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STARGAZING

2020

School of Language and Culture

A thesis submitted to Auckland University of Technology
in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Creative Writing.

ABSTRACT

This thesis consists of practice-led research in the form of a full-length script for a feature film, plus a 6,000 word exegesis. A summary of the script follows:

Rick travels for work, Annie is a stay at home mum, with a difference: He is a globally successful musician, and home for Annie and teenage Violet is a remote off-grid island in the South Pacific. The night sky is Violet's passion, a symbol of her curiosity about the world outside. Two worlds collide when Annie's utopia is disrupted by evidence of Rick's wild living and infidelity, triggering her to reluctantly leave the island for the first time in a decade and take Violet to London.

Once there, she discovers all is not as it appeared. Rick's career is on the skids, and his long-term manager, Simon, Annie's one time employer, has dropped him. Following the suicide of his long-time collaborator, Rick's self-doubt has led to frequent anxiety attacks. He seeks career help from new songwriting partner Ophelia, who Annie can only see as a manipulative sexual predator. Meanwhile, Violet, the innocent child of an old-fashioned childhood, is smitten with the outside world, and desperate for friendship, idolising Ariadne, the precocious daughter of Ophelia.

We learn Annie's revulsion for London and the music industry stems from her youth, when as Simon's employee she was subjected to unwanted sexual advances. She discovers, despite initial misgivings, that London culture has changed for the better, and gains confidence in tackling Simon's sharp business practice, finding unexpected support from women in the business.

Matters come to a head at a music festival, when Annie is able to prevent history repeating for Simon's vulnerable receptionist, and witness his public humiliation at the hands of a girl band. Annie's mistake in allowing Violet and Ariadne the freedom to wander around the festival site backfires, exposing Ariadne's bullying. The potential loss of Violet forces Rick to choose between family and career, and he realises he needs to let Annie into his world. Annie learns to fight for what is right instead of running away, and there is hope that the family will find balance.

The script is framed by an exegesis which is a 6,000 word essay on the subject of

- i) A comparative study of the genre of family drama.
- ii) The development process from synopsis to second draft.

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ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award for any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

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EXEGESIS

2020

School of Language and Culture

Exegesis submitted to Auckland University of Technology
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INTRODUCTION

The intention of this two-part exegesis is to establish the context in which to place my thesis screenplay, *Stargazing*, comparing and contrasting scripts that share commonalities of premise or plot, in order to demonstrate my understanding of the genre, and illuminate decisions pertaining to my writing. The first part comprises a comparative study, and the second part addresses matters pertaining to *Stargazing*.

Part i

Comparative Study

CORE STORY

The core story of *Stargazing* is the evolution of a marriage under the pressure of internal and external forces; examining the search for self-actualisation and the conflict between personal fulfilment and outward success. Ultimately it is about the quest for balance in relationships and in life.

INSPIRATION

Jane Austen, an early writer on women's rights, was arguably a feminist of her time (Kelly. 2016). My thesis was inspired by *Persuasion* (Austen, 1818), in which her steadfast heroine has held onto hope of a romantic reconciliation against the odds, and is gradually recognised for her strength of character, realising her own self-worth, and gaining a second chance at first love. My early drafts followed this premise, however, investigation into the ideas of separate worlds inhabited by a successful man and their

spouse, and how those worlds might be bridged in times of change, later became the subject of my work. In part, this was due to various challenges faced in placing a quiet female protagonist at the heart of a contemporary adaptation, and an interest in ways that years of pent-up frustration might contribute to a balance of power in a relationship. My second draft protagonist has been married for 15 years to a successful man and has a 13 year old child, so the stakes and opportunities for character development were raised considerably.

My research was undertaken through the practice of scriptwriting, participation in workshopping fellow students' scripts, reading film theorists' work, and examination of films and scripts which share this idea at their core.

