters have an unresolved need?
- What underlying fears can be triggered with an episodic inciting incident?
- Is the situation a new one, or can the current situation create new tensions which underpin fears?
- Are the fears mirrored back to the main characters by way of echo characters?
- Is there is DQ or an overt 'frame' which underlies the tension? And does it have the promise of a resolution?
- How has the intervening time frame affected the characters?

Also, it needs to be asked, having decided it is a house-sharing situation, how does Ben come to be in the same house as Rachel. And whose house is it?

The overarching DQ for the series is centred on Ben and Rachel with episodic stories on the dating lives of the divorced singletons living together. Thus, the frame is not as evident as has been posited as being beneficial for the ensemble sitcom. To that end, *Have You Fed the Cat?* falls between the sitcom of repeated behaviour yet with a narrative arc and DQ that encompasses the series, informed by a theme on the nature of dating in midlife. CP3 is therefore a narrative comedy series centred on relationships, with a DQ informing both the series arc and episodic storylines.

Two drafts of the pilot were written, and in the first version, in the lead up to the MP, Clover hitches a ride to Jeremy's work where she meets the office cat and, reluctant to engage with her, runs off; in pursuit Clover comes across Ben. When Jeremy catches up to Clover, he discovers that Ben is looking for somewhere to live. However, this MP scene was too *deus ex machina* in forcing the characters to satisfy the story, with Ben becoming a lodger, rather than the characters' actions determining the plot – the MP needed to be re-thought. Also, in the first draft Kat owned the house and it was suggested by the script editor that Rachel own the house as this raises the stakes for all the inhabitants.

In the second version of the script Rachel has decided to put the house on the market and Ben arrives next door for an interview as a lodger. Jeremy, having disposed of any potential buyers for Rachel's house, now tries to win over Ben in taking the room in Rachel's house by being less than generous about the next-door neighbour. Thus, at the MP/TP Jeremy has attempted to turn the narrative (and catalyst) away from the sale of the house rather than rely on an accidental discovery in a park; now both character have agency in their goal and are directly related. As discussed in Chapter Three, the TP enables a change in direction of the narrative, creating the rectangular shape of the narrative, while the MP delivers information.³⁶

Insights gleaned from this creative practice

In rewriting of these scenes, the exercise became practice-led research; the second version of the MP/TP is in this draft.

While the TP changes the direction of the narrative, the MP delivers essential information – Ben needs a place to live – and this gives Jeremy an idea that will delay, if not

³⁶ This discussion of the second TP also being an MP enabled me to determine that the sitcom has a narrative structure of four acts with each of the TPs creating an act:

Opening and inciting incident

TP1 into Act Two

TP2 into Act Three

TP3 into Act Four to the re-situation and emotional stasis.

prevent the sale of the house. Having tested the principle that a series post-film should the sale of the house. While I tested the technique that a series post-film should exploit unresolved needs, I came to the realisation that this is best done in a situation which triggers different/new flaws. Also, it needs to be considered how Ben and Rachel feel about seeing the other for the first time in years. Are they both pleased? What has been the communication in the intervening years? This was not considered in either draft and must be when further work is done on the script. This draft set out to establish numerous relationships that have a DQ, and which enables both seriality and tension that drives the series as well as within episodes.

Implications for practice

CP3 determines the principle that the second TP in the episodic narrative comedy delivers information much like a MP, yet in this form of screen comedy the character acts in ways that result in a change of narrative direction, as opposed to the character undergoing transformation (even at the last minute as in film comedy). Thus, CP3 and the reworking of the scene that contains TP2, validates that TP2 in an episode is most effective when it is also a MP which delivers information, triggering a MP reversal (MPR); rather than confront their need in response to the narrative, the character acts to alter the narrative in pursuit of their want. Furthermore, CP3 verifies the principle that characters with unresolved needs are best suited for the post-film TV narrative comedy series and is best served by some degree of seriality by way of a DQ.

What are the implications gained from the theoretical chapter and writing creative practice 3?

As noted, developing a series from a film is more challenging as there needs to be tension between the main characters to enable repeatability, and in some cases seriality. Although on reflection I wonder if it is more difficult to develop a film from a series as the analysis of the 2016 *Dad's Army* film elucidated. Regardless, the sitcom must ensure that the characters, in their emotional arrestment, repeat the same mistakes, while the narrative comedy may enable

some degree of emotional growth by way of a DQ. I have argued that such tension can be found either within the second act of the film (as CP1 makes evident) or post the resolution, as CP3 has attempted to achieve. However, if there is no framing discourse or overt story ideology, then a narrative arc with a DQ, centred on the discordant relationship, enables (comic) tension within the episode as well as across the series. As the ‘frame’ of dating post-divorce is more nebulous in terms of status and ideology than that found in the ensemble sitcoms discussed in Chapter One, I offer that CP3 is governed by a ‘social’ frame (dating in midlife). Each of the characters have varying attitudes to this ‘frame,’ making it an ensemble comedy with seriality, enabled by relationships missteps. Further, CP3 testifies to the principle that a DQ enables comic tension by way of inter-relational dynamics, and more so if there is more than one relationship in play, as we see in the ensemble sitcom *Friends* (which has a ‘social’ frame and the need to grow up).

On a final note, and how the originating text, *It’s Academic*, the sitcom, might be capitalised on in a marketing campaign for the film:

The Accidental Academic.

‘The truth about Ben and Rachel is finally out.’

A comedy about love, loss and the confusion of middle age.

In creating a comedy series from the film:

Have You Fed the Cat?

‘Ben and Rachel are far from home – and house-sharing with other divorced singletons. Will any of them ever swipe right again?’

A magic-realist comedy series with a talking cat.

CONCLUSION

This thesis was guided by the question: *How can specific elements of character and plotting be manipulated to generate comic tension in three related forms of screen comedy: the TV sitcom, the feature film, and the half-hour narrative comedy?* Specifically, I set out to explore how comic tension is enabled through the narrative and related plotting that affect, and is affected by, character behaviour. I have examined the sitcom/narrative comedy-film relationship by way of developing three creative practices (CPs) which follow the journey of two characters across three different, yet related, narratives. To that end, this thesis evaluated the nature of comic tension in each form, elucidating principles that offered aspects to be considered in the development and transposition of characters from one screen comedy narrative to another.

Beginning with a formalist approach to determine narrative patterns, this thesis has analysed structural aspects of the midpoint (MP) in specific film comedies and turning points (TPs) in the episodic narrative comedy series to argue that character behaviour and plotting are intrinsically linked. This thesis has also determined a principle that some film comedies, in particular those having plots which deal with a discordant relationship, involve the protagonist being caught in a bind at the MP. I argued that such a bind, being the tension between a goal and unaddressed flaws (need) underscore comic tension in Act Two, specifically the second half. Thus, I posit that comic tension in the film is enabled by way of the narrative bearing down on the character to confront their need; attempting to subvert the narrative in order to serve their goal the character denies the challenge offered by the narrative until the crisis point at the end of Act Two. Such analysis illustrated aspects of comic tension and TPs in episodic narrative comedy series, including the sitcom.

Furthermore, this thesis critically examined the ensemble sitcom to argue that this form of comedy is not only able to harbour a comic antihero, but comic tension is enabled by way

of a discursive frame. However, I posit that the frame is not essential in developing the relational sitcom, or narrative comedy series. If no frame exists then I contend that the narrative comedy series is best governed by an overarching dramatic question (DQ), and when resolved the series ends. The echo character continues to play a vital role in both the sitcom and narrative comedy series, creating the comedic gap between them and other characters, as well manifesting the collective or individual unconscious fear, which may also be delivered by a frame, if one is in play. The role of the echo character in screen comedy is an area for further investigation.

Comedy as a metanarrative

Leger Grindon argues:

Finally, and maybe most vital, the [romantic comedy] genre needs to draw upon related cultural phenomena, whether a hit play, a popular performer, political trends, shifting audience demographics, or the values and problems of the society at large.¹

This thesis offers that the comedy film, as a metanarrative, is best served by drawing on ‘related cultural phenomena’ as it enables characters to protest its restrictions, often by way of incongruity. The comedy film genre’s ability to encompass multiple forms of comedy tropes establishes its potential as a metanarrative under which sits a variety of plots that are comic, one being the relationship comedy, a term offered by Deborah Jermyn now consigned to the “relcom.” Similarly, the narrative comedy series can tap into shifting audience demographics by way of a DQ, rather than characters who simply rail against each other or in opposition to a discursive frame which, for some characters, is disempowering, and for others can be empowering. If the comedy film encompasses generic differences and tensions, I now argue that so too can the short comic narratives of the sitcom and narrative comedy series, particularly when they are situated within ideological frames.

¹ Leger Grindon, *The Hollywood Romantic Comedy. Conventions, Histories, Controversies* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011) p.75.

THE CHAPTERS AND CREATIVE PRACTICES

Chapter One analysed the ensemble sitcom (having five or more main characters) to find that comic tension is best enabled by a frame which renders each character, to varying degrees, disempowered. Further, critically examining the antihero in the sitcom, this chapter and the first CP, an ensemble sitcom titled *It's Academic*, found that the comic antihero (Rachel) is most effective when at odds with the discursive frame (the marketisation of Higher Education). CP1 tested the principle that a discursive frame enables comic tension both inter- and intra- relationally, enabling a secondary comedic gap to that of the echo character. CP1 also explored the notion that the comic antihero's entrapment is born of some loyalty to the gang, yet they are conscious of the frame that traps the group in a situation and which the antihero, in particular, believes is disempowering. The comic antihero's relationship to the frame and existence in other forms of screen comedy is also an area for future research.

Chapter Two examined the MP in film comedies, primarily those with discordant relationships, to find that at the MP the protagonist, in some instances, is caught in a bind. CP2, a feature film, *The Accidental Academic*, set out to explore the transformational journey of two of the characters from the sitcom – Ben and Rachel. In developing the feature film, I utilised the sequence approach of Paul Gulino and David Howard's application of Frank Daniel's framework to align each sequence with the stages for comic plotting, offered by Billy Mernit and Keith Giglio.² From this I discovered that *The Accidental Academic* sits firmly in the 'relationship comedy' oeuvre as well as being a comedy on the 'margins'³ in having older couples, ambivalent endings, neurosis and even a touch of gender confusion. It was the 'uncertain ending' in CP2 which enabled the post-text comedy series for CP3.

² Paul Gulino, *Screenwriting. The Sequence Approach* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018). David Howard, *How to Build a Great Screenplay* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2004). Billy Mernit, *Writing the Romantic Comedy* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2000). Keith Giglio, *Writing the Comedy Blockbuster* (CA: Michael Wiese Prod., 2012).

³ Grindon, *The Hollywood Romantic Comedy*, as before, p.81.

Further, I posited that the tension between the comic antihero and the frame (as per Chapter One) chimes with the tension generated by the bind analysed in Chapter Two, giving insight to the nature of the characters' relationships and any discord which prevents resolution.

