

## “Propelling a Screenplay Forward: How Character Arcs Work in Conjunction with Structure”

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A transformational character arc is the trajectory a character takes over the course of a narrative as the character “grows into [a] new consciousness” (Marks 199). Using the classic, architectural three-act structure, a screenwriter strives to create a believable character who gradually changes internally, ideologically, emotionally, spiritually, psychologically, physically, and or existentially, in stages, over the course of the screenplay. Most character arcs begin with the inciting incident that sets up the character’s deep need, high stakes, and central conflict. The character’s public, private, and secret life, with its ever-deepening emotional needs, transforms as the character faces roadblocks and challenges, whether with self, another character, a thing, the environment, or society. But how does a screenwriter create powerful character arcs that are transformational in the classic three-act structure?

This scholarly essay will offer three strategies that screenwriters employ to create a transformational character arc over the course of the three-act structure, and model how these strategies work. The first strategy is the pairing of nuanced characters as used in the screenplay, *Silence of the Lambs*, written by Ted Tally, adapted from the novel, *The Silence of the Lambs* by Thomas Harris. The second strategy presents characters’ minds through the prism of their actions and dialogue, beat-by-beat, scene-by-scene as employed in the screenplay, *The Lives of Others*, written and directed by Florian Henckle von Donnersmarck. The third strategy sets up, in the beginning of the screenplay, a clear question for the character’s arc. This question is then answered by the end of the screenplay through the use of craft techniques like character-laden

dialogue, repetitive thematic taglines, and thematic visual imagery as experienced in the final montage of Mario Puzo's and Francis Ford Coppola's screenplay, *The Godfather*, adapted from Mario Puzo's novel, *The Godfather*. In this last strategy, we might ask the question: What is our protagonist going to do? Which way is he or she going to go?

As Syd Field explains in *Screenplay – the Foundations of Screenwriting*, “A screenplay is a story told with pictures, in dialogue and description, and placed within the context of dramatic structure” (2-3). Field goes on to say that “structure is like gravity: it is the glue that holds the story in place... it is the spine of the story” (21). In Act I, which is understood to be the first quarter of the screenplay, an inciting incident occurs. It is the moment when the protagonist's need, or goal is revealed, putting the story into motion. Act I is the set-up of the narrative that “establishes character, launches the dramatic premise (what the story is about), illustrates the situation (the circumstances surrounding the action), and creates the relationships between the main character and the other characters who inhabit the landscape of his or her world” (Field 23). Act II, made up of two quarters, contains the Mid-Point of the story. This is the act where the protagonist confronts conflict and roadblocks, and never-ending obstacles that challenge him or her, making it difficult to achieve that initial need or goal introduced in Act I. Act III is the last quarter of the screenplay, where the story is resolved.

Blake Snyder, in his novel, *Save the Cat*, breaks down structure in a slightly different way by placing fifteen beats into the three-act structure, and then identifying the page numbers where transitions are supposed to occur. Snyder's analysis reveals the importance of understanding the value of a screenplay's real estate. He suggests that “the opening scene of the “A” story (defined as the external story or plot) is on page 1...the theme is stated on page 5... the set-up is done between pages 1 to 10... the inciting incident is seen on page 12... the debate

is between pages 12 to 25... the break into Act II (plot point 1) is on page 25...the “B” story (defined as the protagonist’s internal arc) starts on page 30...fun and games [what I refer to as obstacle after obstacle] takes place between pages 30 to 55...the mid-point is around page 55...between pages 55 to 75 the bad guys close in and all is lost...[then] on pages 75 to 85, the dark night of the soul or plot point 2 takes place...propelling us into Act III and the finale between pages 75 to 110.”

But how does a screenwriter move from act to act? The answer, as per an article by Script Reader Pro, “is to create character arcs using key plot points in the screenplay.” At each of these junctions, there should be “turning points” defined by Dara Marks as “escalation[s] of the conflict that turn[s] the story in a new and unexpected direction, substantially raising the stakes for the protagonist” (Marks 200). There can be many turns in a screenplay, but for simplicity’s sake, there are four identifiable points that the screenwriter creates to transform the character over the course of the three-act structure. These four plot points are: the inciting incident at the beginning of Act I, plot point one at the end of Act I that drives the narrative forward into Act II, the midpoint in Act II, and plot point two at the end of Act II, that propels us into Act III, and the climax and resolution to the story. The inciting incident defined by Robert McKee in his novel, *Story*, is the first action in the narrative that “radically upsets the balance of forces in the protagonist’s life” (189). This is the hook that the screenwriter uses to get the audience’s attention. Now the audience wonders what’s going to happen next? As per Syd Field, these turning points do not have to be “big, dynamic scenes or sequences; they can be quiet scenes in which a decision is made” (27).

