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Change in Seasons

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ABSTRACT

My project aims to address the research question of whether or not the central relationship in a film draws out change from both characters and solves the unresolved conflicts within each of them. When summarized, the thesis (filmscript) *From Autumn to Summer* is a family drama about two young Korean women helping each other overcome the long-term wounds – both physical and emotional – that have been inflicted by their families. Gaeul is the main character, and the central relationship is the one between her and Yeoreum, an older girl. As the film progresses, they nudge each other towards meaningful change. The title is a hint to the story, as Gaeul means autumn in English, and Yeoreum translates to summer. The change of seasons, from a windy and cold autumn to a warm and sunny summer, reflects the positive changes in the characters.

My engagement with my research question has led me to editing and refining my story in many different ways. It has prompted me to reassess my characters to ensure that they are deep and real enough to influence one another and have a relatable change take place. In this exegesis, I present and discuss the realisations I have had through analyzing multiple films of the same genre, undertaking genre, characterization and general screenwriting research, and through the most practical method: writing multiple drafts of the script itself. I will talk about my engagement with the research question through my work, and how the question affected the creation of my script. A variety of scholarly articles and books will also be included and addressed to further the discussions. I conclude that the answer to the research question is – and should be – a definite yes when aiming to write a moving script for a family drama film.

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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 of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.”

Maria Kim

February 29th 2016

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'MK' or similar initials, written in a cursive style.

A. The research question, genre, and model films

In this section, I will first present my research question, and then address the genre that my screenplay reflects. Finally, I will discuss several model films that helped me visualize the research question and apply it to my own screenplay. The research question I chose was, ‘Does the central relationship draw out change from both characters, and solve the unresolved conflicts within each of them?’ I believe that this research question is an integral element of this particular screenplay is because it reflects the genre the screenplay is being written in.

According to Barry Langford (2005), genre places films in categories in which audiences can find the same elements (p. 16). The genre of this screenplay is family drama. Robert McKee (1997) places this in the “Social drama” section, and states that the social drama is a genre that “identifies problems in society... then constructs a story demonstrating a cure.” (p. 82). Thus the audience expectations of this genre is a character overcoming the problem they face in society through the cure – which is, most likely, the relationships they share with the other characters. This leads them to meaningful change, another element of the drama genre.

The research question I chose relates how two characters in my screenplay overcome their wounds by influencing each other. This certainly reflects the genre of family drama. I thought that it would be an appropriate research question for my screenplay, and, moreover, it prompted me to research more about the genre and watch more films related to it. I searched for similar films that could help me visualize the topic. I specifically chose films that held multiple characters, and those in which the characters underwent change by influencing and being influenced by one another.

There are several key films which embody this statement and play it out successfully. I will discuss three of them in particular and refer to research question is addressed in each of these films. The first one, *Red Bean Paste Story* (2015) is a Japanese film directed by Naomi Kawase. In this

film, the main character, Sentaro, an owner of a small dorayaki (red bean paste) shop, is approached by an old woman (Tokue) who asks if she can work there. Only after realizing that she is exceptionally skilled at cooking red bean paste, Sentaro lets her in and gives her the job. As their relationship develops and they grow to care for each other, Sentaro slowly comes out of his shell and learns to think of others. Tokue, who had been shunned by society due to her illness, gains the freedom to work and live amongst people.

This film holds two characters who are both in need of healing. The man, Sentaro, has been leading a lonely life. He lives alone, avoids getting close to people (shown in the pleasant but superficial way he treats the young students who frequent his store) and seems to have accepted that his life is the dorayaki store. As for the old woman, Tokue, she has been living a life in which her free spirit has had to be contained. Leprosy has forced her passion for life and sweet red bean paste to stay hidden and in the shadows of society. When the two of them meet, change begins, even without each having the intention of changing each other. Tokue teaches Sentaro how to make good red bean paste, and as Sentaro watches Tokue, with her simple joy of living and empathetic nature, he begins to realise that life is more about people and simple joys rather than just working emotionlessly day after day. At the same time, it is through Sentaro's acceptance of her and her illness that Tokue is finally able to live her life and do what she has always wanted to do. In this way, the characters positively influence each other, and are an effective manifestation of the research question.