CONTEXT

My modern day protagonist, Annie Austen, seeks a way to regain life balance when she realises her family cannot continue as they are. New stories about finding balance between isolation and unity, ambition and meaning, and the opportunity for women to find a different path are beginning to proliferate, challenging patriarchal values in the post '#timesup' '#metoo' world. Women on screen have often been portrayed as selfish if they are not self-sacrificing for the good of family. *Kramer vs Kramer* (Fischhoff, Jaffe & Benton, 1979), a celebration of father-child bonding, rather than a celebration of Meryl Streep's character finding fulfilment, is an example of the cultural shift of its time. I have chosen to look at *Begin Again* (Apatow, Armbrust, Bregman & Carney 2013), *Juliet, Naked* (Apatow, Mendel, Berger, Yerxa, Soros & Peretz 2018) and *Wild Rose* (Taylor, 2017) in this context, as well as two eponymous film adaptations of Jane Austen's (1918) book; (Finlay & Michell, 1995), (Snodin, & Shergold, 2007). The recently

released *Marriage Story* (Baumbach, 2019) has had a timely influence on rethinking my second draft.

Begin Again shows songwriter Gretta, abandoned by partner Dave when his career takes off, learning chart her own course. In *Juliet, Naked* middle-aged Annie Platt believes she has wasted the past fifteen years of her life and makes an unlikely connection with musician, Tucker Crowe, who has lost his career and the respect of his children. In *Wild Rose*, ex-convict Rose-Lynn has the chance to make things right with her family, but dreams instead of a music career in Nashville. *Marriage Story* charts the fallout when Nicole tries to find herself after years of living in her husband, Charlie's, shadow.

These works have a common thread of isolated or lonely protagonists facing up to reality, mulling over lost dreams and second chances, and all share music or creative expression as an intrinsic part of the plot. Ultimately the shared theme of all these films is self-sacrifice, self-actualisation, and love: Love of self, love of a partner, love of family, love of a place all figure strongly in the core stories, almost always haunted by the spectre of homelessness.

WOMEN AND HOME

Long before Austen's writing, women have been vulnerable to the patriarchal ideals of female identity and domesticity being intertwined. The two *Persuasion* adaptations present this idea in the use of frequent location shifts, Anne's lack of autonomy over her location, and the varying degrees of welcome she receives from her hosts. While she could have chosen to be safely domiciled years earlier by accepting other suitors, she holds out for her true love, arguably an assertive action for her time. *Begin Again's* Gretta leaves an untenable situation with her partner, and ends up on a friend's

sofa, whereas Rose-Lynn is reluctant make her own family home, despite her motherhood. 'Well I'm not wanting to rush into anything or put down roots at the moment. There's no point' (scene 11). *Juliet Naked's* Annie is emotionally bound to her father's legacy, and desperate to find her own identity in London. *Marriage Story's* Nicole has tried to be satisfied (p. 35) 'I thought, "Just own it, own it like George Harrison's wife. Being a wife and mother is enough." And then I realised I couldn't remember her name'.

SELF-SACRIFICE AND EMPATHY

Finding balance between the compromise inherent in traditional female roles and the empathy necessary for audience engagement has been handled in a number of ways. Self-sacrifice is inherent in *Persuasion*, when Anne learns to place less importance on the expectations of others and put herself first, much to the surprise of her family. *Juliet, Naked's* Annie is fully aware that she has become stuck in her home town, living for others, but is unsure what to do about it until she connects with Tucker. *Begin Again's* Gretta is in New York solely to support Dave, suppressing any self-interest for the benefit of his career.

