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# Abstract

The adaptation of works for film has been around for almost as long as film itself. The main aims of my research were to investigate the adaptation process, specifically through creating a short film from a short story, *Primary* (2017), and to develop my creative practice as a writer and director. This research was undertaken first by investigating film adaptation and scriptwriting theories, and then applying those ideas practically as I adapted, wrote, directed and edited my short film adaptation.

The result is a summary of both film adaptation theories and how these were (and can be) applied in practice with the two main outputs being my script (appendix 2) and my completed short film, *Primary*. The conclusions drawn from the research include the importance of the differences between film and other storytelling mediums, and how these differences should be leveraged to the advantage of the filmmaker rather than simply trying to faithfully translate a story from one medium to another. Overall, the success of an adaptation rests on maintaining the essence of a story: maintaining the themes, character and spirit of the material more often than not results in a less than perfectly faithful adaptation. These ideas apply not only to adaptation, but to filmmaking and storytelling in general.



Figure 1. Still from scene 1. Eleanor Calder, (2019), *Primary*. Short film.

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# Introduction

The focus of this project was three-fold: the process of adapting a short fiction work to a short film, the improvement of my creative practice as a writer and director, and the development of my own aesthetic, style and voice as a filmmaker. The practical aspect of this process sought to explore the film adaptation techniques and processes at every stage of the filmmaking process – from story analysis to postproduction. The result is a holistic, complete picture of short fiction to film adaptation, and the process of adapting for the screen generally. My research involves undertaking the process of adapting, writing, directing and editing a short film based on the short story *Primary* (2017) by Amy Calder (appendix 1).

*Primary* (2017) is a piece of short fiction about female friendship and growing up. The short story resonated with me on a personal level and was, therefore, a story I was excited to translate to the screen. I focused on getting the themes of the film in line with the short story. This involved experimenting with film techniques at all stages of the filmmaking process.

The adaptation of works for the screen is common across not only the current cinematic landscape, but also the historic film landscape. The art of film adaptation is almost as old as film itself (Nour, 2018). With this trend not slowing down any time soon, my project seeks to examine what is required to produce an adaptation. As the worlds of written storytelling and visual storytelling continue to cross over and often merge together, investigating how to undertake adaptation effectively has a place in the future of film and cinema.

The purpose of my project was to adapt a work of short fiction to a short film, using techniques and processes gleaned from research and my own reflections on my own process.

The research question for my project is:

How do all the aspects of the filmmaking process, from scriptwriting to the editing suite, impact the outcome and overall ‘success’ of the adaptation?

My research included textbooks, written and audiovisual research mediums from across the adaptation, and general film, field. I have also been reflective, aware and critical of my own processes and decisions throughout this experience with the goal of improving my own creative practice. My script and short film are the primary creative outputs, with the objective to enter the film into film festivals in New Zealand and overseas.

This exegesis will discuss the existing film adaptation, subtext and technical research and knowledge, combined with my personal experience of making *Primary*. Overall, this exegesis will conclude with my own reflections on my adaptation and filmmaking processes after having completed a project with that focus.



Figure 2. Still from scene 5. Eleanor Calder, (2019), *Primary*. Short film.

# Literature Review

## Introduction

The adaptation of works for the screen, from written and stage works to video games, has become commonplace in the popular cinema landscape in the twenty-first century. My project involves adapting a short, written work of fiction to a short film. This literature review will take the perspective of discussing the processes which inform and result in an adaptation. A fuller discussion of my research texts is included in the discussion section of my exegesis.

## Adaptation theory and process

Seger (1992) describes adaptation as “a process of identifying and focusing on the story line within the novel, play, or true-life story” (p. 77), claiming that a story line is “often hidden among character details, thematic statements, information and descriptions” (p. 77).

Similarly, Rabiger (2000) encourages short story analysis and identifying the characteristics of a short story that will be effective when adapted to film. These characteristics include the underlying meaning, premise, cinematic and dramatic strengths, character development and point of view. Rabiger (2000) highlights that externalization of internal conflict, motivations and character backgrounds, and evidencing and resolving character problems are the biggest challenges when adapting. Stories are presented differently depending on the medium used. Novels portray stories in ways that film may have trouble with (Now You See It, 2015).

Mantel (2017) highlights the importance of show don't tell and the challenge of good exposition. She claims that there are no special tricks to make exposition work, just to communicate clearly, be sure of your point, and not to underestimate your audience's intelligence. Mantel also discusses emotional subtext, being aware of everything that has brought your character to that place (moments, conscious and unconscious, dreams and desires held invisibly in the text).

Novels use literary devices including metaphor, tone, hyperbole and other techniques to tell a story. Film uses lighting, camera angle, actor placement and other cinematic techniques. These techniques are

very different from each other and have different strengths and weaknesses (Now You See It, 2015).

Films show while novels tell, and in fact films must show in order to keep the audience engaged and invested in the characters and the story (Now You See It, 2015). Mantel (2017) also emphasizes 'show don't tell' while advocating for the intelligence and ability of an audience to follow subtler story cues.

In her video essay, Ellis (2018) seeks to investigate why, when both adaptation series' involved the same creative team, *The Hobbit* (2012-2014) was critically unsuccessful compared with *The Lord of The Rings* (2001-2003). Ellis discusses the difficulties of adapting *The Hobbit*; including the episodic structure of the book and therefore the lack of enough story arcs for a trilogy of three-act structured films. Ellis does, however, highlight some positive changes made, including the development of Bard and the characterization and humour of the dwarves. She argues that the problem with *The Hobbit* films is not the absence of good, it is the amount of unnecessary content. She highlights pacing issues, unnecessary plot points and bad visual effects. As a result of the restructuring of the one novel into what became three films, there were storylines and dramatic plot points added in that go nowhere, and character moments come at the wrong times in the story, either too early or too late. An example of this is Bilbo's rescue of the dwarves and emotional speech about home at the end of the first film, which brought the themes of home and homecoming to the surface (which then weren't addressed again in the following two films). This scene also resolved the tension between Bilbo and the dwarves, particularly Thorin, leaving no space for further relationship development between Bilbo and Thorin in the following films. Similarly, the theme of finding home is not picked up again in the second or third film in the trilogy. Overall, this case study highlights the importance of thematic simplicity and character-driven story and film, particularly where relationships are developed and/or resolved.

## Subtext

Cowgill (2005) and Weston (2003) describe subtext as expressing our real feelings and underlying intentions through body language, tone, voice and expression, and that it is therefore one of the most difficult aspects of screenwriting and filmmaking to grasp. Weston (2003) claims that in life we start with subtext and we end up with language and behaviour. In a script, the writer starts with language and ends up with subtext. The director and actor, however, start with language and delve into the subtext. In scriptwriting, language is what is written on the page, subtext is what is not.

Cowgill (2005) describes subtext as what is happening beneath the surface; the undercurrent of emotions and thoughts that truly motivate characters to behave as they do. Subtext is connected to characters' needs, indicates why characters act the way they do, and determines the feelings, thoughts and motives that lie beneath the actual words and actions of the characters. Cowgill (2005) claims that need is revealed through subtext and that subtext has a direct relationship with the theme.

Overall, Cowgill (2005) argues that dialogue is rarely the best way to express emotion. When characters tell too much audiences don't assign as much emotional weight to their situation. Weston (2003) argues that to be compelling, works demand subtext, character and story.

## Conclusion

The main agreements across the literature discussed in this review include simplicity being an essential element when translating story from written form to the audiovisual medium. Another common thread is the differences between written and film languages and how translation between the two is not simple or straightforward. The devices of written storytelling do not correlate to those of audiovisual storytelling, and therefore the transfer of story from one to the other must be approached in a less direct way. None of the texts disagreed; rather they covered different aspects and satisfied different curiosities of my research into this area of film adaptation and wider audiovisual storytelling. Gaps and areas for further research included literature around specific film techniques, including camera work, editing and location scouting in relation to film adaptation. Research into these more technical, practical areas needed to be considered as I moved into the practical steps of my research and film my film adaptation project.

Similarly, developing characters and relationships was also a common thread in the literature. When characters are sufficiently developed, and the relationships between them explored, the audience is more invested in those characters and cares more about what happens to them throughout the film and beyond. In *The Hobbit* trilogy, the development of the characters and relationships, particularly between Bilbo and Thorin, was sidelined for the second and third films. This resulted in a lack of investment in the character of Thorin and therefore a lack of emotional response from the audience when he was killed in the climax of the third film. We, as the audience, didn't feel invested in him as a character or in his relationship with the main character, Bilbo, as that relationship hadn't been addressed since the first film. Therefore, his death had no emotional impact. Emotional subtext also creates complexity and interest for

an audience, asking the audience to look beyond the first layer of what is happening in the story to what is happening under the surface; to what is actually being revealed about character motives.