Another film, *Late Spring* (2014), a Korean film directed by Cho Geun-hyun, shows a story in which three central characters change one another: a sculptor, his wife, and a meek model who comes to work for them. The famous sculptor, who had abandoned his art and skill due to a worsening illness, takes up his tools again as the model becomes his muse. His wife regains hope

as she sees her husband smiling and sculpting again. As for the model, it is through her relationship with the sculptor and his wife that she is slowly but surely healed of her unhealthy relationship with her husband and the pain (both physical and emotional) he's inflicted on her.

In the beginning of the film, the genius sculptor has lost meaning in life due to progressive muscular paralysis. His wife, who deeply cares for him, feels hopeless and jumps at the opportunity when she comes across a young mother with a model figure waiting in line at a food donation. The model herself is suffering from problems at home. She has an abusive husband who beats her and steals her money. The three of them meet, and just by being around one another, experience change in their lives. The sculptor regains his passion for sculpting as he discovers a simple and untainted beauty in the model. The model discovers a peaceful and happy life through her regular meetings with the sculptor and begins standing up to her husband. The wife, seeing her husband become better, recovers her joy in life. In the end, the sculptor ends his life, but he leaves a letter to his wife. Through that letter, it is evident that, after meeting the model, he has come to love and appreciate his wife once more. He has also discovered the true meaning of art. The model is finally unbound from her abusive husband. And, finally, the wife learns of her husband's love for her. The research question is evident in this film. It was through the meeting of the three characters that this change in each of them was able to happen.

Lastly, *Speedy Scandal* (2008) is a Korean film directed by Kang Hyeong-cheol. The main relationship in this film is between a father and a daughter. The father, who had no idea about his daughter's existence, is one day accosted by her arrival – along with her own son. They're forced to live together, and soon their relationship changes the both of them.

The father, Hyunsoo, is introduced as a selfish and narcissistic womanizer who hates children. He's a famous radio host and only cares about ratings and his own image. That begins to

change when a daughter he'd never planned to have arrives at his house with his also unplanned grandson. His daughter, Jungnam, is a young, single mother who has a passion for singing but has never been able to pursue it. She's been living a quiet life taking care of her son. As they begin living together, Hyunsoo slowly comes to care for Jungnam and her son. He becomes more empathetic and less selfish. As for Jungnam, through her father's help, she gains the opportunity to showcase her singing talent and gains enough confidence to pursue it further. Also, through their relationship, they both come to realise the importance of family and that even single parents can lead a meaningful life. They both nudge and trigger each other to break out of their shell and become who they should be.

Watching and analyzing these films helped me to think through my own characters, their personal backstories and wounds, and the degree of influence they had on each other. Most importantly, it made me think of their character arcs: who were they at first, and who did they become in the end? In conclusion, these model films were extremely helpful in exploring and tackling the research question, and led to a richer and deeper thought and writing process for my own screenplay.

B. Motivation behind the research question

First and foremost, I chose this research question because of my personal desire to write a story in which the characters influence each other to change. I had two characters in mind for my script, and wanted both of them to draw out change from each other.

I have always been drawn by the opportunity to create characters that go through a meaningful character arc. Andrew Horton (1999) states that a character is “an ongoing, ever-changing state... each with its own history, needs, flavor, limitations, joys, and rhythms.” (p. 5). I believe that characters are multidimensional and deep. As a writer, I’ve always desired to create imperfect characters who have been hurt by something that they have no control over, and go through life struggling with their pent-up feelings. I find fulfillment in creating paths for them to be healed, and I really like the idea of drawing out different (almost opposite) characters who meet, discover each of their weaknesses and wounds through each other, and actively help each other overcome them and realise some important truth.