Syd Field reminds us that “all drama is conflict. Without conflict, you have no action, without action, you have no character; without character, you have no story; and without story,

you have no screenplay” (25). It is helpful for us, as writers, to understand and model how screenwriters use these different strategies to create a transformational character arc using this three-act structure. But how is this done exactly?

In the screenplay, *The Silence of the Lambs*, Ted Tally uses nuanced characters that are paired together to create transformational character arcs. Four scenes across the screenplay are placed along key plot turning points. In Act I, ten minutes into the film, we are given the first scene of character pairing that begins Clarice’s journey. This initial meeting is a disturbing moment for the reserved FBI trainer. In their second meeting, found on page 23, the tension between the two paired characters increases, their deep needs become apparent, and the stakes get higher. Their third meeting, beginning on page 49, is at the midpoint of Act II. This is the scene when the paired characters agree to an exchange of information. Their last meeting together takes place at the end of Act II, beginning on page 71. In this scene, Clarice struggles to navigate the manipulative mind games played in her paired relationship with Lecter. Tally’s brilliant use of character pairing takes place over the course of approximately 20-minutes in this 118-minute film. It is the very fabric of Clarice’s character, and Lecter’s unique power, that causes change to happen as seen through dialogue, specifically in the questions Lecter asks that force Clarice to reveal and analyze herself in ways she has long avoided.

At the beginning of the narrative, Starling is emotionally closed and vulnerable. But her tenacity, courage, and sense of duty, as the stakes get higher and higher, allow that vulnerability to be exposed in order to get the information she needs to find the serial killer, Buffalo Bill. Lecter’s character demands this. The result of this payment – her empowerment and the completion of her arc. Clarice Starling follows a moral compass. She’s the main protagonist, a force to be reckoned with, attractive, hard-working, and smart. Her courage and intellect, in the

face of fear, allows her to forge forward through the sexist environment of the FBI, and catch the serial killer, Buffalo Bill, to save the girl. The character of Dr. Lecter, a master of manipulation that thrives on psychological abuse, represents evil and everything that's morally wrong. He's a combination of opposing characteristics: charismatic, brilliant, but dangerously brutal, a deranged serial killer who likes to eat his victims. The genre of Tally's screenplay is a thriller that creates a world of angst, suspense, and unexpected events, interwoven with the hope that things will work out in the end.

In Act I, Tally sets up the story, introducing Starling as an FBI trainee sent to interview Dr. Lecter, "a former psychiatrist turned serial killer" (Arc Studio Pro), who is now incarcerated in a prison for the mentally insane. Lecter holds the clues to catching Buffalo Bill, a serial killer who is targeting large-boned woman for their skin. The inciting incident in Act I is Lecter's first clue, an anagram: "Go to Split City. See Miss Mofet, an old patient of mine. M-O-F-E-T" (Tally 13). Through research, Starling figures out that "Mofet is a mini-storage facility outside Baltimore" (Tally 16). Even though she's jumpy and anxious as she explores the interior of the facility, where she discovers a severed head of a man who is made up as a woman, she "is pleased to find herself quickly regaining control [of herself]" (Tally 22). In their second meeting, Starling's deep needs, to find Buffalo Bill and rescue the kidnapped girl, are revealed as is Lecter's deep needs, to get into Clarice's head and get free from imprisonment and the sadist warden, Dr. Chilton.