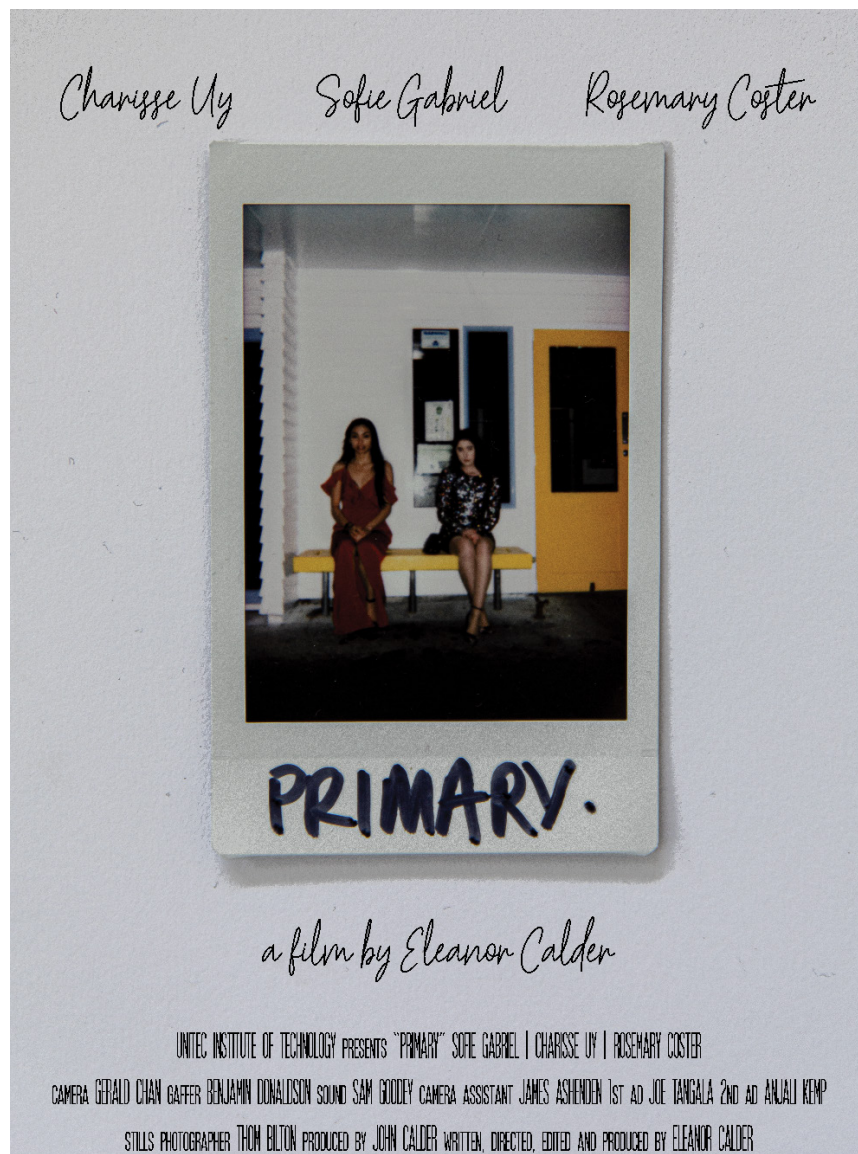


Figure 3. Film Poster. Eleanor Calder, (2019), *Primary*. Short film.

# Methodology

The two methodologies I employed for my research are action research and grounded theory. Grounded theory is an iterative, flexible and non-linear approach that takes the lead from the data gathered. I chose this method because grounded theory lends itself to the gathering of data and information to inform my practice, including from articles and literature that contribute to shaping my own process. Grounded theory, and specifically textual analysis (Charmaz, 2014), enables me to consume, collect and code the information I am researching and fold it into my own creative practice.

Action research is practice-based focused on the improvement of practice, learning improvement and the generation of new theories out of practice. Action research is communal and collaborative and is concentrated on the co-creation of knowledge (Stringer, 2014). This fits well with my creative practice as my approach to researching adaptation involves my own experimentation as guided by current research and critical consensus.

The combination of both methodologies, the theory-focused grounded theory process and the practical, experimental action research, work towards a holistic and informed adaptation practice, and short film adaptation as my creative output. This combined approach is appropriate to my research and objectives as it combines the two aspects of my research project: discovering and experimenting with film adaptation theories and improving my own creative practice. The project design has been developed through collaboration with supervisors as well as the processes identified in the literature and the desired objectives of this research.

My research took place between July 2018 and November 2019 in Auckland, New Zealand. Initial grounded research and collection was undertaken with Dr. Scott Wilson and as part of the 8071 research paper in 2018. Grounded research and coding continued in 2019 alongside the action research and practical aspect of the research, running parallel to the producing, filming and editing of *Primary*. Research continued in 2019 under the supervision of Dr. Leon Tan, Dr. Becca Wood, Johanna Smith and Grant Lahood. Information gathered as part of my grounded research was applied to the practical aspect of my research. Grounded theory information was gathered across video, film, book and e-book formats.

The action research practical research included a film crew, equipment and volunteers (cameras, lights, props, catering, Adobe Premiere Pro editing software, sound).

Both grounded theory and action research methodologies lent themselves effectively to the improvement and development of my creative practice through the length of this research project. Grounded theory provided me with a framework from which to launch my project, with information covering scriptwriting through to editing. I was able to undertake the filmmaking portion of this research with a theoretical knowledge-base to draw upon. Particularly in the production phase of my project, having already built a knowledge framework for this adaptation and filmmaking project was critical when facing challenges on set as a director and filmmaker. When making in-the-moment creative decisions, having put the time and effort into immersing myself in the theory surrounding this adaptation and filmmaking area meant that I was able to quickly and effectively draw on the knowledge and theories explored prior to the production of my short film. The information I gathered did, and will continue, to inform my creative practice as a writer, filmmaker and storyteller.

I feel my grounded theory and action research approach to this research undertaking was effective and appropriate for this research project. Grounded theory set me up with the underlying knowledge base and foundation for the practical aspect of my project, and I feel the combination of both grounded theory and action research methods have produced a successful research project and research output in the *Primary* adapted script and short film.



Figure 4. Still from Scene 1. Eleanor Calder, (2019), *Primary*. Short film.

# Discussion

## Introduction

Without a good script you're never going to make a good film (Waititi, 2019). A good adaptation script, and script in general, is made up of scenes that are doing more than one thing at a time, for example developing both story and character (Krosecz, 2017). Story moments are the emotional pillars of the film, they are what the audience will truly remember (Just Write, 2015).

## Screenwriting

Constandinides (2010) discusses Wagner's (1975) three types of film adaptation: transposition (adapting a novel directly to the screen), commentary (partial, intentional or inadvertent, alteration on an original text) and analogy (modernizing or dramatically changing the source material). I would describe my adaptation of *Primary* as commentary, as the characters, tone and theme have been maintained while aspects of the story structure and plot have been changed. In fact, Stam (2000) argues that adaptation is automatically different because of the different mediums involved.

The question that initiated the scripting process was 'what is this short film about?'. The simple answer, which informed the entirety of the scripting and adaptation process was:

Growing up and growing apart.

Two ex-best friends reunite at a 21st birthday party, a momentous coming-of-age moment. Beth goes to the party to see if amends can be made with Adelaide. She learns that satisfactory closure doesn't always mean a cheerful happy ending. But that doesn't make this any less significant, emotional or conclusive.

Following the research, literature and preparation that went into ICIB 8072, ICIB 8071 and 8002, I approached the initial adaptation and scripting stages by deliberately not consulting the source material. This technique trusts what is in my head; what I have retained from the time I have already spent with the story and characters, that I know the material well enough. As a result, without consulting the

source material initially I will remember the important and thematically significant parts of the story and characters. Other parts of the narrative can be added back in later. I found this technique very helpful for drawing out the themes, story arc and character beats.

The other scriptwriting exercise that was employed in the early scriptwriting stage was a 'Beth's Version'; a version of the script which lets the main character 'Beth' take over. The main concepts which came from this exercise and ended up in the final film were that Beth doesn't like hugs and nobody remembers this (a way to question the value of the friendship she is trying to salvage in the first place), and that, often, childhood friendships are situation-based; who your neighbour is, who you sit next to in class.

At the beginning of the scriptwriting process I made the decision to purchase the Final Draft software, which I found made the process much easier. Before this I was using the screenplay template on Microsoft Word, which I found very frustrating.

After the initial stages of the scriptwriting process, we began to work on pushing the adaptation further; where is there more going on in the story? What do we see, or don't see? What haven't I played with yet? This process brought through a number of ideas, which ended up in the final film:

- Continuing to build the tension at the party and increase the pressure on Beth; pushing the idea that Beth is being buffeted by the party (pushing through groups etc.)
- Transitioning with visual and sound contrasts including space, air, oxygen, noise and silence.
- Beth continually being interrupted in conversations to increase the tension but also help us side with her. Pusckak (2017) describes how often lack of connection between characters communicates more than just what the characters are saying, because human communication isn't easy. This also adds strength to the moments when characters do finally connect and communicate genuinely with one another.