The theoretical analyses in Chapter Two triggered an interest in unpacking the process which the character undergoes when being taken from the narrative structure of the sitcom (and a state of repeated unconsciousness) to film (becoming conscious and thus transformed). However, the comic antihero, as explored in Section One, already has some degree of consciousness or awareness (of the frame). Hence, I determined that it is the unconscious 'need' of the character which is brought to consciousness in response to the film narrative and which drives the character's transformational journey. Thus, the comic antihero, while conscious of the frame may not be conscious of their need, and which ironically may assist in such characters becoming free of their 'entrapment.'

While CP2 was not completely successful as a comedy, more akin to a dramedy, (in that it had some comic moments interspersed in a dramatic story) I posit this is because the bind shifted from being that of Ben to that of Rachel. I reflect on this point in the critical reflection of CP2 to deduce that comic tension is better enabled by either one or both characters caught in a bind (not shifting from one to the other as happened) and which ultimately avoided the fact that neither had a bind related to an effective catch. Further analysis of the connection between the premise, theme and MP may assist in determining the nature and facilitation of the bind, as well as ensuring that the flaw is connected with a catch for the protagonist/s at the beginning of Act Two. Hence, I argue that the relationship film comedy is often determined by the existence of a bind wherein the protagonist is caught between the growing consciousness of a need and a want/goal at odds with the need; at the very least, the protagonist attempts to cling to one (the goal) whilst actively denying the other (the need) until the crisis point at the end of Act Two. As such, it is the tension between

unconscious and conscious states, as mentioned, and which may shed further insight into the nature of the bind; this is also an area for further research. For now, and in light of Chapter Two and CP2, I posit that the following aspects need to be considered when developing a film from an existing comedy series:

- Do all the characters migrate to the film?
- What is the relationship in terms of timeline of the series and the film?
- Which characters undergo transformation? What is the nature of the change in the characters? Which needs are confronted?
- What is the bind of the main character/s in the film text? How is it instantiated?
- Is the situation the same? If different, why? And how does that impact on the originating text if still in production?

Furthermore, and considering the aim of this thesis, I argue that those characters who deny their need in the sitcom have the most potential to change and therefore are best suited to be transposed to either the film, or from film to the comedy series when there are still unresolved needs for the character/s to confront. The study revealed that the second act contains the emotional struggle of the discordant relationship, and as such can be a starting point in ascertaining which characters to transpose from a film to a series. Further, CP2 bears out the proposition that CP1 sits within the second act of a feature film, the primary consideration of Chapter Three: developing a narrative comedy series from a film. To that point, this thesis has revealed that it is necessary for some emotional/discursive tension to be in play for a comedy series to emerge – either out of the second act or at the conclusion of the film narrative.

As noted in the Introduction, and borne out of this research, in the sitcom the situation challenges the character who then subverts the narrative (to ensure the re-situation), while in the feature film the narrative challenges the character to confront their need and associated flaws. I have argued that the film comedy character delays this moment to the crisis point at the end of Act Two, whereas the drama character begins to confront their need at the MP, triggering the MPR (midpoint reversal).

By way of critical examination, this thesis offers that when the situation remains the same in both the comedy series (sitcom/narrative comedy) and the world of the film, then the series sits within the second act of the film; when the situation changes, then the comedy series sits either before the film (prequel) or post the film's resolution, but only when there are still unresolved issues that can inform a DQ or an ideological frame which is entrapping. I note at this point that the situation in the comedy series is often limited to a few sets, or locations whereas the 'situation' in a film is more akin to a larger realm – the story world. Hence, in the former it is the relationship between the 'entrapping' situation and character which enables comic tension, while in the latter it is the relationship between character and narrative born of a story world.

Chapter Three analysed films that spawned comedy series to find that when developing a series from a film it is those characters who deny the reality in either the same environment (such as *9 to 5*, 1980 or *The Odd Couple*, 1968)⁴ or in an unfamiliar environment as CP3 does, wherein new flaws emerge in response to the changed dynamic and/or environment. However, it is essential to determine if the subsequent series is relational or an ensemble and to consider how the situation underscores comic tension.

In developing a narrative comedy for CP3, *Have You Fed the Cat?*, and being a post-film text, I decided to relocate the main characters from the film to a new situation (and country) with a DQ governing the series: will Rachel and Ben get together? The common fear which pervades the lives of each of the main characters in CP3 and underscores a less obvious frame: the nature of love post-divorce. However, if there is no framing discourse or overt story ideology, I argue that a narrative arc with a DQ enables tension within the episode as well as across the series; tension in the sitcom resides primarily *within* the episode to ensure the re-situation. Consequently, I offer that the narrative comedy series needs to find a balance

⁴ *9 to 5*, wrs. Colin Higgins, Patricia Resnick, dir. Colin Higgins (20th Century Fox, 1980). *The Odd Couple* wr. Neil Simon, dir. Gene Saks (Paramount Pictures, 1968).

between the DQ which underpins the discordant relationship/s, and the framing discourse, if one is in play. As such, and, in this case, the DQ plays a larger role than the ‘frame.’

The Critical Reflections

The three CPs map the journey and evolution of two characters from one story world and its ideological frame to another narrative structure that demands transformation and onto a new situation wherein unfinished business is challenged.

Reflecting on each of the CPs, I was able to discern which aspects succeeded (such as the frame, the echo within the group, the MP and related TPs) and those aspects which were more challenging (the comic antihero, the bind and episodic TPs operating as MPs). The comic antihero in the ensemble comedy is particularly difficult to develop. As noted, I offer it is because such characters are aware of the disempowering frame, yet despite their attempts to demolish it, can only articulate the disempowerment that keeps them, and the gang, trapped in its gaze.

Analysing the CPs enabled clarification of practice-based approaches to the theoretical concepts in the dissertation chapters, giving rise to new propositions and insights. For me, the difficulty of practice as research is determining the framework to be applied to the (yet to be realised) practice. Whereas reflecting on a practice through a theoretical framework (as I did in my book) enables insight to trends and which has been offered in this thesis. However, working between practice and theory enabled me to ascertain the ‘narrative theory-comic tension-character behaviour’ accord. Thus, this thesis has analysed the character forced to confront their flaws, in which they are challenged by the narrative, to argue that the resulting tension enables comic performance.

CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

This thesis brings new knowledge to the study of film comedy and related comedy series in that I have derived certain principles that offer some explanation for the success of specific types of comedies. Applying these principles to the CPs, I learned that ensemble sitcoms generate comicality when governed by a discursive frame, and that the echo character, in manifesting the collective fear, triggers internal pressure for the group in relation to the frame. In reflecting on the challenge of developing a comic antihero, I determined that the group could harbour such characters in an ensemble sitcom, and now offer that they may also operate in the ensemble film comedy. Furthermore, I deduced that film comedies about relationships can entrap the main character/s in a bind, in turn underscoring the comic tension in the second act.

Having argued that characters attempt to maintain both want and need in the relcom, the comedy series is therefore related to the film in the repeated denial by the character to confront their need in Act Two and is the basis for my argument that in some cases the sitcom/narrative comedy series sits in the second act of the film. Following on, this thesis finds that the comedy series is centred on some characters' endeavour to actualise, some by way of a DQ and/or a discursive frame, and when acted upon, the series must end. Finally, the second TP in the comedy series episode is also a MP, and which forces the plot, at TP3, to return to the emotional stasis of the series – the re-situation. The tension, between character and narrative, is most intense at TP2, and can now be viewed as a form of bind. What connects all three forms of screen comedy narratives is the tension between characters' desires, discordant relationships and, in some cases, the discourse of the story world and its ideology.

Exposing characters to situations and narratives which put pressure on their flaws is the challenge for all screenwriters, yet in offering the opportunity to laugh at life, we are released from the bind which entraps us in our own struggle to know who we are.

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A SELECTION OF NOTABLE LIVE-ACTION SITCOMS THAT WERE MADE INTO FILMS + FILMS TO SITCOMS (*)

	TITLE OF TV SERIES	YEARS	FILM TITLE	YEAR RELEASED	NOTES
1	<i>Absolutely Fabulous</i>	1992-6 2001-4	<i>Absolutely Fabulous: The Movie</i>	2016	10 years after sitcom
2	<i>Acropolis Now</i> (Aus.)*	1989	<i>Wogs out of Work</i> (from stage play) <i>The Wog Boy</i>	1987 2000	Stage play, film then sitcom then second film
3	<i>The Addams Family</i>	1964-6	<i>The Addams Family</i> <i>Addams Family Values</i>	1991 1993	More than 10 years after
4	<i>Anger Management</i> *	2012-14	<i>Anger Management</i>	2003	More than 10 years after
5	<i>Are We There Yet?</i> *	2010-13	<i>Are We There Yet?</i>	2005	
6	<i>Are You Being Served?</i>	1972-85 1991-2 2016	<i>Are You Being Served?</i>	1977	Film during series
7	<i>Baby Boom</i> *	1988-9	<i>Baby Boom</i>	1987	
8	<i>Bad Education</i>	2012-14	<i>The Bad Education Movie</i>	2015	
9	<i>Bad Teacher</i> *	2014	<i>Bad Teacher</i>	2011	
10	<i>The Beverly Hillbillies</i>	1962-71	<i>Return of the Beverly Hillbillies</i> <i>(made for TV)</i> <i>The Beverly Hillbillies</i>	1981 1993	More than 10 years after series
11	<i>Bewitched</i>	1964-72	<i>Bewitched</i>	2005	More than 10 years after series. Film ends where series began
12	<i>Bless This House</i>	1971-76	<i>Bless This House</i>	1972	Film during run
13	<i>Bottom</i>	1991-5	<i>Guest House Paradiso</i> <i>(not quite a spin off)</i>	1999	
14	<i>The Brady Bunch</i>	1969-74	<i>The Brady Bunch Movie</i> <i>A Very Brady Sequel</i> <i>The Brady Bunch in the White House</i>	1995 1996 2002	More than 10 years after sitcom
15	<i>Bustin' Loose</i> *	1987-88	<i>Bustin' Loose</i>	1981	
16	<i>Car 54, Where Are You?</i>	1961-3	<i>Car 54, Where Are You?</i>	1994 (1990)	More than 10 years after sitcom
17	<i>The Courtship of Eddie's Father</i> *	1969-72	<i>The Courtship of Eddie's Father</i>	1963	Film based on novel
18	<i>Dad's Army</i>	1968-77	<i>Dad's Army</i> <i>Dad's Army</i>	1971 2016	Both during series and more than 10 years after
19	<i>Doctor in the House</i> * <i>(franchise)</i>	1969-91	<i>Doctor in the House</i>	1954	Film based on novel
20	<i>The Farmers Daughter</i> *	1963-6	<i>The Farmers Daughter</i>	1947	More than 10 years after series
21	<i>Father of the Bride</i> *	1961-2	<i>Father of the Bride</i>	1950	
22	<i>George & Mildred</i>	1976-9	<i>George & Mildred</i>	1980	
23	<i>Get Smart</i>	1965-70	<i>The Nude Bomb</i> <i>(aka The Return of Maxwell Smart)</i>	1980	10 years after series