In Christopher Vogler's novel, *The Writer's Journey – Mystic Structure for Writers*, he states that "the [12] stages of [a] hero's journey [are] a good guide to the steps needed to create a realistic character arc" (238). In *Silence of the Lambs*, this is done through character pairing. In Act I, the protagonist starts off in her ordinary world of the FBI, is called to adventure by her

boss, momentarily considers refusing the call because the goal is to deal with a man-eating psychopath, but knows it's a chance to advance, so, she accepts the call and meets the mentor, Dr. Lecter. This is Plot Point 1, the turning point that moves us into Act II where Clarice meets challenge after challenge. In Act II, Starling realizes that Crawford has used her to get information from Lecter, at the expense of her “[feelings being] violated” (Tally 32). Crawford states that Lecter has “got spooky powers...uncanny insight...[and] his profile of Bill could narrow the field and save us weeks” (Tally 32). During the sequence of scenes leading up to the autopsy, Starling experiences gender discrimination from the officers, the sheriff, and even her boss, Crawford. With her discovery of a bug’s cocoon lodged in the victim’s throat, she holds her own, warranting “a new degree of respect” (Tally 36). As Starling and Crawford head back to FBI Headquarters, Starling confronts him on his rude handling of her in front of the sheriff. “It matters, Mr. Crawford...Other cops know who you are. They look at you to see how to act...It matters” (Tally 39). Crawford’s response: “Point taken” (Tally 40). Here, through dialogue, we witness a change in the character’s arc as we see a strong and outspoken woman beginning to stand up for her rights.

The protagonist’s transformation continues as we move through the three-act structure. The third meeting between the paired characters takes place at the Mid-Point of Act II. Lecter insists on a “quid-pro-quo” (Tally 50) in which Starling needs to reveal information about her childhood. “If I help you, Clarice,” says Dr. Lecter, “it will be turns with us too. Quid pro quo. I tell you things, and you tell me things. Not about this case, though - about yourself...Yes or no, Clarice? Catherine is waiting. Tick-tock, tick-tock” (Tally 51). He waits for her “to enchant him” (Tally 50). Starling tells Lecter about a nightmare she has where lambs are being slaughtered. Lecter, in turn, provides her with notes he made in the Buffalo Bill case file she had given to

him. During this scene, Starling offends Lecter's intelligence when she offers a false promise to transfer him to "a maximum-security hospital with a view" (Tally 50), an offer concocted by Jack Crawford using Senator Martin's name. And then the Mid-Point in Act II, when the two paired characters volley back and forth until Lecter reveals why Buffalo Bill lodges a moth in his victims' throats: "The significance of the moth is change. Caterpillar into beauty...Billy wants to change too, Clarice" (Tally 51). The questioning continues between the two until Lecter gets bored. He "snarls, loudly, stretching" (Tally 54). Tally's use of strong verbs captures the animal-like tendencies of Lecter. His images of the moth create a metaphor for Starling's transformation.

In their last meeting together, we find Lecter sitting in a "large, zoo-like cage" (Kemp), in a heavily guarded building in Tennessee. He has promised to tell Senator Martin where her kidnapped daughter is. Starling shows up and Lecter reveals that "Everything you need to find [about Buffalo Bill] is right in [the] pages of your case file...First Principles, Clarice. Simplicity. Read Marcus Aurelius" (Tally 72). Another anagram. Another flashback as Clarice confesses that it was the screaming of lambs being slaughtered on her mother's cousin's ranch that frightened her and caused her to run away as she attempted to carry a lamb to safety.

Clarice: If I could save just one [lamb] (Tally 74).

But she couldn't. The consequence of running away landed her in an orphanage. It is now Lecter's turn to supply information.

Lecter: What is the first and principal thing he does, what need does he serve by killing?

Starling: Anger, social resentment, sexual frus...

Lecter: ...No, he covets. That is his nature. And how do we begin to covet, Clarice? Do

we seek out things to covet? Make an effort to answer... We begin by coveting what we see every day. Don't you feel eyes moving over your body, Clarice? I hardly see how you couldn't. And don't your eyes move over the things you want? (Tally 73).

Act II ends with Plot Point 2, when Lecter kills the two guards and escapes from his cage. In Act II, the protagonist, our hero, crosses the threshold, "in which the hero commits wholeheartedly to the adventure" (Vogler 151). As the protagonist is propelled toward her goal, [she] "gets tested by both allies and enemies" (Vogler 159), then enters her innermost cave (Vogler 169) of self-reflection, to come out at the other end where the climax and resolution of the story play out in Act III.