When there was a flashback in the script, I explored the transitions in and out of that flashback, through sound, picture and match cuts. I also looked at memory and feeling and making the flashbacks emotion-based and dream-like visually. This posed the question of what Beth feels looking back on those memories, working through how those emotions would be played out, and reducing the dialogue in

following versions of the script, including a version with only 1-2 lines, and a version with no dialogue at all, instead utilizing visual language to convey the events as well as the emotion. I began to explore shifting into the unusual psychology of memory; conveying Beth's tension, anger and resentment through a distorted memory experience with shallow depth of field and close ups to give the dreamlike and hazy effect of memory. In the final scripting stages the flashback was removed for scale and time, and to keep the story narratively present. The events of the flashback have instead been shown or hinted at in the rest of the short film.

Other script notes and discussions included digging into the subtext of the film, with the characters giving away the truth with their bodies. Also providing more tensions and pressure by giving Beth more reasons to move through the party space. There was discussion about repetition throughout the story; Beth keeps getting hugged even though she doesn't like it and she keeps getting cut off or interrupted mid-sentence.

## *Structure*

"A good story has direction "toward a climax, with most scenes advancing the action ... dimensionality." (Seger, 1992, pp 77).

A big part of film adaptation is respecting the film medium, using what is unique to this form to enhance the source material while finding ways to trim, break down what the source material is about in essence, without being indentured to it. What is essential? What is at the centre of this? (Fandom Entertainment, 2019).

Aronson (2010) describes the structure of a screenplay as emotion, specifically the control and direction of the audience's emotions. Film is a very emotional medium and it is important to choose the structure to suit the material. The basics of the conventional three-act structure include fitting the story fragments into the structure and ensuring good timing, as everything about film is connected with time and movement through time. Story, essentially, is a series of consequences arising from an initial event or action. These main points are called 'plot points' or 'turning points' (Aronson, 2010). In fact, Mamet (1991) describes story as "... the essential progression of incidents that occur to the hero in pursuit of his one goal" (p. xiv-xv) and screenwriting as "craft based on logic" (p. xv). I wrote ten drafts of the *Primary* script

in order to massage and fit the story to an effective structure to aid the emotion of the storytelling.

The structuring of this story saw a few dramatic additions, specifically the addition of two turning points (to total three), which also added to the drama, building tension and pressure. The two turning points, which were added during this restructuring process, were Mrs. Lewis insisting Beth give a speech during their bathroom conversation (also forcing Beth to stay at the party), and Beth's first conversation with Adelaide, where Adelaide is oblivious and rude about Beth's attendance at the party. Both turning points increase the pressure on Beth, the claustrophobic feeling of the party closing in on Beth, of her being trapped. These also lead to sympathy for Adelaide as indicated through her family situation and nobody following her out of the party.

Seeger (1992) describes the elements of a good story as a series of events that have a beginning, middle and end, with all events being related to each other. These events must 'add up' and 'make sense' to give the audience a sense of completeness. Seeger (1992) describes different types of stories as looking for a 'goal', 'problem or issue' or a 'journey'. Seeger (1992) highlights the three-act structure that provides dramatic form. Act one sets up the story and introduces the characters, act two develops the story and relationships and act three resolves the story with a climax.

Further script revisions included the removal of additional speeches from friends to keep the focus on Beth and her experience. Similarly, the conflict was further enhanced from the source material to reinforce the idea that Beth doesn't want to be at the party, that she is having a bad time. This also raises the question, why doesn't Beth just leave? What is stopping her? This led to one of the biggest departures from the source material; Beth does go to leave the party but doesn't manage to make it out of the room before Mrs. Lewis begins the speeches. At that point Beth is stuck at the party, forced to listen to the speeches and make one of her own. Other revisions included not making it too easy for them to patch up as they are both young, lost and communication between them has broken down. They don't know how to navigate this. This results in a bittersweet, untidy ending. Lack of communication between Beth and Adelaide six years ago led to the breakdown of their relationship, and they have yet to learn the skills to save that relationship. A chance has been lost.

After the first few drafts of *Primary*, I worked through a screenwriting structure process to logically

map out the story (Seeger, 1992), find what was working according to the model I chose and identify what was missing from the story. Visualizing the three-act structure helped place the importance on the protagonist – the audience needs to walk with them and sympathize with them. My concluding breakdown of *Primary* was as follows:

- Act One

Normality: *Beth is unsure about attending the party.*

Disturbance: *Beth shows up at the party.*

Protagonist: *Beth knows nobody at the party, no one wants to know her, she is battered by the party.*

Plan: *Beth plans to show her face, speak to Adelaide and then leave.*

Surprise ... which turns into the ...: *Beth is asked to make a speech, therefore she has to stay and has to speak. This gives Beth the opportunity to get Adelaide back for what happened between them.*

Obstacle: *Beth has to give a speech therefore Beth can't leave the party, she is forced to stay.*

- Acts two and three

Climax (end of act three): *Beth gives her speech and thinks about letting the cat out of the bag, but decides not to.*

- Resolution (how the world goes on): *The scene 5 bench conversation between Adelaide and Beth, resulting in a parting of ways.*
- Ability to use all persons: *the short story follows Beth, however the screenplay demanded more from the other characters, particularly the development of Adelaide, which led to the emotional climax conversation in scene 5.*

While completing this model it became clear that I did not have enough turning points in my story (the model suggested three) so I added Mrs. Lewis insisting Beth make a speech in Scene 3 and Beth being interrupted and Adelaide abandoning their conversation in Scene 4.

# 'PRIMARY' STORY STRUCTURE

## Character conflict:

Beth and Adelaide have unfinished tension and conflict after a miscommunication and prior incident.

## What does Beth want?

Reconciliation, but over the course of the film she learns that that doesn't always mean a happy ending.

## Is her objective linked to desire?

Yes

## What if ...

You showed up to an estranged friends 21st birthday party.

## What is the worst that could happen?

Embarrassment, hurt, mortification

## Why is today like no other?

Adelaide's 21st birthday party and all that represents: coming of age, friendship, nostalgia.

## What are the stakes?

Friendship and closure.

## No way out?

Beth runs into Mrs. Lewis in the bathroom and is asked to make a speech.

## Previous circumstances?

Flashback.

## Present tense?

Almost all of the film (except the flashback)

## Physical life of the film?

A 21st birthday party.

## Rising conflict:

Pressure building on Beth: being battered by the party, constantly interrupted, pushed to the side.

## 3 turning points:

- 1) Beth runs into Mrs. Lewis in the bathroom, asked to make a speech at the party (therefore has to stay at the party until that point).
- 2) Beth speaks to Adelaide, Adelaide reacts rudely to Beth's presence at the party and abandons Beth mid-conversation.
- 3) Beth begins to talk about the shoplifting story in her speech, changes her mind mid-speech about telling the story and lies instead. This close call upsets Adelaide and she storms out of the party.

