

*Give the girl a line: Methods of feature film screenwriting for  
the satirical female voice*

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

**Marilyn Tofler**

B.Ed., M.A.

School of Media and Communication

RMIT University

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## **Declaration**

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; and, any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

Marilyn Tofler

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## **Abstract**

### **Description of Project**

My project, *Yummy Mummy*, is a feature length comedy screenplay in the genre of satire. The screenplay satirises marriage and parenthood and has a female protagonist. The plot satirises women's struggles to have both family and a meaningful career. I attempt to put a contemporary spin on some traditional themes, those of marriage and the pretences of contemporary society and its judgment of women.

### **Description of research which supports the project**

My research explores and examines the genre of satire for feature film with a focus on a female protagonist. Theories relating to satire primarily refer to the arts of theatre and literature. There is very little research available on the cinematic genre of satire and a lack of theory relating to the screenwriting technique of satire for the female voice. In addition, many contemporary film theorists, critics, actresses and audiences agree that it is high time for some strong female comedic roles to be produced, with the female protagonists both spiritually and intellectually matched to their male counterparts (Burr 2005, Denby 1997, Henderson 1978). It is therefore a goal of this study to contribute an understanding of satire as it relates to screenwriting and specifically to the understanding of the methods of screenwriting for the satirical female voice. My research firstly analyses and defines the generic features of satire according to Northrop Frye. In *Anatomy of Criticism*, Frye asserts that two elements are essential to satire; "one is wit or humour founded on fantasy or a sense of the grotesque or absurd, the other is an object of attack" (Frye 1957, p. 234). Secondly, in order to gain a better understanding of how to write a strong satirical female protagonist, I apply Frye's theories to theatrical case studies derived from Congreve's Restoration comedies, known for their strong satirical female protagonists (Gill 1994, Young 1997). By observing Frye's six principles of satire in the female protagonists in Congreve's comedies, I will analyse, examine and discuss aspects of creating strong comedic roles for women. Thirdly, I observe and analyse how Frye's principles of satire have been applied in the feature film screenplay *Something's Gotta Give* in order to examine a satirical female protagonist in a feature film. Using Frye's key terms, I will analyse how screenwriter,

Nancy Meyers, has applied satire to her female protagonist and compare the generic features between the protagonist in *Something's Gotta Give* and the protagonists in Congreve's Restoration comedies. Fourthly, I will explore how useful Frye's theories and Congreve's techniques are to my feature film screenplay project, *Yummy Mummy*. By analysing and exploring Frye's principles of satire and applying these to the composition of my feature screenplay, I plan to discover how to create a modern day satirical female protagonist who is as spirited and independent as her sisters from the Restoration era.



## **Introduction**

### **Description of Project**

My project, *Yummy Mummy*, is a feature length comedy screenplay written in the genre of satire. The screenplay satirises marriage and parenthood and has a female protagonist. My screenplay project satirises unjust attitudes towards women's struggles to have both family and a meaningful career. I attempt to put a contemporary spin on some traditional themes of satire; marriage, the pretences of contemporary society and its judgement of women. Specifically, these relate to society's double standards around domesticity, parenting and employment. Other themes will include intimacy in marriage once babies arrive and the battle of the sexes.

### **Description of research which supports the project**

In order to write the screenplay, my research will explore and examine the generic and historic features of satire with a focus on a female protagonist. I aim to define the generic features of satire according to Northrop Frye and other theorists including Matthew Hodgart, Gilbert Highet and Edward Rosenheim. Secondly, I will observe Frye's six principles of satire in Congreve's Restoration comedies in order to analyse, examine and discuss aspects of creating strong comedic roles for women in performance. Thirdly, I will analyse how Frye's six principles of satire may be observed in the case study, the feature film screenplay, *Something's Gotta Give*. In doing so, I aim to discover how these theories and techniques may usefully be applied to writing a contemporary satirical screenplay with a strong female protagonist.

I will firstly research the generic features of satire. Northrop Frye's theories of the principles of satire will be integral to my project as within my screenplay I hope to satirise several aspects of contemporary society with a focus on marriage. Northrop Frye in *Anatomy of Criticism* asserts that two elements are essential to satire; "one is wit or humour founded on fantasy or a sense of the grotesque or absurd, the other is an object of attack" (Frye 1957, p. 234). Literary theorist and critic, Ian Balfour, describes Northrop Frye's monumental *Anatomy of Criticism* as one of the most important works of literary theory published in the twentieth century (Balfour 1988, p. 18).

The second component of my research concerns the role of female characters in satire. In order to gain a better understanding of how to write a strong satirical female protagonist for performance, I will investigate the role of women in Congreve's Restoration theatrical comedies. According to literary theorists Pat Gill (1994) and Douglas Young (1997), Restoration comedy is known for its strong satirical female protagonists. Restoration comedy features English comedies for the stage by Congreve, Wycherley and Etherege written and performed in what is known as the Restoration period from 1660 to 1710. By observing Frye's principles of satire in the female protagonists in Congreve's theatrical comedy, *The Way of the World*, I will analyse, examine and discuss aspects of creating strong comedic roles for women.

Thirdly, in order to discover the techniques involved in writing a strong satirical female protagonist for the screen, I will analyse how Frye's six principles of satire may be observed in the case study feature film screenplay, *Something's Gotta Give*, written by Nancy Meyers in 2002. The feature film released in 2003 grossed \$124,590,960 in the USA. It also won actress Diane Keaton, who plays female protagonist, Erica, Golden Globe and Golden Satellite Awards for Best Performance by an Actress in a Motion Picture - Musical or Comedy. Meyers work has appeal for me to use as a case study as she is known for writing both critically and commercially successful screenplays featuring a strong female protagonist. Using Frye's theories relating to satire, I intend to analyse how Meyers has written her satirical female protagonist for the screen. Meyers' screenplay humorously and elegantly compares the workings of several relationships and poses questions relating to how to make relationships work in an ever changing society. Using Frye's key terms, I will analyse how screenwriter, Nancy Meyers, has applied satire to her female protagonist. I will then compare the generic similarities between the protagonist in *Something's Gotta Give* and the protagonists in Congreve's Restoration comedies.

Finally, I will explore how the theories and techniques of Frye, Congreve and Meyers are of use in applying satire to my feature film screenplay project, *Yummy Mummy*. By analysing and exploring these various principles of satire and applying these to the composition of my feature screenplay, I plan to discover how to create a modern day satirical female protagonist for the screen who is as spirited and independent as her sisters from the Restoration era.

## **Research questions**

1. According to Frye, how do we define the theoretical and technical principles of satire?
2. How may we observe Frye's six principles of satire in the treatment of female protagonists in Congreve's comedies?
3. How may we observe Frye's six principles of satire in the case study screenplay, *Something's Gotta Give*?
4. How useful are these theories and techniques to my project, *Yummy Mummy*?

## **Methodology**

### **1. According to Frye, how do we define the principles of satire?**

I plan to answer this question by examining the work of Frye (1957), in *Anatomy of Criticism*. I will describe and analyse how Frye defines his six principles of satire. I will also compare his theories with those of his contemporaries, Gilbert Highet (1962) in *The Anatomy of Satire*, Edward Rosenheim (1963) in 'The Satiric Spectrum', in *Swift and the Satirist's Art*, David Worcester (1940) in *The Art of Satire* and Matthew Hodgart (1969) in *Satire*. Literary theorists, Jonathan Hart (1994) in *Northrop Frye, The Theoretical Imagination* and Ian Balfour (1988) in *Northrop Frye* will be referred to as commentators of Frye's theory and A.C. Hamilton's (1990) text, *Northrop Frye: Anatomy of his Criticism* will also be examined for its critical comment relating to Frye.

**2. How may we observe Frye's six principles of satire in the treatment of female protagonists in Congreve's comedy, *The Way of the World*?**

Frye (1957) uses mostly examples from written literature, however, my project is concerned with writing for performance. There is little research in the way of writing female characters for the screen. English screenwriting academic, Helen Jacey, argues that the “vast majority of the screenwriting guides tend to ignore gender difference” (<http://www.writersstore.com/finding-the-womans-voice-helen-jacey>). There is considerable theory, however, relating to writing female characters for the theatrical stage. According to theatrical theorists and historians, Pat Gill (1994) and Douglas Young (1997), Restoration comedy (1660 to 1710) is known for its strong satirical female protagonists. William Congreve is an eighteenth century English writer of satire and in particular, a writer of strong satirical female characters for the stage.

In order to write a strong satirical female protagonist for performance, I will investigate the role of women characters in Congreve’s five act Restoration comedy of manners, *The Way of the World*. I will analyse, examine and discuss aspects of creating strong comedic roles for female characters. I intend to do this by observing Frye's six principles of satire in the analysis of the female characters in Congreve's comedy.

Young’s 1997 text, *The Feminist Voices in Restoration Comedy* will be used as a basis for this section of my research. In addition, I will refer to Gill’s 1994 text, *Interpreting Ladies: Women, Wit and Morality in the Restoration*.

**3. How may we observe Frye's six principles of satire in the case study screenplay, *Something’s Gotta Give*?**

Using Frye’s key terms, I will observe and analyse how screenwriter, Nancy Meyers, has applied satire to her female protagonist in the case study, feature film screenplay *Something’s Gotta Give*. The screenplay is a satirical romantic comedy written by

Meyers in 2002. Screenplay writing differs from writing for literature or the stage. Screenplay writing is used to create a feature film for the screen. The type of action which can be portrayed on the screen cannot always be portrayed on stage or in novel format. By observing and analysing how Meyers has used satire, in particular, for the screen, I will attempt to apply her techniques towards my screenplay. I will use classic screenwriting terminology as derived from screenwriting academic, Dr Lisa Dethridge's 2003 text, *Writing Your Screenplay* to analyse Meyers' screenplay. I will also draw upon literature and film theorist, Mark A. Hamilton's 2006 text, *Categorizing Twentieth Century Film Using Northrop Frye's Anatomy of Criticism: Relating Literature and Film* in order to observe how Meyers has applied Frye's principles of satire to her screenplay. I will also compare the generic similarities between the female protagonist in *Something's Gotta Give* and the female protagonists in Congreve's Restoration comedies.

#### **4. How useful are Frye's theories and Congreve's and Meyers techniques to my project, *Yummy Mummy*?**

I will explore and discuss Frye's principles of satire in light of the satirical writing techniques of Congreve and Meyers. I will discuss how these theories and techniques may be applied to a satirical female protagonist who is intelligent and strong willed. I will discuss how useful Frye's theories and Congreve's and Meyers' techniques are in applying satire to my feature film screenplay project, *Yummy Mummy*.

#### **Rationale**

A search of ProQuest, Jstor, Factiva, Google Scholar, and the libraries of RMIT and Melbourne University for theory relating to satire refers primarily to the arts of literature and theatre. I intend to analyse and compare these theories and apply them to a feature film screenplay as there is, at present, limited research relating to screenwriting for feature film satire. A search of ProQuest, Jstor, Factiva, Google Scholar, and the libraries of RMIT and Melbourne University has also shown that there is very little research available on the cinematic genre of satire. In addition, there is a lack of theory relating to the screenwriting technique of satire for the female

voice. English screenwriting academic, Helen Jacey, argues that the “vast majority of the screenwriting guides tend to ignore gender difference” (<http://www.writersstore.com/finding-the-womans-voice-helen-jacey>). It is therefore a goal of this study to contribute to the field of screenwriting and specifically to the understanding of the methods of screenwriting for the satirical female voice.

Contemporary theorists of literature, film and creative writing agree that humour is a powerful weapon to deflate injustice and turn an audience into a supporter of the beliefs of the writer (Saks 1985, Rich 1994). Within my screenplay, I will primarily focus upon injustices relating to working mothers.

Feminist film theorist, Ruby Rich, asserts that “Humour should not be overlooked as a weapon of great power. Comedy requires further cultivation for its revolutionary potential as a deflator of the patriarchal order and an extraordinary leveller and reinventer of dramatic structure” (Rich 1994, p. 39). Comedy can be used to deflate the “patriarchal order” by presenting narrative and story from a female point of view. By using humour in my screenplay project it may be possible to influence the views of an audience to be sympathetic towards working mothers. Australian cinema studies theorist and academic, Lisa French, argues that films by women show “sensitivities to representations of women on screen” as they “tell stories from a female point of view” centring on women characters (French 2003, p. 119-120). As a female screenwriter it is important to use my female point of view to tell stories about women.

Australian feminist film theorist, Felicity Collins, argues that Frye’s phase of comedy “requires the bride to be little more than the hero’s prize ... bereft of her own desire.” Collins asserts that “Australian women film-makers have made an original contribution to international cinema’s most recent cycle of romantic comedy” by testing the terms by which the romance educates its heroines into acceptance of a happy ending based on inequality. Collins argues that these comedies have refused to “secure its female characters for traditional female roles” (Collins 2003, pp. 168-169). This is of great interest to me as within my screenplay project my

protagonist will refuse to take on a traditional female role of homemaker and instead will battle for equality within her relationship.

Within my screenplay project, I intend to explore how the modern male may share the breadwinning and childcare with his female partner. I also intend to discuss how the modern male feels about this dual role sharing. On another note, I believe that it is important to create strong female role-models in feature film. Female characters in contemporary film should offer their male support and viewers more than mere eye candy. They should also be spiritually and intellectually matched to their male counterparts. This will have cultural ramifications for young women beyond mere entertainment. It may also satisfy a host of actresses who claim that there are no decent comedic roles for women.

Matthew Hodgart, an English literature historian specialising in the eighteenth century, in his 1969 text, *Satire*, draws on renowned eighteenth century author, Dr Samuel Johnson, who states that the history of satire has predominantly been written by men and has displayed women in a less than favourable light (Hodgart 1969, p. 79). My project will attempt to address this issue by developing a female protagonist who is as witty, intelligent and humorous as her male counterpart.

Harvard literature professor, David Worcester, in his 1940 text, *The Art of Satire* argues that the general direction of satire has been toward greater “sensibility and understanding” of humankind by both author and audience (Worcester 1940, p. 148). Worcester argues that modern satirical authors and their audiences are able to share sympathy with minority groups rather than ridicule them. Through the satirised subjects within my project, I anticipate that an audience may gain a greater understanding and sympathy for the stresses placed upon contemporary mothers.

There is a further rationale to this study concerning the need for strong comedic female roles for the screen to be created and written. Contemporary film theorists, critics, actresses and audiences agree that it is high time for some strong female comedic roles for the screen to be produced. Boston Globe critic, Ty Burr (2005, p. 9) says, “more than ever movies are built around male

roles. Increasingly, the pickings for women aren't just slim but nonexistent” (Burr 2005, p. 9). In addition, film theorist, Brian Henderson, in an article for *Film Quarterly* argues that “there can be no romantic comedy without strong heroines” (Henderson 1978, p. 8).

Highly respected *The New Yorker* critic, David Denby (2007, p. 2), examines a trend in the past several years of the *slacker-striver* romance which pulls “jokes and romance out of “the struggle between male infantilism and female ambition” (Denby 2007, p. 2). These movies include *High Fidelity*, *About a Boy*, *Shallow Hal*, *School of Rock*, *Wedding Crashers* and *Knocked Up*. Denby discusses what he calls the “disenchantment of romantic comedy” in movies such as *Knocked Up*, the 2007 box-office smash hit by Judd Apatow. Denby argues that unlike the great screwball comedies of the 1930’s, the female protagonist in the *slacker-striver* romance “doesn’t have an idea in her head, and she’s not the one who makes the jokes” (Denby 1997, p. 2).

Denby’s argument is of relevance to my study as it affirms the need to write a comedic screenplay with a strong female protagonist who “makes the jokes” (Denby 1997, p. 2). In addition, by using satire to focus on the plight of young couples and in particular working mothers, it may be possible to make a statement about contemporary marriage roles and parenthood. It is my aim to take on Denby’s request for a “new comedy of the sexes” (Denby 2007, p. 7) by writing a satirical screenplay which features women that are spiritually and intellectually matched to their male counterparts. I have chosen case studies which feature smart women who challenge rather than acquiesce to their men.

Within my screenplay project, I plan to mirror the great 1930’s screwball comedies as well as my case study, *Something’s Gotta Give* and Congreve’s Restoration women in creating a strong heroine who, as Denby, Burr and Henderson request, will challenge and stimulate her male partner both intellectually and spiritually.

Within my screenplay, I will use satire to expose and question society’s injustices relating to working mothers in a humorous way. Frye’s theories relating to satire will be used as a template for creating satire in my screenplay. Finally, the qualities of the female protagonist in my



screenplay will be based upon the strong and feisty female protagonists in Congreve's Restoration comedies and Meyers' feature film screenplay, *Something's Gotta Give*.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Literature review**

#### **Introduction**

I will research the generic features of satire in order to discover the techniques involved in writing a comedy that can potentially sway an audience's beliefs. Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* will be used as a basis for my research. We will now introduce my key theorist, Frye and his significance to the understanding of the principles of satire.

#### **Northrop Frye: Anatomy of Criticism**

In order to write a comedic feature film satire I will need to define the generic features of satire according to Northrop Frye and other theorists. Frye's monumental work *Anatomy of Criticism* attempts to formulate an overall view of the scope, theory, principles, and techniques of literary criticism. Frye attempts to classify literary criticism as a science as well as an art. He offers theories of modes, symbols, myths and genres of literary criticism. Within Frye's Theory of Myths, he describes various literary forms, essentially the genres of Comedy, Romance, Tragedy and Irony/Satire. Frye identifies typical narrative characteristics and structures for each of these genres. This Theory of Myths is often regarded as the central achievement of Frye's work (Balfour, 1988, p. 33).

Frye's theories sometimes appear to be contradictory and the language he adopts is often difficult to understand and analyse. A writer of satire must therefore look towards other theorists of satire and commentators of Frye to ascertain the full benefit and meaning of his theories. The theorists of satire I will refer to include Edward Rosenheim, Mathew Hodgart, Gilbert Highet, David Worcester and Patricia Meyers Spacks. Frye's commentators which I shall refer to include Murray Krieger, Ian Balfour, Jonathan Hart, A.C. Hamilton and Mark Hamilton. Let us now briefly examine the history of satire according to literature historians, Gilbert Highet and Matthew Hodgart. This will clarify why I have focused on satire as a method of creative writing.

## **History of Satire**

Gilbert Highet is a literature historian, who asserts in his text, *The Anatomy of Satire*, that satire as a form of literature is believed to have started in Rome. Highet points out that Lucilius (c. 180-C. 102 B.C) was the true originator of satire as he gave direction and purpose to the genre. Lucilius satirised contemporary politics and the personalities of his friends and servants as well as the social fads and interests of his time. His tone and comment was mainly critical, derisory and destructive. The earliest satirist whose work has survived intact is Horace (65-8 B.C.).