In this final act, Starling uses Lecter's clues to figure out who Buffalo Bill is. The climax takes place when she confronts Jame Gumb, aka Buffalo Bill, shoots him, and saves Catherine. The resolution ends with Starling's graduation ceremony. Lecter calls to congratulate her and assures her that he will not be coming after her. She cannot, however, make that same promise to him. Lecter leaves her with a final farewell, "I'm having an old friend for dinner" (Tally 119). The hero is back in her original world, changed forever.

According to Marilyn Horowitz in her article, *Exploring Unusual Character Relationships to Improve Your Script*, she suggests that "the relationship between Clarice and Hannibal leads to the capture of Jame Gumb, but also provides a character arc for each character. Clarice becomes empowered and solves the crime, and Hannibal regains his humanity when out of love, he helps Clarice find the essential clue to the mystery." In an interview with Mike Fleming Jr., Jonathan Demme, the director of *The Silence of the Lambs*, shared that "a basic premise of *Silence of the Lambs* is [that] the story [is] about two people, fighting their way into each other's heads." On close analysis, I would argue that Tally's pairing of these two, uniquely

different characters, each with deep needs and high stakes, is an effective and brilliant strategy to create Starling's transformational character arc as she changes internally, emotionally, psychologically, and existentially over the course of the three acts. The hero's journey for her is because of this dynamic pairing. These four scenes, set in the structure along the plot, are the "gravity and glue" (Field 21) through which Starling goes from an emotionally closed woman to face herself and her darkness as she allows herself to become vulnerable in Lecter's presence.

In the screenplay, *The Lives of Other*, written and directed by Florian Henckle von Donnersmarck, the transformational character arc, over the course of the classic three-act structure, is artfully crafted using a different strategy than Tally employed in *Silence of the Lambs*. This screenplay is a magnificent character study, a masterpiece of writing and architecture. Everything connects to everything else. There's no exposition. The main protagonist is Captain Gerd Wiesler, a Stasi officer in the East German secret police during the year 1984. Wiesler's need to expose Georg Dreyman, a playwright, as an enemy of the Socialist's party, transforms over the course of the narrative as he observes, through surveillance, Dreyman and Dreyman's girlfriend, actress Christa Maria. Wiesler's journey begins as a man rigid in his beliefs, a master instructor of interrogation, loyal to the German Republic that keeps a strict control over its citizens. But by the end of the film, Wiesler realizes that his life lacks human contact and compassion; he is changed internally, emotionally, ideologically, existentially, and psychologically, until he becomes a "good man" (Henckle von Donnersmark 78). Other characters grow and change over the course of the story, but for this thesis, I will focus on Captain Weisler's transformational arc.

Wiesler's dramatic arc is crafted beat-by-beat, scene-by-scene, as the screenwriter presents the protagonist's mind through the prism of his actions and dialogue. "Will

Wiesler out Dreyman as a dissident? Can he become a good man?" (Voytilla). In Act I, the screenplay begins with Captain Wiesler teaching a group of students the art of interrogation. This is "Wiesler's ordinary world" (Voytilla). He's a skilled, cold-hearted Stasi officer. The inciting force occurs about ten minutes into the film. It is the initiation of the spying on Dreyman as an enemy of the Socialist government. Captain Wiesler is assigned to oversee the investigation. He bugs Dreyman's apartment, "representing Dreyman's ordinary world, and inhabits the attic for monitoring...a continued reflection of Wiesler's ordinary world [of surveillance]" (Voytilla). Wiesler is now "called to the adventure" (Voytilla). During Act I, Dreyman has a birthday party. Wiesler observes Dreyman's friends, and his love for Christa Maria and the warmth, friendships, and beauty of the art forms they share with each other. Jerska, a friend of Dreyman, and a government blacklisted theater director, gives Dreyman a gift of an original piece of piano music entitled "Sonata for a Good Man" (Henckle von Donnersmarck 53). When Wiesler realizes that Christa Maria, whom he admires, is being forced to succumb to sexual intimidation by Minister Hemph, he questions why his boss, Lieutenant Colonel Grubitz and Minister Hemph want to investigate Dreyman. He begins to shift. Plot Point 1 occurs when Wiesler alerts Dreyman to this intimidation. As Stuart Voytilla suggests in his article, *Structure: The Lives of Others*, Wiesler now "becomes an active participant in the lives of Dreyman and Christa Maria."