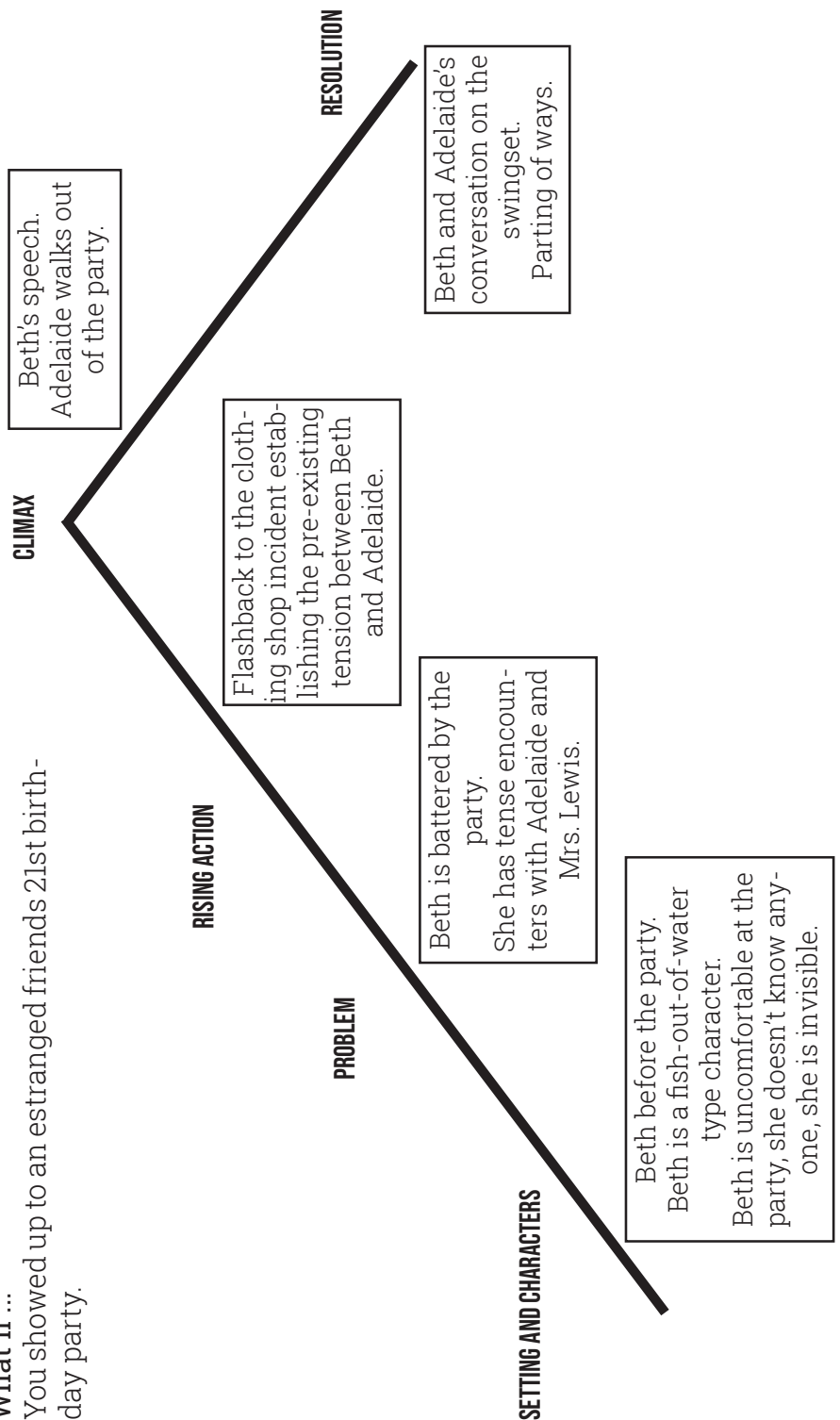


Figure 5. 'Primary' Story Structure Diagram. Eleanor Calder, (2019), *Primary: film adaptation in theory and practice*.

The external goal or throughline for Beth is to survive the party and make up with her estranged friend, Adelaide (this goal needed to be simple, but not easy). I also created obstacles and learning moments for the Beth in the story; not being able to leave the party and having to give a speech, taking the speech too far and her final conversation with Adelaide. It was important to me that Beth be a three-dimensional, well-developed character (as she is in the source material). Beth makes mistakes throughout the film, says the wrong things and realizes something about her previous actions that she didn't realise previously. At the same time, Beth is still unable to right the wrongs of the past and the film has a bittersweet ending as a result (Film Courage, 2017).

One of my biggest goals for the outcome of this project was to communicate emotion effectively in the short film. For me the story is emotional; it draws on the themes of rejection, miscommunication and the rollercoaster of anxiety and emotions that comes with being in your teens and early twenties. I drew on personal experiences for a lot of the dynamic between Adelaide and Beth, as well as the source material. This is because I truly believe friendship, as well as the breakdown of friendship, is a universal human experience, albeit a painful one. One of the most important parts of the screenwriting process for me was the learning and rewriting of the script and garnering feedback from supervisors, friends and family (Film Courage, 2017). I ended up writing over ten versions of *Primary* by the time we got to a shooting draft (Appendix 2) and went into production.

Rabiger (2000) claims that art thrives on the pressure of limitations, and short stories can produce highly effective short films when adapted well, while Seger (1992) highlights the importance of simplicity in adaptation for the screen, arguing that a large section of the film should be understandable by simply looking at the moving pictures. By applying story structure models, undertaking an extensive process of editing and refining through multiple draft versions and focusing on character, emotion and simplicity, the limitations of the short film form were able to be utilized in a way where story, character and theme were distilled to their simplest and purist form, which results in those ideas being more effectively communicated to an audience.

# Directing

Mamet (1991) describes directing as telling the story in cuts “because otherwise you have not got dramatic action, you have narration” (p. 2). Mamet also focuses on simplicity, drama and being prepared with a shot list. The original first full draft of the script was twice as long as the final shooting draft, with the editing and rewriting focusing on simplicity, the main relationship in the story and keeping aware of what was realistic within this project, timeline and the resources were available to me.

In terms of the actual construction of the film, Mamet (1991) describes making a statement based on the meaning of the scene and what the protagonist wants. He encourages increasing audience interest by putting them in the position of the protagonist. He also stresses the importance of simplicity and keeping only what is essential in your film, as well as directing audience attention in each frame. Overall, Mamet stresses that every choice made by a director must be in service to what is essential to telling the story. For *Primary*, I made every decision based on the relationship between the two main characters, Beth and Adelaide. This included slowly revealing details of their relationship history through the course of the short film, particularly in blocking (Adelaide pulling Beth to the side of the party during their conversation, so that less of the party guests see them together) and Beth’s reaction shots (including in her conversation with Mrs. Lewis in the bathroom, and when Adelaide leaves their conversation while Beth is mid-sentence in scene 4).

Bloom (2017) describes some basic visual storytelling techniques in *Visual Storytelling 101*. The first of these is the rule of thirds, which improves shots by placing important parts of the shot in the best part of the frame to draw our attention to them. In this shot from scene 2, Adelaide is the most important person in the shot, so has been placed on the cross-section on the right side of the frame, according to the rule of thirds. She also stands out among the other people in the shot because she is wearing a different colour. Beth is also framed up according to this rule while she is writing in Adelaide’s book.



Figure 6. Still from Scene 2. Eleanor Calder, (2019), *Primary*. Short film.



Figure 7. Still from Scene 2. Eleanor Calder, (2019), *Primary*. Short film.

Alternatively, by placing a subject in the centre of the frame, attention is also drawn to it. In this still from scene 5, both Adelaide and Beth are centre of the frame, which also draws the focus of the shot onto them.



Figure 8. Still from Scene 5. Eleanor Calder, (2019), *Primary*. Short film.

Similarly, I also used depth of field to direct focus and attention to my subject. In this still from scene 4, a shallow depth-of-field was deliberately employed to separate Adelaide from what was going on behind her.



Figure 9. Still from Scene 4. Eleanor Calder, (2019), *Primary*. Short film.

I played around with specific light changes, for example the contrast between the darkness and neon colour palette of the party, with the clinical bright coldness of the bathroom.



Figure 10. Still from Scene 3. Eleanor Calder, (2019), *Primary*. Short film.

I also used 'frame within a frame' techniques as another way to draw attention to the important parts of the frame and scene, for example when Beth begins her speech in scene 4, she is framed by the silhouettes of the party guests.



Figure 11. Still from Scene 4. Eleanor Calder, (2019), *Primary*. Short film.

Bloom does stress, however, that rules can be broken for effect. In this shot from scene 2, Beth is right on the edge of the frame, going beyond the rule of thirds.



Figure 12. Still from Scene 2. Eleanor Calder, (2019), *Primary*. Short film.

Visual subtext was a priority for me in directing *Primary*. The colour scheme (Buono, 2017) was one area that I focused on to communicate the deeper themes of the film. In the source material, Beth's dress is described as covered in multicoloured sequins while the other party guests are all dressed in dark colours such as black and navy. While being visually interesting, this contrast also emphasizes Beth's feelings of being an outsider, standing out and not wanting to and not knowing anyone else at the party, and not being a part of Adelaide's life anymore. In this shot from scene 4, Beth's multicoloured, glimmering outfit stands out against the dark outfits of the rest of the guests.



Figure 13. Still from Scene 4. Eleanor Calder, (2019), *Primary*. Short film.

In *Mistakes to Avoid When Directing Your First Short* (Film Riot, 2018), it is advised to hook the audience in the first thirty seconds. In the *Primary* short film, I made the decision to begin the film with Beth pulling up to the primary school in her car, rather than in the short story where it begins with her entering the party. I made this decision for a few reasons; I wanted to establish the setting of the primary school strongly as this plays an important part in the theme of 'growing up and growing apart'. I also wanted to visually establish Beth's internal conflict around attending the party – even as she has pulled up outside the party venue she still hasn't fully committed to attending. She is visibly nervous and hesitant. In the short story this is all communicated as Beth's internal thoughts as she walks into the venue, but as I did not want to employ voice over, I needed to establish this visually from the outset. Therefore, the first thirty seconds of *Primary* establish the main character, her feelings about what she is about to walk in to and intrigue as to why she decides to attend anyway.

Other points of importance include dialogue as character not information, emotional content is what the characters are not saying, making the timing, rhythm and flow uneven and therefore more dynamic, and finally the film being about a theme, not just plot (Pape, 2018b). In terms of pacing, Mamet argues that the “nature of human perception is to go to the most interesting thing ... the most interesting thing is what happens next in the story that you promised the audience you were going to tell.” (p. 59). The human perception connects unrelated images into a coherent story because it needs to make sense of what it is seeing, if the mind is already doing this, the director does it first, “ ... going with the flow rather than battling against the tide.” (Mamet, 1991, p. 61).