In the polarising *Marriage Story*, Nicole initially appears selfish, but the couple disclose their own truths that flip audience loyalty throughout: Nicole (p.35) "...I got smaller". "I realised that I didn't really ever come alive for myself, I was just feeding his aliveness". Charlie (p.123) conversely believes he has sacrificed the freedom of his youth, "I was hot shit and I wanted to fuck EVERYBODY and I didn't. And I loved you and didn't want to lose you... and I'm in my twenties and I didn't want to lose that too." This self-centred revelation is easily rebuffed, but Nicole lets it go: 'thanks for that', a more telling response. Later, Nicole posits (p.124) "You're so merged with your own

selfishness that you don't even identify it as selfishness anymore". Building upon insights about self-sacrifice in marriage, lawyer Nora's powerful outburst about parenting (p.129) "You (mothers) will always be held to a different, higher, standard," has reportedly received applause in cinemas (Brody, 2019).

Rose-Lynn's mother is self-sacrifice personified, abandoning her career dreams to bring her daughter up, and then taking care of her grandchildren when Rose-Lynn is incarcerated. Rose-Lynn's redemption comes only after her mother lets go and allows her take responsibility and make sacrifices of her own volition.

Persuasion's protagonist is juxtaposed against the women around her, it becomes apparent that her initial selflessness, constancy and prudence is in sharp contrast to the fickle nature of others, such as Benwick and Louisa's swift transfer of affections to each other, 'such a heart is very little worth having' (Finlay & Michell, 1995). *Begin Again's* Gretta is a self-sacrificing supporter of her boyfriend's success, to her detriment, but takes better care of her own band, an action that makes her more empathetic than pathetic. Like Gretta, Annie Platt is similarly self-effacing and kind, and we find her directionless, reflective and therefore hard to empathise with, whereas Rose-Lynn is fiercely ambitious and irresponsible, her selfishness and lack of self-awareness an internal antagonistic force. We feel her frustration and understand her problems. Arguably, *Marriage Story's* problems are middle-class and first-world, but the inner character arcs of the couple, who are both justified and yet both selfish, mean we are able to understand and care. Truby (2007, p77) makes the point, 'What's really important [to create empathy] is that the audiences understand the character but not necessarily like everything he does.'

AUTHENTICITY, SELF-EXPRESSION AND SELF-ACTUALISATION

Engaging audiences with frustrated or trapped female characters whose potential for creative outlet is suppressed is a common theme in these films, all of which strive for a fulfilling outcome. Ending *Begin Again* with collaborator Dan's return home and a blank slate for Gretta, each enabled to live their lives untainted by the past, is a pragmatic if unromantic ending that reflects the film's themes of integrity and authenticity. Rose-Lynn's tattooed mantra, "three chords and the truth" takes on a new meaning when we see her mother, daughter and son together watching her perform (scene 153). The song lyrics "Ain't no yellow brick road running through Glasgow, but I've found one that's stronger than stone" lay out an apology to her mother "should have thanked you a thousand miles ago", and a celebration of her family and home city. "...there it is, what's always been mine". *Persuasion*'s Anne and Wentworth are united in marriage, shown either as Anne happily, incongruously, sailing on his ship, presumably into the midst of war in the 1995 adaptation, or as new proprietors of her ancestral home in the 2007 adaptation; neither rings completely true, but suit the romantic drama genre of these period pieces.

Creative self-expression is an important device in these films. *Persuasion*'s protagonist overhears Frederick Wentworth learning that she plays piano for others and no longer dances herself, a moment of realisation for both. Music is pivotal to the plot of *Wild Rose*, where self-actualisation, redemption and forgiveness are strong themes. Rose-Lynn believes that she "... should've been born in America. I'm an American." (Taylor, scene 75), rejecting her roots and not taking responsibility for her own problems. When encouraged to write about her own life by mentor figure, real-life radio DJ Bob Harris, she muses that the only thing she could have to write about would be 'the bleach ran away with the broom', in reference to her day job as a cleaner. Her redemption comes in the

form of a song which is both an apology to her mother and children, and a love song to her home city of Glasgow.

Begin Again features the gift of a song from Gretta to her boyfriend, Dave, who subsequently adulterates it into something disappointing, making her realise how incompatible they have become. In *Juliet, Naked*, Annie's partner Duncan's obsession with Tucker Crowe and his music provokes her to express herself online, inadvertently making an emotional connection with the reclusive Tucker.