Highet explains that the satire of Lucilius derives from the “Old Comedy of Athens”, specifically the comedies of Aristophanes (c. 448 B.C.E. – 385 B.C.E.). The satires of Lucilius were non-dramatic poems meant to be read while Aristophanes’ comedies were plays rich with music and dancing. Both satirists, however, wrote about real contemporary people in a “spirit of mocking criticism” (Highet 1969, p. 26). Highet argues that despite Aristophanes crudity and absurdity he was a great moral and political reformer. This is of great interest to my project as I also intend to write about real contemporary people in a “spirit of mocking criticism” of their injustices relating to women.

Hodgart’s 1969 text *Satire*, analyses satire in Western literature from Aristophanes to Brecht. His text is of particular interest to my study as he devotes a chapter to women and satire, arguing that the war between the sexes has been as much a target of satire as has politics. According to Hodgart, renowned eighteenth century poet and literary critic, Samuel Johnson, implies that nearly all satire has been written by men with a deep antagonism towards women (Hodgart 1969, p. 79-80). I intend to turn this antagonism around by satirising marriage from a female point of view.

Hodgart argues that when antagonism between men and women is taken lightly it is the basis of most comedies of manners, eg by Congreve or Shaw; but taken moralistically it has inspired satire. “Satire on women is a comic recording of deviations from the ideal ... and traditionally it has been centred on the cardinals of docility, chastity and modesty” (Hodgart 1969, p. 81). Satire

traditionally lampoons women who stray from the boundaries placed upon them by society. These are the boundaries of submissiveness, modesty and humility.

Hodgart argues that a major development in the representation of women in Christian myth occurred through the Genesis story in the Pauline Epistles. The polar antithesis of Eve and the Virgin Mary dramatised man's ambivalent feelings about women and also affected all subsequent satire on women. Whilst the Virgin Mary was seen as sinless, Eve "became the symbol of everything that was wrong with women. Her chief faults were her forwardness, and her domination of her husband, whom she persuaded to eat the fatal fruit" (Hodgart 1969, p. 87). The question of a female dominating her husband will be central to this inquiry.

Hodgart traces the development of anti-feminist satirical literature beginning with the Greeks in seventh century BC. Hodgart claims that Aristophanes "is at heart sympathetic to women." He also examines and criticises the first and second century AD Roman poet, Juvenal's sixth satire, *The Decay of Feminine Virtue*. Hodgart criticises this satire as "a scabrous diatribe against the vices and follies of contemporary Roman women" (Hodgart 1969, p. 83).

Hodgart suggests the thirteenth century was the age of the *fabliaux*, rhymed stories in verse that combine the two great satirical themes of anti-feminism and anti-clericalism. At the same time, literature concerning marriage and its problems was growing with the work of Theophrastus, Juvenal and St Jerome, culminating in fourteenth century English poet, Chaucer's victorious use of this material in his collection of stories, *The Canterbury Tales*. According to Hodgart, Chaucer's solution for marital happiness in *The Wife of Bath* and *Canterbury Tales* is for the husband to hand over all authority to the wife.

Upon his flesh, as long as I'm his wife.

For mine shall be the power all his life

(Chaucer 1977, p. 220)

In Chaucer's Franklin's Tale, neither husband nor wife is to have the 'mastery' but marriage is to be a partnership of equals.

Love is a thing as any spirit free;  
Women by nature long for liberty,  
And not to be constrained or made a thrall,  
And so do men, if I may speak for all.

(Chaucer 1977, p. 338)

"Chaucer has turned satire against the satirists: he accepts the absurdities and grossness of sexuality and marriage with ironic good humour, as the richest part of life's comedy" (Hodgart 1969, p. 99).

Hodgart describes Chaucer's account of women in *The Canterbury Tales* as either pure and virginal or adulterous and deceitful as "ludicrous" (Hodgart 1969, p. 90). Hodgart argues that Chaucer denigrates women. In *The Canterbury Tales*, however, as I have described in the paragraphs above, Chaucer is, in fact, pro-women, arguing that marriage should be a partnership of equals. Contrary to Hodgart's arguments, in *The Wife of Bath* Chaucer writes his women to be strong and sexually liberated.

Hodgart claims that The Middle Ages repeats the topic of anti-feminism and anti-clericalism leading into the elaborate burlesque of Rabelais' Third Book. The themes of women's deception, vanity and domination had a long life in the sixteenth century together with the poems of Francois Villon which opened a new chapter in the satirical literature of prostitution. Villon's lyrics were used by German playwright, Bertold Brecht, as the starting point for the songs in his masterpiece, the *Threepenny Opera* (Hodgart 1969, p. 101). Once again, Hodgart has ignored the fact that Brecht wrote many of his *Threepenny Opera* female characters as tough and intelligent.

Twentieth century literary theorist and philosopher, Mikhail Bakhtin, in *Rabelais and His World*, examines popular humour and culture in the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Bakhtin, in

particular, looks at the literature of Rabelais' sixteenth century *Gargantua and Pantagruel*. Bakhtin claims that "carnavalesque" literature liberates the human spirit by breaking apart oppressive and out-dated forms of thought. Bakhtin pinpoints two important principles. The first is "carnavalesque" which Bakhtin describes as a social institution, where all people were seen as equal, suspending "all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions" (Bakhtin 1984, p. 10). The second is "grotesque realism" which he defines as a literary mode which emphasises bodily changes through eating, evacuation and sex (Bakhtin 1984, p. 18). Bakhtin argues that the "essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation" (Bakhtin 1984, p. 19). This theory of "degradation" coincides with the theories of Frye and Hodgart. Hodgart describes this *reduction* technique as "The basic technique of the satirist ... the degradation or devaluation of the victim by reducing his stature and dignity" (Hodgart 1969 p. 115). This technique of satire will be discussed in greater detail within the following chapter.

Feminist theorist, Mary Russo, in her 1994 text, *The Female Grotesque*, also explores the "grotesque". Russo argues that the "grotesque" is a process through which gender is displayed in new and stimulating ways. Russo discusses how the image of the grotesque pregnant body can be used to "destabilize the idealizations of female beauty or to realign the mechanism of desire" (Russo 1994, p. 65). Within my screenplay project, I intend to explore this notion with themes of breastfeeding, pregnancy and sexuality.

Hodgart argues that the tradition of denigrating women "lingered on well after the Reformation (of the Christian church in the sixteenth century) affecting even the greatest of English epics" including seventeenth century English poet, Milton (Hodgart 1969, p. 90). Milton, in his text *Samson Agonistes*, discusses how Samson's "unmanly, ignominious" servitude to Dalila is worse than slavery and persecution (Milton 2007, p. 722). Similarly, the male support character in my screenplay will feel emasculated when his wife has the upper hand within their marriage. Hodgart again ignores Milton's feminist ideology in "Paradise Lost." Joseph Wittreich's *Feminist Milton* (1987) showed that many women were in fact empowered by Milton's portrayal of Eve (Milton 2007, p. 281).

Hodgart asserts that the Medieval attitude to women lingers in English literature of the early seventeenth century, not only in Webster, but in the tirades of Cyril Tourneur and in Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*. Thereafter, he claims that the relation of the sexes is treated as part of the wider subject of social refinement and manners, as in the formal satire of Régnier and Boileau and in Molière's, *Les Précieuses Ridicules*. The seventeenth century playwright, Molière, has been deified as the "originator of modern satirical comedy," (Norman 1999, p. 1). In the preface to his theatrical satire of religion, *Tartuffe*, Molière stresses the importance of the element of attack arguing, "If the function of comedy is to correct men's vices, I do not see why any should be exempt... we have seen that the theatre is admirably suited to provide correction. The most forceful lines of a serious moral statement are usually less powerful than those of a satire; and nothing will reform most men better than the depiction of their faults. It is a vigorous blow to vices to expose them to public laughter. Criticism is taken lightly, but men will not tolerate satire. They are quite willing to be mean, but they never like to be ridiculed" (Molière 1669 pp. 2-3). Molière discusses the purpose of satire. He asserts that once people see their faults attacked and exposed to public laughter, they are likely to correct them. This satirical writing technique of Molière coincides with Frye's principle that an "object of attack" is essential to satire (Frye 1957, p. 224). This principle will also be discussed in greater detail within the following chapter.

William Congreve's comedies of the seventeenth century Restoration era echo Chaucer's idea of a marriage of equals. This will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3 and is of great interest to my screenplay project as, like Chaucer and Congreve, I intend to create a couple who discover the importance of equality in marriage.

According to Hodgart, the partial emancipation of women that began in the eighteenth century was evident in the writing of Addison and Steele in the *Tatler* and the *Spectator*. Hodgart fails to describe the subject of anti-feminist satire through the late eighteenth to the twentieth century, however, he notes that the radicals of the Enlightenment and most of the Romantics were pro-feminist. Hodgart omits any discussion of popular nineteenth century Romantic literary author, Jane Austen. Austen successfully uses satire and irony to express beliefs which may have been

socially unacceptable during her era. Austen often wrote dominant and aggressive female characters that reject marriage. Within the next section on *The Purpose of Satire* we will discuss how satire can be used to “jeer at folly and expose evil to bitter contempt” (Highet 1962, p. 156). Austen was able to use satire to expose inequality of the sexes.

Hodgart asserts that “a later revival of the (anti-feminist) genre took place in early Twentieth Century America” (Hodgart 1969, p. 106) culminating in Vladimir Nabokov’s *Lolita* (1955). In *Lolita*, Nabokov satirises sexuality and obsession.

In summary, within this section of the history of satire, we have examined how early Roman satire was critical of politics and social fads. The Ancient Greek comedy of Aristophanes used “mocking criticism” to morally and politically reform an audience (Highet 1969, p. 26). First century Roman poet, Juvenal, was responsible for denigrating women within his satire. Chaucer’s fourteenth century idea that marriage should be a partnership of equals is echoed in William Congreve’s comedies of the seventeenth century Restoration era. This will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3 and is relevant to my screenplay project as, like Chaucer and Congreve, I intend to create a couple who discover the importance of equality in marriage. Seventeenth century English poet, Milton, eighteenth century poet, Addison, nineteenth century Romantic literary author, Jane Austen and twentieth century playwright, Brecht all wrote strong and intelligent female characters.

I intend to reverse eighteenth century author, Johnson’s argument that nearly all satire has been written by men with a deep antagonism towards women by satirising marriage from a female point of view (Hodgart 1969, p. 79-80). Within my screenplay project I aim to satirise marriage and the pretences of contemporary society and its judgement of women. In particular, my female protagonist is unfairly judged by her husband, mother-in-law, editor and other mothers. Literature theorists, critics and historians have discussed the purpose of satire which, it has been argued can be used to “jeer at folly and expose evil to bitter contempt” (Highet 1962, p. 156). Let us now examine the purpose of satire in greater detail.



## **Purpose of Satire**

Literature theorist and critic, Professor Patricia Meyer Spacks (1968), offers a useful survey of theorists whose focus is satire, in particular, John Dryden, Alvin Kernan, Edward Rosenheim, Gilbert Highet, Northrop Frye and Robert Elliott. She claims that theories which define the nature of satire historically fall into two categories, emphasising either purpose or technique. Literary theorists, Highet, Rosenheim and Worcester, specifically deal with the purpose of satire and will be discussed below.

Highet argues that the satirist condemns ignorance or injustice in such a way as to warn and deter an audience. He claims that although some satirists are too embittered, others too seized with laughter to give voice to their positive beliefs, all satirists are at heart idealists (Highet 1962, p. 243). Highet argues that the satirist uses either venom and spite or raucous humour to condemn evil. In doing so, the satirist attempts to make the world into what he/she envisages as ideal.

Highet argues that the “purpose of satire is, through laughter and invective, to cure folly and to punish evil; but if it does not achieve this purpose, it is content to jeer at folly and expose evil to bitter contempt” (Highet 1962, p. 156). He also discusses the differences between satire, pure comedy, invective and lampoon arguing that “the purpose of invective and lampoon is (merely) to destroy the enemy. The purpose of comedy and farce is to cause painless undestructive laughter at human weaknesses and incongruities.

Highet defines pure comedy as “a story which merely amuses or thrills us, with no aftertaste of derisive bitterness” (Highet 1962, p. 150). Highet argues that the purpose of comedy is to “cause painless undestructive laughter at human weaknesses and incongruities. Highet claims that the final test for satire is the emotion which the author feels and wishes to evoke in his readers – a blend of amusement and contempt. In some satire the amusement far outweighs the contempt and in others it almost disappears into a sour sneer or “wry awareness that life cannot all be called reasonable or noble” (Highet 1962, p. 21).

Highet cites two main conceptions of the purpose of satire and two different types of satirist. The optimist, who writes in order to heal, “likes most people but thinks they are rather blind and *foolish*. He tells the truth with a smile, so that he will not repel them but cure them of that ignorance which is their worst fault. Such is Horace.” Horace’s satires are upbeat and aim for an audience to laugh at folly rather than see it destroyed. The pessimist, on the other hand, writes in order to punish. He hates or despises most people and aims “to wound, punish and destroy. Such is Juvenal” (Highet 1962, p. 235).

Spacks argues that Highet is the only critic who considers satiric emotion which she believes is “one of the most important distinguishing marks of satire” (Spacks 1968, p. 363). The emotion created within an audience of satire distinguishes it from the “purposeless” laughter of an audience of pure comedy (Worcester 1940, p. 38).

Harvard literature professor, David Worcester, in his 1940 text *The Art of Satire*, analyses English satire. Worcester attempts to explain how to distinguish satire from pure comedy. He asserts that harsh derision denotes satire while gentle banter and mild amusement denotes comedy. Worcester argues that, in contrast, the comic wit of pure comedy is loose and casual. Worcester claims that “the laughter of comedy is relatively purposeless” whereas “the laughter of satire is focused toward a preconceived end. Comedy demands little of the audience” whereas satire “makes the brain reel with the continuous effort of unravelling the irony” and subtext (Worcester 1940 pp. 37-38).

Edward Rosenheim is a prominent theorist of eighteenth century satire. Like Worcester and Highet, Rosenheim also believes that satire goes further than pure comedy. Apart from merely making an audience laugh, satire “elicits special awarenesses, invites particular questions, and accomplishes particular effects” (Rosenheim 1963, p. 317). This is significant towards my research. Not only do I intend to make my audience laugh, but I also intend to bring out certain issues and allow an audience to question their belief systems.

Rosenheim argues that the satirist can expose evils and elicit blame. The satirist does this by using intellectual or emotional strategies for individuals, groups and institutions and may urge its audience to a somewhat hostile future action against the object under attack (Rosenheim 1963, p. 307). He states, however, that there are also works of satire that do not need to persuade an audience. “No new judgement is invited; no course of action is urged; no novel information is produced. The audience, rather, is asked chiefly to rejoice in the heaping of opprobrium, ridicule, or fancied punishment upon an object of whose culpability they are *already* thoroughly convinced” (Rosenheim 1963, p. 307).

Rosenheim also describes a type of satire which does not seek to be “persuasive” but more likely attempts to be “punitive.” Within the play *Tartuffe*, seventeenth century playwright, Molière, punishes the hypocrisy of the church when his protagonist, Tartuffe, believed to be saintly, is finally exposed as a hypocrite and villain and is subsequently banished from the country. As per Rosenheim’s theory, Molière punishes Tartuffe’s hypocrisy. Rosenheim claims that there are also works of satire with both persuasive and punitive effects (Rosenheim 1963, p. 308). These works persuade an audience while also punishing incorrect or unjust beliefs.

We have discussed that the fundamental purpose for using satire is “through laughter and invective, to cure folly and to punish evil (be it evil resulting from ignorance or cruelty); but if it does not achieve this purpose, it is content to jeer at folly and expose evil to bitter contempt” (Highet 1962, p. 156). Literary theorists, Highet, Worcester, Rosenheim and my primary theorist, Frye argue that satire includes both a sense of attack combined with wit or humour.

### **Satire and Comedy**

We have discussed how the writer’s treatment of satire differs from that of pure comedy through the addition of harsh derision and invective (Highet 1962, p. 156, Worcester 1940 p. 37). Highet makes a distinction between satire and other forms of comedy and literature. Highet argues that satire falls in between invective and lampoon; comedy and farce. The main difference between comedy and farce and invective and lampoon is that comedy and farce are kind. They are “rich

with liking, and want to preserve, appreciate and enjoy.” Invective and lampoon “are full of hatred, and wish only to destroy” (Highet 1962, pp. 154-155). Highet argues that the writer of satire strives for emotional effects within an audience somewhere in-between these above two polar emotions.

Highet argues that the satirist would be happy if his victim had, in tears, permanently reformed. The satirist would be even more pleased if the victim was tarred and feathered and pushed out of town (Highet 1962, p. 155). Highet suggests that the writer of satire includes elements of lampoon, invective, comedy and farce. Frye agrees with Highet, however, he argues that sheer invective is purely “name-calling” and not satire as it does not have irony (Frye 1957, p. 223). This principle of irony will be discussed within the following chapter relating to Frye’s principles of satire. Let us now explore these other forms of comedy and literature and discuss how satire compares with these genres.

Highet suggests that on one side of satire lies the writer’s use of invective and lampoon (Highet 1962, p. 155). Invective is described in the Concise Oxford Dictionary (1985) as a “violent attack in words” or “abusive oratory.” Like Highet, Frye also describes a sense of “attack”, however, Frye argues that satire differs from invective through the writer’s addition of “wit or humour” (Frye 1957, p. 224). The author of a lampoon criticises or ridicules a person, group or institution. Highet argues that lampoon “can exist only through destroying its victim” (Highet 1962, p. 152). Frye argues that, similar to lampoon, an author of satire may also “ridicule” a victim but he does so with wit, humour and irony (Frye 1957, p. 224 & p. 229).

Highet argues that on the other side of satire lies comedy and farce (Highet 1962, p. 155). He asserts that the author of comedy always wishes to evoke laughter or at least a smile of pure enjoyment. In contrast, the author of farce focuses upon elements of the “ridiculous” and “ludicrous” in human existence in order to create “gaiety” and a “joke” (Highet 1962, p. 155). The author of farce employs devices such as exaggerated and slapstick characters and situations for humorous effect. Highet claims that in nearly every satire there are some elements of comedy

and farce. Frye would agree with Highet, arguing that satire should have “wit or humour founded on fantasy or a sense of the grotesque or absurd ... (and) an object of attack” (Frye 1957, p. 224).

### **Satire – The theorists: Frye, Rosenheim, Highet and Worcester**

Rosenheim, Worcester and Highet all agree with Frye that satire must have an element of wit or humour. They also believe that satire distinguishes itself from pure comedy as it has an object of attack by the author. This is important as my satirical project will not merely have humour in it for entertainment value but will attack certain injustices relating to women.