Mamet describes directing actors and crew as communicating the objective of the scene; the meaning behind each beat. Based on this identified objective and meaning, you direct cast and crew to do those things. Dialogue is not supposed to carry information or cover for what is lacking in the shot list. Mamet argues that shots carry a film, and that “you should always be striving to make a silent movie.” (p. 72).

Buono (2017) describes the first rule of subtext as organic-ness; the subtext must serve the text. My costuming decisions were faithful to the source material, while serving the story further in a visual and thematic way when translated to the screen. The second rule is that the undefined is more powerful than

what is defined, and that audience engages in the not-knowing; don't give your audience the answers. Neither Adelaide nor Beth explicitly say what happened between them in the film, it is only hinted at (and indeed Beth backtracks during her speech). It is therefore up to the audience to determine what happened from what they see on screen, and side with the character they determine to be the victim in the situation.

My main takeaway from the directing process was the importance of preparation. The challenges of directing include holding multiple elements in place during production, which is a fast-paced and high-pressure environment. Within the adaptation context, it is a real challenge to hold the source material and adaptation process front of mind as the other demands of filmmaking also happen. Keeping the adaptation as the focus is a real challenge. As a result, my preparation around adaptation theories, as well as my story work on this specific adaptation, became crucial as it became the decision-making foundation while the rest of the production was taking place. The preparation enabled both the adaptation and filmmaking focuses of the research project to be held together simultaneously, each given equal importance during the production phase of *Primary*.

# Editing

## *Process*

Murch (2001) describes editing as “structure, colour, dynamics, manipulation of time ...” (p. 10). My editing process began in late July 2019 after production was completed earlier that month. The process began with synchronizing and organization, and then a first rough cut was assembled. From there, I continued to edit down the film, removing and shortening clips to help with pacing. I also worked on colour grading and sound mixing simultaneously during this time.

One of my biggest focuses during the editing process was the pacing of the film; when, how and in what order I should reveal various pieces of information in the film (Murch, 2001). Murch (2001) also encourages not changing your direction or mind during the editing process. Murch has six criteria for making a good cut during editing: emotion, story, rhythm, eye-trace, planarity and continuity (in that order). Murch describes his ideal cut as being one that satisfies all six criteria, but that in the case that not everything can be satisfied, the items should be prioritized in order. Murch argues that emotion is the most important; considering what you want the audience to feel through the scene and the film because that is what the audience will remember – how the film made them feel. This is a list of priorities, with all six items being fulfilled wherever possible. Overall, “... if the emotion is right and the story is advanced in a unique, interesting way, in the right rhythm, the audience will tend to be unaware of (or unconcerned about) editorial problems with lower-order items like eye-trace, stage-line, spatial continuity, etc.” (Murch, 2001, p. 19). Therefore, it often takes more work and discernment to determine when to not cut (Murch, 2001).

For example, my first priority during the editing of *Primary* was the emotional story arc between Beth and Adelaide. This comes to fruition in scene 5. For the editing of scene 5, I focused on the performances of the actors first, both to hit the bittersweet, melancholic tone of the end of the short story, but also to complete the emotional arc of the whole short film. Once I had selected shots for both actresses which conveyed this emotion and story in the most effective way, I moved on to the pacing of the scene. One of the biggest editing changes made here was the removal of Beth’s first line, Adelaide jumps straight in with the line “What are you doing here?!”. This immediately brings to the surface emotions that have been

underlying the entire film up until that point. Following that I looked at the continuity of the scene; where the actors were looking, when they were turning their heads and when they stand up at the end of the scene. Editing with the emotional heart of the source material in mind, as well as the emotion of the scene and the performances, greatly added to the emotion communicated through the film which ties in with the themes of friendship and disconnect that were established in the original short story.

In essence, the film editor should put themselves in place of the audience, asking questions about what the audience is thinking at a particular moment, where they are looking, what you want them to be thinking about, what they need to be thinking about and, most importantly, what you want them to feel (Murch, 2001). Murch warns against developing over-familiarity with the material, which particularly comes from directors and those involved with the production process being involved in the editing process. This is because the editor can be impartial, particularly when it comes to scenes which were difficult or costly to film. None of this matters to the editor, they simply work towards what the best final product will be. This was a particular challenge with my project, as I was the writer, producer, director and editor, and I found creating space and impartiality between myself and the material particularly challenging. The input of specialist supervisors helped me look more objectively at the material I edited, but I still found this to be an obstacle throughout the edit.

In film, the shot presents an idea or series of ideas, and the cut is a 'blink' that punctuates those ideas. A cut is the bringing of one idea to an end to begin another (Murch, 2001). For example, when

*... observing a dialogue between two people, you will not focus your attention solely on the person who is speaking. Instead, while that person is still talking, you will turn to look at the listener to find out what he thinks of what is being said. The question is, "when exactly do you turn?" There are places in a conversation where it seems we almost physically cannot blink or turn our heads (since we are still receiving important information), and there are other places where we must blink or turn away in order to make better sense of what we have received. ... For instance, by cutting away from a certain character before he finishes speaking, I might encourage the audience to think only about the face value of what he said. On the other hand, if I linger on the character after he finishes speaking, I allow the audience to see, from the expression in his eyes, that he is probably not telling the truth (Murch, 2001, p. 66-68).*

Accordingly, Murch (2001) breaks down three problems to be solved when deciding when to cut:

identifying the potential cut points, determining the effect each cut point will have and choosing those that are correct for the film. Taking this idea further, Murch suggests leading the audience with the cuts creating potential blinking points for the audience. This way, you are

*blinking for the audience: You achieve the immediate juxtaposition of the two concepts for them ... to anticipate, partly to control the thought processes of the audience ... If you are too far behind or ahead of them, you create problems, but if you are right with them, leading them ever so slightly, the flow of events feels natural and exciting at the same time (Murch, 2001, p. 69).*

As Beth is the main character in *Primary*, and we spend the film following her and viewing the events from her point of view, I made the decision to prioritise her in the edit. This included favouring her reaction shots, particularly in dialogue scenes, over others in the story, as mentioned by Murch. The point of this was to keep the audience with Beth, experiencing the party as she is, empathizing with her. Much of the story and emotion of the film is conveyed through Beth's reactions to what is happening around her. Her subtle reactions to certain lines of dialogue or situations hint to the audience of the backstory and history between the characters. Overall, the purpose behind this was to encourage the audience to get behind Beth as a character, while also hinting at the real state of the relationships that we are watching play out on screen.

## *Subtext*

Murch (2001) encourages the editor to produce the

*... greatest effect in the viewer's mind by the least number of things on screen. Why? Because you want to do only what is necessary to engage the imagination of the audience – suggestion is always more effective than exposition. Past a certain point, the more effort you put into wealth of detail, the more you encourage the audience to become spectators rather than participants (p. 15).*

Cutting is not simply practical, it is also an effective tool in itself (Murch, 2001). Making good cuts serves not only the practicalities of telling a story through the medium of film but can communicate emotion and subtext in profound ways. Overall, through the process of editing *Primary*, I focused on stepping into the audience role, working to make the best of the source material we shot during production. This

involved the input and involvement of others who were more removed from the production process to keep the impartiality and distance from what went on during production week, and to keep the focus on what is happening on screen between action and cut.

# Conclusion

This research project has highlighted the importance of the integration of adaptation throughout all the stages of making a film adaptation. Similarly, this research project has helped me develop personally as a writer, director and visual storyteller.

I sought to test my thinking around successful adaptation in the short form context, including ideas around simplicity, theme and visual film language, to determine what constitutes a 'successful' adaptation. The desired outcomes of my research project included the adaptation of a short fiction work to a short film, the improvement of my creative practice as a writer and director, and the development of my own aesthetic, style and voice as a filmmaker. This research project has not only expanded my knowledge of film adaptation theory through research and practice, but also challenged me to grow as a storyteller interested in screenwriting and film directing.

From the first story breakdown and draft of the script to the final editing touches, the themes of the original short story and the essence of the characters in that story have led my creative practice of film adaptation and direction. While the story was changed, particularly the ending, I always ensured my script, what we shot, and how I edited *Primary* was in the spirit of the original story. As a result, I believe I have been successful in adapting the essence of the story, themes and tone of the original text to the screen. I maintained the essence of the source material by focusing on character relationship and development, being deliberate with scriptwriting, subtext, costuming, colour, framing and editing.

The practice of screenwriting and rewriting, and character development aided and deepened my understanding of the source material and themes which put me in the position to successfully create an adaptation and come to the results I've achieved; a short film which maintains the characters and essence of the material it is adapted from.

Overall, I feel this project has improved my personal understanding of story, adaptation, audio and visual storytelling language and my own preferences and aesthetic when it comes to my own creative practice of scriptwriting and directing. This project forced me to look closely at character and relationship

and make all other creative decisions from that lens. The result is *Primary*, a short film adaptation that maintains the core themes, characters and relationships of its source material, while being changed to suit a different storytelling medium.

The adaptation techniques explored in my research are universal; they can be applied to more than just film adaptation, but screenwriting and film in general. Strong understanding of story, theme, subtext and character lend themselves to telling any story in any medium in an effective and affecting way.