Nicole's early musings over loss of self, "I wasn't even sure what my own taste was anymore because I'd never been asked to use it" (Baumbach, p.35) develop into anger against Charlie, "You gaslighted me, you're a fucking villain." (Baumbach, p.122). Couples' therapist Ian Kerner references sociologist Eli Finkel in an interview (Fetters, 2019) about *Marriage Story*, and his view on a recent evolution in societal expectations of marriage that "a spouse should help someone grow and self-actualise". Kerner reports that this has struck a chord with audiences; he has had numerous requests from clients to discuss the film in future therapy sessions.

CHANGE AND CONTRAST

Austen set *Persuasion* against a backdrop of uncertain social change and a new age of scientific understanding that would have resonated strongly with her readers. While her father clings to tradition, her friends strive to embrace modernity, and Anne is cast adrift between the two. The *Persuasion* adaptations make scant reference to this, the modern audience's attention directed to the comedy of manners between characters, and depiction of 19th century rural England, rather than the deeper context that would have been grasped by contemporary readers of the novel. *Begin Again* portrays the music

industry in a state of flux, with Dan and Gretta in danger of irrelevance. *Juliet, Naked* is set in a pretty English seaside resort, but Annie's introductory oxymoronic voiceover explains why it feels like internment to her, and Rose-Lynn is more understandably desperate to leave the gritty surrounds of Glasgow and begin her 'real life' in the country music glamour of Nashville, and both long for change.

Contrasts are at play in all the films, Rose-Lynn's dream taking on an incongruous quality when confronted by inflatable cacti and comedy cowboy hats at her boss's party, and firmly put paid to on her return from Nashville, a montage of aerial shots latterly establishing showing the similarity between these post-industrial river cities. The contrast between her boss preparing courgettes for dinner and her own unwillingness to care for her children triggers Rose-Lynn's new-found drive to clean up her council flat and make a home allows viewers to feel hope for her eventual redemption. *Persuasion* conversely juxtaposes lonely, unhappy grandeur with crowded, happy poverty and both adaptations use strong imagery of the wild sea and crumbling cliffs at Lyme to underpin themes of uncertainty and change. *Juliet, Naked* uses posters and photos of the younger, cool, Tucker to illustrate the stark differences between fantasy and reality. *Begin Again* is an ode to New York authenticity, with Gretta recording songs in grimy alleyways and rooftops, rather than the upscale recording studio used by Dave.

Marriage Story is a battle that pits New York's theatre scene against Los Angeles' television industry. "The space" appears in praise of L.A.'s attributes numerous times (Baumbach p.14, p.59, p.99, p.102), Charlie, eventually countering "Fuck the space" (p. 101), whereas New York is referenced by "shoebox apartment", "all that honking"(p.67). When trying to park his car to go trick-or-treating, Charlie tells his son Henry "If we were in New York we could be walking", Henry counters "I like to sit."

NARRATIVE AND CONFLICT

These scripts present the internal and external conflict of the characters in a number of effective ways. The events of *Wild Rose* and *Juliet, Naked* are presented in a linear structure, as are the *Persuasion* films, with point of view almost exclusively from the female protagonist. *Juliet, Naked* begins with a clip from Duncan's fan site, and cuts to narrative voiceover by Annie, an expositional speech for the purpose of set-up we later realise is an email to Tucker Crowe. Tucker's life is shown from his point of view, also with his explanatory narrative superimposed. *Begin Again*, however, explains backstory through memory using film footage from Gretta's own recordings, and begins with a complex set up of the trigger scene where Dan sees Gretta perform, and the events leading up to that. The scene is shown twice, from their differing points of view. *Begin Again* uses a number of mini-montages to show the time and effort taken to record an album's worth of songs around the city. *Marriage Story* sets up the couple's love for each other and exposition comes from their conversations with others, where we see the influence that their confidantes have in developing understanding of their relationship. A viscerally powerful third act scene, Charlie singing 'Being Alive' in a bar, is almost dream-like. *Wild Rose* uses one fantasy sequence, when Rose-Lynn is cleaning, singing, and imagining a band playing around her (Taylor, scene 32). Rose-Lynn's internal conflict is set up with this scene, where we understand the strength of her passion for music, and her propensity to wear headphones shows her internal world is more important than the external. Rose-Lynn's frustrations and conflict drive the story forward quickly but in a less articulate way than the middle-class and middle-aged Annie Platt's rational voiceover. Gretta explains little to the audience, forcing close attention on her actions.