24	<i>The Ghost and Mrs. Muir*</i>	1968	<i>The Ghost and Mrs. Muir</i>	1947	Novel, film then sitcom; more than 10-year gap
25	<i>Gilligan's Island</i>	1964-7	<i>Rescue from Gilligan's Island</i> (made for TV movie) <i>The Castaways on Gilligan's Island</i> (Made for TV movie) <i>The Harlem Globetrotters on Gilligan's Island</i> (Made for TV movie)	1978 1979 1981	10 years after series
26	<i>The Honeymooners</i> With Jackie Gleason	1955-6	<i>The Honeymooners</i> (African American cast)	2005	More than 10 years after
27	<i>House Calls*</i>	1979-82	<i>House Calls</i>	1978	
28	<i>How to Marry a Millionaire*</i>	1957-59	<i>How to Marry a Millionaire</i>	1953	
29	<i>The Inbetweeners</i> + USA remake 2012	2008-2010	<i>The Inbetweeners Movie</i> <i>The Inbetweeners 2</i>	2011 2014	
30	<i>Kath & Kim</i>	2002-4 2007	<i>Kath & Kim</i> telemovie <i>Kath & Kimderella</i>	2005 2012	
31	<i>Leave It to Beaver</i>	1957-63	Leave It to Beaver	1997	More than 10 years after
32	<i>The Likely Lads</i>	1964-6	<i>The Likely Lads</i>	1976	More than 10 years after series
33	<i>Man About the House</i>	1973	<i>Man About the House</i>	1974	Spin offs <i>Robin's Nest</i> , <i>George & Mildred</i> .
34	<i>Margie*</i>	1961-2	<i>Margie</i>	1946	Film based on short stories
35	<i>M*A*S*H *</i>	1972-83	<i>M*A*S*H</i>	1970	
36	<i>McHale's Navy</i>	1962-6	<i>McHale's Navy</i> <i>McHale's Navy Joins the Air Force</i>	1964 1965	Series originated from an hour drama entitled <i>Seven Against the Sea</i>
37	<i>Meet the Browns*</i>	2009-11	<i>Meet the Browns</i>	2008	Film based on play
38	<i>In-Laws</i>	2002-3	<i>Meet the Parents</i>	2000	Film reworked from independent film 1996
39	<i>Mister Roberts*</i>	1965-6	<i>Mister Roberts</i>	1955	Film based on play, based on novel. Series 10 years after film.
40	<i>Mister Smith Goes to Washington*</i>	1962-3	<i>Mister Smith Goes to Washington</i>	1939	Series more than 10 years later
41	<i>The Monkees</i>	1966-8	<i>Head</i>	1968	
42	<i>The Munsters</i>	1964-6	<i>Munster, Go Home!</i> <i>The Munsters' Revenge</i> (made for TV) <i>Here Come the Munsters</i> (telemovie)	1966 1981 1995	Some more than 10 years after

42			The Munsters' Scary Little Christmas (made for TV)	1996	
43	My Favorite Martian	1963-6	My Favorite Martian	1999	More than 10 years
44	My Sister Eileen*	1960-1	My Sister Eileen	1942 1950	Film based on play and series based on short stories. Series more than 10 years after films.
45	9-5*	1982-83	9-5 (Nine to Five)	1980	Film before series
46	The Odd Couple* The New Odd Couple The Odd Couple	1970-75 1982-83 2015	The Odd Couple The Odd Couple II (sequel to 1968 film)	1968 1998	Based on 1965 play
47	The Office	2001-3	David Brent: Life on the Road	2016	More than 10 years
48	On the Buses	1969-73	On the Buses Mutiny on the Buses Holiday on the Buses	1971 1972 1973	Made during and at the end
49	The Phil Silvers Show (Sergeant Bilko)	1955-9	Sgt. Bilko	1996	More than 10 years
50	Pizza (Aus.)	2000	Fat Pizza	2003	
51	Please Don't Eat the Daisies*	1965-7	Please Don't Eat the Daisies	1960	Film based on novel.
52	Police Squad!	1982	The Naked Gun: From the Files of Police Squad! The Naked Gun 2½: The Smell of Fear Naked Gun 33 1/3: The Final Insult	1988 1991 1994	
53	Porridge	1974-7	Porridge	1979	
54	Private Benjamin*	1981-3	Private Benjamin	1980	
55	Rising Damp	1974-8	Rising Damp	1980	
56	The Simpsons	1989-	The Simpsons Movie	2007	
57	Spaced	1999-2001	Shaun of the Dead	2004	
58	Steptoe and Son	1962-5 1970-74	Steptoe and Son Steptoe and Son Ride Again	1972 1973	During the series
59	The Thick of It	2005-12	In the Loop	2009	Film made during series. Veep series in USA situation
60	Till Death Us Do Part	1965-75	Till Death Us Do Part The Alf Garnett Saga	1969 1972	Made during series
61	Topper*	1953-5	Topper	1937	Based on novels
62	Upstart Crow*	2016	Shakespeare in Love	1998	Film before sitcom; more than 10-year gap
63	What We Do in the Shadows*	2019-	What We Do in the Shadows	2014	
64	Whoops Apocalypse	1982	Whoops Apocalypse	1986	
65	The Young Offenders*	2018	The Young Offenders	2016	

Sequence	Paul Gulino, <i>Screenwriting. The Sequence Approach. The Hidden Structure of Successful Screenplays.</i> 2004	Frank Daniel's approach in Howard <i>How to Build a Great Screenplay.</i> 2004	Keith Giglio's approach – <i>Writing the Comedy Blockbuster</i> 2012
#1 (A)	Life of protagonist – <i>point of attack, or inciting incident</i>	STATUS QUO	THE COMEDIC WORLD
#2 (B)	<i>predicament</i> , marking the end of the first act and setting up the main tension	EXTERNAL WANT EXPLICIT	YOU'RE GOING TO DO WHAT?
#3 (C)	first attempt at solving the problem posed at the end of the first act	EXPLORING THE WORLD	MAD MAD WORLD
#4 (D)	leads to the <i>First Culmination</i> or <i>Midpoint Culmination</i> of a film – the first culmination may be a glimpse at the actual resolution of the picture, or its mirror opposite.	FIRST BIG TEST OVERCOME	IT JUST KEEPS GETTING WORSE
MIDPOINT			
#5 (E)	the protagonist works on whatever new complication arose in at the first culmination; Sometimes this is a place in the story in which new characters are introduced and new opportunities present themselves. This, and Sequence F, are sometimes occupied primarily by subplots,	FORCES GATHERING (FRIENDSHIP)	LOVE IS IN THE AIR
#6 (F)	Protagonist works toward a resolution of the main tension, and the dramatic question is answered; end of the sixth sequence thus marks the end of the second act; Second Culmination, like the first, can be a glimpse of the actual resolution of the picture, or, more typically, its mirror opposite	HITTING THE WALL (BREAKDOWN)	WHAT WAS I THINKING?
#7 (G)	seventh sequence is often characterized by still higher stakes and a more frenzied pace, and its resolution is often characterized by a major twist.	DESPERATE ACTION	TIME TO GROW UP
#8 (H)	eighth and final sequence almost invariably contains the <i>resolution</i> - the point at last where, for better or for worse, the instability created in the point of attack is settled.	SUCCESS AND AFTERMATH	THE NEW ME.

It has been said...

If you can't do, then teach ...

But, if you can't teach then...

It's Academic

A studio-based
ensemble sitcom

Created by

Deborah Klika

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents either are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

It's Academic centres on TV lecturer Rachel, 52, recovering from a bad divorce and Ben, 48, a once successful film director recovering from a breakdown. Running away from life, these two, once in a relationship, come face to face in the media department of the University of South Sydney, a middle ranking university spiralling down the league table.

A studio-based ensemble comedy set in the shifting sands of academia.

SET UP: **Rachel Kozlowski**, recently appointed team leader of TV Production, divorced, and **Ben Baxter**, filmmaker on the rise, interrupted by a nervous breakdown, surrounded by the grumpy and once successful documentary director **Jack Kerr** the idealistic new lecturer **Brianna Williams** and controlling Indigenous departmental administrator **Luciana Fonseca**.

The department is overseen by the Machiavellian **Henry Upton** whose brown-nosing of the rarely seen Dean Fiona Willoughby-Baxter knows no bounds.

Audience: Anyone who has worked in an open plan office fraught with politics or survived higher education as a student, academic or administrator, ages 30-75. 9.00 pm.

MAIN CHARACTERS

Rachel Kozlowski, 52, Senior Lecturer in TV, ambitious for her students to succeed, only problem most of them think the TV degree is the easy one. Rachel likes to be needed, which means she gives more to her students than she needs to. She also likes to win. Thinks she knows best. Can't admit she is wrong. **Loves to have a document with a number of words at 0 or 5**. Her heart is in the right place but her ambition undercuts her. PhD on *Love Island*, 'Guilty TV – how we need it yet reject it'. **Hates spreadsheets**. Lies to herself (and others when it suits her ambition) especially when it comes to ...

Benjamin Braddock Baxter 48, Lecturer in film, had been a director, recovering from what people think is an attempted suicide. Sweet and confused; likes being with Rachel and finds excuses to be with her, without sending signals. Needs to be loved. Loves to see students develop. Has won some film awards for his commercial work and fears he is a one-trick pony. **Afraid of life (especially failure, conflict and commitment). Tries to impress with technical knowledge**. Wants to direct a feature. Loves hanging out with the students and telling war stories from his past and seeing them develop with their projects, often becoming versions of how he sees the world. The technicians treat him like a brother, which he craves. Wears muted colours and on off days, an old green T-shirt, looked after by ...

Luciana Fonseca 35, (Aboriginal Italian descent) departmental administrator, knows how the game is played and plays some games herself. **Passive-aggressive**. The **kitchen** area is her battle ground and the **stationery cupboard** she guards like the jewel crowns. Dreams of working in marketing. Luciana has an assistant who changes with each episode. The body clock is ticking; wears bold colours and florals are her camouflage to hide in plain sight from... .

Henry Upton, 50, English Head of Department and line manager to Rachel, Ben, Luciana, Brianna and Jack. **Self-serving and vain** he wears purple suits or Harris Tweed suits. Had some success as a playwright in his 30s and drops names like confetti. Sees students as customers and a source of income much to the consternation of ...

Jack Kerr, 59, (Irish descent) Senior Lecturer. Successful documentary producer frustrated with Higher Education and its trend towards marketisation. **Grumpy**. Like Rachel needs to be right – a source of both conflict and partnership between them. PhD in history of film. Goes to extreme lengths to help his students get jobs, interviews, make contacts. Published book on 1960s Hollywood films and no one is interested. Constantly crumpled. **Grammar Nazi**. Good to younger staff members, up to a point, especially ...

Brianna Williams, 28, Associate Lecturer, hardworking, but no idea of the games at play. Naïve. Idealistic about teaching and HE. PhD in Journalism. **Eager to please**. A throwback to pre-feminism, she believes talent will always shine through, such as her approach to teaching and doing things like quizzes, team building exercises, apps to inspire the students, and Monday morning blogs. **Loves to create spreadsheets**.

Hans Winkler 39, lecturer in digital media and all that is internet. **Eccentric** Eastern European from a holocaust surviving family. Loud and abrasive, lives at the cutting edge of digital media. Dream is to have an Ada Lovelace award.