Frye, Hodgart and Highet also agree that the satirist must apply a sense of irony. In addition, Frye, Highet and Rosenheim all argue that the satirist shows his/ her moral standard in selecting which injustices to attack. Hodgart, like Frye believes in the importance of the satirist reducing a character’s incorrect or unjust belief system. Lastly, Frye and Rosenheim believe that there must be a token fantasy, recognised as absurd for satire to exist. Rosenheim, however, expands upon Frye’s theories by asserting that the writer needs to focus on a particular historical identity as well as a satiric *fiction* or *fantasy*. These principles of satire will be discussed in greater detail within the following chapter.

### **Northrop Frye: Literary commentators**

Within my research I will refer to literary theorists, Hart (1994), in *Northrop Frye, The Theoretical Imagination* and Balfour (1988) in *Northrop Frye*. Hart and Balfour do a fine job summarising Frye’s theory of Myths, however, they do little towards analysing or critiquing Frye’s theory. On the other hand, A.C. Hamilton in his 1990 text, *Northrop Frye: Anatomy of his Criticism* successfully summarises and critiques Frye’s theory of Myths. Hamilton will therefore be referred to for critical evaluation of Frye’s theories.

### **Northrop Frye: Relating literature and theatre**

Frye, in *Anatomy of Criticism*, uses mostly examples from written literature, however, my project is concerned with writing for performance. There is little research in the way of writing female characters for the screen. There is considerable theory, however, relating to writing female characters for the theatrical stage.

Within my second chapter, I will observe Frye's six principles of satire in the female protagonists in William Congreve's theatrical comedy, *The Way of the World* and examine and discuss aspects of creating strong comedic roles for women in performance.

Young's 1997 text, *The Feminist Voices in Restoration Comedy* will be used as a basis for this section of my research. Young examines the plays of Etherege, Wycherley and Congreve to show the consistent developmental patterns of the principal female character. He also compares each playwright's method of development and indicates how the particular character represents the author's position on the issues of marriage and the social status of women.

In addition, I will refer to Gill's 1994 text, *Interpreting Ladies: Women, Wit and Morality in the Restoration*, which looks at morals and compares corrupt women characters with the heroine in the Restoration Comedies of Etherege, Wycherley, Congreve and Behn.

### **Northrop Frye: Relating literature and film**

We have discussed how Frye, in *Anatomy of Criticism*, uses mostly examples from written literature. My research is involved with writing satire for feature film. Mark A. Hamilton is a theorist of literature and film. In his 2006 text, *Categorizing Twentieth Century Film Using Northrop Frye's Anatomy of Criticism: Relating Literature and Film*, he proves that it is possible to apply Frye's myth theories to feature film. Hamilton's text, written primarily for scholars of film and literature, was the first book-length study categorising twentieth-century film using

Frye's myth theories from *Anatomy of Criticism* (Hamilton 2006, p. 2). Hamilton's text, though extremely comprehensive, is of more use to a film critic or scholar than to a screenwriter.

Frye, in his essay *Reflections in a Mirror*, states that he hoped that his Theory of Myths would "serve as a guide to practical criticism" (Krieger 1966, p. 137). My research deals with the methods involved in writing satire rather than criticising it. Hamilton's 2006 text applies Frye's theories to feature film. He is nevertheless a film theorist rather than a screenwriter. Within my third chapter, I will analyse how Frye's six principles of satire can be observed in Nancy Meyers' screenplay, *Something's Gotta Give*. I will then apply her writing techniques to the development of a strong female character in my screenplay, *Yummy Mummy*.

Screenwriting academic, Dr Lisa Dethridge, discusses the psychology of the feature film protagonist in her 2003 text, *Writing Your Screenplay*. Dethridge defines the protagonist as "the lead character defined by their backstory, motives, dilemmas, needs and fears." In addition, Dethridge refers to the plot as "the organisation of events, actions and dialogue within the time frame of the story. Dethridge asserts that the protagonist is motivated within the "plot" by a "dramatic problem" consisting of an "organised set of obstacles or dilemmas for the protagonist to solve (Dethridge 2003, p. 57). Dethridge discusses how the protagonist's "problem" is structured around "dramatic conflict" (Dethridge 2003, p. 201). She also discusses how the protagonist's "motivation for change" leads to the character's "central dramatic problem." The character's "psychological motivation" is influenced by his/her "character backstory" which Dethridge describes as the "character's 'life' before the action begins onscreen (Dethridge 2003, pp. 62-63). These terms will be referred to within my research.

Within my research, I will also use classic screenwriting terminology as described by Dethridge to identify major dramatic structure within my case study screenplay. Dethridge identifies seven main structural points in a three act screenplay. These include "the set-up" which situates the protagonist in his/her normal world; the "inciting incident" which may establish the "protagonist's problem"; the "act one turning point" which "propels the protagonist into a new world or way of being"; the "mid point" which Dethridge describes as "the lowest point of the

protagonist's journey"; the "act two turning point" which sees the protagonist struggle to "overcome all the odds and often "consists of a confrontation between the protagonist and key support character (whether a love interest or an antagonist)"; the climax" which shows that the "hero *must* deal with the problem in a situation of direct and major conflict"; and finally the "resolution" which shows how the protagonist has resolved his/her problem and also gives an "indication of the protagonist's future direction" (Dethridge 2003, pp. 133-135).

## **Summary**

Highet and Hodgart are literature historians who suggest that the history of satire has primarily been written by men with a deep antagonism towards women. We have seen how satire traditionally lampoons women who stray from the boundaries of submissiveness, modesty and humility placed upon them by society. Fourteenth century English poet, Chaucer, along with seventeenth century Restoration era playwright, Congreve, have both gone against their era's popular beliefs, writing that marriage should be a partnership of equals. In addition, seventeenth century English poet, Milton, eighteenth century poet, Addison, nineteenth century Romantic literary author, Jane Austen and twentieth century playwright, Brecht all wrote strong and intelligent female characters.

Literary theorist, Highet argues that the "purpose of satire is, through laughter and invective, to cure folly and to punish evil; but if it does not achieve this purpose, it is content to jeer at folly and expose evil to bitter contempt" (Highet 1962, p. 156). My screenplay project will use satire to expose and ridicule injustices and ignorance relating to the treatment of women in marriage and employment. Literary theorists, Highet, Worcester, Rosenheim and my primary theorist, Frye, argue that satire includes both a sense of attack combined with wit or humour.

Let us now describe and analyse how Frye defines his six principles of satire.



## Chapter 2

### According to Frye, how do we define the principles of satire?

#### Frye's principles of satire - Introduction

Within this chapter, I will attempt to define the principles of satire according to mid-twentieth century literary theorist, Northrop Frye, and other theorists including Highet, Hodgart and Rosenheim. Frye's text, *Anatomy of Criticism* will be drawn upon within this chapter. Patricia Meyer Spacks is a literature theorist and critic, specialising in satire. She describes Frye as "the most influential modern theorist about satire" and a number of contemporary literature theorists agree (Spacks 1968, p. 362). Ian Balfour, a Professor of Literature at York University, describes Northrop Frye's monumental *Anatomy of Criticism*, as one of the most important works of literary theory published in the twentieth century. Balfour (1988, pp. 18-19) argues that no other text of its kind rivals Frye's *Anatomy* in its comprehensiveness of literary theory and criticism. "Its project is ambitious in the extreme, nothing less than to provide a synoptic view of everything that criticism does and should do, a task which in turn would entail an inductive survey of the "whole" of literature" (Balfour 1988, pp. 18-19).

Although Frye's theories of satire are groundbreaking, the language he adopts is often confusing as his critics outlined below argue.

#### Northrop Frye: Criticism

Frye's theories have been described as difficult (Hart, 1994, p. 2). English Professor, Dr Eugene Crook explains how the now legendary film-critic, Roger Ebert, in 1966 came up with a diagram to explain to his baffled classmates how Frye's four Myths were inter-related. Dr Crook takes a polite jab at Frye, writing "Had Frye been as helpful as Mr Ebert, he too would have given us the schema that explains with great clarity how this (Frye's four myths) works" (Hamilton, 2006 p. ii).

Frye has been accused of building a system for others in *Anatomy of Criticism* without performing the practical application of his theory. Frye himself argues that rather than build a system, he set out to create a framework and many critics and theorists have been able to apply his theories to specific literary texts (Hart 1994, p. 57).

Frye assumes the reader has prior knowledge of the Classics and Ancient Literature. In order to analyse and understand Frye, there is much decoding needed. His theories have been described as inconsistent and illogical (Wimsatt n.d. in Krieger 1966, p. 103), his language as “crabbed critical shorthand” (Hamilton, A.C., 1990) and yet he still “has had an influence – indeed an absolute hold – on a generation of developing literary critics greater and more exclusive than that of any one theorist in recent critical history” (Krieger 1966, p. 1).

Frye defends his theories in Krieger (1966 pp. 136-137) arguing that he hoped that *Anatomy of Criticism*, particularly the third essay of the Theory of Myths, would serve as “a guide to practical criticism.” He argues that *Anatomy of Criticism* was schematic rather than systematic. “The reason why it is schematic is that poetic thinking is schematic” (Frye n.d. in Krieger 1966, p. 136). Frye nevertheless is not a poet but a critic with a propensity for extravagant and perplexing language. Frye contradicts himself in the Polemic Introduction to *Anatomy of Criticism* when he states that he aims to criticise literature as a “science” in a “systematic” fashion (Frye 1957, pp. 7-8). Krieger, however, overlooks these inconsistencies by describing Frye as a “poet-critic” (Krieger 1966, p. 7).

Krieger argues that traditional theorists have manifested their distrust of what they see as Frye’s emphasis on “eccentric and arbitrary pseudo-logos. There has been a complaint that Frye’s shifting categories produce, not the brilliant dynamics of dialectic, but the sloppiness of inconsistency ... More specifically, there has, first, been the complaint that he neglects, and at times flatly denies the critics task of evaluation; but the complaint is often accompanied by the acknowledgement that he sometimes speaks effectively about taste and judgement” (Krieger 1966, pp. 5-6).

Northrop Frye argues that literary analysis should focus on literary and mythological systems, rather than individual texts (Jancovich 1993, p. 4). On the other hand, literature theorists and critics, William K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley, disagree. Wimsatt and Beardsley argue in their essay, *The Intentional Fallacy*, against any discussion of an author's intention or intended meaning; the text itself is all that matters (Wimsatt & Beardsley 1954, p. 4). This became a central principle of the New Criticism, a dominant trend in English and American literary criticism of the mid twentieth century, from the 1920s to the early 1960s.

Within Frye's myths of comedy, romance and tragedy, Frye abstracts a typical form and discusses it. Within the myth of satire/irony, Frye concedes, "As in this *mythos* we have the difficulty of two words to contend with, it may be simplest, if the reader is now accustomed to our sequence of six phases, to start with them and describe them in order, instead of abstracting a typical form and discussing it first" (Frye 1957, p. 225). Hamilton argues that the "reason he never abstracts a typical form may be that there is none" (Hamilton 1990, p. 149). The difficulties in defining satire led Spacks to ask the question, "Is satire a genre at all?" (Spacks 1968, p. 360). Literary theorist, Robert C. Elliott, in his 1960 text, *The Power of Satire: Magic Ritual, Art*, argues that rather than satire being a genre, it is possibly "a purpose and a tone" (Elliott 1960, p. viii). Hamilton recognises that Frye's explanation of satire in *Anatomy* is somewhat confusing but refers to literary theorist, Alvin B. Kernan, who in his 1965 text, *The Plot of Satire*, acknowledges that Frye has nevertheless, "explained the genre in a way which helps raise it to a position of importance it has never before enjoyed in critical schemes" (Kernan 1965, p. 12).

Perhaps one of the reasons that satire is so difficult to define is due to the fact that there are so many different degrees of satire, ranging from the most uproarious comedy to the most dire tragedy. Frye's theories, with their six phases of satire/irony, attempt to define and analyse each of these categories. Through the explanation of these six phases, Frye has been able to position himself at the pinnacle of his contemporaries.

It is the purpose of my research to interpret Frye's theories of satire and analyse them so that they can be of benefit to a writer of satire. In his essay, *Reflections in a Mirror*, Frye states that he hoped that his Theory of Myths would "serve as a guide to practical criticism" (Krieger 1966, p. 137). My research deals with the methods involved in writing satire rather than criticising it. I will therefore use Frye's theories of satire and apply them to discover the methods involved in writing satirical comedy for the screen. Let us now discuss Frye's principles of satire which will form the basis of my research.

### **Northrop Frye's principles of satire**

Frye asserts that two elements are essential to satire; "one is wit or humour founded on fantasy or a sense of the grotesque or absurd, the other is an object of attack" (1957, p. 224). We have seen in the previous chapter that it is this sense of attack that differentiates the author of satire from the author of pure comedy. Frye argues that attack without humour forms one of the boundaries of satire (1957, p. 224). Literary theorist, critic and historian, Highet, defines pure comedy as "a story which merely amuses or thrills us, with no aftertaste of derisive bitterness" (Highet 1962, p. 150).

Frye also claims that "satire is militant irony: its moral norms are relatively clear, and it assumes standards against which the grotesque and absurd are measured" (Frye 1957, p. 223). This sense of irony applied by the satirical writer along with the satirist's moral standard will be analysed in greater detail below.

Frye also describes six phases of satire. Frye describes his first three phases of satire as "ironic phases of comedy" (1957, p. 225), whilst phases four to six are "ironic phases of tragedy" (1957, p. 236). Frye's first three phases of satire are of most interest to my screenplay project as I am writing a satirical comedy rather than an ironic tragedy. Frye's theory of myths and in particular his six phases, although groundbreaking, tend to apply more towards a literature scholar and critic rather than to a writer. For a writer of satire, Frye's principles of satire are of most use and will form the basis of my study into satire. Let us now describe and analyse Frye's principles of satire in greater detail.

## **Northrop Frye's definition of satire**

Frye asserts that two elements are essential to satire; "one is wit or humour founded on fantasy or a sense of the grotesque or absurd, the other is an object of attack" (Frye 1957, p. 224). Frye claims that, "satire is militant irony: its moral norms are relatively clear, and it assumes standards against which the grotesque and absurd are measured" (Frye 1957, p. 223). These and other principles of satire defined by Frye and other theorists such as Rosenheim, Worcester, Hodgart, and Hightet will be described and analysed in greater detail below.

### **1. The satirist's use of wit or humour**

The first of Frye's six principles of satire is the satirist's use of wit or humour. Frye argues that wit or humour is "essential to satire" (Frye 1957, p. 224).

Psychologist, Sigmund Freud, in his text, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905) claims that a joke can be a powerful swayer of beliefs. He argues that a joke "turn(s) the hearer, who was indifferent to begin with, into a co-hater or despiser, and creates for the enemy a host of opponents when at first there was only one... in the second (case) it upsets the critical judgement which would otherwise have examined the dispute. In the third and fourth cases ... it shatters respect for institutions and truths in which the hearer has believed ... Where argument tries to draw the hearer's criticism over on to its side, the joke endeavours to push the criticism out of sight. There is no doubt that the joke has chosen the method which is psychologically the more effective" (Freud 1960 p. 133).

Freud argues that a joke's "significance seems to lie in the fact that the person concerned finds criticism or aggressiveness difficult so long as they are direct, and possible only along circuitous paths" (Freud 1960 p. 142). Where criticism and aggressiveness may fail in exposing what a writer may believe to be unjust or foolish, the use of wit and humour by the satirist may soften an attack but still hit and ridicule or punish the target.

According to Frye, I should use wit and humour within my screenplay in order for it to be considered satirical. We have seen in the previous chapter how humour can have a powerful influence over an audience's beliefs. Humour can be used to align my audience with my viewpoint and "bring the laughers over to our side" (Frye 1960, p. 103). We will now see how my screenplay will evolve from a work of pure comedy to a satirical comedy by a focus upon an object of attack.

## **2. The satirist's focus upon an object of attack**

The second of Frye's six principles of satire is the satirist's focus upon an object of attack. Frye claims that "invective is one of the most readable forms of literary art" (1957, p. 224), however, he also argues that sheer invective is satire which has relatively little irony (Frye 1957, p. 223). If invective is used without a flourish of wit it can become vulgar name-calling. Frye argues that "Attack without humour, or pure denunciation, forms one of the boundaries of satire" (Frye 1957 p. 224). By this, Frye is referring to the fourth, fifth and sixth phases which deal with tragedy are more ironic than satiric in nature (Frye 1957, p. 236).

Frye's argues that "To attack anything, writer and audience must agree on its undesirability" (Frye 1957, p. 224). He also argues that because of this "the content of a great deal of satire founded on national hatreds, snobbery, prejudice, and personal pique goes out of date very quickly."

Frye argues that the satirical writer may attack injustice. The writer's use of attack without humour makes the work pure invective rather than satire. Satire must have an element of wit or humour combined with the notion of attack by the satirist. Frye points out that we like hearing people cursed and if the curse is enthusiastic enough an audience or reader cannot help but smile (Frye 1957, p. 224).

In accordance with Frye, a number of theorists of satire including classical and modern literature theorists, Mathew Hodgart (1969), Edward Rosenheim (1963) and the seventeenth century

playwright, Molière, all believe that in order for a text to be considered satire, there must be an object of attack.

Rosenheim defines *attack* by stating that “in one way or another, satire seems always to treat an object of some kind in an unfavourable way” (Rosenheim 1963, pp. 306-307). Rosenheim concedes that some satirists may criticise while others may ridicule or expose, however, all satirists will in some way *attack*. Rosenheim pays homage to Frye’s notions of the importance of “an object of attack” and an element of fantasy, but elaborates on Frye’s definition by arguing that “All satire is not only an attack; it is an attack upon *discernable, historically authentic particulars*” (Rosenheim 1963, pp. 317-318). For instance, in “The Producers,” satirist, Mel Brooks, takes a stab at Hitler and his beliefs through his hilarious song, “Springtime for Hitler.” Brooks is not attacking an esoteric figure but a “historically authentic” character and regime.

Mathew Hodgart claims that the mocking laugh of the satirist “is an aggressive gesture, a means of waging war on his fellow creatures, albeit in a good cause” (Hodgart 1969, p. 109). Hodgart argues that human nature shows that we “laugh at someone else’s misfortunes, or at our success in deliberately overcoming competition or opposition, and getting ahead in the rat race” (Hodgart 1969 p. 109).

Hodgart, like Frye, also examines *invective* which is a violent attack in words. Hodgart states that the best satirists use invective only occasionally for shock effect. “It requires elegance of form to set off grossness of content, and learned allusiveness to set off open insult” (Hodgart p. 130). Hodgart claims that a satirist risks becoming as bad as his enemies if vulgar invective is overused.

Freud also discusses literary attack. He argues that a writer can effectively use humour to sway an audience’s beliefs into his/her way of thinking and “bring the laughers over to our side” (Freud 1960, p. 103). A writer of satire can expose problems and injustices in society and turn an audience into an ally. In his text, Freud also describes a new species of attack where, combined

with a joke, is able to “bribe the hearer with its yield of pleasure into taking sides with us without any very close investigation” (Freud 1960, p. 103).