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# Appendices

## *Appendix 1 - Primary Short Story by Amy Calder*

### PRIMARY

Moorfield Primary School Hall had glossy wooden floors that magnified the click of Beth's heeled boots and reflected the glittering decorations. The hall was almost dressed up enough to pass for a swanky bar, if it weren't for the telling details - the fuzzy walls with juvenile art stapled to them, the hollow raised stage with curtains pulled across, and the glass sliding door Beth had just stepped through. The mood lighting helped in the masquerade, but Beth could still see in the shadows that the hall hadn't really changed all that much in ten or so years. Maybe the stage was shorter, but perhaps it had always been that way.

On one side of the room stood a table with gifts arranged in rows and an open guestbook. The clear patch of wall above the table was dressed up with a pair of balloons - fat gold sausages forming '21'.

The food table on the other side was laden with canapés. It was one of those fold-out, metal-wood hybrids that Beth and Adelaide would sit on during playtime with the other kids, until they developed permanent bends. A bar was planted next to the food. Was it an open bar? With Adelaide skimping on the venue she could surely manage that. But Beth reminded herself she had come alone. Dad had offered to drop her off and pick her up, but she had declined in a surge of independence. Her restricted license curfew gave her the perfect exit strategy. The only downside was not being able to drink.

Everyone looked casual-cool, probably business students or netball players, that was Adelaide's scene these days. Most wore black, like they had reached a consensus. When Beth had put on her sequined dress, sapphire scales glimmering as she shimmied in front of the mirror at home, part of her wondered if she would look better even than Adelaide. But now she felt like a little girl playing princesses. The dress would draw attention to her, they would know she didn't belong.

Beth aimed for the gift table. She had spent the last few weeks debating the gift situation, finally settling on a movie gift card. It felt impersonal, but was certainly inoffensive.

She slid the gift card between two gift bags. She turned around. Now she had performed her one task she had nothing to do. It was then that she saw Adelaide.

She was perched on a tiny wooden chair, one of the ones they used to sit on during school assemblies, with two other people. Adelaide wore a red dress that she had carefully draped around her knees, long legs stretched out in front of her. Her black hair was woven into braids pinned tightly to her head. Her smile was

outlined in red.

And then she looked up, and saw Beth. For a second, Beth thought she saw the smile drop, but it returned almost immediately. So Beth smiled back, awkward. Then Adelaide turned back to her companions, and carried on talking.

Adelaide and Beth had been best friends. It was a friendship of proximity, the seating plan put their desks opposite each other in their very first class at Moorfield Primary School. It was effortless, they saw each other every day.

Then they had gone their separate ways at secondary school – Adelaide to that all-girls private school and Beth to Moorfield College.

Beth turned back to the gift table.

The instructions for washing hands were faded grey-blue. There was a little rhyme.

Do what you oughta, wash your hand with soap and water!

Beth turned off the tap, and grabbed three paper towels to dry her hands. She checked her makeup in the mirror. Her eyeliner had already rubbed off in the outer corner, and her lipstick had faded. The concealer had found its way into the cracks of her under eyes. She rubbed to get rid of it. Her hair, which she had taken a lot of time to curl that day, was frizzing up. She raked her fingers through it.

Someone opened the door.

‘Beth, darling! I haven’t seen you in years!’

It was Adelaide’s mum. Beth made eye-contact with her in the mirror.

‘Mrs. Lewis!’ Beth greeted her reflection in the mirror, before she turned to face her properly.

Mrs. Lewis would have been approaching 50, as far as Beth could remember. She had bottle-blond hair falling in glossy waves and nails shaped like coffins. Her black dress and heels seemed to be on theme. Her eyes were a little crinklier, but otherwise she was as impeccable as Beth had always known her.

‘What are you up to these days?’ Mrs. Lewis said.

Beth began the spiel that she gave to most adults, about how she had one more year to go of her conjoint degree and she was doing some statistics tutoring for NCEA kids. And no, she didn’t know what she wanted to do when she was finished.

Beth felt that, seeing as she was now an adult herself, she should attempt to direct the conversation towards Mrs. Lewis, but the truth was that she remembered very little about her from her childhood. Like a splash of cold water Beth recalled that Mrs. Lewis was a widow now, but that was hardly something to enquire about. So Beth complimented her on the party, and left it at that.

‘Oh you like it? I was surprised when Adelaide wanted to have it here – I personally thought that place at the Viaduct would be lovely but Adelaide insisted. She said that it’s this new trend – have your 21st somewhere significant in your life. Mixing of memories old and new. We were able to spice the place up and I think it lends the whole thing a certain... je ne sais quoi..’

Beth assured her that it did.

‘Are you going to give a speech tonight?’ Mrs. Lewis asked.

‘I haven’t prepared anything.’

‘You should! I’m sure you have some lovely stories to tell about when you were girls.’

‘Maybe,’ Beth said. ‘Will you excuse me? I need to write in the guestbook.’

Mrs. Lewis nodded, and entered one of the toilet stalls.

Adelaide sat on the stage now, surrounded mostly by young men. Her legs dangled over the edge, the sharpened toes of her stilettos brushing the floor. Adelaide laughed at something a boy was saying and took regular sips of her drink through her straw, staining it red.

Beth finished signing her name in the guestbook, then read over what she had written. She smoothed her dress down at the sides. A few sequins had fallen off already, revealed specks of black under the blue. She wandered over to the stage, weaving between the partygoers. Then she stood facing Adelaide.

‘Beth!’

Adelaide slid off the stage, landing like a gymnast. She towered over Beth, statuesque in stilettos.

‘I love your dress!’ Beth said.

‘Thanks. You look great!’ Adelaide said, casting her eye down Beth’s dress. Beth felt uncomfortable under Adelaide’s examination.

‘Thanks! Happy Birthday!’

‘Thanks!’

‘How is... business was it?’ Beth was grasping at any topic possible to keep the conversation going.

‘Pretty good. Graduating soon actually.’

‘Congratulations.’

A pause.

‘I’m still doing my conjoint,’ Beth added.

‘Oh. That’s right. It was... arts?’

‘Yes.’ No.

Adelaide glanced back at her harem. The group had splintered into little conversations. She turned

back to Beth, her smile strained.

‘It’s so lovely to catch up with you!’ Adelaide said.

‘Yeah, it was nice to catch up with you too!’

Beth knew it was her cue to go. Adelaide hadn’t even bothered to introduce her to her group of friends.

It would have been five years ago now. Beth’s mum had told her. Mr. Lewis had died, no warning. Beth didn’t really know him all that well, he was at work most of the time she had visited them. She wasn’t even sure what sort of work it was, only that they seemed to give him a new car every year.

Afterwards Beth kept checking her cellphone, just wondering if there would be a text from Adelaide. She wrote out a message to her. Hey Adelaide. How are you? She deleted it.

Beth didn’t go to the funeral. She didn’t really know Mr. Lewis, did she? Adelaide didn’t ask her to go. Adelaide didn’t want her there. Beth wouldn’t know what to say.

Beth had run into Adelaide about a month later in the mall. Adelaide’s arms were laden with glossy plastic bags. They talked about innocuous things, celebrity gossip Beth had forgotten five years later, and the sale on at the shop Adelaide had just raided.

Beth ended up going back there with her, not wanting Adelaide to know she only really had enough money for the train ride home. The shop was so busy that the sales assistants didn’t greet Beth and Adelaide as they walked in. Adelaide disappeared behind rails of fabric, and came back with a powder-blue, cable-knit, high-neck jersey. It was a little grannyish, Beth thought.

‘It’s so you!’ Adelaide said.

Beth found herself trying it on in the harshly lit cubicle. The jersey was, admittedly, comfortable, but so warm that Beth found herself sweating in the changing room.

‘Let me see!’ Adelaide said.

Beth turned the changing room lock, and stepped out.

‘Yes, you have to get it.’

‘But I can’t. I don’t have the money.’

‘Don’t worry about it.’

And for a moment Beth thought she knew what that meant.

‘Where’s your jacket?’ Adelaide said.

The scrunched denim jacket had been chucked onto the concrete cubicle floor. Adelaide picked it up, and shook it out. She handed it to Beth.

'Put it on,' she said.

Beth did as instructed, still unsure of Adelaide's intentions. Adelaide buttoned up the front of it.

'Let's go.'

Adelaide was beaming. Her hazel eyes were sparkling in the store light. She was transferring her weight from leg to leg, almost dancing with anticipation.

'Come on, Beth. Don't you trust me?'

Would this make her happy? Would this make Adelaide forgive her?

'Quick, come on.'

Adelaide grabbed Beth's arm, and they began to leave the store. Beth stared straight ahead, scared that the store assistants would sense her guilt if she looked at them, busy as they seemed to be.

Beth had only been on a plane a few times in her life. Every time she had, she had dreaded walking through the security sensors. Every time, despite knowing she had nothing contraband, she felt like she was going to get into trouble.