I believe that it is these kinds of characters that move audiences the most. Robert McKee (1997) presents the idea that in order to create an effective and memorable character, audiences must feel empathy towards them. McKee (1997) defines empathy as being “like me”: “deep within the protagonist the audience recognizes a certain shared humanity.” (p. 141). He also states that “we all share the same crucial human experiences.” (p. 387). We are all individually complex, and it’s a truth that, regardless of the degree, we all experience hardship and suffering in our lives. Problems within the family – being hurt by your parents or siblings – is an experience that I believe everybody has been through, because we were all born from a mother. Even the absence of a parental figure can be the reason for a wounded heart. Therefore, I attempted to create characters who have been hurt by their families in ways that audience members would be able to relate to.

Furthermore, I chose this research question because I felt a personal connection to it and also to the story. McKee (1997) states that “story is metaphor for life.” (p. 108). In my screenplay *From Autumn to Summer*, the main character Gaeul suffers from lack of love from her family members. Born out of an affair, she lives in a family in which her father has a hard time feeling genuine love for her, and her older brother overtly blames and despises her for the breakup of their family. My personal connection to the story is that, although I wasn’t born from an affair, I have felt the intense desire for love and approval from a family member. Gaeul needs to realise that her worth doesn’t come from winning the approval of another person; she already has purpose and meaning in her life, and that is discovered when she genuinely reaches out to help and love the people around her. Also, similar to Yeoreum, I have experienced living away from home for an extended period of time. Yeoreum hides away from Gaeul, scared that her flaws and failures will be exposed, and that people will realise that she is strictly imperfect. I could relate to this, and decided to include it in the screenplay.

The research question definitely helped in bringing forth these ideas and characteristics. Thinking of how two characters would influence each other towards meaningful change made me ponder what kind of family and personal hardships they had, whether or not I (and other people) could relate to them, and if they would move audiences. In choosing this particular research question, it pushed me to look deeper within myself and also at other people, and thus helped to create empathetic characters who could lead the audience through a deeply moving experience.

C. From synopsis towards second draft

In this section, I talk about the relationship between the research question and my second draft screenplay, and how the research question is explored in it. The research question strongly influenced my screenplay. Its impact on it has changed and evolved throughout the entire process: from synopsis to first beat-sheet, from beat-sheet to first draft, and finally from first draft to the completed second draft.

During the process of the synopsis to the first beat-sheet, and then the process of the beat-sheet to the first draft, the impact of the research question was non-existent. This was because at that time, I had not yet formalized my research question. I was also struggling with what kind of story to tell. Therefore, the screenplay was very weak and there was no clear through line or structure. It was during the process of rewriting the first draft into a completed second draft that I chose the research question. Having the research question in mind was incredibly helpful. I was constantly reminded of the focus of the screenplay, and with each scene I wrote, I reminded myself that the characters were meant to change each other, gradually. It helped me develop the characters individually too. Knowing that they had to be changed and their inner conflicts had to be resolved by the end of the film, I delved deeper into the characters and made sure they had a strong, believable inner and outer conflict. I also made sure they seemed capable of change, and that they were well set-up to be influenced by the other character.

My first draft had lacked this kind of focus. I concentrated on the characters individually, and did not think of how their inner conflicts could be healed by another character. I only thought of their individual character arcs, instead of trying to create a mutual influence and link the characters' arcs together.

In the end, my completed second draft showed how the characters were in the beginning, how they began changing each other, and how each of them changed in the resolution. It definitely had a significant impact on the final screenplay, and below, I will discuss in depth each of the changes my screenplay experienced due to the creation of the research question.

Firstly, my research questioned helped me further explore the characters. My screenplay holds two major characters that have been hurt by their respective families. Gaeul, born by an affair her mother had with another man, grows up without the love of her father nor her older brother. Yeoreum grows up and lives with parents who care more about their reputation and their sense of general altruism than their daughter. The two of them meet, and begin changing each other. Yeoreum's interest in and acceptance of Gaeul – through teaching her the piano – helps Gaeul realise that her life might in fact have purpose, and that despite the way she was born, she has the opportunity to be a positive influence on others. Also, she learns that her confidence and purpose does not - and should not - come from gaining the approval of others. She starts off wanting to be loved and approved, but by the end of the script, she has come to accept and love herself first, and is shown helping others with a genuinely happy heart.