Similarly, David Worcester argues that for satire to be effective, the attack must be restrained (Worcester 1940, p. 13). He claims that there are two steps in the formation of any kind of satire. The author first evolves a criticism of conduct. He then contrives ways of making his readers comprehend and remember that criticism and adopt it as their own. Rather than a direct verbal attack, Worcester argues that generally within a satire the emotion is controlled, the blow is softened and the approach is indirect (Worcester 1940, p. 17). He argues that satire is the engine of anger, rather than the direct expression of anger (Worcester 1940, p. 18).

In conclusion, my screenplay should focus upon an object of attack in order for it to be considered satirical. I should show a sense of aggression towards the belief systems of characters which I believe to be unjust. According to Worcester, the attack should be controlled and the approach should be indirect (Worcester 1940, p. 17). This may be possible by applying both wit and humour to my screenplay. We will now see how the use of irony by the satirist may make this sense of attack even more indirect.

### **3. The satirist’s application of irony**

The third of Frye’s six principles of satire is the satirist’s application of irony. Frye claims that, “satire is militant irony: its moral norms are relatively clear, and it assumes standards against which the grotesque and absurd are measured” (Frye 1957, p. 223). He argues that “satire is irony which is structurally close to the comic: the comic struggle of two societies, one normal and the other absurd, is reflected in its double focus of morality and fantasy” (Frye 1957, p. 224). Frye defines irony as “a technique of appearing to be less than one is, which in literature becomes most commonly a technique of saying as little and meaning as much as possible, or, in a more general way, a pattern of words that turns away from direct statement or its own obvious meaning” (Frye 1957, p. 40). He argues that “irony is consistent both with complete realism of



content and with the suppression of attitude on the part of the author.” An author that uses irony may refrain from clearly stating the truth but it will nevertheless be evident to an audience.

The definition of *irony* in the Concise Oxford Dictionary (1985) goes further to explain this technique. It is described as the “expression of one’s meaning by language of opposite or different tendency, esp. Simulated adoption of another’s point of view or laudatory tone for purpose of ridicule; ill-timed or perverse arrival of event or circumstance in itself desirable, as if in mockery of the fitness of things; use of language that has an inner meaning for a privileged audience and an outer meaning for the person addressed or concerned.” If we apply the Concise Oxford Dictionary definition of irony to Frye’s definition we may have the humour of viewing two different societies judging one another. One society may make a moral comment on the behaviour of the other society which may have one meaning to the society but another humorous meaning to an objective audience.

Mathew Hodgart refers to Frye when he says satire is “militant irony: the satirist uses irony to make the reader uncomfortable, to shake him out of his complacency and to make him an ally in the battle against the world’s stupidity” (Hodgart 1969, p. 131). Hodgart states that the greatest satirists’ standard device which helps to avoid backlash is irony. Hodgart describes irony as “the systematic use of double meaning” (Hodgart 1969, p. 130). For satiric purposes this technique can be particularly effective to address a particular person or group that the writer despises without causing outward offence. The audience, and perhaps other characters in alliance with the writer, however, may understand the hidden meaning of the words. Thus, the target is hit and wounded without counterattack and looks the fool for being none the wiser. He also argues that irony is the “normal device for exposing the comedy of human pretensions” (Hodgart 1969, p. 131). This may have implications for my screenplay as I intend to expose the pretensions of those who are unjust towards women.

Classical theorist, Gilbert Highet, in his text, *The Anatomy of Satire*, argues that irony is the mask of the satirist whose “voice speaks a gross exaggeration or falsehood, knowing it to be exaggerated or false, but announcing it as a serious truth” (Highet 1962, p. 55). Highet argues

that when a satirist uses irony and shows a character saying the opposite of what the satirist believes, an audience may be shocked into understanding the truth. Highet also states that a satirist who uses irony may be attacked as a provocateur or liar by an audience who misunderstand the satirist's motives.

We have seen how the satirist uses wit and humour, combined with a sense of attack and irony, to potentially turn an audience into an ally. We will now discover how the satirist draws upon his/her moral standards to select what to attack.

#### **4. The satirist's implicit moral standard**

The fourth of Frye's six principles of satire is the satirist's implicit moral standard. Frye claims that satire requires "an implicit moral standard ... The satirist has to select his absurdities, and the act of selection is a moral act" (Frye 1957, p. 224). In order to choose an object of attack, the satirist must rely on his/her moral standards to make the selection of what is grotesque or unjust. Frye argues that "For effective attack we must reach some kind of impersonal level, and that commits the attacker, if only by implication to a moral standard. The satirist commonly takes a high moral line" (Frye 1957, p. 225).

Literature theorist and critic, Professor Patricia Meyer Spacks, describes how satiric practice in our time has changed from that of the eighteenth century. Twentieth century satire rarely includes a dominant character that embodies the author's moral purpose. The greatest contemporary satires state their moral purpose subtly so that an audience does not acknowledge that they are being manipulated. The moral purpose of the satirist is there nevertheless.

Rosenheim argues that satire is an effective tool to "expose" evils or infirmities hitherto unrecognized by its audience" (Rosenheim 1963, p. 307). To select what is considered *evil*, a satirist must draw on his moral beliefs which will in turn give a moral purpose to the satire. By presenting these injustices in a humorous way, Rosenheim argues that it may be possible for a satirist to sway an audience to his beliefs; to elicit blame or urge an audience to a somewhat

hostile future action against the object or belief under attack (See Purpose of Satire, Chapter 1). If an audience already shares a satirist's beliefs they can "gain a collective pleasure in experiencing the object of their loathing punished" (Rosenheim 1963, p. 307). If this is not possible, a satirist can at least be "content to jeer at folly and expose evil to bitter contempt" (Hight 1962, p. 156).

Film academic, Dr Lisa Dethridge, in *Writing Your Screenplay*, argues that "the best writing comes from anger; from 'the fire in the belly' of one who has the urgent need to communicate to others" (Dethridge 2003, p. 4). The satirist uses her moral stance to attack injustice.

None of these theorists argue the fact that a good satirist need not be overly moralistic or preachy, as in eighteenth century satire, but can draw on his/her powers of persuasion to present an argument and rely on an audience to draw a moral conclusion.

In summary, Frye argues that the satirist draws upon his/her moral standards to select which evils to attack with wit and humour and a sense of irony. We will now see how the satirist degrades and reduces the stature of these unjust beliefs.

## **5. The satirist's reduction or degradation of character or belief system**

The fifth of Frye's six principles of satire is the satirist's reduction of character or belief system. Frye argues that Second Phase Satire is the completion of the "*reductio ad absurdum*, which is not designed to hold one in perpetual captivity, but to bring one to the point at which one can escape from an incorrect procedure" (Frye 1957, p. 233).

Frye does not explain this term particularly well. Wimsatt's criticism of Frye's expression of language rings true. Frye's use of language is, at times, baffling. Wimsatt argues that "Frye needs not only his own cast of characters and his special plots but his own language or vocabulary of displaced diction – derangement of epitaphs. It is a strange language ... Frye's vocabulary is not an accident but a necessary engine for the projection of some of his slanted

visions” (Wimsatt n.d., in Krieger 1966, pp. 99-100). Frye defends himself against Wimsatt arguing, “even given Mr. Wimsatt’s premises, it is clear that he finds much more than beautifully cadenced nonsense in me, otherwise he could hardly put his finger on so many central things” (Frye n.d. in Krieger 1966, p. 134).

I will therefore turn to Hodgart who describes this *reduction* technique claiming that “The basic technique of the satirist is reduction: the degradation or devaluation of the victim by reducing his stature and dignity. This may be done on the level of plot and will almost always be continued to the level of style and language” (Hodgart 1969 p. 115).

Frye argues that the protagonist may degrade an unjust person or devalue an incorrect belief system. In doing so, the protagonist hero can escape from an incorrect procedure to a more peaceful and agreeable environment (Frye 1957, p. 233). Frye claims that “Second-phase satire shows literature assuming a special function of analysis, of breaking up the lumber of stereotypes, fossilized beliefs, superstitious terrors, crank theories, pedantic dogmatisms, oppressive fashions, and all other things that impede the free movement (not necessarily, of course, the progress) of society” (Frye 1957, p. 233). Frye argues that a writer of satire may degrade an incorrect belief system so that the protagonist hero can escape to a more agreeable and satisfying environment.

Film theorist, Gerald Mast, in his text, *The Comic Mind*, defines and categorises seven comic structures. Like Frye and Hodgart, Mast also refers to the “*reduction ad absurdum*” comic plot, however, Mast is able to define this plot simply. It features “A simple human mistake or social question magnified, reducing the action to chaos and the social question to absurdity ... Perfect for revealing the ridiculousness of social or human attitudes, such a plot frequently serves a didactic function” (Mast 1973, p. 6). By “didactic,” Mast asserts that the *reduction ad absurdum* comic plot aims to instruct an audience (see Chapter 1, *Purpose of Satire*). If we combine Mast’s and Frye’s theories of the *reduction* technique, it may be deduced that a writer of satire may instruct an audience that some “stereotypes, fossilized beliefs, superstitious terrors, crank

theories, pedantic dogmatisms, oppressive fashions” may “impede the free movement ... of society” (Frye 1957, p. 233).

Frye also briefly mentions the predominance of the “Omphale archetype” in literary satire which he describes as “the man bullied or dominated by women” (Frye 1957, p. 228). Omphale was the queen of Lydia who bought Hercules as a slave from the Greek god Hermes. In her service, Hercules may have been humiliated by wearing women's garments or doing traditionally feminine tasks (<http://ancienthistory.about.com/od/herculespeople/g/Omphale.htm>). Within my theatrical and feature film case studies in the next two chapters, we will discuss examples of “Omphale archetypes,” male characters whose incorrect beliefs have been quashed and their characters have been degraded in a similar fashion as Hercules.

We have seen how the degradation or devaluation of a character or incorrect belief system by the satirist can reduce its stature and dignity. Let us now see why a satirist may need to apply a fantasy element, based upon a specific historical identity.

## **6. The satirist’s application of a token fantasy which the reader can recognise as grotesque or absurd**

The last of Frye’s six principles of satire is the satirist’s application of a token fantasy which the reader can recognise as grotesque or absurd. By “fantasy,” Frye argues that “satire demands at least a token fantasy, a content which the reader recognizes as grotesque” (Frye 1957, p. 224). Satire should include an element of the imaginary, recognised as absurd, farcical or ridiculous. Frye argues that satire “breaks down when its content is too oppressively real to permit the maintaining of the fantastic or hypothetical tone” (Frye 1957, p. 224). Without this element of an absurd fantasy with a “hypothetical tone,” a work cannot be considered to be satirical.

Frye argues that most fantasy is pulled back into satire by a dominant allegorical undertow. He describes “allegory” as “the implicit reference to experience in the perception of the incongruous” (Frye 1957, p. 225). By this, Frye suggests that satire uses fantasy as a metaphor to

compare it with a historically authentic event or situation. Frye uses The White Knight in Lewis Carroll's, *Alice in Wonderland*, as an example. Frye argues that it is "pure fantasy" when Carroll's White Knight character who "felt that one should be provided for everything" put "anklets around his horse's feet to guard against the bites of sharks" (Frye 1957 p. 235). Frye goes on to argue that *Alice in Wonderland* becomes a satire once the author Carroll shows the White Knight parodying the nineteenth century English poet, Wordsworth. This is because Wordsworth is a historically authentic character rather than one of fiction. Carroll is, in fact, satirising Wordsworth.

Rosenheim also observes that the satirical writer may need to focus on a particular historical identity as well as a satiric *fiction* or *fantasy*. Rosenheim draws from Frye's theories, arguing that "all satire involves, to some extent, a *departure from literal truth* and, in place of literal truth, a reliance upon what may be called a *satiric fiction*" (Rosenheim 1963, p. 312). Rosenheim asserts that this "satiric fiction" can take on a number of forms appearing as a slight exaggeration, a derisive metaphor or sarcasm. He argues that satire requires both truth and reality as well as fiction and fantasy. He also argues that punitive satire distinguishes itself from pure comedy "by the presence of *both* the historically authentic and the historically particular; in the absence of either, the satiric quality disappears" (Rosenheim 1963, p. 318). Rosenheim argues that the satiric is lost when the object of attack by the author is entirely imaginary or when it cannot be assigned specific historical identity.

## **Summary**

We have seen that Frye asserts that two elements are essential to satire; "one is wit or humour founded on fantasy or a sense of the grotesque or absurd, the other is an object of attack" (1957, p. 224). Frye argues that, "satire is militant irony: its moral norms are relatively clear, and it assumes standards against which the grotesque and absurd are measured" (1957, p. 223). Frye argues that satirist draws upon his/her moral standards to select which injustices to attack with wit and humour and a sense of irony. The satirist degrades and reduces the stature of these

unreasonable beliefs. Finally, the satirist applies an absurd or farcical fantasy element based upon a specific historical identity.

Within the next chapter, I will move towards the second component of my research. By observing Frye's six principles of satire in the treatment of female protagonists in Congreve's theatrical comedy, *The Way of the World*, I will analyse, examine and discuss aspects of creating strong comedic roles for women.

## Chapter 3

### How may we observe Frye's six principles of satire in the treatment of female protagonists in Congreve's comedy, *The Way of the World*?

#### Introduction

We have previously discussed how Frye uses examples from literature to argue his case. My screenplay project is, however, concerned with writing for performance. Research relating to writing female characters for the screen is scarce. English screenwriting academic, Helen Jacey, argues that the “vast majority of the screenwriting guides tend to ignore gender difference” (<http://www.writersstore.com/finding-the-womans-voice-helen-jacey>). There is considerable theory, however, relating to writing female characters for the theatrical stage. According to theatrical theorists and historians, Pat Gill (1994) and Douglas Young (1997), Restoration comedy (1660 to 1710) is known for its strong satirical female protagonists. Within the second component to my research, I will observe Frye's six principles of satire in the treatment of female protagonists in William Congreve's most renowned comedy, *The Way of the World*. I will then analyse, examine and discuss aspects of creating strong comedic roles for women in performance.

*The Way of the World* is considered by many critics as Congreve's best work and by many as the best of the Restoration comedies (Young 1997, p. 209). For this reason, I have chosen this play and the character of female protagonist, Millamant, as a benchmark for creating a strong, independent and witty heroine. Young argues that in the theatre of the seventeenth century, the character of the virtuous woman becomes a serious advocate for equality of the sexes. “No comedy illustrates this better than the last of the social comedies in the Restoration tradition, Congreve's *The Way of the World* (1700). And no character illustrates the concept of feminine wit and independence better than Congreve's heroine in the play, Millamant” (Young 1997, p. 162). Young also argues that “Only in *The Way of the World* is this separate but equal status (of heroine and hero) spelled out so clearly” (Young 1997, p. 248). This is relevant to my screenplay project as I intend to create a female protagonist of equal status to her male counterpart.



Young asserts that much has been written about the leading men in Restoration Comedies but not enough attention has been given to the female characters. He argues that these women's ideals and stratagems eventually allow them to dominate their gallants and establish them as equal to or superior to them. Young asserts that the heroines in Restoration comedies "offered to their society a new and distinctly modern perspective on social and marital relationships" (Young 1997, p. 1).

Young asserts that the playwrights of the Restoration period, 1660 to 1710, who include Congreve, Wycherley and Etherege, wrote comedies to entertain an aristocratic audience. In doing so, these satirists attacked some of the social abuses practiced within this society. The institution of marriage was a special target for mockery in these comedies. Congreve's plays often feature a love duel between a major female character and an antagonistic gallant. The heroine is able to match her substantial worldly wit and wisdom with the men who pursue her (Young 1997, p. 2).

#### The role of female characters – Restoration comedy

Young argues that through the heroines in the plays of Etherege, Wycherley and Congreve, we can catch a glimpse of a very modern and refreshing approach to the relationship between the sexes. Ironically, this can be appreciated more today than it was in its own time (Young 1997 p. 6). Young's description of the Restoration heroines of Congreve's play world may therefore be of great benefit towards the construction of the satirical female protagonist of my screenplay as she also believes in equality within marriage.

Young devotes a chapter to "The Real World of the Restoration" which I have summarised below. It describes the social conventions of the Restoration and how Congreve's satires on marriage and society fit into these conventions.

### Restoration society

According to Young, the future of the Court of Charles II during the early period of its restoration was uncertain. The aristocratic soldiers at court lived for the moment, seeking pleasure in defiance of the strict Puritan ethic being practiced all around them. On the surface, however, the fashionable court adhered to the traditional social conventions. Things were not always what they appeared to be and it was the task of the libertine to find out what was real or true and use the appearance of things in pursuit of his pleasure and avoid the social entrapment of marriage (Young 1997, pp. 7-10)

The pretences of Restoration society were ripe for satire. Frye argues that there is “a recurring tendency on the part of ironic comedy to ridicule and scold an audience assumed to be hankering after sentiment, solemnity and the triumph of fidelity and approved moral standards” (Frye 1957, p. 48). This is particularly apt if these “approved moral standards” are a sham.

The desirable woman in Restoration society became a foil to the gallant’s pursuit of pleasure as she was bound and protected by society’s double standard in sexual behaviour. The laws and customs of marriage were so strict and male orientated that marriage for the aristocratic woman in Restoration society was akin to servitude. She saw matrimony as the suppression of her capacity to make independent decisions (Young, 1997, pp. 10-11).

### Marriage as an industry

Young asserts, that in seventeenth century England, marriage for the upper-class was a practice of financial bargaining. Neither sex had much influence in their choice of mate. Vast wealth was exchanged when English nobility married. Fathers set an appropriate price for their sons and daughters and the future husband would maintain complete control over the dowry. Most marriages among the upper classes were carefully negotiated by the fathers with the sole purpose of preserving and expanding their estates. Little consideration was given to the compatibility or

desires of the couple (Young 1997, pp. 11-12). The futility of marriage as an industry was often a topic of satire within the plays of Congreve, Wycherley and Etherege.

### Women as legal and social inferiors

Young emphasises the inequality and injustice for the married seventeenth century woman. Seventeenth century women received little education, mainly focussing on the domestic arts, with perhaps a dash of reading, French and music. “A woman could not own property and anything she owned prior to her marriage automatically became her husband’s” (Young 1997, pp. 13-14).

Rosenheim asserts that the “foibles of public men and institutions,” are well established topics of satire (Rosenheim 1963, p. 308) whilst Frye argues that a great deal of satire relates to “national hatreds, snobbery, prejudice and personal pique” (Frye 1957, p. 224). On reading Young’s descriptions above, it is no wonder then that prejudices and injustices relating to women pertaining to the institution of marriage is a frequent topic for Restoration comedy satire. In comparison, within contemporary marriage, a source of satire could be derived from the fact that the roles within marriage of breadwinner, carer and cleaner are sometimes blurred with couples disagreeing about where responsibilities lie.

Young claims that the majority of English society accepted and found comfort in the traditional marriage arrangement but the “debased social revolt of the court of Charles II and the first expressions of a tentative feminist movement suggested the possibility of alternatives and subsequent changes” (Young 1997, p. 15).