Walking out of the shop felt like that. Her face was on fire.

And then they were out, but Adelaide kept steering Beth until they were safely beyond the scene of the crime. They never mentioned the jersey, or Adelaide's father, ever again.

Clink clink clink!

Mrs. Lewis was standing on the stage, tapping her half-empty wine glass with the sturdy nail of her index finger.

'Speeches!'

Everyone settled in seats. Beth was at the back of the room, too slow for the unofficial game of musical chairs.

Adelaide's mum gave a speech. She said how proud Adelaide's dad would be of her, graduating soon with her business degree, star netball player and good girl. Beth watched Adelaide carefully. She was crying with precise daintiness.

A group of Beth's netball friends. A group of uni friends. A friend from secondary school. Uncles and aunts. After every speech Adelaide gave a hug of graciousness.

Then the speeches were done for the moment. The net was cast wide, who else had something they wanted to say?

Mrs. Lewis began to shout out 'Beth!'

Before long, everyone at the party, the majority of whom didn't actually know who this Beth was, had

joined in her chant. Mrs. Lewis, standing next to Adelaide on the stage, pointed to Beth right at the back of the hall by the sliding door. Then Beth, for the first time that night, felt all the eyes turn to her. And in her glittery dress she was a beacon.

‘Come on, Beth. Don’t you trust me?’

Beth looked at Adelaide. She was like a sculpture on a plinth. She nodded slightly, permitting or demanding, Beth couldn’t tell.

So Beth would give her what she wanted.

Beth zig-zagged through the chairs, and climbed onto the stage. She took the mic from Mrs. Lewis.

‘Well, I didn’t prepare anything.’

Laughter. An easy crowd to please.

‘Adelaide and I... are old friends. We met when we were at primary school together. Here, actually.’

And that part was true.

‘One day I came to school without any lunch. Then Adelaide came up to me, and she had pink ribbons in her hair I think. She offered me some of her organic tabbouleh, but I hated tomatoes so I picked them all out. She managed to look past this and we became friends anyway.’

The crowd roared. Beth deliberately avoided seeing Adelaide’s reaction, instead focusing on Mrs. Lewis who had a look of glazed delight.

‘I need to think of something embarrassing to say about her, but it is difficult when she is so perfect. You all know what I mean. Excellent grades. Player of the day every day.’

For a time in Primary School Beth had been on the netball team too, but mainly because Adelaide had joined first. She spent her Saturday mornings shivering on the sidelines, hardly getting so much as to touch a bib, let alone the ball.

‘But once, when we were sixteen, we were at the mall together. Adelaide helped me to pick out a jersey. She has great taste.’

Then Beth allowed herself the pleasure of turning to look at Adelaide on the stage next to her. Adelaide was avoiding her gaze, and fiddling with the silver charms on her bracelet. She seemed to be counting them like beads on an abacus.

‘I tried it on and fell it love with it. But then I realised I couldn’t afford it.’

Beth looked back from the audience to Adelaide. Adelaide still wouldn’t make eye contact with her. ‘So she bought it for me! And I think this really shows what a kind, generous soul she is. Happy Birthday, Adelaide.’

The audience cheered. Mrs. Lewis looked satisfied that her call had been the right one.

Beth turned back to Adelaide, but she was already descending the stairs. Her hair was a coiled rope on the back of her head.

‘Where you going, darling?’ Mrs. Lewis called out.

‘Spot of fresh air, Mum!’

Beth was left on the stage alone. She put the mic down. Without knowing why, but motivated by some lingering curiosity, she followed Adelaide outside.

‘Good, yes, check up on her sweetie. I’m getting rosé,’ Mrs. Lewis said when Beth passed her.

In Beth’s time the school playground had been made entirely of grey wood. Giant steps, so tall that 5-year-old Beth had to stretch her leg right up to climb, led to the top of the castle tower. At the top you could see most of the school – kids kicking around a football, teachers policing hat-wearing, little girls making daisy chains on the field, and the bark right below.

Now it was all plastic and rounded, and the ground was cushioned with green rubber mats that fitted together like puzzle pieces. The playground still had a castle tower, with a red plastic flag to aid the imagination. In the centre of the playground was a climbing spider-web.

Adelaide had woven herself into the spider web, and was swaying back and forth. Her head was bowed.

Beth stood in front of her, not sure who should speak first.

‘I really didn’t think you would come tonight.’ Adelaide hadn’t looked up from her gold-tipped fingers.

‘You invited me.’

Beth slipped her boots off and wove herself into the net beside Adelaide without invitation. She turned to her.

In the darkness Beth could make out the outline of Adelaide’s profile, loose hairs like a halo.

‘You lied,’ Adelaide said.

‘Yeah.’

The rope was already starting to dig into Beth’s bum. She was certain that it would strip all the sequins off.

‘I returned the jersey the next day. Snuck back in and left it on the table,’ Beth said.

‘I’m glad to hear it.’

Adelaide finally turned to Beth.

‘I’m sorry,’ she said. ‘It wasn’t really about you, you know.’

‘I’m sorry too,’ Beth said.

Beth saw the party continued without its Queen in attendance. Supposedly they had accepted that Adelaide was overcome with emotion following the speeches and were milling about, waiting for the opportunity to cut the cake. Supposedly they had also seen Beth follow her, and figured the comforting duties were being attended to by someone who had such nice things to say.

Beth remembered the last time she had been to a party in the hall. A big disco ball hanging from the ceiling. A bubble machine, that would stop if you got too close. Smoke that smelled almost minty.

‘Do you remember our Year 4 school disco?’

Adelaide laughed. ‘Yeah. You crimped your hair!’

‘And you were wearing a white top, and Peter Moss spilled Fanta all over it.’

‘I cried for an hour.’

‘And Miss Lee thought it would make you feel better to tell you it was an improvement..’

Adelaide laughed and the whole web shook. She began to sing the songs that they had danced to then, and Beth joined in. But eventually they ran out of words, so they just sat in silence.

Adelaide untangled herself from the web.

‘I should really get back,’ she said.

‘And I should really leave. Restricted license curfew,’ Beth said.

Adelaide gave a knowing nod. She gathered her stilettos in her arms. Beth jumped off the web, showering sequins as she did so. She began to slide her boots back on. Adelaide hesitated.

Beth straightened up, and Adelaide gave her a hug. Adelaide folded her arms around Beth, pinning Beth’s to her sides. Adelaide had hugged a lot of people that evening. Every friend she had met, everyone who had given a speech. Some people several times over. Beth remembered how they never used to hug when they were friends, because there was no need.

Adelaide let go, flashed a grin of ivory, and turned back towards the party. When she opened the glass door, Beth heard a burst of music from the hall, before it was gone.

The crowds of black had removed their heels and jackets, and had formed little rings. They bopped to the music. It wasn’t all that different from the dancing at the school disco.

Mrs. Lewis relaxed with a group of adults, enjoying the rosé she had promised to get herself.

Adelaide had joined a group of people forming an oval by the door. She was swaying her hips from side to side, the red skirt of her dress wrapping around her with every swish.

Beth walked away before the cake came out.

## *Appendix 2 - Script Draft Version 10: The Shooting Draft*

FADE IN: INT - BETH'S CAR - NIGHT

BETH has just parked her car. She turns the ignition off.

She remains seated in the car. She is wearing a multicoloured sequin dress.

Next to Beth is a small bag, an envelope and a greeting card.

She opens the flip-down visor and opens the mirror. She surveys her appearance. Effort has obviously been put into her hair and makeup. She seems unsatisfied but resigned with her appearance.

She sighs.

She looks at a Facebook event on her phone. The event reads 'Adelaide's 21st'.

Her thumb hovers over the response button on the screen.

She changes her response from 'maybe' to 'going'.

She picks up a birthday card and bag.

She exits the car.

INT. SCHOOL HALL

Beth enters the school hall. Her heels click on the glossy wooden floor.

She immediately stands out among the sea of navy and black.

The hall is decorated with gold balloons, including a large gold '21' on a table of presents.

Beth spots ADELAIDE from across the room, in a red dress and high heels, surrounded by young people in navy and black chatting and laughing.

Beth makes her way to the gift table and places the envelope on it next to a row of gift bags.

She walks over to a photo collage wall. A black piece of

paper is littered with polaroids and photos of Adelaide.

Adelaide is perfectly posed in every picture. Beth is not on the wall.

Adelaide happens to make eye contact with Beth across the room for a brief second before continuing with her conversation, turning he back to Beth.

Beth looks around the room. She knows no one. She waits, watching the party happen around her.

Beth spots the bathroom.

#### INT. SCHOOL HALL BATHROOM

Beth turns off the tap, grabbing three paper towels, she dries her hands.

She checks her makeup in the mirror. Her eyeliner has already rubbed off in the outer corners. Her lipstick has already begun to rub off.

Her hair is frizzing up. She rakes her fingers through it.

The bathroom door opens.