In Act II, we see Wiesler's personal world, "a two-room apartment, furnished with thin wooden furniture and steel legs...and an army calendar on a painted wall" (Henckle von Donnersmarck 36-37). His dinner consists of "rice and tomato puree" (Henckle von Donnersmarck 37); his sexual activity, with a prostitute, is an unemotional and loveless interaction. This is juxtaposed with the richness of Dreyman's world and the difficulties

Dreyman is having with Christa Maria, her addiction, and her forced involvement with the Minister. Beat-by-beat, scene-by-scene, we watch Wiesler's humanity transform. First, he breaks into Dreyman's apartment and steals a poetry book by Brecht. He takes the book home and reads it, moved by the words. Then, when Dreyman gets the phone call that his good friend Jerska has committed suicide, he sadly plays Jerska's sonata on his piano. Wiesler listens from the attic and is so moved by the melody that he cries. This is followed by another emotional shift as evidenced in an elevator scene with a young boy who shares that his father does not like the Stasi. "Wiesler stops himself from demanding the father's name" (Voytilla), something he would have done in the past. The Mid-Point of Act II takes place when Wiesler runs into Christa Maria in a bar and tells her that she is a great actress. She tells him he is "a good man" (Henckel van Donnersmarck 78) . Instead of her going to meet Minister Hemph, she goes home to Dreyman. In the second half of Act II, Dreyman shifts from a loyal playwright to a writer who is going to reveal to the west the reality of living in the Republic of East Germany and the high suicide rates of artists who are silenced, destroyed by the system. Wiesler now has a choice. Should he reveal Dreyman's disloyalty? He almost does, until he realizes that Lieutenant Colonel Grubitz is only looking to protect himself when he demands that Wiesler break Christa Maria in an interrogation to convict Dreyman. Wiesler goes back to Dreyman's apartment and takes the incriminating typewriter, thereby saving Dreyman from arrest. Plot Point 2 occurs when Christa Maria commits suicide out of guilt for betraying Dreyman.

Act III, is Wiesler's "road back" (Voytilla) to becoming a good man. Grubitz demotes Wiesler, the Berlin Wall falls, and Dreyman, after realizing that his apartment had been under surveillance the whole time, researches his investigation and discovers that Wiesler

was his “guardian angel” (Henckle van Donnersmark 135) and dedicates his novel, “Sonata for a Good Man” to Wiesler. Wiesler’s transformation from a staunch, Socialist, mentoring others to torture people by breaking them down, transforms over the course of the screenplay and learns how to do the right thing. Wiesler’s empathy and compassionate action comes from observing the lives of others, and his understanding of our shared humanity. Wiesler’s heroic journey is a “path of transformation to a higher self” (Cabal). His journey is different than Starling’s journey, but in the end, he is changed, like Starling, in a positive direction. “Absorbed in [the lives of Dreyman and Christa Maria and] their world of love, passion, and art” (Gao), Wiesler is transformed as he begins omitting evidence and eventually [sacrificing] his career to shield the two artists from imprisonment” (Gao). Gao suggests that “art transforms Wiesler from a disciplined, dispassionate Stasi interrogator to an empathetic human being” because art has the power to do so.

A third strategy used to create a transformational character arc, over the course of a three-act structure, is employed by Mario Puzo and Francis Ford Coppola, in *The Godfather*, a screenplay adapted from Mario Puzo’s novel, *The Godfather*. If Tally’s screenplay uses character pairing and dialogue as action to illustrate and create Starling’s transformation, and Donnersmark’s approach uses successive scenes and a beat-by-beat use of structure to present the protagonist with external situations that force internal change, illustrated through the choices he makes, I would argue that *The Godfather* creates character transformation using bookending. This strategy is shown through an Act I narrative question set up 13-minutes into the film, followed by a powerful climactic visual moment during the ending montage that begins on page 111 in Act III, where the question is explosively answered. Here, visual images, voice-over, thematic repetitive taglines, and use

of a montage flag internal transformation in a dramatic way, allowing us to track a series of plot points where the protagonist's transformation occurs.