SUPPORTING CHARACTERS:

Fergal Dempsey 32, studio technician, in awe of Ben.

Sarah Charlton 35, Senior Lecturer in English. A poet, she is single and desperately seeking a husband online, voracious sex appetite. Constantly has a cold. Work wife to Henry.

Fiona Willoughby-Baxter 49, Dean, who has to implement policies of the VC, represents neo liberal HE discourse (or whatever will save her bacon). Communicates only through emails.

OCCASIONAL CHARACTERS

Julia Barsakova, 26, technician, savvy, smart and known as ‘Bossykova’; doesn’t suffer fools.

Angela, late 50s, café supervisor, runs it like a concentration camp, but don’t mention the war or Brexit, she’s German.

Mariam Hansen, 28, Graduate assistant, in love with Rom Coms. Can run a spreadsheet around any unsuspecting lecturer. Good friends with Julia, sharing female perspectives on the actions of academics and the system. They see it as a reality show.

Simon Baxter, 50, Ben's brother, freelance producer and occasional lecturer, always on the prowl but rarely around. Wears flashy watches and shoes. Rarely seen.

Francesco Vico, 22, sound technician, finishing his major work, a documentary about refugees. A sharp dresser, Francesco falls in love easily and never completes anything. Eager. Follows Rachel and Brianna around like a puppy.

SETS: open plan office, Head of Department Office, University café.

Occasional: Tech's office, Classroom.

SERIES 1 EPISODES

Pilot It's the Kilo Merger.

Henry has announced that the film and TV degrees will be merged. Rachel and Jack decide to write to the union. Ben has returned from a leave of absence and has been paired with Rachel for the annual Kilo Challenge which she has won every year and intends to win again despite Ben's inability to give up chocolate.

Episode suggestions:

It's the Teacher of the Year Award.

Nominations are open for teacher of the year and Rachel wants to win, giving her a hat trick. Henry wants Ben to get it. Simon, (Ben's brother) is off on a shoot, and along with Ben and Rachel all are short listed and the staff will now vote. Rachel thinks she has it in the bag.

A film crew arrives.

Former students have been commissioned by ABC to do an observational documentary of life in HE. Rachel attempts to guide the crew; they go to Jack for advice and follow Ben like he is a god.

It's Second offer round.

Rachel and Ben are down for clearing duty and Rachel can't stand Ben getting more calls and more acceptances than her, so she starts offering applicants accommodation.

It's the printer.

The printer has been replaced and no one can get it to work through their computers; they ask Luciana to help out – but at a cost. There are four strange people in the office and no one knows who they are or why they are there. Ben has a plan to find out.

It's Open day

At the open day Ben comes across his therapist whose son wants to go to the university. Rachel applies for a job overseas.

It's the Theory of ...

Rachel is ordered take theory out of the degree under review only to find that Ben is allowed to teach theory. Simon's class goes into meltdown and he gets Ben to restore order. Rachel begins to see Ben's gift for teaching and rethinks her overseas move.

It's the Student Survey

The student survey is on and Henry asks Rachel to charm the students and Fiona asks Ben to take the students out drinking leading to disaster.

FURTHER STORYLINES

Simon is accused of sexual harassment by one of the students and Ben is forced to support him. Henry weasels his way out of the confrontation. Ben thinks a student is stalking him but all she wants is some advice.

Henry calls a staff meeting and tries not to use the R word (redundancy) when saying 15% cuts to the budget are needed if the university is to survive. The VC had reset the strategic plan for all lecturers to take on tutees. Rachel refuses. Ben is inundated with requests to be tutor for students. Rachel is incensed and sets out to lobby students to be their pastoral carer.

At a departmental meeting where Fiona discusses further cuts, the wine gums are handed out and the staff start talking like children.

Brianna needs to find a husband, so she can stay in the country. Rachel thinks Ben would be perfect choice. Ben gets a windfall from a distant relative.

The staff survey is on and the Dean has pastries sent to the media department as Henry takes Ben out for drinks.

It's Patrick's retirement afternoon tea. Henry asks Rachel to give a speech, only she has no idea who Patrick is and can't find anyone who admits to knowing him.

The faculty strategy is out, and number one priority is recruitment. No one can remember the other four, when Henry does a quick straw poll he discovers Ben is the only one who knows the four strategies. Rachel tries to get Ben to tell her the answers and realises he is smarter than he lets on.

Rachel tries to introduce a studio-based program but is stopped at every turn by Henry. The techs find a way to get what she wants.

Rachel applies to go to a conference and is turned down only to find that Fiona gave Ben the gig and she is going as well.

Ben discovers that he has a sister he didn't know about. Rachel discovers Jack was one of the reviewers for an article that she submitted and rejected.

Rachel's ex-husband turns up and everyone falls in love with him, including Luciana and Brianna.

The department has to decide which films are chosen for the annual film awards. Rachel is determined that her students are included.

The department has been nominated for the learning onscreen awards and Francesco only has twelve tickets to the event. Rachel and Ben both want seven tickets for their students.

The staff survey is out, and Henry has held back the feedback from the department. Ben's short film wins an award and Rachel can't hide her jealousy.

The VC pays an unexpected visit to the department and Rachel flirts outrageously with him only to be outdone by Luciana and Brianna.

It's the Faculty away day and Australia has made it to the world cup football. Australia scores as the Dean announces that the budget cuts will come into force in the next two months, the media faculty members roar with excitement as a goal is scored.

Numbers are down, and Rachel and Ben are ordered to do college visits where they try to outdo each other.

Rachel's son turns up wanting Ben to help him with a project. Ben has a new girlfriend who is exactly like his ex-wife.

Ben's ex-wife gets a job in the department as department administrator.

The students sign a petition against the Dean. Henry convinces Ben to placate them.

It's Christmas and Rachel decides to try online dating only to find some interesting facts about Ben's new girlfriend. The delivery of online shopping creates chaos in the office and Luciana takes drastic steps.

The central computing systems unit has closed down the student portal – the day before graduation and the students demand to know their results.

A new central email system for each programme is required to ensure students have a central address to send their work and queries to. However no one takes responsibility for it, causing bad reviews from students for lack of responses.

Francesco offers to do a class on how to win at interviews, bringing in trick questions to watch out for such as 'will you have sex with me'.

The computers are down and technicians come to fix them, blowing into the portals and competing with each other to get computers working.

The students stage a sit-in and the lecturers are locked in the building. Rachel and Ben get trapped in the kit hub. When they are freed the students can't remember why they held the sit-in.

THE ACCIDENTAL ACADEMIC – a comedy set in a university media department about loss, love and confusion in midlife. by Deborah Klika

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents either are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Premise: An out-of-work director, forced to work in the only place he can get a job, confronts the woman he blames for sabotaging his career 20 years ago.

Tone: *Something's Gotta Give* meets *It's Complicated*.

Log Line 25-40 words:

A comedy about an out-of-work director forced to work with the woman he blames for his breakdown 20 years ago as he struggles to accept the truth - about the past, her, and himself.

Pitch:

Ben, once a star director, agrees to be attached to a project devised by his entrepreneurial brother, Simon. Needing to pay rent until the green light, Ben takes a job at a university (thinking anyone can teach), where he comes across the woman he blames for de-railing his career; feelings, something Ben is good at keeping locked away, due to a disorder he denies, now bubble to the surface, threatening to erupt and de-rail him again. A comedy about misunderstandings and the disorder of mid-life.

The story in 3 sentences:

Ben needs a job to pay the rent and Simon offers him a gig directing green screen scenes in his film, which Ben rejects as he wants to be a 'real' director – directing actors. In the meantime Ben takes a job at a prestigious university media department teaching film practice where he comes across Rachel, the woman he blames for de-railing his career 20 years ago. When Ben discovers Simon has given the gig away he is forced to work with Rachel to salvage his self-esteem, only for Ben to fall hopelessly in love with her – but the past comes back to confront both of them.

The story in 3 paragraphs:

Act 1

Ben is being hounded by an ex-wife wanting settlement and is about to be evicted because of a neighbour's dog. Ben needs a job, meanwhile his brother, Simon, offers him a directing green screen gig but Ben refuses, his goal is to direct real people. Hoping Simon will come through, and in need of an income, Ben decides to take a job at the university (anyone can be an academic). Ben bumps into Rachel, the woman he blames for his breakdown and which de-railed his career 20 years ago. In order not to be triggered again, Ben decides to take Simon's gig only to discover he has given it away.

Act 2

Fiona, the Dean, makes a deal with Rachel: she will support Rachel's application for deputy dean if Rachel mentors Ben. Fiona gets snoop dog Luciana, the departmental administrator, to spy on them (in comical ways) uncovering Rachel's secret love of Dolly Parton, and Ben's strange dashes to the men's toilet. Ben tries to impress Rachel with disastrous results. However, the more Ben and Rachel work together and her competitiveness as a teacher is exposed, even Rachel has to admit that the students flourish under their combined tutelage. But it all goes horribly wrong in a directing actors class and Ben loses it in the pub with the students. Ben decides to end it all but then the dog wants to be walked. Waking in the hospital Ben is confronted by the therapist, his ex-wife and Rachel, who thinks he is back with the ex-wife.

Act 3

Simon offers Ben the directing gig which Ben rejects having accepted that he has a disorder causing him to sabotage his dreams and to build a new life. Rachel loses out on getting the deputy dean position to a career hungry incompetent, forcing her to confront her own lost dreams; she decides to accept a writing internship in London. Ben tells Rachel he was wrong to blame her. Rachel hopes he will come visit London; Ben says he might, but now the dog needs a walk.

One-page story.

THE ACCIDENTAL ACADEMIC is a comedy set in the world of Academia. It centres on a middle-aged filmmaker who comes face to face with the woman he blames for a breakdown twenty years earlier that (he believes) de-railed his burgeoning career.

BEN, 48, may appear cool as a cucumber, yet this facade masks the emotional volcano that emerges under pressure. When Ben is offered the opportunity to direct a film by his entrepreneurial brother, Simon, he believes this is the break he needs to get his career back on track. Hounded by an ex-wife for alimony, the landlady for rent, Ben is forced to take a job at the prestigious film academy, headed by Simon's ex-wife, FIONA, 50.

On his first day Ben come across RACHEL, 52, the woman he blames for his breakdown twenty years ago, causing him and his career to spiral out of control; paralysis sets in and his teaching goes off the rails. Rachel, a serious academic imparting the gems of screen studies to her adoring students is oblivious to the impact she has on Ben, or anyone in fact. Rachel is ordered by Fiona to help Ben settle into teaching or she risks not getting the deputy dean position she covets. Trying to impress Rachel, Ben continues to stumble. While the students love Ben's tales from LA, Rachel takes offence at his behaviour, in particular his popularity and socialising with the students. Meanwhile Rachel's secret love of Dolly Parton is discovered by the perceptive and sarcastic LUCIANA, 39, the indigenous departmental administrator who knows where all the skeletons are hidden and relishes bringing them out to play. Sensing there is history between Ben and Rachel, Luciana sets out to find out what it is.