### The feminist debate

Young asserts that toward the latter half of the seventeenth century, the position of women in English society showed some improvement. The “double standard regarding sexual morality came under heavy criticism. Ironically, it was intolerance of male adultery, a common practice in

arranged marriages, that helped to bring the question of the position of women to the forefront” (Young 1997, p. 15).

Young asserts that within the plays of Etheridge, Wycherley and Congreve, women provide a social commentary which is usually feminist in point of view, placing women on an equal footing with men in the social world. “She is equal or superior in wit and worldly knowledge to her male counterpart and she is as spirited and independent as he. Indeed, in some cases, she is assigned a role that requires her not only to match her gallant in wit and resourcefulness in the love-duel, but also to instruct him on how he should conduct himself in the social world. The characters of Alithea in *The Country Wife*, Fidelia in *The Plain Dealer* and Angelica in *Love for Love* are three of the most obvious examples in which women instruct and educate gallants” (Young 1997, p. 233). In Congreve’s *Love for Love*, for instance, the female protagonist, Angelica, educates her gallant, Valentine, that flashy shows of extravagance are not as worthy as honest love and affection.

ANGELICA: I thought your love of me had caused this transport in your soul, which it seems you only counterfeited for by mercenary ends and sordid interest. (Congreve 1968, p. 344)

### “Learned ladies”

According to Young, women in the eighteenth century who wrote for publication risked their moral reputation as such women were perceived as immodest and unchaste. Despite this, select women of upper-class seventeenth century society, known as “learned ladies,” benefited from an informal education. These women were judged harshly by society. Their published work was considered inferior and not to be taken seriously. These “learned ladies” were such a rare breed that they became subjects of satire in Restoration comedy in plays such as Wycherley’s *The Plain-Dealer* and Congreve’s *Love for Love*. None of these comic figures are developed as a principal female character in any of these plays but their inclusion confirmed society’s belief that any kind of educational or professional skills were beyond the ability of women (Young 1997 pp.

17-20). Young argues that despite the fact that the seventeenth century saw little progress in the intellectual or social status of women, a new attitude began to develop amongst women.

This is appropriate for the female protagonist in my screenplay, herself a “learned lady.” She discovers that she can never fully return to her previous professional role after becoming a mother. She must instead develop a new job description for herself.

### Female characters in the theatre

Young suggests that it was the “playwrights of the Restoration period who first gave voice to the new aspirations of women. In spite of their occasional satire of learned women, the playwrights reflected sympathy for women who rebelled against the system of arranged marriages and gave their characters firm reasons for their opposition to such arrangements” (1997, p. 20).

Ram Chandra Sharma observes in his text, *Themes and Conventions in the Comedy of Manners*, that “the inspiration for portrayal of a new type of woman came to the dramatists from an aspiration which had begun to be felt in the contemporary society itself” (Sharma 1965, p. 66). This “new type of woman” will be of great value to my project. I intend to observe and analyse how Congreve’s female protagonists are portrayed and then apply this knowledge to develop female characters for my project.

We have discussed how double standards for women were ripe within Restoration society. We have also been given a glimpse at how Restoration theatre was able to satirise these double standards showing sympathy towards women. The methods that playwright, Congreve, uses to satirise these injustices towards women may have implications towards the writing of my satirical screenplay project. My screenplay will also satirise contemporary double standards towards women. I will now give a brief overview of Congreve’s play, *The Way of the World*, to give context to the characters, plot and character psychology within the play which we will then examine.

### **Congreve's *The Way of the World* - Synopsis**

Congreve's, *The Way of the World*, is set in London, in the early eighteenth century and is a theatrical comedy of manners, satirising the follies and frivolity of the fashionable English upper classes. In act one, Congreve introduces us to his male support character, Mirabell, who has just finished playing cards with his friend, Fainall. Mirabell is visited by a servant and told that Mirabell's servant, Waitwell, and Lady Wishfort's servant, Foible, have just been married. Mirabell tells his friend, Fainall, that he is in love with female protagonist, Millamant. Mirabell's friend, Fainall, encourages Mirabell to marry Millamant. Millamant's friends, Witwoud and Petulant, appear and inform Mirabell that he will lose his inheritance should Lady Wishfort marry. He must make Lady Wishfort consent to his and Millamant's marriage if he wishes to receive the inheritance.

In act two, Lady Wishfort's daughter, Mrs Fainall, and Mrs Marwood discuss their hatred of men. Later, Mrs Fainall tells Mirabell that she hates her husband. It is revealed that prior to his courtship of Millamant, Mirabell had an affair with Lady Wishfort's daughter, (now Mrs Fainall), and arranged for her to marry Fainall as he feared that she was pregnant as a consequence of their affair. Fainall agreed to marry her for monetary reasons. The arranged marriage becomes complicated by Fainall's illicit affair with Mrs Marwood and her secret desire for Mirabell. Mirabell and Mrs Marwood plot to trick Lady Wishfort to give her consent to the marriage of Millamant and Mirabell. Millamant appears and is angry with Mirabell and refuses his advances towards her. Millamant is not pleased with Mirabell's plan to trick Lady Wishfort.

In act three, Lady Wishfort is encouraged by her servant, Foible, to marry 'Sir Rowland,' Mirabell's pretend uncle, so that Mirabell will lose his inheritance. Sir Rowland is, in fact, the servant, Waitwell, in disguise. The plan is to arrange a marriage with Lady Wishfort which cannot go ahead because it would be bigamy. It would also be a social disgrace for an aristocrat such as Lady Wishfort to marry the servant, Waitwell. Mirabell will offer to help her out of the embarrassing situation if she consents to his marriage. Later, Mrs Fainall discusses this plan with Foible, but this is overheard by Mrs Marwood. Mrs Marwood hopes to prevent Mirabell's marriage to Millamant as she plots with Fainall to gain the Wishfort estate.

In act four, it becomes clear that all the principal female characters are in love with Millamant, except the one he desires the most, Millamant. Mirabell, however, refuses to give up pursuing her. Beneath the surface of their love-duel is a serious amount of hard bargaining between Millamant and Mirabel, both who, as a consequence of the society around them, fear disillusionment in marriage. There is finally a shared agreement between them that promises a successful marriage partnership based on equality.

Lady Wishfort arrives and announces that she wants Millamant to marry her nephew, Sir Wilful. Later, Lady Wishfort receives a letter revealing that Sir Rowland is a fraud. Sir Rowland (Waitwell) sees the letter and blames Mirabell of trying to sabotage his wedding to Lady Wishfort. Lady Wishfort agrees to let Sir Rowland bring the writings of his estate as well as a marriage contract later that night.

By act five, Lady Wishfort discovers the plot and accuses the servant, Foible, of conspiring against her. Fainall has Mirabell's servant, Waitwell, arrested but Mirabell gives security for his release. Mrs Fainall's previous affair with Mirabell is discovered by Mrs Marwood and Mr Fainall. Lady Wishfort thanks Mrs Marwood for unveiling the plot against her. Fainall uses the knowledge of Mrs Fainall's affair with Mirabell to blackmail Lady Wishfort. Fainall insists that Lady Wishfort transfer her fortune over to him. Lady Wishfort offers her consent to the marriage of Millamant and Mirabell if Mirabell can save her fortune and honour. Waitwell brings a contract from the time before the marriage of the Fainalls in which Mrs Fainall gives all her property to Mirabell to prevent her possessions falling into Fainall's hands. This prevents Fainall from being able to blackmail Lady Wishfort. Mirabell restores Mrs Fainall's property to her possession and then is free to marry Millamant with their full inheritance. (Congreve 1988; Young 1997, pp. 211-212)

Let us now apply Frye's six principles of satire to an analysis of female protagonists in Congreve's satirical comedy, *The Way of the World*.

## 1. Congreve's use of wit or humour

Frye argues that “wit or humour” is essential to satire (Frye 1957, p. 224). Young claims that the virtue of the female characters in the Restoration Comedy play-worlds of Etheridge, Wycherley and Congreve “is the manner in which they use their wit and wisdom to tame their gallants and achieve social equality and independence, while observing the moral code and rejecting their inferior social status” (Young, 1997, p. vii).

Whilst the Restoration era was not known for its high moral character, the Restoration women characters were not deceived by appearances. “They used the fashionable manners and brilliant and witty conversation to challenge and conquer both rivals and admirers ... While they reflected the real world's ideas and conventions, they also condemned some of the injustices and weaknesses of that world and offered alternative modes of social conduct that were far ahead of their time... They are the best women of their time, far ahead of their models in the real world of fashionable society. They are the first to express a point of view that a modern play-goer would not only recognise, but would readily accept. That point of view is simply that women should have the same degree of independence and equality as men in the social world as well as in the marital relationship” (Young, 1997, p. 1).

Congreve's women effortlessly match their wit and wisdom with the men who pursue them. For instance, in act two of *The Way of the World*, the female protagonist, Millamant, plays the game of love after the male support, Mirabell, argues that cruelty is not in her nature. Millamant asserts that she must give some pain and cruelty to her gallant, key male support, Mirabel.

MILLAMANT: one's cruelty is one's power, when one parts with one's cruelty, one parts with one's power: and when one has parted with that, I fancy one's old and ugly” (Congreve 1988, p. 42).



Young (1997, p. 221) asserts that “In the artful game of love, one must maintain the advantage or else lose and await Time’s wrinkled shadows.” Mirabell replies that such “cruelty” and “power” may “destroy your lover” (Congreve 1988, p. 42).

MIRABELL: you are no longer handsome when you’ve lost your lover; your beauty dies upon the instant: for beauty is the lover’s gift; ‘tis he bestows your charms – your glass is all a cheat (Congreve 1988, p. 42).

Mirabell is asserting here that a woman is only beautiful through the eyes of a lover. Once you have lost your lover, your beauty and charms fade. Millamant can match Mirabell’s arrogance with pure wit.

MILLAMANT: One no more owes one’s beauty to a lover, than one’s wit to an echo (Congreve 1988, p. 43)

Millamant is a woman who is sure of herself. Her confidence in herself and her place in the world will ensure that she will always have the upper hand in her relationships. The proviso scene in act four of *The Way of the World* is an example of Frye’s second-phase satire which “shows literature assuming a special function of analysis, of breaking up the lumber of stereotypes, fossilized beliefs, superstitious terrors, crank theories, pedantic dogmatisms, oppressive fashions, and all other things that impede the free movement (not necessarily, of course, the progress) of society” (Frye 1957, p. 233). The “stereotype” and “fossilized belief” that Congreve is satirising within the above dialogue is that a woman is only beautiful through the eyes of a lover.

Young asserts that the proviso scene between Millamant and Mirabell in *The Way of the World* is indicative of the bargaining arrangements for marriage which was prevalent in the real world of the seventeenth century (Young 1997, p. 223). In the real world of the Restoration, questions regarding estate and dowry are central issues. In the proviso scene in *The Way of the World*, the

central issues relate more to the central core of the couple's relationship and how they will live and love together.

Through Millamant's witty demands on Mirabell, Congreve breaks down what Frye describes as the "fossilized belief" that a woman should be subservient to her husband. Millamant demands that after marriage she should be:

MILLAMANT: as liberty to pay and receive visits to and from whom I please; to write and receive letters, without interrogatories or wry faces on your part; to wear what I please; and choose conversation with regard only to my own taste; to have no obligation upon me to converse with wits that I don't like, because they are your acquaintance; or to be intimate with fools because they may be your relations. Come to dinner when I please, dine in my dressing-room when I'm out of humour, without giving a reason ... to be sole empress of my tea-table ... and lastly, wherever I am, you shall always knock at the door before you come in. These articles subscribed, if I continue to endure you a little longer, I may by degrees dwindle into a wife.

(Congreve 1988, p. 79)

Young argues that "the central issue in the proviso is individual liberty and independence." Other characters in the play "respond to their worlds either destructively or ineffectually, in contrast to Mirabell and Millamant who, within the proviso scene, attempt to build constructively on the confusion of family ties and the failures in the emotional relationships they perceive around them" (Young 1997, p. 223). Young asserts that the proviso scene is "a guarantee as far as Millamant is concerned that she will have equal privileges in marriage with those of her prospective husband" (Young 1997, p. 223).

Millamant provisos demand that she preserves her state of liberty, independence and privacy. She asserts that she will only befriend those who she chooses. She will not suffer fools gladly despite the fact they may be Mirabell's friends or family. Mirabell must also give her space at home, respect her privacy and not expect her to be good company if she does not feel like it.

Young asserts that Millamant seeks liberty and independence in matrimony but is also wise enough to recognise the need for mutual respect for her partner (Young 1997, p. 225). This is an understanding of true equality. Millamant appreciates that devotion and understanding cannot be one-sided. If Millamant demands respect and freedom from Mirabell then she must also respect his needs and desires within their relationship.

MILLAMANT: You have free leave, propose your utmost, speak and spare not.  
(Congreve 1988, p. 79)

Some of Mirabel's subsequent demands include that Millamant should not help screen her female friends' adulterous affairs and that she should feel confident in her natural beauty and not attempt to alter her appearance with cosmetics.

This proviso scene is of great significance to my screenplay as I hope to include a similar proviso between my female protagonist and her key male support which will assure them of a sense of equality within their relationship.

Young argues that the plays of Etheridge, Wycherley and Congreve present marriage as a "sordid arrangement and a subject reserved solely for ridicule", however, they also assert an alternative arrangement to the real world. "Basic to these alternative conditions is the status of the woman. If the marriage is to be successful, the woman must take her place as an equal in the social world. Without this mutual respect and mutual independence, the balance is tipped and the objective, a successful relationship equally shared, cannot be achieved" (Young 1997, p. 250).

Congreve's heroines keep their balance by relying on "observation and timing rather than on aggressiveness" (Frye 1957, p. 226). Reminiscent of Frye's phase one of satire, they understand the codes of conventional life and are able to avoid all "illusion and compulsive behaviour" (Frye 1957, p. 226) by using wit or humour rather than aggression. Congreve has written the female protagonist in *The Way of the World* as a woman who knows her mind and is not afraid to speak it. She successfully trains her male support character to behave and speak in a way that avoids

pretences and will make her happy for a lifetime. She does this by using Frye's principle of "wit and humour" rather than "compulsive behaviour" and aggression.

There is also much wit and humour in Congreve's supporting women characters and their descriptions of men. For instance, consider the following exchange in act two between antagonists, Mrs Marwood and Mrs Fainall, after they falsely profess friendship to one another:

MRS FAINALL: Is it possible? Dost thou hate those vipers,  
men?

MRS MARWOOD: I have done hating 'em, and am now come to despise 'em; the next thing I have to do, is eternally to forget 'em.

(Congreve 1988, p. 30)

Later, during this exchange, Mrs Marwood humorously describes how, if she was married, she would make her husband believe she was having an affair to keep him racked with "fear and jealousy." Mrs Fainall believes this to be "ingenious mischief!" (Congreve 1988, p. 31).

Congreve shows Mrs Marwood's and Mrs Fainall's treatment of their men as delightfully and humorously cruel.

Congreve's heroines understand society's codes and, unlike their supporting female characters, are able to avoid affectation. According to Young, Congreve's heroines pride themselves on "being able to mix and talk freely and unblushingly with these gentlemen about love and sex" (Young 1997, p. 3). Young argues that Congreve's female protagonists use their wit, intelligence, moral restraint and spiritual independence in the game of love. "Love for the virtuous woman in the Restoration play-world requires intellect and self-restraint, a brittleness that denies sentiment or faintness of heart. It also requires self-confidence in a world in which the conduct of life is judged solely by men" (Young 1997, p. 3). Young argues that it requires a woman of extraordinary strength to hold herself an equal to men in Restoration society. Young claims that the principal female characters in Congreve's comedies have astonishing qualities of

exuberance, sense of worth and scepticism about society. These character traits are usually associated with the Renaissance man of the preceding era. This suggests that Congreve's female protagonists have adopted the positive qualities of the men of the previous era. Congreve's heroines are able to avoid affectation and communicate openly and truthfully.

## **2. Congreve's focus upon an object of attack**

We have just described Frye's first principle of satire, being "wit or humour," within the analysis of female protagonists in Congreve's, *The Way of the World*. Let us now observe Frye's second principle of satire, "an object of attack" within Congreve's female characters (Frye 1957, p. 224).

Congreve attacks many of society's hypocrisies. In *The Way of the World*, Congreve attacks those characters that are insincere and keep up appearances for the sake of those they are trying to impress. Consider one of the female protagonist's proviso's to her male love interest, Mirabel, in act four. Once they are married she asks that they not:

MILLAMANT: ... go to Hyde Park together the first Sunday in a new chariot, to provoke eyes and whispers, and then never to be seen their together again; as if we were proud of one another the first week, and ashamed of one another for ever after."

(Congreve 1988, p. 78)

Congreve is attacking insincere and hypocritical couples, like the Fainalls, who are clearly not in love but are either married for the sake of society or for monetary reasons. The Fainall's insincerity and deception is an "object of attack" by female protagonist, Millamant (Frye 1957, p. 224).

Millamant insists on being her own person and will not be told what to do by Mirabel. In the following exchange in act two, she knows that Mirabel is in love with her and clearly gains pleasure from torturing him emotionally. Here, the male support character's arrogance is what Frye refers to as "an object of attack" (Frye 1957, p. 224).

MILLAMANT: I'm pleased – for I believe I gave you some pain.

MIRABELL: Does that please you?

MILLAMANT: Infinitely; I love to give pain.

MIRABELL: You would affect a cruelty which is not in your nature; your true vanity is the power of pleasing.

MILLAMANT: one's cruelty is one's power, when one parts with one's cruelty, one parts with one's power: and when one has parted with that, I fancy one's old and ugly.”  
(Congreve 1988, p. 42).

In the passage above, Congreve is also attacking the fact that some men expect women to be demure and “pleasing.” He also ridicules and attacks women who are not true to themselves and have a “pleasing” nature in order to be loved. This is what Frye describes as “the sources and values of conventions themselves are objects of ridicule” (Frye 1957, p. 229). The values of Restoration and even some of contemporary society are that a woman should be demure and unthreatening in order to be liked. These conventions have been satirised and attacked by Congreve.

Millamant reprimands and attacks Mirabel for telling her what to do.

MILLAMANT: I shan't endure to be reprimanded nor instructed; 'tis so dull to act always by advice, and so tedious to be told of one's faults: I can't bear it. Well, I won't have you, Mirabell. I'm resolved – I think – you may go. Ha, ha, ha! What would you give, that you could help loving me?  
(Congreve 1988, p. 44)

Mirabel has had an affair with Mrs Fainall and she becomes pregnant as a consequence. He has acted like a cad for not marrying her. In addition, the majority of the female characters in the play are in love with him but he cares not for them in return. It only seems fitting therefore that the woman with whom he is truly in love with attacks him. The attitude that a male should be able to play the field without becoming emotionally involved is what Frye would describe as “an object of attack” by Congreve.