In contrast to the positive transformations of the protagonists in *Silence of the Lambs* and *The Lives of Others*, the protagonist's character arc of Michael Corleone transforms in a negative trajectory. According to Weiland in his essay, *Helping Writers Become Authors*, "Michael's arc is a corruption arc...[succumbing] to the lie that defending one's family is an end that justifies all means." I would argue that weaved through this screenplay, these craft techniques service the story as it explores the complex Corleone family, its fathers and sons and their subservient daughters and wives, and their need for power and respect; it sets the tone and mood, while capturing the creeds and ideologies of the underworld of the Italian Mafia.

But what is the question that is set up right at the beginning of the screenplay? I would suggest that the question is the following: Will Michael Corleone change from a war hero to become a working member of his crime family? The answer will be revealed over the course of the three acts, finalized in the last montage, where Michael's character change is complete. He is now the Godfather to his nephew and the Godfather to the Corleone crime family. Without that moment in the beginning, when the question is set forth, the montage would not work in the end.

In Act I, we meet Michael and his girlfriend, Kay Adams. He is a war hero. His ordinary world is "that of a smart and upright man who is moving away from his corrupt family into a promising new and legal life of his own, with his non-Italian girlfriend, Kay" (Weiland). During his sister's wedding, Michael tells Kay how his father convinced a

Hollywood mogul to hire his godson, Johnny Fontane, to play a leading role in a Hollywood movie. This is the scene that sets the question in motion.

Michael: My father made him an offer he couldn't refuse. [repetitive tagline]

Kay Adams: What was that?

Michael: Luca Brasi held a gun to his head, and my father assured him that either his brains or his signature would be on the contract.

(Then) That's a true story. (Then) That's my family, Kay. It's not me.

(Puzo and Coppola, 13).

The narrative question is clear here. Who is Michael Corleone going to be? We see the beginning of the character arc when Puzo and Coppola ask the question in Act I and then the end of the arc when the question is answered in Act III. Between this dialogue moment in Act I that asks the question and the dialogue/montage climax in Act III, there are moments in the narrative, series of plot points, where we can track the protagonist's transformation. The inciting force in Act I occurs when Vito Corleone, Michael's father, is shot, "leaving him fighting for his life in a hospital" (Weiland). This scene begins on page 32. This attempted assassination pulls Michael into his family's business. His deep need - to be loyal to his father and the family. He maintains a sense of control and calm as he whispers to his father, "Just lie here, Pop. I'll take care of you now. I'm with you now. I'm with you" (Puzo and Coppola 49). Act I ends with Plot Point 1, the turning point where Michael

shoots “the rival mobster and the dirty cop responsible for shooting his father” (Weiland), found on page 59. The stakes get higher. Clemenza, one of the Corleone’s hit men, tells Michael that “All the families will line up against us” (Puzo and Coppola 56) once Michael takes revenge for his father’s attempted assassination. A second, repetitive, thematic tagline, that reveals Mafia ideology, is spoken by the mobster Sollozzo: “What happened to your father was business” (Puzo and Coppola, 61). For Michael’s safety, he is flown to Sicily, where he is protected by Don Tomassino. He is now a gangster in hiding, never to be that war hero, clean-cut kid ever again. Plot Point 2, beginning on page 86, takes place when Michael’s brother, Sonny, is gunned down on the Causeway and Michael returns home to become the head of the family.

Act III opens as Michael arrives in New Hampshire where he proposes to Kay. He reveals that he is now “working for [his] father” (Puzo and Coppola 96). Kay responds to this information:

Kay: But you’re not like him, Michael. I thought you weren’t going to become a man like your father.

Michael: My father’s no different than any other powerful man. Any man who’s responsible for other people. Like a senator or a president.

Kay: You know how naïve you sound?

Michael: Why?

Kay: Senators and presidents don’t have men killed.

Michael: Oh, who's being naïve, Kay?

Michael's transformation, through the course of the screenplay, reveals a changed man as he lies to Kay. "In five years, the Corleone Family is going to be completely legitimate. Trust me. That's all I can tell you about my business" (Puzo and Coppola 96). Plot Point 2 ends with Vito Corleone telling his inner circle that Michael is now the official head of the family. Michael announces that the Corleone family will be moving their business to Las Vegas.