The more Ben and Rachel team teach the more the students flourish under their tutelage and the more Ben and Rachel flourish in each other's company, despite the desperate attempts by newly minted academic BRIANNA, 28. Ben begins to fall for Rachel

Rachel asks Ben to help with a student who has symptoms they are both too familiar with. Realising he is now hopelessly in love with Rachel, Ben attempts to ask Rachel out only for Rachel to misunderstand the signals. Ben goes back to therapy and has to confront the secret that haunts him. When Ben finally finds the courage to tell Rachel he has a disorder, she shrugs it off. HENRY, 50, the unseen head of department, gets the deputy dean's job, forcing Rachel to confront her own demons and lost dreams. Ben confronts Simon who offers him the actor directing gig which Ben rejects, realising that his gifts lie in teaching as Rachel realises she has taken the wrong path in her life.

THE ACCIDENTAL ACADEMIC is a comedy about the accidents we make in life and the opportunity to correct them when given a second chance.



Have You Fed the Cat? is set in a shared house in North London. It centres on Rachel, Kat, and Jeremy all divorced and wondering if they will ever swipe right again.

When a new lodger, Ben, moves in, Clover the talking cat discovers there is history between this interloper and Rachel. Curiosity killed the ... romance... or did it?

Have You Fed the Cat?

A magic-realist comedy about divorce, middle-age, and unrequited love.

Created by Deborah Klika.

MAIN CHARACTERS

RACHEL, 54, who came from Australia to work on a soap but things haven't turned out as she hoped. Messy, like her relationships. Pressed by Kat to go online dating, she prefers eHarmony because she likes taking surveys. Brought up to speed in all ways English by

KATHERINE (KAT), 44, Journalist. Loves to organise people and their lives. One son, George, whom she loves to death. Always on dating apps. Dream is to work for a charity but the income won't support her lifestyle. Avid entertainer, mother to George and owner of ...

CLOVER the talking cat. Runs the house like it's her kingdom, has firm views on why the women in this house are failing in their lives. In love with...

JEREMY, 35, writer and lodger. Works in publishing. Pines for his ex-wife. Fussy, tidy, and clean. Likes to boss Kat's son....

GEORGE Kat's son, 15. Mixed race. Behaves like a cat. Triggers sibling rivalry in Clover. Extreme conservative; rejects Kat's liberal views as hypocritical. Befriended by ...

BENJAMIN (Ben), 50, Australian filmmaker in London on a teaching exchange at the NFTS, hoping to get a big break. A dreamer, still recovering from the departure of the woman that has rekindled his flame Rachel.

SUPPORTING CHARACTERS

SERENA, Kat's sister, 42, lives with her ex-husband; life is chaos and constantly asks Kat for money.

ASHLEY, Jeremy's ex-wife, 30. Cries on Jeremy's shoulder after each lover leaves her.

SETS: House (Kitchen, living, front hallway) local pub.

SERIES STORIES:

- Rachel and Ben's relationship
- Rachel and Jeremy's unrequited desires in work
- Jeremy and Kat's search for love
- Clover's relationship with the audience....

PILOT EPISODE (Episode 1):

“On the market”

Rachel needs another lodger to help pay the mortgage, failing to find a suitable candidate and having an offer of a 12-month contract back home in Australia, she decides to sell the house. Clover has other ideas, encouraging Jeremy to take down the for-sale signs.

Clover decides this has to be stopped and she and Jeremy set about finding a lodger while stopping buyers at the door.

As Kat continues her search for love, Clover gets into her dating app while putting an ad for a lodger on spareroom.com.

When Rachel's job offer falls through, Rachel agrees to meet the new lodger, only to discover it is Benjamin the man she left behind....

Storylines for subsequent episodes follow. Ben and Rachel must now confront their feelings for each other; **storyline in bold is through line for their relationship and B plot for each episode.**

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents either are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

POSSIBLE STORYLINES FOR FURTHER EPISODES AFTER THE PILOT

- Ep 2 Kat encourages Rachel to go online dating, only to find Ben on Bumble. **Rachel does everything to avoid Ben but keeps bumping into him.** Kat is falling for Ben and Rachel gets jealous. A student flirts with Ben and he doesn't know what to do and asks Rachel for advice. Jeremy's ex-wife wants him to meet her new beau; Jeremy asks Rachel for advice.
- Ep 3 Rachel's friend is convicted of manslaughter back in Australia. Jeremy feels the need to make up a story about his wayward youth. **Ben starts seeing someone from work. Kat and Rachel gang up on him.**
- Ep 4 Kat tries a new look. Rachel puts on weight. Jeremy splashes out on a new coat. Clover gets covered in paint. **Ben's is accused of fraternising with the students and asks Rachel and Kat for help.**
- Ep 5 **After a disastrous blind date set up by Kat, Rachel realises she wants to be with Ben. So does Kat.** Rachel orders a new bed and Clover decides to "mark" it. Rachel sets off the fire alarm and Kat's ex wants to get back together. **Ben has a disastrous date, and realises he wants to be with Rachel.**
- Ep 6 Clover spends the night on the streets. When she returns, she is coy about what she has been doing. **Ben and Rachel start seeing each secretly. Jeremy suspects something is going on and threatens Rachel that he will tell Kat. Rachel begs him not to and offers to do anything for him.**
- Ep 7 **Kat's sister Serena buys her new cushions for the lounge, but Kat thinks they don't match. She calls for opinions from Rachel and Jeremy who calls Benji.**
- Ep 8 Kat decides to help out a local youth shelter only to find her son George is the ringleader of a local gang. Rachel's past catches up with her when a long-gone ex turns up. **Ben gets jealous and keeps popping in to borrow condiments.**
- Ep 9 **Rachel applies for a new job. Kat gets a new job – only problem is it is the one Rachel went for. Jeremy seat warms his ex-wife's job in the hope she will come back. Ben gets an offer back home that he can't resist/offer to direct a film in US. Rachel encourages him to take it. Jeremy knows she is lying. Jeremy finds ways of making Ben talk about Rachel.**
- Ep 10 It's Christmas and Kat and Rachel are getting the house ready. Kat is expecting family. Jeremy's ex-wife surprises him at work and Rachel's son arrives. Kat plans a holiday with George who has plans of his own. **Ben arrives back and declares he wants to be with Rachel – back in Australia.**

Deborah Klika.

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Absolutely Fabulous. Created by Jennifer Saunders and Dawn French. Produced by Saunders and French Productions, BBC. UK: BBC, 1992-96, 2001-4, 2011-12.

Absolutely Fabulous: The Movie. Written by Jennifer Saunders. Directed by Mandie Fletcher. Produced by Damien Jones, Jon Plowman. 20th Century Fox, Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2016.

The Accidental Husband. Written by Mimi Hare, Clare Naylor and Bonnie Sikowitz. Directed by Griffin Dunne. Produced by Jennifer Todd et al. Yari Film Group, 2008.

Acropolis Now. Created by Simon Palomeres, Nick Giannopoulos & George Kapiniaris. Produced by Seven Network et al. Australia: ATN 7, 1989-1992.

The Addams Family. Created by David Levy. Produced by Filmways. USA: ABC, 1964-1966.

The Addams Family. Written by Caroline Thompson and Larry Wilson. Directed by Scott Rudin. Produced by Barry Sonnenfeld. Paramount Pictures, 1991.

All About Steve. Written by Kim Barker. Directed by Phil Traill. Produced by Sandra Bullock et al. 20th Century Fox, 2009.

All in the Family. Created by Johnny Speight. Developed by Norman Lear and Bud Yorkin. Produced by Tandem Productions. USA: CBS, 1971-79.

Along Came Polly. Written and Directed by John Hamburg. Produced by Danny DeVito et al. Universal Pictures, 2004.

Always Be My Maybe. Written by Randall Park, Ali Wong and Michael Golamco. Directed by Nahnatchka Khan. Produced by Nathan Kahane et al. Netflix, 2019.

America's Sweethearts. Written by Billy Crystal and Peter Tolan. Directed by Joe Roth. Produced by Susan Arnold et al. Sony Pictures Releasing, 2001.

Analyze This. Written by Kenneth Lonergan, Peter Tolan and Harold Ramis. Directed by Harold Ramis. Produced by Paula Weinstein et al. Warner Bros., Roadshow, 1999.

¹ Increasingly recognition is given to series creators (the Showrunners), as such I have given preference to the creator, with the production companies, as the risk-taking 'middle-man,' broadcaster (as the 'publisher') then years of broadcast. Specific channels within broadcasters (e.g., BBC2, CBS2) are not listed. Individual episodes, where quoted in the main text, along with the writer are footnoted in the main text and listed in the Bibliography. Films are referenced by Writer, then Director, then Producer/s (if more than one then et al. is listed), followed by the distributor and the year of release, as is common in Chicago referencing.

Anger Management. Written by David S. Dorfman. Directed by Peter Segal. Produced by Jack Giarraputo et al. Sony Pictures Releasing, 2003.

Annie Hall. Written by Woody Allen and Marshall Brickman. Directed by Woody Allen. Produced by Charles H. Joffe. United Artists, 1977.

The Apartment. Written by Billy Wilder and I.A.L Diamond. Directed by Billy Wilder. Produced by Billy Wilder. United Artists, 1960.

Are You Being Served? Created by Jeremy Lloyd & David Croft. Produced by BBC. UK: BBC, 1972-1985.

Are You Being Served? Written by David Croft and Jeremy Lloyd. Directed by Bob Kellett. Produced by Andrew Mitchell. EMI, 1977.

As Good As It Gets. Written by Mark Andrus and James L. Brooks. Directed by James L. Brooks. Produced by James L. Brooks et al. Sony Pictures Releasing, 1997.

As Time Goes By. Created by Colin Bostock-Smith. Written by Bob Larbey. Produced by Sydney Lotterby, Theatre of Comedy Entertainment, DLY Entertainment. UK: BBC, 1992-2005.

Baby Boom. Written by Nancy Meyers and Charles Shyer. Directed by Charles Shyer. Produced by Nancy Meyers et al. MGM/UA Communications, 1987.

Back from the Edge – Borderline Personality Disorder. Produced by New York Presbyterian Hospital. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=967Ckat7f98&t=3s>>. Accessed December 30, 2019.

Bad Education. Created by Jack Whitehall. Produced by Tiger Aspect Productions. UK: BBC, 2012-14.

The Bad Education Movie. Written by Freddy Syborn and Jack Whitehall. Directed by Elliot Hegarty. Entertainment Film, 2015.

Bad Teacher. Written by Lee Eisenberg and Gene Stupnitsky. Directed by Jake Kasdan. Produced by Jimmy Miller et al. Sony Pictures Releasing, 2011.

Barney's Version. Written by Michael Konyves. Directed by Richard J. Lewis. Produced by Robert Lantos. Sony Pictures Classics, 2010.

Begin Again. Written and Directed by John Carney. Produced by Anthony Bregman et al. The Weinstein Co., 2014.

Bell Book and Candle. Written by Daniel Taradash. Directed by Richard Quine. Produced by Julian Blaustein. Columbia Pictures, 1958.