Marriage Story demonstrates the love this couple have for each other in its first moments, through voiceovers that are quickly revealed to have been unspoken. This revelation makes the fallout from their breakup all the more painful for the audience, as we watch the shift from apparently happy marriage to separation. Tidmarsh (2014, p.7) argues that change is a more important than conflict. These films place importance on change through self-determination, showing happy endings that do not end with a union, rather the ability to move forward into an uncertain future. While Austen's novel does end in matrimony, Anne Elliot's willingness to change and embrace the unknown, and her independence of mind, makes her a thoroughly modern protagonist.

ANAGNORISIS AND RESOLUTION

It may be argued that the transition from ignorance to insight is at the heart of romantic drama on screen. The form of the novel, which appeared from the eighteenth century onwards, has its roots in comedic plot, and the three act structure of set-up, conflict and resolution transposed from the stage to the printed word. Jane Austen began writing novels in 1790, and placed women at the heart of her storytelling, her moments of revelation coming through the protagonists' gradual discovery of the character of others, often following mistaken first impressions. Her heroines, although diverse in their natures, are ultimately able to unite with their hero in the third act through recognition and acceptance of their own failings, akin to the ancient Greek idea of anagnorisis. Similarly, the filmic protagonist is conventionally forced to recognise something in themselves that is so important that it totally changes their attitude, and this is at the crux of storytelling. Antagonist and protagonist are flawed in some way, perhaps trapped in a misapprehension of their own state, perhaps with a physical or relational problem, but ultimately in need of

a moment of recognition that reveals their own true identity and enables a full and satisfactory resolution. ‘...the nature of what it is that has to be discovered or made clear before a change of heart can pave the way to a happy ending’ (Booker, 2004, p.111).

Tidmarsh argues that audiences of romantic comedy confidently expect a romantic union to take place at the end, and are watching for the “how” (Tidmarsh, 2014, p.60). He goes on to describe steps and pitfalls the protagonist and love interest inevitably take in order to remain ignorant of each others’ feelings (p.64). The films discussed depart from the romantic comedy genre in this regard, but remain true to the idea of romantic drama, and all have the moment of anagnorisis, the realisation often being personal rather than interpersonal.

Rose-Lynn is oblivious to her own failings and must undertake a journey of self-discovery before she is able to fully recognise what stands in her way. *Begin Again’s* joint protagonists symbiotically work out their issues, simultaneously realising they are more fulfilled as friends than lovers. Much like Anne Elliot, Annie in *Juliet, Naked* realises that the constraints of responsibility to family she has been operating under are no longer necessary, and she can finally control her own future. Nicole’s Emmy nomination, for directing rather than acting, comes as a shock to Charlie, the moment we realise, through his eyes, that she has been able to become something she could not with him.

Romantic drama demands resolution, recognition of failure, and reconciliation. This may come in many forms, and it is with this understanding that I was able to construct the spine of my story, and imagine a fulfilling and satisfying ending for *Stargazing’s* Annie Austen and her family.