Change happens in Yeoreum also. Later on in the script, Yeoreum leaves her family and is left alone in the city. Hardships lead her to withdraw further into herself and avoid sharing her hurts. Gaeul finds her and helps her come out of her shell, resulting in healing. Gaeul's influence on Yeoreum helps Yeoreum realise that there is healing and strength in being vulnerable with those you trust, and sharing your hardships with them. At the start of the script, she's closed off and very independent. Yeoreum is still very self-focused, and she doesn't know the best way to cooperate with others. By the end of the script, Yeoreum has confided in Gaeul, depends on her, and works with her and other people.

Moreover, due to the research question, the screenplay has been structured so that we get to see the change in both characters: first Gaeul, then Yeoreum, then both. In Act 1, we see an anxious Gaeul and her constant search for love and approval. Then Yeoreum arrives, and slowly teaches her through the playing of the piano that she has the opportunity/strength to love herself. Once Act 2 begins, Yeoreum is the one in trouble. She's been left alone by her family and has turned to the wrong people and the wrong method to quench her loneliness. In Act 3, Gaeul goes back home and has the realisation that her absence has made quite an impact on her family. This prompts her to go back for Yeoreum. When she gets back, she finds out that Yeoreum chose not to have the abortion because of her, and that solidifies her belief that she is definitely capable of being a positive influence on the people around her without the desperate need to gain the approval or love of others.

The screenplay went through numerous transformations from the first draft to the second. Once the research question was set up, I realised that the focus of my screenplay was towards the characters and their relationship. Therefore, this resulted in eliminating various elements of the story which I found unnecessary or distracting to the manifestation of the research question. This included the change of setting from New Zealand to Seoul. At first, I was rather stubborn about having at least half the film set in Auckland. I wanted the film to reflect my own experience of the Korean diaspora. However, the more I worked on the screenplay, the more it seemed to me that the story would be much more effective and realistic when set in Seoul. I could not imagine Gaeul spontaneously deciding to move to New Zealand, a faraway country where she could not even speak the language. She had never even been on a plane before. Moreover, when I had attempted to write the second and third act as being set in New Zealand, the story suddenly seemed cut up into two: a story about Gaeul and Yeoreum and their families, and then a separate story about

Gaeul adjusting to a new country. When concentrating on the research question, I made the decision to focus on the characters and the story of their relationship that I had set up in Act one.

All in all, setting up a research question had a significant, if not vital, effect on the development of my screenplay. I believe it guided my screenplay towards a single focus and an uncluttered story.

D. Conclusion

In summary, my personal understanding of and relationship to this research question has definitely changed since I began the screenplay. When I first began the screenplay, I didn't have the research question in mind. Therefore, I felt like I was groping in the dark. I had a story I wanted to tell, but the story lacked a definite purpose. Once I came up with the research question, I knew where the script was heading. I had my characters, and I realised that I had to make them so that they would start at one point, then change to be at another point by the end.

This research question has helped me to learn more about character, structure, genre, and also more about myself and other people. It definitely led me to develop my characters further than I ever have. It made me look deeper into them and mold them into multidimensional characters. I realized that a character needs to be set up well in order to be capable of change, and for the audience to regard the change as significant and cathartic. I have learned more about what might move an audience, and why.

If I had the opportunity to explore this research question further in later drafts, I would flesh it out even further. I believe that so far I have created the backbone of the story. In later drafts, I would delve even deeper into the characters, especially Shinwoo and Yeoreum's parents. I would like to explore their motivations, and give their characters more dimension. Also, I would explore Mr. Yoon further. There were several characters whose backstories and thoughts could have been further revealed. I believe it would have made the screenplay richer and more interesting, even more real.

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