The Beverly Hillbillies. Created by Paul Henning. Produced by Filmways, CBS Television. USA: CBS, 1962-1971

The Beverly Hillbillies. Written by Lawrence Konner, Mark Rosenthal, Jim Fisher and Jim Staahl. Directed by Penelope Spheeris. Produced by Ian Bryce et al. 20th Century Fox, 1993.

Bewitched. Written by Nora Ephron and Delia Ephron. Directed by Nora Ephron. Produced by Nora Ephron et al. Columbia Pictures, 2005.

Bewitched. Created by Sol Saks. Produced by Screen Gems Television and Ashmont Productions. USA: ABC, 1964-1972.

The Big Bang Theory. Created by Chuck Lorre & Bill Prady. Produced by Chuck Lorre Productions and Warner Bros Television. USA: CBS, 2007-2019.

Book Club. Written by Bill Holderman and Erin Simms. Directed by Bill Holderman. Produced by Andrew Duncan et al. Paramount Pictures, 2018.

The Break-Up. Written by Jeremy Garelick and Jay Lavender. Directed by Peyton Reed. Produced by Vince Vaughn et al. Universal Pictures, 2006.

Bridesmaids. Written by Annie Mumolo and Kristen Wiig. Directed by Paul Feig. Produced by Judd Apatow et al. Universal Pictures, 2011.

Bridget Jones' Diary. Written by Richard Curtis, Andrew Davis and Helen Fielding. Directed by Sharon Maguire. Produced by Tim Bevan et al. Universal Pictures, Miramax Films, 2001.

Bringing Up Baby. Written by Dudley Nichols and Hagar Wilde. Directed by Howard Hawks. Produced by Cliff Reid et al. RKO Radio Pictures, 1938.

British Sitcom: 60 Years of Laughing at Ourselves. Produced by Breid McLoone for BBC Scotland. UK: BBC. Transmitted September 12, 2016.

Can You Keep a Secret? Written by Peter Hutchings. Directed by Elise Duran. Produced by Claude Dal Farra et al. Vertical Entertainment, 2019.

Cheers. Created by James Burrows, Glen Charles & Les Charles. Produced by Charles/Burrows/Charles Productions and Paramount Network Television. USA: NBC, 1982-1993.

Closely Watched Trains. Written and directed by Jiri Menzel. Produced by Zdeněk Oves. Ústřední půjčovna filmů, 1966.

Cold Feet. Created by Mike Bullen. Produced by Granada Television, Big Talk Productions. UK: ITV, 1997-2003, 2016-2020.

Community. Created by Dan Harmon. Produced by Krasnoff Foster Productions, et al. in association with Sony Pictures Television. USA: NBC, 2009-2014, Yahoo Screen! 2015.

Crazy, Stupid, Love. Written by Dan Fogelman. Directed by Glenn Ficarra and John Requa. Produced by Steve Carell et al. Warner Bros, 2011.

Dad's Army. Created by Jimmy Perry. Produced by BBC. UK: BBC, 1968-1977.

Dad's Army. Written by Jimmy Perry and David Croft. Directed by Norman Cohen. Produced by John R Sloan. Columbia Pictures, 1971.

Dad's Army. Written by Hamish McColl. Directed by Oliver Parker. Produced by Damian Jones. Universal Pictures, 2016.

David Brent. Life On the Road. Written and Directed by Ricky Gervais. Produced by Ricky Gervais et al. Entertainment One, 2016.

Defending Your Life. Written and Directed by Albert Brooks. Produced by Robert Grand et al. Warner Bros., 1991.

Definitely, Maybe. Written and directed by Adam Brooks. Produced by Tim Bevan et al. Universal Pictures, 2008.

Derry Girls. Created by Lisa McGee. Produced by Hat Trick Productions. UK: Channel 4, 2018-2022.

The Devil Wears Prada. Written by Aline Brosh McKenna. Directed by David Frankel. Produced by Wendy Finerman. 20th Century Fox, 2006.

Dinnerladies. Created and written by Victoria Wood. Produced by Geoff Posner and BBC.UK: BBC, 1998-2000.

Down with Love. Written by Eve Ahlert. Directed by Peyton Reed. Produced by Dan Jinks et al. 20th Century Fox, 2003.

Drop the Dead Donkey. Created by Andy Hamilton and Guy Jenkin. Produced by Hat Trick Productions. UK: Channel 4, 1990-1998.

Easy A. Written by Bert V. Royal. Directed by Will Gluck. Produced by Zanne Devine et al. Screen Gems, 2010.

Election. Written by Alexander Payne and Jim Taylor. Directed by Alexander Payne. Produced by Albert Berger et al. Paramount Pictures, 1999.

Enough Said. Written and directed by Nicole Holofcener. Produced by Anthony Bregman et al. Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2013.

50 First Dates. Written by George Wing. Directed by Peter Segal. Produced by Jack Giarraputo et al. Sony Pictures Releasing, 2004.

500 days of Summer. Written by Scott Neustadter and Michael H. Webb. Directed by Marc Weber. Produced by Mason Novick et al. Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2009.

The 40-Year-Old Virgin. Written by Judd Apatow and Steve Carrell. Directed by Judd Apatow. Produced by Judd Apatow et al. Universal Pictures, 2005.

Faith in the Future. Created by Jan Etherington and Gavin Petrie. Produced by Jamie Rix and London Weekend Production. UK: ITV, 1995-1998.

Falling in Love. Written by Michael Cristofer. Directed by Ulu Grosbard. Produced by Marvin Worth. Paramount Pictures, 1984.

Fawlty Towers. Created by John Cleese & Connie Booth. Produced by BBC. UK: BBC, 1975, 1979.

I Feel Pretty. Written and directed by Abby Kohn and Marc Silverstein. Produced by Nicolas Chartier et al. STX Entertainment, 2018.

Finding Fatima. Written and Directed by Oz Arshad. Produced by Sol Harris. Icon Distribution, 2017.

A Fine Romance. Created by Bob Larbey. Produced by London Weekend Television. UK: ITV, 1981-84.

First Wives Club. Written by Robert Harling. Directed by Hugh Wilson. Produced by Scott Rudin. Paramount Pictures, 1996.

A Fish Called Wanda. Written by John Cleese. Directed by Charles Crichton. Produced by Michael Shamberg. MGM/UA Communications Co., 1988.

Fleabag. Created by Phoebe Waller-Bridge. Produced by Two Brothers Pictures. UK: BBC, 2016-19.

Forces of Nature. Written by Marc Lawrence. Directed by Bronwen Hughes. Produced by Susan Arnold et al. DreamWorks Pictures, 1999.

Forgetting Sarah Marshall. Written by Jason Segel. Directed by Nicolas Stoller. Produced by Judd Apatow et al. Universal Pictures, 2008.

Four Weddings and A Funeral. Written by Richard Curtis. Directed by Mike Newell. Produced by Duncan Kenworthy. Rank Film Distributors, 1994.

Frasier. Created by David Angell, Peter Casey & David Lee. Produced by Grubstreet Productions, in association with Grammmnet Productions and Paramount Television. USA: NBC, 1993-2004.

Friends. Created by David Crane & Marta Kauffman. Produced by Bright/Kaufman/Crane Productions and Warner Bros. Television. USA: NBC, 1994-2004.

Friends. "The One Where Monica Gets a New Roommate" a.k.a. The Pilot. Opening Scene: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=weEHDrPQjrY>>. Accessed July 18, 2018.

Gavin & Stacey. Created by James Corden and Ruth Jones. Produced by Baby Cow Productions. UK: BBC, 2007-2010.

George & Mildred. Created by Brian Cooke & Johnnie Mortimer. Produced by Thames Television. UK: ITV, 1976-1979.

Get Smart. Created by Mel Brooks and Buck Henry. Produced by Talent Associates, CBS Productions. USA: NBC, CBS: 1965-1970.

Get Smart. Written by Tom J. Astle and Matt Ember. Directed by Peter Segal. Produced by Leonard B. Stern et al. Warner Bros, 2008.

The Ghost and Mrs. Muir. Written by Philip Dunne. Directed by Joseph L. Mankiewicz. Produced by Fred Kohlmar. 20th Century Fox, 1947.

The Ghost and Mrs. Muir. Developed by Jean Holloway. Produced by 20th Century Fox Television. USA: NBC, 1968-1968, ABC, 1969-1970.

Gilligan's Island. Created by Sherwood Schwartz. Produced by Gladysya Productions et al. USA: CBS, 1964-67.

Girl, Interrupted. Written by James Mangold, Lisa Loomer and Anna Hamilton Phelan. Directed by James Mangold. Produced by Douglas Wick et al. Columbia Pictures, 1999.

Girlfriends. Created by Mara Brock Akil. CBS Paramount Network Productions, Gramnet Productions. USA: UPN 2000-6, CW: 2006-8.

Going the Distance. Written by Geoff LaTulippe. Directed by Nanette Burstein. Produced by Adam Shankman et al. Warner Bros. Releasing, 2010.

The Golden Girls. Created by Susan Harris & Warren Littlefield. Produced by Witt/Thomas/Harris Productions and Touchstone Television. USA: NBC, 1985-1992.

Grace and Frankie. Created by Marta Kauffman and Howard J. Morris. Produced by Skydance Television, Okay Goodnight. Netflix: 2015-present.

The Graduate. Written by Calder Willingham and Buck Henry. Directed by Mike Nichols. Produced by Lawrence Turman. Embassy Pictures, 1967.

Greenberg. Written and directed by Noah Baumbach. Produced by Scott Rudin et al. Focus Features, 2010.

Groundhog Day. Written by Danny Rubin and Harold Ramis. Directed by Harold Ramis. Produced by Trevor Albert et al. Columbia Pictures, 1993.

Happiest Season. Written by Clea DuVall and Mary Hollans. Directed by Clea DuVall. Produced by Isaac Klausner et al. Hulu, Sony Pictures Releasing, 2020.

Happy Valley. Created and written by Sally Wainwright. Produced by Red Production Company. UK: BBC, 2014-present.

Harold and Maude. Written by Colin Higgins. Directed by Hal Ashby. Produced by Colin Higgins et al. Paramount Pictures, 1971.

Having a Life Worth Living. DBT Center, 2016.
<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L4swWaWANUQ>> Accessed July 20, 2019.

Hi-de-Hi! Created by Jimmy Perry & David Croft. Produced by BBC. UK: BBC, 1980-1988.

His Girl Friday. Written by Charles Lederer. Directed and produced by Howard Hawks. Columbia Pictures, 1940.

Hitch. Written by Kevin Bisch. Directed by Andy Tennant. Produced by Will Smith et al. Sony Pictures, 2005.

Hogan's Heroes. Created by Bernard Fein & Albert S. Ruddy. Produced by Bing Crosby Productions et al. USA: CBS, 1965-1971.

The Holiday. Written and directed by Nancy Meyers. Produced by Nancy Meyers, Bruce A. Block. Sony Pictures, Universal Pictures, 2006.

Hope Springs. Written by Vanessa Taylor. Directed by David Frankel. Produced by Guymon Casady et al. Sony Pictures Releasing, 2012.

Horrible Bosses. Written by Michael Markowitz, John Francis Daley and Jonathan Goldstein. Directed by Seth Gordon. Produced by Brett Ratner et al. Warner Bros. Pictures, 2011.