Part ii
Script Development
STARGAZING

This section attempts an explanation of the decisions that I was able to make during my research into family drama, a year-long journey through a number of iterations of *Stargazing*, which began as a modern day retelling of *Persuasion*. A major weakness was the idea of a passive female protagonist waiting to be noticed by a man. Further, in our connected world, the idea that people would lose touch with one another was problematic. Not insurmountably so, but my early drafts relied on attempting to portray internal suffering of the protagonist on screen. As a woman, her inaction and pain was especially difficult to portray in an empathetic way, and she appeared somewhat selfish and petulant.

My next attempt was to bring this couple together at age 28 as if they had not yet met, and investigate the drama that it yielded, but my most recent attempt has been to set them as a married couple, who did get together when they were young, and are now approaching mid-life. This yielded stronger results, as a close examination of a marriage under pressure, with an adolescent child at its heart. I learned that that a powerless protagonist is worth writing, and that women have unique means of action through female styles of discourse, shared experiences and sisterhood. I owe a number of insights around depicting ‘quiet’ women to a November 2019 workshop at AUT run by Stephen Cleary, in partnership with Script to Screen.

WORLD

Stargazing is set between two diametrically opposed worlds: The low-tech utopian paradise of a practically deserted island, where Annie is able to create a lifestyle that nurtures her child, isolates her from her past and create a healing refuge for her husband, and the connected, fast-paced and competitive world of London and the music industry that provides their livelihood and Rick's raison d'être.

At first glance, island life is perfect, but cracks are self evident: Violet is growing up and beginning to need more than the old-fashioned childhood can give. Annie's obsession with clean living has begun to isolate Violet in more ways than one, and, even without internet, the outside world cannot be ignored. Annie's single minded rejection of participation in Rick's life is beginning to isolate him too.

London has changed since Annie left ten years earlier, and she is surprised to find their old neighbourhood, Shoreditch, once all they could afford, has become not only acceptable, but desirable. London has embraced clean living, plant-based culture and her staunch lifestyle choices are no longer unusual. Post #metoo, even her nemesis, Simon, is at least aware that he should not be groping women. The ugliness of the business she rejected is still there, but now she has allies in the shape of professional women that she is able to connect with. What has changed is that she now has an adolescent daughter, and she realises that keeping her innocent has the potential to do more harm than good, as she is ill equipped to deal with the real world.

Rick struggles with his mental health, in a world that is learning to recognise the vulnerability of creative people, and his treatment at the hand of the industry machine is a triggering them to find a new way of surviving and flourishing in this brutal environment.

Their two worlds, the nourishing and the self-actualising, ultimately combine to create a new harmony for the family.

THEME

McKee (1998, p.115) prefers the term “controlling idea”, to the broader implications of a single word theme, arguing that an idea that is “expressible in a single sentence”, rather than a single word, enables the writer to more accurately articulate the theme of the story. Isolation and unity are the backdrop to this marriage, in a modern world where grand ideas of stardom, celebrity and adulation sit uneasily alongside the intimacy of fulfilment, meaning and love.

McKee postulates that the controlling idea is a “living philosophy”, and urges writers to focus and explore and understand value and cause that “express the core meaning of the story”. Truby (2007 p.108) further asserts that theme is the writer’s “moral vision”, or “view of how to act in the world”.

The moral predicament set up by the story explores Annie and Rick’s diametrically opposed views as to how best to keep their unusual family functioning. Whatever they agreed ten years earlier, their view of their split lifestyle has changed. When the story opens, Annie sees no problem in continuing as they had before.

Rick’s assertion that they cannot continue the same way are countered by Annie’s declaration that she can’t go back to their old lifestyle. The isolation that this has created for both of them is not solved when Anne arrives in his world, rather, it drives them

further apart until Annie can find a way to find balance for all of them. The controlling idea is therefore that Annie must change in order to safeguard the family unit, and in broader terms, that family dynamics are not fixed and must evolve over time to survive.

INTENTION

The intention of *Stargazing* is to examine the forces that act upon a marriage under pressure, and show how one particular family learns to cope with change, in order to stay united.