I would argue that dialogue in *The Godfather* is a craft technique used to flag character transformation. These thematic dialogue taglines reveal the fundamental codes of this Italian crime family. When Act III opens in Las Vegas, where Michael proposes to buy Moe Greene's casino, he repeats one of the thematic taglines: "I'll make him an offer he can't refuse" (Puzo and Coppola 103), first used by Vito Corleone in Act I, followed by Michael at his sister's wedding. These eight words hold the power used by the mob to intimidate and get what they want and need. When Fredo, Michael's dimwitted older brother, tries to question Michael's handling of Moe Greene, we hear a third thematic tagline: "Don't ever take sides with anyone against the family. Ever" (Puzo and Coppola 106).

When Vito Corleone dies, Michael's ruthlessness grows. The climax: "Michael has become a far greater monster than his father ever was, unmitigated in the brutalities he is willing to commit, even down to murdering his brother-in-law on the very day he becomes his nephew's godfather. He is victorious, but he has clearly sacrificed his soul" (Cabal).

The famous montage in Act III, where images of the brutal retaliation killings for his brother Sonny's murder is juxtaposed with the baptismal scene of Connie and Carlo's son, uses the craft technique of voice-over dialogue intercutting with thematic images to reveal Michael's final transformation to a lying, ruthless gangster, and his position as the new Don Corleone. This montage answers that first question asked in the set-up in Act I as we hear "the church music continue to play" (Puzo and Coppola 114).

Priest: Michael Francis Rizzi do you renounce Satan?

Michael: I do renounce him.

Priest: Michael Rizzi...Go in peace, and may the Lord be with you. Amen" (Puzo and Coppola 114-116).

I would argue that this montage, used to answer the question asked during the set up in the beginning of the script, is an effective craft technique employed by filmmakers, like Puzo and Coppola, to bring home a character's completed transformation. This "cinematic technique" (Tour Box), defined by Film Supply, in the article, *Montage as an Advanced Technique to Make Your Films Stand Out*, is "a sequence of different clips (or still images) that are edited together to convey a specific idea, theme, or message. Most often, the purpose of a montage is to condense time or information into a much shorter amount of time on screen. They may also be used to illustrate a character's emotional state or thought process, or potentially convey a message through visual metaphors or symbols."

Francis Ford Coppola once said that “the essence of cinema is editing. It’s the combination of what can be extraordinary images of people during emotional moments, or images in a general sense, put together in a kind of alchemy” (Rivka). According to Linda Seger, in her novel, *Making a Good Script Great*, “the use of voice-overs, used sparingly, can be quite effective when used in tandem with images...meaningful juxtaposition to actions and images...to help layer a story thematically” (99). Like Rivka, Dara Marks argues that “Image is everything...because film is a visual medium...conflict and theme can best be expressed through images” (Marks 188-189).

The transformational arc of Michael Corleone’s journey, over the course of the three-act structure, from a war hero to a cunning, ruthless Mafia boss, is a magnificent visual journey. His needs change as the stakes gets higher and higher. His first need in his ordinary world is not to be part of the family business. His need changes when he vows to take care of his father. His final need - to revenge his brother’s death. His journey, unlike the journeys of Starling and Wiesler, is the journey of an anti-hero. He too has transformed physically, emotionally, psychologically, spiritually, and existentially, back to the original world the screenplay started in, but in a negative direction from the start of the film.

The use of dialogue is “one of the most powerful narrative tools Francis Ford Coppola uses to carry forward the gripping gangster drama” (Chakravorty). Through dialogue, thematic taglines, and visual images, the writers “assert the credo and codes that dictate life in the underworld” (Chakravorty), flagging the transformational character arc moments as the structure moves through the plot of the story.

Each of these three screenplays have crafted solid, three-act structures that serve as textbook examples of how to construct and build a screenplay. They offer models for transformational character arcs, in tandem with this structure, using such strategies as: the pairing of diametrically different, nuanced characters, transforming a character beat-by-beat in stages, setting up a character arc question at the beginning of the narrative and answering it by the end, and finally, through the use of employing craft techniques like character laden-rich dialogue, flashbacks, montages, thematic taglines, and visual images. Coupled with these strategies are the themes of doing the right thing, good versus evil, and gender and sexual discrimination, in a heavily white, male-dominated society. These same themes will be weaved through the tapestry of my screenplay, *Behind the Hedges*. Additionally, I will employ several of the craft techniques utilized by Tally, Henckle von Donnersmarck, Puzo, and Coppola to create transformational character arcs, in tandem with the classic three-act structure, to propel my storyline forward.

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