### **3. Congreve’s application of irony**

Frye claims that “satire is militant irony: its moral norms are relatively clear, and it assumes standards against which the grotesque and absurd are measured” (Frye 1957, p. 223). He argues that “satire is irony which is structurally close to the comic: the comic struggle of two societies, one normal and the other absurd, is reflected in its double focus of morality and fantasy.” Frye defines irony as “a technique of appearing to be less than one is, which in literature becomes most commonly a technique of saying as little and meaning as much as possible, or, in a more general way, a pattern of words that turns away from direct statement or its own obvious meaning” (Frye 1957, p. 40).

There is abundant comic irony in Restoration comedy. Gill argues that “In Congreve’s play (“The Double Dealer”) all characters equivocate. Some purposely make use of double meanings; others inadvertently evoke dual interpretations.” (Gill1994, p. 100)

Within the following exchange in act two, Mrs Fainall insinuates that Mrs Marwood is in love with Mirabell, but she does so with irony by not directly saying what she thinks. Instead, both female characters falsely declare their hatred for Mirabell.

MRS MARWOOD: Oh, then it seems you are one of his (Mirabell’s) favourable enemies. Methinks you look a little pale – and now you flush again.

Consider the irony in Mrs Fainall's corresponding dialogue below. The sight of her husband should fill her heart with joy but instead makes her sick.

MRS FAINALL: Do I? I think I am a little sick o' the sudden.

MRS MARWOOD: What ails you?

MRS FAINALL: My husband; don't you see him? He turned short upon me unawares and has almost overcome me.

(Congreve 1988, pp. 31-32)

The Concise Oxford Dictionary (1985) describes this ironic technique as an "ill-timed or perverse arrival of event or circumstance in itself desirable, as if in mockery of the fitness of things." Mrs Fainall is ironically sickened by the sudden arrival of her husband rather than overjoyed.

In the exchange following between Mr and Mrs Fainall, they ironically refer to each other as "My dear" and "My soul" (Congreve 1988, p. 32) but they clearly despise one another. This is yet another example of one Frye's principles of satire, being "irony which is structurally close to the comic" (Frye 1957, p. 224). The Fainalls may talk tenderly to one another but ironically they are in love with other people. It is also a perfect example of Frye's third phase satire where customary associations are broken down (Frye 1957, p. 235). Congreve shows us how ridiculous the artifices of a "well-bred" society are by comparing those who lie and are not true to themselves with the high ideals and honesty of the virtuous, Millamant. Hamilton argues that 'true comic irony or satire' is Frye's third phase: with irony most militant, it attacks society's common sense as norm for behaviour and even the use of sense experience as a guide" (Hamilton 1990, p. 150). This is displayed via the seemingly well-bred Restoration women above who are nonetheless guilty of conducting illicit extra-marital affairs. Congreve shows that they are not as well-bred as they would have society believe.



Congreve's female protagonist, Millamant, is an example of a character within Frye's phase three of satire who defines "the enemy of society as a spirit within that society" (Frye 1957, p. 47). This enemy of society described by Frye is often a character with a strong voice that may be perceived as a pillar of the community. Their beliefs nevertheless may hold back the "progress of society" (Frye 1957, p. 233). Congreve shows that his female protagonist, Millamant, is able to see through the artifices of the men who pursue her and the double standards of the female characters who try to bring her down. Millamant succeeds in ridiculing what Frye describes as her antagonists' *fossilized beliefs* and *pedantic dogmatisms* (Frye 1957, p. 233). Millamant's enemies may appear to be well-bred but ironically they lie and cheat. Frye describes satire as "irony which is structurally close to the comic: the comic struggle of two societies, one normal and the other absurd, is reflected in its double focus of morality and fantasy."

#### 4. Congreve's implicit moral standard

The fourth of Frye's six principles of satire is the satirist's implicit moral standard. Frye claims that satire requires "an implicit moral standard ... The satirist has to select his absurdities, and the act of selection is a moral act" (Frye 1957, p. 224). In order to choose an object of attack, the satirist must indeed rely on his/her moral standards to make the selection of what is grotesque or unjust. Frye argues that "The satirist commonly takes a high moral line" (Frye 1957, p. 225). Similarly, Highet argues that a work is not satire if it does not contain hatred based on a moral judgement together with a degree of amusement (Highet 1962, p. 150). Let us now see how Congreve displays his *moral standard* within the treatment of his female characters in *The Way of the World*.

Congreve shows his implicit moral standard in *The Way of the World*, by treating those characters who indulge in extramarital affairs and those who marry purely for money with disdain. He also shows his personal moral code by attacking those who are insincere or adopt false affectations to succeed in society. See "Object of attack by the satirist" above. Congreve, in fact, names one of his insincere characters "Fainall" as in "feigns all." This character is named after his false nature.

Within the proviso scene in act four, Congreve shows that the male support character expects the female protagonist to be honest and decent and not to be drawn into the scandal of protecting a friend's illicit affairs. In contrast, consider Lady Wishfort's conversation with Mrs Marwood in act three, "If that wheedling villain has wrought upon Foible to detect me, I'm ruined. Oh my dear friend, I'm a wretch of wretches if I'm detected" (Congreve 1988, p. 49). This is an example of Congreve displaying what Frye describes as "an implicit moral standard" (Frye 1957, p. 224) when "the exposure and humiliation of duplicitous women ... provides the fragile moral basis for the play's satire" (Gill 1994, p. 134). Congreve also exposes and satirises the double standards of gender in *The Way of the World*. Throughout the play, and indeed Restoration society, men are as guilty as women of conducting extramarital affairs. Congreve displays Frye's principle of an *implicit moral standard* by showing that it is unjust for unfaithful women to be judged much more harshly than unfaithful men.

The author, Congreve, also displays his moral code by subtly pointing out the harm of insincerity. Congreve describes and satirises a deceitful character, named Petulant, in the following dialogue between Petulant to Mirabell.

WITWOULD: Truths! Ha, ha, ha! ... he never speaks the truth at all ... He will lie like a chambermaid ... Now that's a fault.

(Congreve 1988, p. 22)

Literary theorist, Rosenheim, argues that satire can be effective in exposing evils. To select what is considered *evil*, a satirist must again draw on his moral beliefs which then give a moral purpose to the satire (Rosenheim 1963, p. 307). Within the above dialogue, Congreve displays his moral beliefs in his derision of those who are false.

In addition, in act two, page 31, Mrs Marwood and Mrs Fainall both speak of their hatred of Mirabel when it is clear that they are both in love with him. These insincere characters are drawn by Congreve to contrast with his heroine, Millamant, whose natural inclination is to speak with

truth and sincerity. By mocking these disingenuous characters, Congreve once again shows his implicit *moral standard*.

Consider the scheming Lady Wishfort in act three altering her image. She sits at her dresser with her chambermaid and aggressively demands:

LADY WISHFORT: Fetch me the red – the red do you hear sweetheart! An arrant ash colour, ... Complexion, darling. Paint, paint, paint!”

(Congreve 1988, p. 48)

Once again, Congreve has drawn this vulgar character in contrast to Millamant’s natural beauty. Congreve is displaying his *moral standard* in suggesting that it is improper for a woman to cover the truth of her appearance. Similarly, I will contrast my female protagonist with a character who believes it is more important to adhere to her beauty regimen than look after her children. Theatre historian, Pat Gill, in *Interpreting Ladies: Women, Wit and Morality in the Restoration*, looks at morals and compares corrupt women characters with the heroine in the Restoration Comedies of Etherege, Wycherley, Congreve and Behn. According to Gill, “Corrupt women seem especially dangerous because they are hybrids – an innocent façade concealing illicit knowledge within (Gill 1994, p. 14). Gill argues that Restoration comedy’s “heroine’s role as formal and moral counterpoint to the rest of the female population serves as a locus ... for the play’s tenuous moral underpinning” (Gill 1994, p. 14). The heroine’s role is to highlight the author’s moral code when surrounding her are female characters with questionable beliefs and actions. Gill asserts that “Female characters perform oppositional functions in the satiric comedy of this era: the villainous ones personify the decadent hypocrisy that simultaneously endangers and is part of the status quo, while the heroines offer the promise of renewal” (Gill 1994, p. 15). Supporting female characters represent what Frye describes as the “fossilized beliefs” and “pedantic dogmatisms” of society (Frye 1957, p. 233). The hero, Millamant, with her modern view on the importance of equality in marriage, represents a positive future for women.

## 5. Congreve's reduction or degradation of character or belief system

The fifth of Frye's six principles of satire is the satirist's reduction or degradation of an unjust person or incorrect belief system. Literary theorist, Hodgart, describes this technique of satire as the "degradation or devaluation of the victim by reducing his stature and dignity" (Hodgart 1969 p. 115).

In *The Way of the World*, Congreve is able to reduce the arrogance and ego of his male support when his female protagonist, Millamant, in act two asserts that she can just as easily find another lover if her current one displeases her.

MILLAMANT: Why, one makes lovers as fast as one pleases, and they live as long as one pleases, and they die as soon as one pleases: and then if one pleases one makes more. (Congreve 1988, p. 42)

During the proviso scene in act four of *The Way of the World*, Millamant bargains with Mirabell for her "individual liberty and independence" (Young 1997, p. 223) within their future marriage. During this scene, Congreve is able to reduce and degrade those in society who are hypocritical. He is also able to degrade the belief that a woman in marriage is subservient to her husband. Consider the dialogue of female protagonist, Millamant, below:

MILLAMANT: Oh, I hate a lover that can dare to think he draws a moment's air independent on the bounty of his mistress. There is not so impudent a thing in nature as the saucy look of an assured man confident of success. The pedantic arrogance of a very husband has not so pragmatical an air. (Congreve 1988, p. 77)

Millamant announces here that it is impertinent and arrogant for Mirabell to assume that he has already won her. This is an example of Frye's completion of the "*reductio ad absurdum*, which is not designed to hold one in perpetual captivity, but to bring one to the point at which one can

escape from an incorrect procedure” (Frye 1957, p. 233). Congreve ensures that his female protagonist will not be held captive by the arrogance of her male support character. Congreve refuses to allow her to be subservient to her future husband. He also ensures that her intellectual and social freedom will not be restricted by her husband or by the bonds of marriage (Young 1997, p. 224).

MILLAMANT: Ah! I’ll never marry, unless I am first made sure of my will and pleasure.

(Congreve 1988, p. 77)

Consider also the humiliation of Mrs Fainall in act five once her husband, Fainall, discovers her affair with Mirabell.

FAINALL: I will not leave the wherewithal to hide thy shame. Your body shall be naked as your reputation.

(Congreve 1988, p. 110)

Congreve humiliates Mrs Fainall as she has previously had an affair with Mirabell and has deceitfully married Mr Fainall to save her reputation. Mr Fainall is also degraded when it is discovered that he has foolishly married a woman pregnant with another man’s child. In the previous chapter, I described how Frye would refer to Mr Fainall as an *Omphale Archetype* as he is bullied and *degraded* by a woman (Frye 1957, p. 228).

## **6. Congreve’s application of a token fantasy which the reader can recognise as grotesque or absurd**

The last of Frye’s six principles of satire is the satirist’s application of a token fantasy which the reader can recognise as grotesque or absurd. By “fantasy”, Frye argues that “Satire demands at least a token fantasy, a content which the reader recognizes as grotesque” (Frye 1957, p. 224). According to Frye, there must be an element of fiction, recognised as absurd for satire to exist.

Rosenheim expands upon Frye's theories by asserting that the writer needs to focus on a particular historical identity as well as a satiric *fiction* or *fantasy*. He claims that the satiric is lost when the object of attack by the author is entirely imaginary or when it cannot be assigned specific historical identity.

Congreve introduces us to his *grotesque or absurd* (Frye 1957, p. 224) supporting women as a counterpoint to the integrity of his heroines. The grotesque female characters, Mrs Marwood and Lady Wishfort, in "The Way of the World" are "tarnished within as they are polished without" (Kronenberger 1952, p. 137). On the surface, these female characters are civilised and refined, however, behind closed doors, they are deceiving and adulterous.

In *The Way of the World*, Congreve compares the virtuous Millamant with the grotesque supporting women, most of whom are having extramarital and illicit affairs. He satirises these female characters' lack of morals. For instance, Mrs Fainall only marries Mr Fainall for appearances, to cover up her accidental pregnancy to Mirabell. On the surface, in act two, the Fainalls may refer to each other affectionately as "My Dear" and "My soul" (Congreve 1988, p. 32) but it is clear that their marriage is a disaster, with Mrs Fainall still clearly in love with Mirabell and Mr Fainall in love with Mrs Marwood. Congreve includes these characters so an audience will compare them with his heroines and pass judgement. According to Gill, "For heroines, other women are the enemy, and their social demise serves as the basis for the heroines' elevated status" (Gill 1994, p. 123).

In addition, consider the *grotesque* and scheming Lady Wishfort in act three with an over made-up face like "an old peeled wall" (Congreve 1988, p. 53). She is a direct contrast to the natural beauty of the heroine, Millamant. Similarly, I will include female characters within my screenplay who unlike my female protagonist, will rely on their appearance rather than their intellect and good nature in order to be loved.

As per Frye's theory, there is an element of the fictional amongst Congreve's immoral female characters. Their dialogue and actions, while humorous, is somewhat exaggerated and removed

from reality. As per Rosenheim's theory, however, these female characters have an element of the "historically authentic" (Rosenheim 1963, p. 318). An audience may be able to recognise these female characters as a certain type of immoral woman, albeit their nature is somewhat exaggerated by Congreve.

## **Summary**

Within this chapter I have observed and analysed Frye's six principles of satire in the treatment of female protagonists in Congreve's comedy, *The Way of the World*. I have also discussed how Young and other theorists describe and analyse the role of female characters in Congreve's Restoration comedies.

We have observed Frye's six principles of satire in order to interpret the satire used by Congreve in his theatrical play, *The Way of the World*. These have included:

1. *The satirist's use of wit or humour*: Congreve's female protagonists are able to match their wit and wisdom with the men who pursue them. For instance in *The Way of the World*, the female protagonist, Millamant, can match her male support character's arrogance with pure wit. Congreve's heroines rely on what Frye describes as "observation and timing rather than on aggressiveness" (Frye 1957, p. 226). Congreve has shown that his female protagonist understands the codes of conventional life and is able to use wit or humour rather than aggression within her dialogue and actions. Congreve has written the female protagonist in *The Way of the World* as a woman who knows her mind and is not afraid to speak it. Frye argues that attack without humour forms one of the boundaries of satire (Frye 1957, p. 224). Congreve's heroines successfully use their wit to tame their gallants into submission rather than purely attacking them.

2. *The satirist's focus upon an object of attack*: Congreve attacks many of society's hypocrisies. In *The Way of the World* he attacks hypocritical characters who indulge in extramarital affairs and also those who marry purely for money. In addition, the author attacks people who adopt false affectations to succeed in society.

3. *The satirist's application of irony:* There is much comic irony in Congreve's Restoration comedies. According to Gill, some characters purposely make use of double meanings and others unintentionally evoking dual meaning. The author, Congreve, uses irony when his characters do not directly say what they think. We have also discussed how Congreve shows us how the artifices of a "well-bred" society are ridiculous. He does this by comparing those who lie and are not true to themselves with the high ideals and honesty of his virtuous female protagonist.

4. *The satirist's implicit moral standard:* In *The Way of the World*, Congreve shows what Frye describes as the satirist's moral standard, by treating those who indulge in extramarital affairs and those who marry purely for money with disdain. He also shows his moral standard when he compares these corrupt characters with his virtuous female protagonist. In addition, Congreve shows his personal moral code by attacking those who are insincere or adopt false affectations in order to succeed.

5. *The satirist's reduction or degradation of character or belief system:* During the proviso scene in *The Way of the World*, Congreve humiliates and degrades characters he thinks are hypocritical, insincere, vain and egocentric. Congreve also belittles the attitude that a woman is subservient to her husband. There are examples in Restoration comedy of what Frye refers to as *Omphale Archetypes* whereby a male character is bullied and *degraded* by a woman, in particular, when his wife has an extramarital affair.

6. *The satirist's application of a token fantasy which the reader can recognize as grotesque or absurd:* Congreve's grotesque female characters are used as a counterpoint to the integrity of his heroines. There is an element of the fictional amongst Congreve's immoral supporting women. Their dialogue and actions, while humorous, are somewhat exaggerated, farcical and removed from reality.



According to Young, the point of view of Congreve is that his female protagonists should have the same measure of freedom and equality as men in the social world as well as within the marital relationship. In *The Way of the World*, the female protagonist, Millamant, seeks liberty and independence in matrimony but is also wise enough to recognise the need for mutual respect for her partner (Young 1997, p. 225). This is an understanding of true equality. Millamant appreciates that devotion and understanding cannot be one-sided. If she demands respect and freedom from Mirabell then she must also respect his needs and desires within their relationship.

Congreve's view of feminine independence is of direct relevance to my project. According to Young, the female characters in Congreve's plays must prove themselves equal in the marital relationship and within society. The female protagonist in my screenplay project must also battle for equality within her marriage. She must also re-establish her professional role to fit in with motherhood but still be rewarding and worthy of her talents.

Within the next chapter, I intend to observe Frye's principles of satire at work in a more contemporary case study, the feature film screenplay, *Something's Gotta Give*. Using Frye's key terms, I will analyse how screenwriter, Nancy Meyers, has applied satire to her female protagonist and examine whether there are generic similarities between the protagonist in *Something's Gotta Give* and the protagonists in Congreve's Restoration comedies.

## **Chapter 4**

### **How may we observe Frye's six principles of satire in the writing techniques employed by Nancy Meyers in the case study screenplay, *Something's Gotta Give*?**

#### **Introduction**

In the previous chapter, we observed Frye's six principles of satire in the treatment of female protagonists in William Congreve's theatrical comedy, *The Way of the World*. We also examined and discussed aspects of creating strong comedic roles for women in performance. Let us now observe Frye's six principles of satire at work in my case study, the feature film, *Something's Gotta Give*. Using Frye's key terms, I will analyse how screenwriter, Nancy Meyers, has applied satire to her female protagonist and compare the generic similarities between the protagonist in *Something's Gotta Give* and the protagonists in Congreve's Restoration comedies.

Nancy Meyers has written over ten screenplays in the United States, including *Private Benjamin* (1980), *Irreconcilable Differences* (1984), *Protocol* (1984), *Baby Boom* (1987), *Father of the Bride* (1991), *The Parent Trap* (1998), *Something's Gotta Give* (2003) and *The Holiday* (2006). In *Something's Gotta Give*, Meyers has written a satirical romantic comedy which is the same genre I intend to use for my screenplay project. *Something's Gotta Give* deals with a number of themes relating to women. Some of these themes include: Society has double standards relating to single older men and older women; An older, single and successful man is considered a real catch whereas an older, single and successful woman is referred to as the derogatory term, "spinster;" Older men are threatened by rather than attracted to this type of woman; Although love may hurt, it is worth opening your heart to; Physical intimacy without commitment leads to emotional pain; Women and men both fear ageing.