AUDIENCE

Large audiences for recent music films such as *A Star is Born* (Cooper, 2018), *Rocketman* (Bohling, Furnish, Reid, Vaughn & Fletcher, 2019) and *Bohemian Rhapsody* (King, Beach & Singer, 2018) and have demonstrated the popularity of the music biopic genre, placing the audience as an insider to the personal life of performers, real or imagined. *Stargazing* not only taps into this fascination with the celebrity at home, but also into the universality of family dynamics, and is aimed at mature cinema audiences, many of whom will have first-hand experience of long-term relationships.

KEY IMAGE

The key image is the family together, stargazing, both in the Southern hemisphere at the beginning of the script, and in the Northern hemisphere at the end. Violet may have lost some of her innocence, but she has gained a friend. More importantly, Annie and Rick are now looking at their life in the same way, and trying to make it work.

PROTAGONIST

Annie is a devoted mother and wife. She works hard to make a happy, healthy home life, away from the threats, real and imagined, of the outside world. She has deliberately isolated herself from harmful influences, including following a strict plant-based diet, keeping her daughter in a benign digital-free bubble, and distancing herself from her husband's problems. Her choices have become more extreme and more polarising as time has gone by, and she has little involvement in her husband's work life. Her need to stay away from the unhappy life she led in London has blinded her to his needs, and her desire to keep island life idyllic blinds her to the changing needs of her daughter. It eventually becomes apparent that she must adjust her ideas and actively participate in her husband's world in order to keep the family together.

MOTIVATION

Annie is motivated by love for her husband and child, and by fear of the world he participates in. She has run away from that world to create a safe haven for herself and her family in the hope that the ugliness of the music business would do them no harm. She believes she supports Rick's stressful life by balancing his work time with recreation, affection and stability. Providing her daughter with an old-fashioned childhood meets her own need for innocence and safety. Her overall motivation is to keep her family together.

STAKES

Annie's family are her world. She has eschewed a career in the outside world, and keeps herself satisfied by dabbling in photography and helping a community gallery. While it appears that she is happy to do this, she has sacrificed a great deal of autonomy

to attain the family life she has created. We learn that she had a receptionist role in the office of a music industry mogul, a highly sought-after position which she abandoned on meeting Rick, in large part as a way to escape the unwanted sexual attention of her boss. The importance placed on the stable, healthy, benign family home is therefore high to her. She has to physically work hard to maintain their lifestyle and emotionally hard to keep a brave face on her loneliness and isolation, but she is in control in this world. She can't bear to lose control of her lifestyle, husband or daughter, so is evidently prepared to lose something of herself.

PROTAGONIST'S ARC

Annie begins as an apparently contented homemaker, prepared to work hard to keep her relationship with her husband strong, and to give her daughter a wholesome childhood. She is fearful of the outside world, rejecting digital media outright for fear it will invade and taint the utopia she has created. Confronted by the flaws in some of her reasoning, she initially fights back to maintain the status quo, but eventually accepts that there are positives in the world she has rejected. Further, she evolves from timidity to assertive with her nemesis, Simon, and re-engages with the music industry that she had once loved. Rather than just becoming the supportive wife that Rick had hoped for, she sees his needs more clearly than he does, and becomes a powerful ally for him in his career.

ANTAGONIST

The primary antagonist in the story is Rick, not because he is trying to stand in her way, but because he believes that he knows the right way to deal with their problems. He

disrupts her views by showing her that he understands their daughter's needs better than she does, and tries hard to get her to change her mind about joining him in London. His apparent infidelity and the ensuing gossip is a trigger to get her there, and it may be that he deliberately did it to get her attention. However, when she does arrive in his world, he tries to keep her in her quiet role as wife and mother, not allowing her into his business decisions or innermost fears. He actively rebuffs her attempts to understand his business problems, rejecting her opinions until they are impossible to ignore. He is in thrall to the idea of success, framing it in his own way, and he's also oblivious to the threat that Annie feels from his own manager.