How I Met Your Mother. Created by Carter Bays & Craig Thomas. Produced by 20th Century Fox Television and Bays Thomas Productions. USA: CBS, 2005-2014.

How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days. Written by Kristen Buckley, Brian Regan, and Burr Steers. Directed by Donald Petrie. Produced by Lynda Obst et al. Paramount Pictures, United International Pictures, 2003.

I Do Until I Don't. Written and Directed by Lake Bell. Produced by Miranda Bailey et al. The Film Arcade, 2017.

I Give It a Year. Written and directed by Dan Mazer. Produced by Tim Bevan et al. Studio Canal, 2013.

I Married a Witch. Written by Robert Pirosh and Marc Connelly. Directed and produced by René Clair. United Artists, 1942.

If Only You Knew. Written by Gary Goldstein and David Snedeker. Directed by David Snedeker. Produced by Richard Salvatore et al. 2000.

In Good Company. Written and directed by Paul Weitz. Produced by Lawrence Pressman et al. Universal Pictures, 2004.

In the Loop. Written by Jesse Armstrong, Simon Blackwell, Armando Iannucci and Tony Roche. Directed by Armando Iannucci. Produced by Adam Tandy et al. Optimum Releasing, 2009.

The Inbetweeners Movie. Written by Damon Beesley and Iain Morris. Directed by Ben Palmer. Produced by Christopher Young. Entertainment Film Distributors, 2011.

The Inbetweeners. Created by Damon Beesley and Iain Morris. Produced by Bwark Productions, Young Films. UK: E4, 2008-2010.

The Intern. Written and directed by Nancy Meyers. Produced by Nancy Meyers et al. Warner Bros. Pictures, 2015.

The Invention of Lying. Written and directed by Ricky Gervais and Mathew Robinson. Produced by Ricky Gervais et al. Warner Bros Pictures, Focus Features, 2009.

Isn't It Romantic. Written by Erin Cardillo, Dana Fox and Katie Silberman. Directed by Todd Strauss-Schulson. Produced by Todd Garner et al. Warner Bros, Netflix, 2019.

The IT Crowd. Created by Graham Linehan. Produced by Talkback Thames. UK: Channel 4, 2006-2013.

It Happened One Night. Written by Robert Riskin. Directed by Frank Capra. Produced by Frank Capra et al. Columbia Pictures, 1934.

It's Complicated. Written and directed by Nancy Meyers. Produced by Nancy Meyers et al. Universal Pictures, 2009.

Jerry Maguire. Written and directed by Cameron Crowe. Produced by James L. Brooks et al. Sony Pictures Releasing, 1996.

Joe Versus the Volcano. Written and Directed by John Patrick Shanley. Produced by Teri Schwartz. Warner Bros.,1990

Just Friends. Written by Adam Davis. Directed by Roger Kumble. Produced by Chris Bender et al. New Line Cinema, 2005.

Just Like Heaven. Written by Peter Tolan and Leslie Dixon. Directed by Mark Waters. Produced by Walter F. Parkes et al. Dreamworks Pictures, 2005.

Kath & Kim. Created by Gina Riley & Jane Turner. Produced by ABCTV and Riley Turner Productions. Australia: ABC, 2002-2004, ATN7 2007.

Kath & Kimberella. Written by Gina Riley, Jane Turner and Magda Szubanski. Directed by Ted Emery. Produced by Gina Riley, Jane Turner et al. Roadshow Films, 2012.

Kiss Me Stupid. Written by Billy Wilder and I.A.L Diamond. Directed and Produced by Billy Wilder. Lopert Pictures Corporation, United Artists, 1964.

The Kominsky Method. Created by Chuck Lorre. Produced by Chuck Lorre Productions, Warner Bros. Television. Netflix: 2018-2021

La La Land. Written and directed by Damien Chazelle. Produced by Fred Berger et al. Lionsgate, 2016.

The Lady Eve. Written and directed by Preston Sturges. Produced by Paul Jones. Paramount, 1941.

Last Chance Harvey. Written and directed by Joel Hopkins. Produced by Tim Perell et al. Usborne. Overture Films, 2008.

Last Christmas. Written by Emma Thompson and Bryony Kimmings. Directed by Paul Feig. Produced by Paul Feig et al. Universal Pictures, 2019.

Last Tango in Halifax. Created by Sally Wainwright. Produced by Red Production Company. UK: BBC, 2012-2020.

Late Night. Written by Mindy Kaling. Directed by Nisha Kanatra. Produced by Ben Browning et al. Amazon Studios, Sony Pictures Releasing, Stage 6 Films, 2019.

Life as We Know It. Written by Ian Deitchman and Kristin Rusk Robinson. Directed by Greg Berlanti. Produced by Barry Josephson et al. Village Roadshow Pictures, Warner Bros, 2010.

Life on Mars. Created by Mathew Graham, Tony Jordan and Ashely Pharoah. Produced by Kudos and BBC Wales. UK: BBC, 2006-7.

The Lives of Pippa Lee. Written and directed by Rebecca Miller. Produced by Lemore Syvan. Plan B Entertainment. Screen Media Films, 2009.

Love Actually. Written and directed by Richard Curtis. Produced by Duncan Kenworthy, Tim Bevan et al., Studio Canal, Working Title Films. Universal, 2003.

Love is in the Air. Written by Vincent Angell, Xavier Nemo, Julien Simonet, Nirina Ralanto, Brigitte Bemol, Alexandre Castagnetti, Nicolas Bedo. Directed by Alexandre Castagnetti. Universal Pictures, 2013.

Love, Guaranteed. Written by Elizabeth Hackett and Hilary Galanoy. Directed by Mark Steven Johnson. Produced by Rachel Leigh Cook et al. Off Camera Entertainment. Netflix, 2020.

Love Life. Created by Sam Boyd. Produced by Foxera, Feigo Entertainment, et al. USA: HBO Max, 2020 – present.

I Love Lucy. Written by Jess Oppenheimer, Madelyn Davis, Bob Carroll Jr, Bob Schiller, and Bob Weiskopf. Produced by Desilu Productions. USA: CBS, 1951–1961.

Love Wedding Repeat. Written and Directed Dean Craig. Produced by Piers Tempest et al. Notorious Pictures, Tempo Productions. Netflix, 2010.

Mad About You. Created by Paul Reiser & Danny Jacobson. Produced by In Front Productions, Nuance Productions and TriStar Television. USA: NBC, 1992-1999.

Mamma Mia! Written by Catherine Johnson. Directed by Phyllida Lloyd. Produced by Judy Craymer et al. Relativity Media et al. Universal Pictures, 2008.

Man About the House. Written by Johnnie Mortimer and Brian Cooke. Directed by John Robins. Produced by Roy Skeggs. EMI Films, 1974.

The Mary Tyler Moore Show. Created by James L. Brooks & Allan Burns. Produced by MTM Enterprises. USA: CBS, 1970-1977.

*M*A*S*H*. Written by Ring Lardner Jr. Directed by Robert Altman. Produced by Ingo Preminger. Twentieth Century Fox, 1970.

*M*A*S*H*. Created by Larry Gelbart & Gene Reynolds. Produced by 20th Century Fox Television. USA: CBS, 1972-1983.

Meet the Parents. Written by Jim Herzfeld, John Hamburg. Directed by Jay Roach. Produced by Nancy Tenenbaum, Jay Roach, et al. DreamWorks Pictures, 2000.

Mister Ed. Created by Walter R. Brooks. Produced by The Mister Ed Company, Filmways. USA: CBS, 1961-66.

Modern Family. Created by Christopher Lloyd & Steven Levitan. Produced by Lloyd-Levitan Productions, Picador Productions, Steven Levitan Productions in association with 20th Century Fox Television. USA: ABC, 2009-present.

Mom. Created by Chuck Lorre, Eddie Gorodetsky and Gemma Baker. Produced by Chuck Lorre Productions, Warner Brothers Television. USA: CBS, 2013-present.

The Morning Show. Created by Jay Carson. Developed by Kerry Ehrin. Produced by Echo Films et al. USA: Apple TV+, 2019-present.

Moonstruck. Written by John Patrick Shanley. Directed by Norman Jewison. Produced by Norman Jewison et al. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1997.

Mum. Created by Hans Golaszewski. Directed by Richard Laxton, Hans Golaszewski. Produced by Big Talk Productions. UK: BBC, 2016-19.

The Munsters. Created by Allan Burns & Chris Hayward. Developed by Norm Liebman & Ed Haas. Produced by CBS Television Productions and Kayro-Vue Productions. USA: CBS, 1964-1966.

Muriel's Wedding. Written and directed by P. J. Hogan. Produced by Lynda House et al. Miramax Films, 1994.

Murphy Brown. Created by Diane English. Produced by Shukovsky English Entertainment and Warner Bros Television. USA: CBS, 1988-1998.

My Big Fat Greek Wedding. Written by Nia Vardalos. Directed by Joel Zwick. Produced by Gary Goetzman et al. IFC Films, 2002.

My Best Friend's Wedding. Written by Ronald Bass. Directed by P. J. Hogan. Produced by Jerry Zucker et al. Sony Pictures, 1997.

9 to 5. Written by Colin Higgins and Patricia Resnick. Directed by Colin Higgins. Produced by Bruce Gilbert. 20th Century Fox, 1980.

9 to 5. Created by Michael S. Baser & Kim Weiskopf. Produced by IPC Film, 20th Century Fox Television. USA: ABC, 1982-1983.

Never Look Away. Written and directed by Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck. Produced by Quirin Berg et al. Walt Disney Studio Motions Pictures, 2018.

Ninotchka. Written by Melchior Lengyel, Charles Brackett, Billy Wilder and Walter Reisch. Directed by Ernst Lubitsch. Produced by Ernst Lubitsch et al. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1939.

No Strings Attached. Written by Elizabeth Meriwether. Directed by Ivan Reitman. Produced by Jeffrey Clifford et al. Paramount Pictures, 2011.

Notting Hill. Written by Richard Curtis. Directed by Roger Michell. Produced by Duncan Kenworthy. Polygram/Universal/Spinal, 1999.

The Odd Couple. Written by Neil Simon. Directed by Gene Saks. Produced by Howard W. Koch. Paramount Pictures, 1968.

The Odd Couple. Created by Jerry Belson & Garry Marshall. Produced by Paramount Television. USA: ABC, 1970-1975.

The Odd Couple II. Written by Neil Simon. Directed by Howard Deutch. Produced by Neil Simon et al. Paramount Pictures, 1998.

The Office. Created by Ricky Gervais & Stephen Merchant. Produced by BBC Comedy-North et al. UK: BBC, 2001, 2002.

Office Space. Written and Directed by Mike Judge. Produced by Daniel Rappaport et al. 20th Century Fox, 1999.

On the Buses. Created by Ronald Chesney and Ronald Wolfe. Produced by London Weekend Television. UK: ITV, 1969-73.

On the Buses. Written and produced by Ronald Chesney and Ronald Wolfe. Directed by Harry Booth. MGM-EMI, 1971.