### ***Something's Gotta Give – Synopsis***

*Something's Gotta Give* is a satirical romantic comedy feature film written by Nancy Meyers and set in 2002 in the Hamptons, a wealthy east coast American seaside resort, as well as in New York City. The set-up in act one of the screenplay sees Harry Sanborn, a 63 year old playboy and hip-hop label owner and his young girlfriend, Marin Barry (late 20's), drive to her mother's Hamptons beach house for a weekend fling. Marin's mother, successful playwright and female protagonist, Erica Barry and her sister Zoe, a lecturer in Women's Studies, surprises Harry and Marin with their unexpected arrival at the beach house. Dramatic conflict arises when Erica believes that Harry is a burglar and dials 911, only to discover worse news – this elderly man is dating her daughter. Harry, feeling incredibly uncomfortable in the presence of these formidable women, is motivated to drive back to the city, however, Zoe and Marin convince him to stay.

Erica glimpses her future at an East Hampton gourmet market when she sees other older men with younger women contrasted with two sad-looking elderly sisters. Later that evening, dinner is an awkward affair with Erica outwardly judging Harry's inability to settle down. Zoe makes matters worse when she announces how society is geared against older women. According to Zoe, Harry as an older man is applauded for never marrying and is considered "a real catch." On the other hand, over 50 divorcée, Erica, is highly accomplished, interesting and productive and, therefore, considered less than desirable to older men who are threatened by her. The night becomes even more disastrous when, during the inciting incident, Harry has a heart attack during foreplay with Marin, receives mouth-to-mouth resuscitation from Erica and is rushed to a hospital.

The author, Meyers, encourages the audience to question Harry's virility when Julian Mercer, a handsome 30-something young doctor, forces Harry to admit he has taken Viagra. After a day and a half in hospital and still unable to walk without passing out, Julian orders Harry to stay nearby for a few days until he regains his strength. Erica's problem is established when she reluctantly allows Harry to stay with her at her Hampton's home, while Marin returns to the city. Erica is resentful that her calm writing solace has been interrupted by Harry and his hip-hop lifestyle. Her dignified composure unravels further when Harry accidentally sees her naked.

Erica is asked on a date by Harry's doctor, Julian, who is 20 years her junior. The screenwriter, Meyers, has constructed this relationship in direct contrast to male antagonist, Harry's relationship with a younger woman, Erica's daughter, Marin. Meyers reveals Erica's and Harry's backstory and character psychology as they begin to open up and start liking each other. Marin breaks up with Harry after she admits that he is too old for her and instead would be perfect for her mother. Erica and Harry continue to spend time together. The act one turning point shows their relationship develop emotionally and physically. Harry's health improves, he and Erica reluctantly say farewell and he heads home.

In act two, Erica receives an emotional phone-call from Marin with news that her father, Erica's ex-husband and theatre director, Dave, is getting remarried. Erica is pressured by Marin to join her, Dave and his fiancée for dinner. Erica is crushed to see Harry with another woman at the restaurant. Harry tries to convince Erica that the woman is just a friend. Dramatic conflict ensues between Harry and Erica and he suffers from what he believes is another heart attack. He is rushed to the hospital and is told that it is only a panic attack but he must rest. Harry goes home, feeling his age. The mid-point of the screenplay shows Erica back home breaking down in tears. She is motivated by her heartbreak into writing a play based upon her experience with Harry. Erica tells Marin that although love hurts it is still worth opening your heart to.

Erica is pursued romantically by Julian and they begin to start seeing each other. While at lunch with an actress friend, Harry discovers that a new play that she is auditioning for is about him and Erica. At the act two turning point, Harry attends the rehearsal of Erica's play and confronts her. Erica tells Harry that she would like to remain friends with him. Harry, on the other hand, cannot be friends with someone with whom he has previously had sex. Erica tells Harry that she is doing fine without him. Harry is rushed to hospital suffering from another panic attack and the doctor orders him to de-stress his life.

Act three sees us six months later. Harry visits Marin, who is now married and 3 months pregnant. Marin tells Harry that Erica is holidaying in Paris. The climax of the screenplay sees Harry showing up to the Parisian restaurant where Erica is eating because of an agreement they made earlier, that they should spend their birthday together in Paris. Harry is surprised when

Erica's boyfriend, Julian, interrupts, carrying a birthday gift for Erica. The gift appears to be jewellery, possibly a ring, however, Erica says she will open it later. Julian is sobered by the chemistry Erica and Harry share but Harry realises it is too late for him and Erica.

Alone, Harry gazes over the Pont Neuf at the Seine, feeling broken hearted. Suddenly, Erica pulls up in a taxi. She explains that Julian made her see that she was still in love with Harry. Harry ecstatically declares his love for Erica and they share a passionate kiss. The resolution, one year later, is played out at a New York restaurant. Erica and Harry arrive with Marin and her new husband, Danny, with Harry a reformed man, proudly holding Marin's one year old daughter.

Let us now observe and analyse Frye's six principles of satire in the feature screenplay, *Something's Gotta Give*.

### **1. Meyers' use of wit or humour**

Frye argues that "wit or humour" together with an "object of attack" is essential to the satirist's method (Frye 1957, p. 224). He also argues that if invective is used without a flourish of wit, it can become vulgar name-calling (Frye 1957, p. 224). Similarly, David Worcester argues that for satire to be effective, the attack must be restrained (Worcester 1940, p. 13). In examining Meyers' script, we may see how she conforms to Frye's theory. She has written her female protagonist, Erica, as one who is extremely witty and not afraid to speak her mind. Meyers has ensured that the female protagonist, Erica, attacks her male support, Harry, in a restrained way. For instance, in act one, on page 15, dramatic conflict is shown when Erica describes Harry's genre of hip-hop music as "violent and crude ... not to mention just a tad misogynistic" (Meyers 2002, p. 15). After Harry replies that "a lot of people see rapping as poetry" Erica is able to restrain her attack when she wittily replies, "Yeah, but come on, how many words can you rhyme with 'Bitch'?"

The author also ensures that Erica is able to wittily attack Harry when he is being shallow. For instance, in act two, on page 86, Harry is unable to commit to saying "I love you," and instead

delivers a paltry “I love ya.” Erica responds by saying, “... I don’t know if it ends in ‘ya’ if it’s an official I love you.” Later, on page 110, the author maintains that Erica is able to once again attack the fact that Harry does not know how to commit. She makes her male support, Harry, “the laughing stock of Broadway” when Erica’s stage manager asks in front of Harry, “when Henry says, “I love ya”, you want it to be ‘Ya’, not ‘You’, right?”

The playwright, Congreve, in *The Way of the World* also ensures that his female protagonist, Millamant, seeks permanence in her relationship with her male support, Mirabell. Both Meyers and Congreve have given their heroines the use of wit and humour as they insist that their male supports cease their womanising ways and commit to them fully. Meyers is able to attack injustice within her male characters by using wit and humour.

Meyers has shown her female protagonist to be smart and genuine by contrasting her with a male protagonist who is often shallow and flippant. Similarly, Congreve’s female protagonist does not suffer fools gladly and is able to dismiss those who are insincere with a sharp tongue.

Within Chapter 1, we discussed how the “purpose of satire is, through laughter and invective, to cure folly and punish evil; but if it does not achieve this purpose, it is content to jeer at folly and expose evil to bitter contempt” (Highet 1962, p. 156). Both Meyers and Congreve have used Frye’s principle of “wit or humour” to hold injustices towards women up for judgement by an audience. Similarly, within my screenplay project, I also intend to use wit or humour within my arguments relating to double standards for working mothers.

## **2. Meyers’ focus upon an object of attack**

We have just described Frye’s first principle of satire, being “wit or humour,” within the writing techniques used by Nancy Meyers in the screenplay, *Something’s Gotta Give*. Let us now observe Frye’s second principle of satire, “an object of attack,” within Meyers’ female characters (Frye 1957, p. 224).

Meyers ensures that male antagonist, Harry, gives female protagonist, Erica, much fuel to attack him. Meyers has constructed the character psychology of Harry as a womaniser who has never been married. In the set-up to the screenplay in act one, Harry dates Erica's daughter, Marin. It is clear that he does not want commitment and is motivated by the thrill of dating younger women. In addition, Harry cannot seem to go past the physical attributes of the intelligent women he dates. For instance, Harry was once engaged to the much respected journalist, Diane Sawyer, who he describes in act one as "just this adorable lanky girl from Kentucky with the greatest pair of legs I'd ever seen... Never understood her ending up with a job where she never showed them." (Meyer 2002, p. 18). Erica, who finds Harry's attitude incredibly degrading to women, attacks him, replying on page 18, "You're not serious? She's Diane Sawyer, she goes into caves in Afghanistan with a shmahtah on her head. Who cares about her legs?" Later, on page 21, Meyers again attacks Harry's ideals when Erica asks her daughter, Marin, "... what are you doing with this guy? He's old, he's chauvinistic ... What does that mean he owns ten different companies? He can't commit, that's what that means." The writer attacks the chauvinistic attitude of Harry within Erica's above speech. She attacks him for being chauvinistic, too old for Marin and the fact that he cannot commit to marriage.

Later, during Harry and Erica's romantic walk on the beach in act one, on page 55, Erica asks Harry why he likes to date young girls. His response is, "I just like to travel light" to which Erica replies, "If that's what you want... a non threatening woman, who won't get your number, you get to run the show..." Here, Meyers attacks Harry for choosing to date younger women so that he can have power over them. Within the previous chapter we discussed how Congreve's heroines also reject the traditional view of women as subordinate and inferior to men, endorsing instead a relationship based upon the freedom and equality of both sexes (Young 1994, p. 251).

Erica's problem with Harry is reinforced in act one, on pages 43-45. Meyers shows Erica attacked by Harry for being uptight and wearing turtlenecks in the middle of summer. He also insinuates that she doesn't like to let loose. This shows how, in satire, no-one is immune from being satirised. Frye claims that within first phase satire, "conventional life" is recommended with an avoidance of "compulsive behaviour" (Frye, 1957 p. 226). Meyers conforms to Frye's

theories by satirising the “compulsive behaviour” of her female protagonist in being so anxious and covering herself up with inappropriate clothing.

Within the third act, Harry visits a number of his former lovers to ascertain where he went wrong. Meyers subsequently reveals more of Harry’s backstory when he is attacked by generations of women that he has previously wronged. He learns that a conventional life of monogamy is preferable to being hated. Harry subsequently decides to give up on his “compulsive” dating and settle down with Erica. This coincides with Frye’s phase 1 satire which stresses that “conventional life is recommended with a sense of pragmatism and avoidance of illusion and compulsive behaviour” (Frye 1957, p. 226).

We have previously discussed Frye’s argument that if invective is used without a flourish of wit, it can become vulgar name-calling (Frye (1957 p. 224). Similarly, we have examined Worcester’s theory that for satire to be effective, the attack must be restrained (Worcester 1940, p. 13). Meyers applies Frye’s and Worcester’s theories when her female protagonist, Erica, finds a way to humiliate Harry and attack him in a restrained way through her play, rather than attack him to his face for hurting her on page 109.

ERICA

A guy like you is in it but he's  
not you.

HARRY

What happens to this guy who's  
..not me?

ERICA

Haven't totally decided. He can  
live or he can die.

HARRY

What are you leaning towards?



ERICA  
Death.  
(Harry reacts)  
It's funnier.

HARRY  
He dies of a funny heart attack?

Rather than attack Harry to his face, Erica is able to restrain her attack by killing off a character “like” Harry in her play.

Within the previous chapter we discussed how Congreve attacks many of society’s hypocrisies. In *The Way of the World*, he attacks hypocritical characters and also attacks those who adopt false affectations in order to succeed. In *Something’s Gotta Give*, Meyers also attacks those who are insincere and unjust in their attitudes towards women. Within my screenplay project, I will also attack the unfair attitudes of those who believe that a woman should give up on her career in order to raise a family. Let us now look at Frye’s third principle of satire, the application of irony.

### **3. Meyers’ application of irony**

Frye defines irony as “a technique of appearing to be less than one is, which in literature becomes most commonly a technique of saying as little and meaning as much as possible, or, in a more general way, a pattern of words that turns away from direct statement or its own obvious meaning” (Frye 1957, p. 40). Irony is also defined in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* (1985) as an “ill-timed or perverse arrival of event or circumstance in itself desirable, as if in mockery of the fitness of things.” We have already seen in the previous chapter how Congreve uses irony when some of his characters purposely make use of double meanings and others unintentionally evoking dual meaning (Gill 1994, p. 100). Let us now discuss how the writer, Meyers, has applied irony to her screenplay, *Something’s Gotta Give*.

Comic irony is displayed on page 27 when Harry is rushed to hospital, and is forced to confront his age and mortality.

JULIAN

Your Dad's gonna be okay.

MARIN

Oh, he's not my Dad...

JULIAN

I'm sorry.

(then)

Your Grandad's gonna be okay.

Meyers has used what Frye describes as “a technique of saying as little and meaning as much as possible, or, in a more general way, a pattern of words that turns away from direct statement or its own obvious meaning” (Frye 1957, p. 40). Meyers is avoiding the obvious fact that Harry is too old for Marin but she is ironically and subtly stating this fact when the character of Dr Julian mistakes Harry for Marin’s grandfather.

In act one, on page 35, “irony which is structurally close to the comic” (Frye 1957, p. 224) is also shown when Harry looks forward to eventually having sex with Marin but after his heart attack she has other ideas, merely kissing him on the cheek. The irony is that while Harry still sees himself as a potential suitor for Marin, she now perceives him as an old man. Once again, Meyers has avoided direct statement but ironically shows that Marin’s physical response towards Harry has changed. Rather than jump on top of Harry as we saw earlier at the Hampton’s home, Marin now kisses him as she would her father, on the cheek.

Meyers shows irony within the dramatic conflict on pages 36-37 when Harry is forced to live with Erica, who he despises. It is ironic then that these two people who appear to be the enemy and the antithesis of what each other are looking for, end up falling madly in love. This also

coincides with Concise Oxford Dictionary's (1985) definition of irony as an "ill-timed or perverse arrival of event or circumstance."

Later, in act two, on page 56, Meyers has Erica dating the much younger doctor, Julian. Meyers is then able to show Harry giving Erica her words back to her ironically replying, "Anyway, you may like it. Think of it this way -- he's not threatening, won't get your number, you get to run the show. You might have a hell of a time." This is ironic as Harry is avoiding saying that Erica is being a hypocrite who chastises him for dating younger women while she herself dates a much younger man. Later, on the date with Julian, on page 59, Meyers shows the irony of Erica "blushing for the first time in twenty-five years." Erica says, "It's like a thousand degrees in here" while "fanning herself with the menu." Meyers shows Erica "appearing to be less than one is" (Frye 1957, p. 40). The irony is that earlier, on page 43, Erica tells Harry that she never gets hot.

On page 66, Marin interrupts Harry and Erica's pyjama party saying, "Oh, this is too sweet. You're making pancakes? Awwww. And you're both in your pj's. Now I feel I'm interrupting." The irony is that usually it is a parent who interrupts a young couple but it is, in fact, Marin and Harry who are dating. It is also ironic that Marin brings old people's food, matzoh ball soup for Harry and raisin-bread for Erica, but a bottle of vodka for herself. Meyers ironically "turns away from direct statement or its own obvious meaning" (Frye 1957, p. 40) by subtly stressing the inappropriateness of Marin and Harry's relationship and the suitability of Erica and Harry's liaison.

At the act one turning point, on page 74, when Erica takes Harry's blood pressure before they have sex, there is also a sense of irony. Meyers avoids the "direct statement" (Frye 1957, p. 40) that Harry is an old man and the last time he planned on having sex, at the inciting incident, he suffered a heart attack. Meyers also ironically shows that Harry, who Erica's sister, Zoe, describes as "a real catch" (Meyers 2002, p. 19) cannot even climb a flight of stairs after his heart attack, let alone chase after younger women. This coincides with Frye's phase one of satire where despite the humour within this scene there is a "sense of nightmare and demonic" (Frye 1957, p. 226). Meyers shows irony in the fact that womaniser Harry, suffers from a heart attack. This aligns with The

Concise Oxford Dictionary's (1985) definition of irony. Harry's heart attack may be described as an "ill-timed or perverse arrival of event or circumstance."

The irony continues, on page 75, after Erica and Harry make love for the first time. Erica, who thought she was "sorta closed for business" actually discovers in an overwhelming revelation, "Oh my God. I do like sex." Meyers makes it clear within her female protagonist's backstory that Erica has previously turned away from getting close to someone and expressing her sexy side but ironically she enjoys it. Frye would describe the irony of this situation as Erica appearing to be less than she is (Frye 1957, p. 40). There is also a humorous irony to the fact that Erica and Harry usually cannot sleep but after an intense physical and emotional connection together, on page 80, they sleep together for 8 hours straight. Frye would describe this technique of Meyers as saying as little and meaning as much as possible (Frye 1957, p. 40). Meyers uses irony in this scene, avoiding saying that Erica and Harry are so miserable alone that they cannot sleep but together, and in love, they sleep for a full eight hours.

Meyers' use of irony continues when Harry and Erica have differing feelings about their sexual encounter.

Flattered, Erica snuggles up close. Harry puts his arm around her. Then, with no warning, his eyes fill with tears.

HARRY

This is crazy. I can't remember the  
Last time I cried. I think I'm  
overwhelmed.

ERICA

(crying with him)  
Me too. That's the perfect word.

HARRY

Baby, I had sex three days after a  
Heart attack and I didn't die!

Erica pauses. Oh. That kind of overwhelmed.

The above dialogue ironically shows the difference in attitudes of the sexes. As per Frye's dictum, Meyers avoids direct statement. The female is "overwhelmed" with emotion. The male, on the other hand, is "overwhelmed" with his sexual prowess and the fact that miraculously he had sex without dying shortly after sustaining a heart attack.

Harry tells Erica before the mid-point, on page 95, "I have never lied to you. I have always told you some version of the truth" to which Erica replies, "The truth doesn't have versions." Meyers has Erica use Harry's line back on him, on page 110, when she tells him ironically that the character in her play is "not you. He's just a version of the truth of you. So to speak." Here, Meyers shows Erica ironically adopting Harry's point of view for the purpose of ridicule. The use of irony also avoids the direct statement of stating how insincere Harry's words to Erica were.