Simon's attitude to Annie represents the patriarchal view of women in the business, and the antagonistic forces of toxic masculinity that pervade. Women she encounters in the business react to one other in ways that are impacted by these misogynistic behaviours, pitting them against each other in ways that Annie must navigate and overcome. Her imagined fear that Simon might claim parentage of Violet has cast a shadow over her life, and our understanding of her ambivalence to return is all the more powerful. Her realisation that Simon abused his position does not render her blameless for her flight when she realises her silence has left others to the same fate.

Anne's internal antagonistic force is her mistaken belief that keeping the family together means maintaining the status quo. She has very strong, fixed ideas about how to feed, educate and bring up her child, rejecting generally accepted norms as threats. Her insistence on the lack of screen time and her own fear of contact with others trigger the adolescent Violet, who pushes back even harder as a result. Annie's support for Rick extends to domestic care and sympathy, her feeling that his business problems are his own

mean that she initially avoids supporting his whole self. This dogmatism is counter to her need to unify the family by being prepared to engage and adapt.

MAIN DRAMATIC QUESTION

The main dramatic question is *what will it take for this family to stay together?*

The split in their worlds is set up at the beginning, and Annie is reluctant to leave the island and accompany Rick to London. She has a litany of excuses, and appears unsupportive and selfish. The separation of their two worlds are laid out in the first pages, Annie seen as content with that, with Rick seeking to bridge the gap. Initially, the audience is waiting to see if Annie will go to London, and then watching to see if Rick is unfaithful, and what will happen to the couple. Once in London, the focus shifts to Rick's ailing career and questions about what he needs to do about his work, and how Annie will adapt. Unresolved questions about Simon and Annie's past are revealed gradually, and the parents lose control of Violet's behaviour as she encounters the teenage world of London. The story proper begins on p.14, when the audience sees the threat of Rick with another woman in his flat, just hours before Annie sees photos of them on the cover of her local newspaper.

MAIN CHARACTER QUESTION

The main question about Annie is how she will need to change and compromise to achieve her goal. Her realisation that they can't continue as before comes on p.40, when Rick has a breakdown after their fight about what constitutes 'home': She realises she has to make it work in London and find her place in his world.

Annie is fearful of the outside world, trying to keep her family in a safe bubble, but she has to learn to compromise and face her fears in Rick's world in order to find a balance that works for everyone. In rejecting her previous unpleasant lifestyle in London, she has not made allowance for the fact that London has changed, and that there are parts that may now be better than island life. Changes in Violet are alarming to her, and they are both ill-equipped for the new normal.

Annie's inner need is to be in control, which she has on the island, but has not in Rick's world, so she has ignored it. However, Violet's needs change over time, as do the reasons Annie cannot be in London, and she is initially in denial about these outside forces. She realises that Rick cannot cope alone, but rather than try to take control, she pushes him to see that there could be a better way to resolve his needs. To truly belong, she needs to be seen and heard in his world, mirroring his own need.

Rick tries to welcome her to his world, but he sees her as wife and mother, not as an equal partner. She is an extension to himself, and her professional opinion is not welcome. Annie's ability to connect with other women allows her insight into Rick's problems, and helps her find a way to establish her own worth, and to act as an effective partner in his endeavours.

Annie's main turning points are when she realises Rick's world can negatively impact her utopia, when she realises Rick is unwilling to return, when she realises she needs to save Rick's career, when she realises Violet is being bullied by Ariadne, when she realises that when Tallulah is being abused by her own former abuser, and she has the power to do something about it.

When Annie challenges Rick to make a choice between career and family, she walks away; she realises she can live without him, she just doesn't want to. Annie's

moment of anagnorisis comes on p.96 when she realises that her way of keeping Violet protected did not keep her safe, nor prepare her for life. We see that Annie has changed when she makes the family stay in England to face their problems together.

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