MRS LEWIS, Adelaide's mother, enters the bathroom.

MRS LEWIS

(loudly)

Beth darling!

Beth jumps

MRS LEWIS

Look at you! How are you?! I haven't seen you in years!

Dressed in black, she has a lipstick-stained glass of ros*fo* in hand, makeup looking worse for wear.

Mrs. Lewis hugs Beth. Beth looks very uncomfortable.

BETH

(timidly)

Hi Mrs Lewis. I'm good, how are you?

MRS LEWIS

Oh excellent! Excellent! What are you doing with yourself at the

moment?

Beth takes a deep breath.

BETH

Ah, I'm still doing my conjoint,  
NCEA tutoring on the side, not sure  
what ...

Mrs. Lewis takes a big sip of her drink. Ignoring Beth's answer.

Mrs. Lewis clears her throat, interrupting Beth.

MRS LEWIS

Oh I'm so glad you're here! Have  
you seen Adelaide yet?

BETH

Ah no, not yet. She seems pretty  
busy ...

Beth smiles nervously, desperately searching for something to say.

BETH

(nodding)  
... Lovely party

Mrs. Lewis is concerned with her nails.

MRS. LEWIS

You like it? Personally I suggested  
that new place on the Viaduct, but  
Adelaide insisted. Apparently it's  
the new trend; have your 21st  
somewhere significant in your life

Mrs. Lewis clinks her nails against her glass.

MRS. LEWIS

We were able to spice this place up  
and I think it gives the whole  
soiree a nice je ne sais quoi

BETH

(nodding politely)  
Oh absolutely

MRS. LEWIS

... Are you going to give a speech  
tonight?

BETH  
(alarmed)  
Oh no ...

MRS. LEWIS  
(forcefully)  
Nonsense! I'm sure you have lovely  
stories from when you and Addy were  
young! You have to give a speech!

BETH  
Uh, I don't know ...

MRS. LEWIS  
(dismissively)  
It will be great!

Mrs. Lewis enters the toilet cubicle.

Beth turns back to the mirror and sighs.

Beth exits the bathroom.

INT: SCHOOL HALL

Adelaide is surrounded by admirers, laughing and sipping a  
drink through a straw.

Beth weaves through party-goers towards Adelaide.

Adelaide notices Beth as she approaches, and, trying to hide  
her confused surprise, excuses herself from her conversation.

Adelaide meets Beth as she approaches, pulling her to the  
side of the party, out of view of many of the guests.

BETH  
(politely)  
Happy birthday Adelaide.

Adelaide hugs Beth briefly. Beth looks uncomfortable.

ADELAIDE  
(surprised and not quite  
happy to see her)  
You're ... here!

Beth is slightly offended.

Both girls search for something to say.

BETH  
... I love your dress

ADELAIDE  
(politely)  
Thanks! You look great!

BETH  
(searching)  
... How are you finding ...  
business was it?

ADELAIDE  
Yeah, marketing and international  
business, it's awesome.

BETH  
... I'm still doing my conjoint,  
got another year to go

ADELAIDE  
Oh that's right ... arts?

BETH  
Actually I'm studying ...

Beth is interrupted as a FRIEND of Adelaide's approaches,  
grabbing Adelaide.

CHARLIE  
Adelaide! We have to get a group  
photo!

Adelaide turns and leaves with Charlie without another word.

Beth is left standing alone.

Beth turns, looking for somewhere - anywhere - to go.

Beth spots the exit.

Beth begins to move towards the exit, weaving through the  
guests.

Mrs. Lewis appears at the front of the party, microphone in  
one hand and *rosfó* in the other, she taps the microphone to  
her glass and the loud thudding grabs the attention of  
everyone in the room.

MRS. LEWIS  
Is this thing on?! Oh hello!

Beth freezes. She is halfway to the exit.

Beth turns around slowly.

The noise of the party dies down as guests turn towards Mrs. Lewis.

MRS. LEWIS

Welcome to Adelaide's twenty-first birthday party! For those who don't know me I am Adelaide's mum

Mrs. Lewis turns towards Adelaide, who is standing to the side of the front of the party, addressing her

MRS. LEWIS

My dear Adelaide, I am so so proud of you. Graduating soon!

Adelaide smiles shyly

MRS. LEWIS

Star netball player, genuinely beautiful person inside and out

Mrs. Lewis sighs

MRS. LEWIS

My beautiful, resilient daughter. Happy birthday my darling!

The room applauds.

Adelaide moves forward to give her mother a hug.

MRS. LEWIS

Beth, Beth where are you?!

Beth tenses up.

Mrs. Lewis looks around the room, eventually spotting Beth

MRS LEWIS

Oh there you are! Beth is Adelaide's childhood best friend, come here Beth! Give your speech!

The guests turn towards Beth. All eyes are now on her.

Beth doesn't move, looking from Mrs. Lewis to Adelaide.

After a moment Adelaide gives Beth a small nod, and Beth walks towards Mrs. Lewis and the microphone.

Beth takes the microphone and looks nervously at the waiting crowd.

She clears her throat.

BETH  
(nervously)  
Hello, everyone. As Mrs. Lewis  
mentioned my name is Beth

Beth pauses and is met with silence from the crowd.

BETH  
(awkwardly)  
I have known Adelaide for, well, a  
really long time. We went to  
primary school together. Here,  
actually.

Beth looks around the hall.

BETH  
I mean where do I even start?  
Adelaide has always been a people  
magnet, heaps of friends, lots of  
hobbies ...  
(searching)  
... We bonded over what most eight  
year olds care most about: cookies

The attendees laugh politely. Adelaide looks more relaxed.

BETH  
(to Mrs. Lewis)  
You make great cookies Mrs. Lewis

The crowd laughs again. This boosts Beth's confidence.

Mrs. Lewis enjoys the attention.

BETH  
(searching)  
I can't even think of any  
embarrassing stories, Adelaide is  
so perfect. You know, excellent  
grades, player of the day every  
day.

Beth looks down in thought, and then up again, now certain of what she is going to say

BETH  
(with slight sarcasm)

I have so many memories of Adelaide just being there whenever I needed her, and obviously she's very generous.

Adelaide's smile disappears.

BETH  
(confidently)  
For example, there was this one time when we were shopping and I found this amazing sweater, but I couldn't afford it.

Adelaide tenses up.

BETH  
(humourously)  
So Adelaide suggested I steal it?!

The crowd laughs, but Adelaide is stone-faced.

BETH  
(jokingly and passive aggressively)  
... Adelaide can be very convincing when she wants to be.

Beth is met with more laughter from the guests.

She glances briefly at Adelaide, clocking her reaction. Adelaide is doing her best to look emotionless, but her eyes are watering - giving her away.

Beth feels a sudden pang of guilt, losing all confidence.

BETH  
(hastily)  
...but then she bought it for me. I couldn't believe it, I loved it so much.

The guests 'aw'. Mrs. Lewis looks pleased.

BETH  
(to the guests)  
Anyway ... I think it's a testament to the person that Adelaide is that you're all here tonight to celebrate with her.

Beth turns to Adelaide who is trying not to cry.

BETH

(smiling)  
Happy birthday Adelaide.

Beth hands the microphone back to Mrs. Lewis as the guests clap.

Adelaide quickly exits the hall.

Mrs. Lewis grabs Beth's arm, nodding toward the exit

MRS. LEWIS  
Go after her will you dear?

Mrs. Lewis takes off to recharge her empty glass.

Beth looks around, waiting for someone else to go after Adelaide.

No one even notices she's gone. Beth exits the hall.

EXT: SCHOOL - NIGHT

Beth spots Adelaide on a bench.

Adelaide is stone-faced. Beth sits next to her.

They sit in tense silence, not looking at each other.

Beth waits for Adelaide to speak. When she doesn't, Beth breaks the silence.

BETH  
Do you remember the year 6 disco here? We drank way too much cola and screamed that song about being blue all the way home -

ADELAIDE  
(abruptly)  
Why are you here?

Beth stops talking, caught off guard by Adelaide's reaction

ADELAIDE  
(thick with emotion)  
Why did you come? Tonight? Why now?

Beth is taken a-back. Speechless.

ADELAIDE  
Leaving you there was a shitty

thing to do. I know. But I tried -

Adelaide continues with a mixture of anger and emotion

ADELAIDE

(deeply hurt)

I tried everything, text messages,  
at school. You were my best friend  
and then just ... nothing?!

Beth is shocked, still unable to speak.

ADELAIDE

I thought you, of all people, would  
stay

Adelaide breaks on 'stay', beginning to cry.

BETH

(almost whispering)

... I don't know ... I'm sorry.

Adelaide starts pulling herself together.

ADELAIDE

I should get back.

They both stand. Adelaide gently wipes her face, fixes her  
dress and smiles.

ADELAIDE

(pleasantly but coldly)

Thanks for coming.

Adelaide walks back towards the party.

Beth watches her, then turns and walks in the other  
direction.

FADE TO BLACK