Only You. Written by Diane Drake. Directed by Norman Jewison. Produced by Robert N. Fried et al. Tristar Pictures, 1994.

The Other Sister. Written by Bob Brunner and Gary Marshall. Directed by Gary Marshall. Produced by Mario Iscovich et al. Buena Vista Pictures, 1999.

The Phil Silvers Show (a.k.a. *Sergeant Bilko*). Created by Nat Hiken. Produced by CBS Television Network. USA: CBS, 1955-59.

The Philadelphia Story. Written by Donald Ogden Stewart. Directed by George Cukor. Produced by Joseph L. Mankiewicz. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1941

Picture Perfect. Written by Arleen Sorkin, Paul Slansky and Glenn Gordon Caron. Directed by Glenn Gordon Caron. Produced by Erwin Stoff et al. 20th Century Fox, 1997.

Porridge. Created by Dick Clement & Ian La Frenais. Produced by BBC. UK: BBC, 1974-1977.

Porridge. Written by Dick Clement & Ian La Frenais. Directed by Dick Clement. Produced by Ian La Frenais. ITC Films, 1979.

Pretty Woman. Written by J.F. Lawton. Directed by Garry Marshall. Produced by Arnon Milchan et al. Beuna Vista Pictures, 1990.

Pride and Prejudice. Written by Deborah Moggach. Directed by Joe Wright. Produced by Tim Bevan et al. United International Pictures, Mars Distribution, Focus Features, 2005.

Prime. Written and Directed by Ben Younger. Produced by Jennifer and Suzanne Todd. Universal Pictures, 2005.

The Proposal. Written by Peter Chiarelli. Directed by Anne Fletcher. Produced by David Hoberman et al. Walt Disney Studios, 2009.

Rare Beasts. Written and directed by Billie Piper. Produced by Vaughan Sivell. 2021.

Return to Me. Written by Bonnie Hunt and Don Lake. Directed by Bonnie Hunt. Produced by Jennie Lew Tugend. MGM, United International Pictures, 2000.

The Rewrite. Written and Directed by Marc Lawrence. Produced by Liz Glotzer et al. Image Entertainment, 2015.

Rhoda. Created by James L. Brooks & Allan Burns. Developed by David Davis & Lorenzo Music. Produced by MTM Enterprises. USA: CBS, 1974-1978.

The Right One. Written and Directed by Ken Mok. Produced by Ken Mok et al. 2015.

Rumour has it... Written by Ted Griffin. Directed by Rob Reiner. Produced by Ben Cosgrove et al. Warner Bros. Pictures, 2005.

Saving Face. Written and directed by Alice Wu. Produced by Will Smith et al. Sony Pictures Classics, 2004.

Seinfeld. Created by Larry David & Jerry Seinfeld. Produced by West-Shapiro Productions, Castle Rock Entertainment. USA: NBC, 1989-1998.

Serendipity. Written by Marc Klein. Directed by Peter Chelsom. Produced by Peter Abrams et al. Miramax Films, 2001.

Sgt. Bilko. Written by Andy Breckman. Directed by Jonathan Lynn. Produced by Brian Grazer. Universal Pictures, 1996.

Second Thoughts. Created by Jan Etherington and Gavin Petrie. Produced by David Askey and London Weekend Television. UK: ITV 1991-94.

Sex and the City. Created by Darren Star. Produced by Darren Star Productions, HBO. USA: HBO, 1998-2004.

Shakespeare in Love. Written by Marc Norman and Tom Stoppard. Directed by John Madden. Produced by David Parfitt et al. Miramax Films, Universal Pictures, 1998.

She's Funny That Way. Written by Louise Stratten and Peter Bogdanovich. Directed by Peter Bogdanovich. Produced by Holly Wiersma et al. Lionsgate, 2015.

The Shop Around the Corner. Written by Samson Raphaelson and Ben Hecht. Directed and produced by Ernst Lubitsch. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1940.

Sideways. Written by Alexander Payne and Jim Taylor. Directed by Alexander Payne. Produced by Michael London. Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2004.

Silver Linings Playbook. Written and directed by David O. Russell. Produced by Donna Gigliotti et al. The Weinstein Company, 2012.

Sink or Swim. Written by Ahmed Hamidi, Julien Lambroschini and Gilles Lellouche. Directed by Gilles Lellouche. Produced by Alain Attal et al. StudioCanal, 2018.

Sleeping with Other People. Written and directed by Lesley Headland. Produced by Jessica Elbaum et al. IFC Films, 2015.

Sleepless in Seattle. Written by Nora Ephron, David S. Ward and Jeff Arch. Directed by Nora Ephron. Produced by Gary Foster. TriStar Pictures, 1993.

Sliding Doors. Written and Directed by Peter Howitt. Produced by Sydney Pollack et al. Miramax, Paramount Pictures, 1998.

Some Like It Hot. Written by Billy Wilder and I.A.L Diamond. Directed and Produced by Billy Wilder. United Artists, 1959.

Something's Gotta Give. Written and directed by Nancy Meyers. Produced by Nancy Meyers et al. Warner Bros, 2003.

Someone Like You. Written by Elizabeth Chandler. Directed by Tony Goldwyn. Produced by Lynda Obst. 20th Century Fox, 2001.

Starter for 10. Written by David Nicholls (based on his novel) Directed by Tom Vaughan. Produced by Tom Hanks et al. Icon Film Distribution, Picturehouse, 2006.

Starting Over. Written and produced by James L. Brooks. Directed by Alan J Pakula. Paramount Pictures, 1979.

State of Happiness. Created by Mette M. Bølstad, Synnøve Hørsdal, and Siv Rajendram Eliassen. Directed by Pa Jackman and Petter Naess. Norway: NRK, 2020.

Steptoe & Son. Created by Ray Galton & Alan Simpson. Produced by BBC. UK: BBC 1962-1974.

Steptoe & Son. Written by Ray Galton and Alan Simpson. Directed by Cliff Owen. MGM-EMI, 1972.

Stephoe & Son Ride Again. Written by Ray Galton and Alan Simpson. Directed by Peter Sykes. Produced by Aida Young. Anglo-EMI, 1973.

Stranger than Fiction. Written by Zach Helm. Directed by Marc Forster. Produced by Lindsay Doran. Sony Pictures, 2006.

Stuck in Love. Written and Directed by Josh Boone. Produced by Judy Cairo. Millenium Entertainment, 2013.

Sullivan's Travels. Written and directed by Preston Sturges. Produced by Paul Jones. Paramount Pictures, 1941.

Sweet Home Alabama. Written by C. Jay Cox. Directed by Andy Tennant. Produced by Neal H. Moritz et al. Buena Vista Pictures, 2002.

Swimming with Men. Written by Aschlin Ditta. Directed by Oliver Parker. Produced by Stewart Le Marechal et al. GEM Entertainment, Vertigo Films, 2018.

That '70s Show. Created by Bonny Turner, Terry Turner & Mark Brazill. Produced by Casey-Werner-Mandabach Productions et al. USA: Fox, 1998-2006.

That Uncertain Feeling. Written by Walter Reisch and Donald Ogden Stewart. Directed and produced by Ernst Lubitsch. United Artists, 1941.

Thelma and Louise. Written by Callie Khouri. Directed by Ridley Scott. Produced by Ridley Scott et al. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1991.

There's Something About Mary. Written by Ed Decter, John J. Strauss, Peter Farrelly and Bobby Farrelly. Directed by Peter Farrelly and Bobby Farrelly. Produced by Michael Steinberg et al. 20th Century Fox, 1998.

The Thick of It. Created and Directed by Armando Iannucci. Produced by Adam Tandy, Armando Iannucci and BBC. UK: BBC, 2005-12.

Til Death Us Do Part. Created by Johnny Speight. Produced by BBC. UK: BBC, 1966–1968, 1972-1975.

Tootsie. Written by Larry Gelbart, Murray Schisgal, along with Barry Levinson, Elaine May (both uncredited). Directed by Sydney Pollack. Produced by Charles Evans et al. Columbia Pictures, 1982.

Trainwreck. Written by Amy Schumer. Directed by Judd Apatow. Produced by Judd Apatow et al. Universal Pictures, 2015.

The Ugly Truth. Written by Nicole Eastman, Karen McCullah Lutz and Kirsten Smith. Directed by Robert Luketic. Produced by Tom Rosenberg et al. Sony Pictures, 2009.

Upstart Crow. Created by Ben Elton. Directed by Matt Lipsey, Richard Boden. Produced by Gareth Edwards. UK: BBC, 2016.

Veep. Created by Armando Iannucci. Produced by HBO Entertainment. USA: HBO, 2012-2019.

The Vicar of Dibley. Created by Richard Curtis, Paul Mayhew-Archer. Produced by Tiger Aspect Productions et al. UK: BBC, 1994-2007.

We're Doomed! The Dad's Army Story. Directed by Steve Bendelack. Produced by Endemol Entertainment UK, Darlow Smithson Productions. UK: BBC, 2015.

The Wedding Singer. Written by Tim Herlihy. Directed by Frank Coraci. Produced by Robert Simonds et al. New Line Cinema, 1998.

Welcome to Me. Written by Eliot Laurence. Directed by Shira Piven. Produced by Jessica Elbaum et. al. Alchemy, 2014.

We're the Millers. Written by Bob Fisher, Steve Faber, Sean Anders and John Morris. Directed by Rawson Marshall Thurber. Produced by Chris Bender et al. Warner Bros., 2013.

What If? (aka *The F Word*) Written by Elan Mastai. Directed by Michael Dowse. Produced by David Gross et. al. Entertainment One, 2014.

What Women Want. Written by Josh Goldsmith, Cathy Yuspa, and Diane Drake. Directed by Nancy Meyers. Produced by Susan Cartsonis et al. Paramount Pictures, 2000.

When Harry Met Sally... Written by Nora Ephron. Directed by Rob Reiner. Produced by Rob Reiner et al. Columbia Pictures, 1989.

When We First Met. Written by John Whittington. Directed by Ari Sandel. Produced by Adam Saunders et al. Netflix, 2018.

While You Were Sleeping. Written by Daniel G. Sullivan and Frederic Lebow. Directed by Jon Turteltaub. Produced by Roger Birnbaum et al. Buena Vista Pictures, 1995.

Will & Grace. Created by David Kohan & Max Mutchnik. Produced by KoMut Entertainment, Three Sisters Entertainment, NBC Television et al. USA: NBC, 1998-2006.

Wine Country. Written by Emily Spivey and Liz Cackowski. Directed by Amy Poehler. Produced by Morgan Sackett et al. Netflix, 2019.

Woman of the Year. Written by Ring Lardner Jr. and Michael Kanin. Directed by George Stevens. Produced by Joseph L. Mankiewicz. Loew's Inc., 1942.

Yes Man. Written by Nicholas Stoller, Jarrad Paul, Andrew Mogel. Directed by Peyton Reed. Produced by David Heyman et al. Warner Bros. Pictures, 2008.

The Young Offenders. Written and directed by Peter Foott. Produced by Screen Ireland. Wildcard Distribution, 2016.

The Young Offenders. Developed by Peter Foott. Produced by BBC and Vico Films. UK: RTE, BBC, 2018 – present.