It is clear that Meyers uses irony in abundance within *Something's Gotta Give*. She shows female protagonist, Erica, and male support, Harry, appearing to be less than they are (Frye 1957, p. 40). Meyers has ironically drawn Harry as believing he could be happy dating numerous younger, carefree women until he meets the mature and desirable Erica. Meyers also ironically shows that the female protagonist, Erica, believes she could be happy alone and sober until she meets a fun-loving, Harry. Erica, at face value, stereotypes Harry as "chauvinistic" (Meyers 2002, p. 21) as he owns a hip-hop label. She assumes that because hip hop is "a tad misogynistic" (Meyers 2002, p. 15) then Harry must be too. In addition, Erica assumes that because Harry has lots of girlfriends, he is shallow. It is ironic, however, that after Erica spends some time with Harry, she discovers that "He's soulful when you don't expect it" (Meyers 2002, p. 68). Likewise, Harry assumes that because Erica wears skin covering turtlenecks and is disapproving of his womanising, then she must be frigid. After their first sexual encounter together, within the act one turning point, on page 75, Harry ironically discovers otherwise.

At the mid-point, Meyers moves the plot from satire into the tragic. Here we see “The fall of the tragic hero” (Frye 1957, p. 236). It is ironic that Erica and Harry fall dramatically from tough and independent to “needy” (Meyers 2002, p. 102). This is ironic as Meyers avoids stating that Harry and Erica need each other despite their beliefs that they are happy single. Harry suffers from one anxiety attack after another until he decides to sell the majority of his business interests. He retraces his steps by visiting all the women he has dated to discover how he “got so screwed up” (Meyers 2002, p. 121).

The overriding irony in Meyers’ screenplay is that the actor, Jack Nicholson, a serial dater of younger women, is playing the part of Harry. Meyers avoids saying that Nicholson himself is a womaniser, however, an audience in the know will understand Meyers’ “own obvious meaning” (Frye 1957, p. 40).

Both Meyers and Congreve show irony when their characters avoid direct statement and either purposely or unintentionally evoke dual meaning (Gill 1994, p. 100). Meyers also uses irony in the plot of *Something’s Gotta Give* when her characters fears become reality and they become what they are trying to avoid. Both characters believe they can be happy if they remain unattached. When Erica and Harry fall in love, however, their “compulsive” desire for remaining single cannot remain (Frye, 1957 p. 226). I intend to show similar irony within my screenplay through the dual meaning of my characters’ dialogue and also within the plot. As Frye would describe within his second phase satire, “experience is bigger than any set of beliefs about it” (Frye 1957, p. 229). There may be irony in the fact that life experience for my characters will be more valuable than their theoretical beliefs. Real life experience for my characters will outweigh their idealism about life.

#### **4. Meyers’ implicit moral standard**

The fourth of Frye’s six principles of satire is the satirist’s implicit moral standard. Frye claims that satire requires “an implicit moral standard ... The satirist has to select his absurdities, and the

act of selection is a moral act” (Frye 1957, p. 224). In order to choose an object of attack, the satirist must rely on his/her moral standards to make the selection of what is grotesque or unjust. We have previously discussed how Congreve shows his *moral standard* in *The Way of the World* when “the exposure and humiliation of duplicitous women ... provides the fragile moral basis for the play’s satire” (Gill 1994, p. 134). The deceitful female characters of Mrs Fainall and her mother, Lady Wishfort, are exposed by Congreve to be held up and judged in contrast to the sincerity and virtue of his female protagonist, Millamant. Let us now discuss how the writer, Meyers has applied her moral standard to her screenplay, *Something’s Gotta Give*.

Meyers shows her *moral standard* in Erica’s judgment of Harry when the character announces in the first act, on page 15, that rap music, which is Harry’s livelihood, is “sort of violent and crude for my taste, not to mention just a tad misogynistic.” Meyers also displays her *moral standards* when, on page 19, the character Zoe, Erica’s feminist academic sister, derides society’s belief that a single, older, successful man is “a real catch” whereas an unmarried woman is known as “an old maid, a spinster.” Meyers continues on page 20 with an example of her *moral standards*, with Zoe describing the injustice of older men finding older women who are productive and interesting less desirable than younger women.

Meyers again shows her *moral standard* within the inciting incident in act one when the “chauvinist older guy” (Meyers 2002, p. 108) is punished with a heart attack for fooling around with a younger girl. In addition, Meyers shows her moral standard when Erica explains to Harry on page 109 why she kills the character based upon him in her play. “He’s sort of a schmuck who screwed around with our heroine, so it won’t be too sad.” This dialogue shows Meyers moral belief that it is not fine for a man to have physical relations with a woman without any lasting commitment. Let us now see which techniques the writer may use to degrade attitudes of characters who she believes are morally unjust.

## 5. Meyers' reduction or degradation of character or belief system

The fifth of Frye's six principles of satire is the satirist's reduction or degradation of an unjust person or incorrect belief system. Literary theorist, Hodgart, describes this technique of satire as the "degradation or devaluation of the victim by reducing his stature and dignity" (Hodgart 1969 p. 115). We have seen how Congreve uses his moral standard to expose and degrade his deceitful characters. Let us now examine how Meyers uses this technique within her screenplay, *Something's Gotta Give*.

In act one, when Erica and her sister, Zoe, discover Harry half naked in Erica's kitchen and mistakenly believe him to be an intruder, dramatic conflict ensues when Erica threatens Harry with a knife and claims that Zoe was in the Israeli army and "can break you in half" (Meyers 2002, p. 9). This scene is an example of what Frye describes as the "Omphale Archetype", whereby the man is "bullied or dominated by women" (Frye 1957, p. 228). In this scene, Meyers has totally emasculated Harry, even dressing him in boxer shorts as he is dominated by the characters of Erica and Zoe. We may observe another example of an "Omphale Archetype" on pages 31 and 32 of *Something's Gotta Give*, when Harry "stumbles into the corridor in his Hospital Gown, pretty out of it ... Confused ... a little lost, giving the Women a FULL VIEW OF HIS BARE ASS." In this scene, Harry is degraded and emasculated, dressed in a hospital gown, almost a feminine garment. This is much like the Greek myth of Hercules, who served Omphale and may have been humiliated by wearing women's garments (<http://ancienthistory.about.com/od/herculespeople/g/Omphale.htm>).

Within the plot, Meyers also has Erica's sister, Zoe, reduce the unjust idea or *belief system* that an older unmarried woman is called "an old maid, a spinster" (Meyer 2002, p. 19) whereas someone like Harry who has never married is considered "illusive and ungettable ... a real catch" (Meyer 2002, p. 19). This is an example of what Frye describes as "literature assuming a special function of analysis, of breaking up the lumber of stereotypes, fossilized beliefs ... oppressive fashions, and all other things that impede the free movement (not necessarily, of course, the progress) of society" (Frye 1957, p. 233). The dialogue above and below may give an example of Meyers



revealing and degrading the double standards for single older men and women. Meyers continues on page 20, exposing the injustice that men Harry's age want a younger woman.

ZOE

.. the whole over fifty  
dating scene is geared completely  
towards men leaving older women out  
and as a result that makes the  
older women more and more  
productive and more and more  
interesting, which, in turn, makes  
them even less desirable because as  
we all know -- men, especially  
older men, are threatened and  
deathly afraid of interesting and  
accomplished women.

Meyers reduces the injustice of a male character being threatened and afraid of a productive and interesting older heroine. She does this by exposing this prejudice to "bitter contempt" within Zoe's above dialogue (Hight 1962, p. 156). Within this scene, Meyers shows that Harry is extremely uncomfortable with Zoe pointing out the unfairness of him dating a young woman such as Marin and ignoring a highly successful woman his own age, such as Erica.

In *Something's Gotta Give*, the author degrades Harry's love of younger women. He is shown alone before the act one turning point, on page 59, recuperating after his heart attack in Erica's Hampton home. He is degraded, lying on Erica's sofa with a "hospital take out container on his stomach" while Erica is on a date with Julian and Marin has gone back home to the city. He tries to call several girlfriends but is greeted with answering machine messages. He pitifully responds by saying aloud to himself, "Everybody's out but old Har...Old, old old old Har..." Later, on page 61, the author further humiliates Harry when it is revealed that he has fallen asleep on Erica's bed while looking at her family photos. He awakens when he hears her return from her date.

Oh shit. He leaps out of bed, this is the fastest he's moved in days. A bit disoriented, he straightens the covers, looks around for other evidence then hightails it out of there.

Meyers makes it clear in this scene that Harry likes Erica and would have been embarrassed and humiliated to be found asleep on her bed with her family photos beside him.

Before the mid-point, on page 97, after Meyers lists all the disparaging things about Erica that would surely put Harry off, she then shames his unjust mindset when Erica says, "And you know what? Everyday, I'm getting' older ... just like you." Meyers continues to degrade Harry by making him "the laughing stock of Broadway" with Erica's play which shows him on page 110 as a foolish old man, needing Viagra to keep up with the young women he dates and also magnified in a "chorus line of balding 60 year old men in hospital gowns and socks" on page 112. Frye argues that within the third phase of satire a satirist "will change his hero into an ass and show us how humanity looks from an ass's point of view. An example of this is shown on page 109. Meyers has Erica describe the character in her play based upon Harry as "a schmuck who screwed around with our heroine, so it won't be too sad" when he dies of a heart attack. Harry (the ass) retaliates by arguing "Schmucks are people too you know. Death doesn't seem a little harsh?"

The final humiliation for Harry occurs in act three, on page 127, when he travels all the way to Paris to meet up with Erica and proclaim his love for her, only to find that she is now in a relationship with Dr Julian. Harry now sees himself as "a sap, a stupid old sap, standing on a bridge in Paris, crying my eyes out" (Meyers 2002, p. 127). Later on in the scene, Harry finds another tear on his face and proclaims, "Look who gets to be the girl." Meyers ensures that Harry, the womaniser, is seen to be broken hearted and degraded.

Erica is also subject to degradation. In act one, on pages 19-20, Erica's backstory is revealed when her sister, Zoe, describes Erica to Harry as "over fifty, divorced and still sits in night after night because... men, especially older men, are threatened and deathly afraid of interesting and

accomplished women.” Erica has previously attacked Harry for being sexist and objectifying women and now Zoe has revealed that Erica is not able to get a decent date with men her own age as they do not find her attractive. This makes Erica’s previous comments appear to arise from the fact that she is bitter from now being single and this, in turn, degrades her further. Erica has a right to her opinions about lecherous men who objectify women, however, Meyers ensures that the way Erica has shut herself off sexually is cause for subsequent satire.

Meyers also satirises the fact that Erica appears to be sexually frigid. She does this by *degrading* the ridiculousness of Erica covering up her body so much in the middle of summer. Like Frye’s phase two of satire, whereby “stereotypes and belief systems are irrelevant when set against real life” (Frye 1957, p. 230), Meyers shows that Erica’s “belief system”, that she needs to cover herself up to protect herself from being hurt, is “irrelevant” and should be “degraded” by her male support, Harry.

Meyers shows Erica’s dignified composure unravelling further when Harry accidentally sees her naked after the inciting incident on page 46. Erica, highly embarrassed the next day, takes to covering herself up even further, wearing “hat, sunglasses, turtleneck, long skirt. Pretty much no skin is showing whatsoever.” Harry, on page 48, says, “You saw my ass, you don’t see me acting nuts, wearing hats and glasses and weird get ups...” This humiliation shows Erica being made fun of by Harry until she changes her sexual frigidity. Later, on page 63, it is shown that Harry is successful in breaking down Erica’s defences when she meets him, at his request, for a “pajama party” in her living room.

During the next scene, Erica’s “impervious” character is reduced by Harry when he describes what he thinks of her on pages 64 and 65. Harry describes Erica as “a tower of strength ... flinty and ... Impervious ... formidable.” Harry says he thinks she is strong but Erica reads this as “inhuman ... cold and distant.” Erica does not want to be cold so by hearing Harry reduce her, she is able to warm up. Later, at the mid-point on page 100, Meyers reduces Erica to tears with a montage of her crying over Harry. Meyers shows that the woman who Harry describes as “impervious” (Meyer 2002, p. 65) does have feelings after all.

We have now seen how the satirist uses humour and irony to attack and degrade those characters and attitudes which she believes is unjust. Let us now observe how Meyer has incorporated a fantasy element within her satirical screenplay.

## **6. Meyers' application of a token fantasy which the reader can recognise as grotesque or absurd**

In the second chapter, we described the last of Frye's six principles of satire as the satirist's application of a token fantasy which the reader can recognise as grotesque or absurd. By "fantasy", Frye argues that "Satire demands at least a token fantasy, a content which the reader recognizes as grotesque" (Frye 1957, p. 224). Frye asserts that there must be a token fantasy, recognised as absurd for satire to exist.

In the previous chapter, it was shown how Congreve uses his grotesque female characters as a counterpoint to the integrity of his heroines. For instance, in *The Way of the World*, the author, Congreve, compares the virtuous Millamant with his grotesque supporting women, most of whom are having extramarital and illicit affairs. Let us now see how the screenwriter, Meyers, applies this technique within her screenplay, *Something's Gotta Give*.

It may be argued that an elderly man dating younger women is somewhat grotesque or absurd. Some may even argue that a man dating a younger woman is acceptable but a woman dating a much younger man is truly grotesque or absurd. Then there are those who may argue that these judgments of society are the very matter which is grotesque or absurd.

In the plot set-up, in act one, Meyers shows Erica viewing an "epidemic" of older men with younger women contrasted with a "grotesque" glimpse of her future seeing "sad Old Women in their Eighties" with their arms linked, looking very similar to Erica and Zoe. This "absurd" contrast reiterates the fact that at 55 years of age, Erica is left out of the dating game. She is too old for men her own age who it seems would prefer a much younger and uncomplicated partner.

Later, Meyers displays humour in the “grotesque or absurd” (Frye 1957, p. 224) when Erica, who Harry appears to think of as an old shrew, is forced to give him mouth to mouth resuscitation while Harry’s “eyes WIDEN IN HORROR” (Meyer 2002, p. 23). This scene is almost farcical with Harry’s revulsion to the idea of close proximity with Erica exaggerated for comic effect.

Humour founded on fantasy is shown when Zoe, a feminist, becomes flirty and “Even she softens as she looks up at (handsome doctor) Julian” (Meyer 2002, p. 29). The Barry women are not known for being sweet and demure. On the contrary, they would be more likely to criticise those who “soften” to appear attractive to men. However, in the presence of handsome doctor Julian, played in the movie by Keanu Reeves, Meyers humorously and farcically transforms both Marin and Zoe into “the Step Sisters trying on the Glass Slipper” (Meyers 2002 p. 29). They compete for Julian’s affections with Marin seductively blowing on the steam of the cup of tea that Julian hands her. This performance satirises flirty and sweet women.

Meyers’ montage of Erica crying over Harry in the mid-point on page 100 is, while incredibly humorous, an “absurd” “fantasy” as it is unlikely that a dignified woman such as Erica would cry so dramatically. Frye argues that satire “breaks down when its content is too oppressively real to permit the maintaining of the fantastic or hypothetical tone” (Frye 1957, p. 224). Had Meyers made this scene more realistic, it would have come across as tragic, however, by adding the element of fantasy and farce by having Erica cry so profusely, Meyers keeps a satirical touch. It is this element of absurd fantasy that makes this montage one of the funniest moments in the screenplay rather than the most tragic.

Literature historian, Rosenheim, expands upon Frye’s theories by asserting that the writer needs to focus on a particular historical identity as well as a satiric “fiction” or “fantasy”. Rosenheim asserts that the satiric is lost when the object of attack by the author is entirely imaginary or when it cannot be assigned specific historical identity. The fantasy touches that Meyers has adopted throughout her screenplay, while imaginary and exaggerated, are still based upon real characters and people whom an audience may recognise. We all know women, for instance, like the character Zoe, who no matter how accomplished, fall weak at the knees at the sight of a young,

handsome doctor. The actress, Frances McDormand, who plays Zoe, however, exaggerates and “hams up” the way she flutters her eyes at the doctor character. This exaggeration is an example of Frye’s principle of a fantasy element bordering on the absurd.

### **Parallels between female protagonists in Restoration theatre and Hollywood Romantic Comedy**

There are similarities between the character of Erica and the heroines in Congreve’s Restoration comedies. Like Erica and her sister, Zoe, Congreve’s heroines display “an implicit moral standard” (Frye 1957, p. 224) relating to how they believe they should be treated by society and men, in particular. The authors and their female characters are all prone to using irony in their witty and humorous attack and degradation of those who do not fit their moral codes. The heroines of Congreve’s comedies resemble Meyers’ heroines, Erica and Zoe, in that they also reject the traditional view of women as subordinate and inferior to men, endorsing instead a relationship based upon the freedom and equality of both sexes (Young 1994, p. 251). Specifically, in their dealings with men, they all may display “Omphale” tendencies whereby the man is “bullied or dominated by women” (Frye 1957, p. 228). The women are also shown to test the loyalties and constancy of the valour of their men.

We have observed Frye’s principles of satire in Meyers’ screenplay, *Something’s Gotta Give* and interpreted the results. Let us now review our investigation.

### **Summary**

We have observed all of Frye’s six principles of satire within Meyers’ writing techniques in her screenplay, *Something’s Gotta Give*. For instance, Frye asserts that *the satirist uses wit or humour*. Meyers shows her female protagonist, Erica, using wit and humour rather than mere aggression to attack her male support Harry’s penchant for womanising, sexist behaviour and failure to commit to a relationship.

Secondly, Frye suggests that *the satirist focuses upon an object of attack*. Meyers shows her female protagonist, Erica, attacked by male support, Harry, for being uptight and sexually repressed. In addition, Meyers enables Erica to attack Harry as he has never been married, he is a serial dater who cannot commit to one woman.

In his third principle, Frye points out that *the satirist applies irony*. Meyers applies irony in her screenplay in act one when Harry is forced to live with Erica, who he despises. It is also ironic that these two people, who appear to be the enemy, end up falling madly in love.

Frye's fourth principle is that *the satirist displays an implicit moral standard*. Meyers demonstrates her *moral standard* when, at the inciting incident, the "chauvinist older guy" (Meyers 2002, p. 108), Harry, is punished with a heart attack for fooling around with a younger girl. Harry, subsequently, after not being able to commit to female protagonist, Erica, ends up lonely and miserable in act three.

Frye's fifth principle involves *the satirist's reduction or degradation of character or belief system*. Meyers ensures that Erica's sister, Zoe, reduces the incorrect belief system and injustice that an older unmarried woman is called "an old maid, a spinster" (Meyers 2002, p. 19) whereas someone like Harry who has never married is considered "illusive and ungettable ...a real catch" (Meyers 2002, p. 19). Meyers also degrades the belief system of men who are threatened and afraid of productive and interesting older women. Erica's belief that she should cover herself up to be protected is degraded when Harry accidentally spies her naked. Harry's belief that he should play the field and never need settle down is tainted by the author, Meyers, when he ends up alone.

Finally, Frye asserts that *the satirist applies a token fantasy which the reader can recognize as grotesque or absurd*. Meyers displays this final principle of Frye when female protagonist, Erica, who Harry appears to think of as an old shrew, is forced to give him mouth to mouth resuscitation, while Harry's "eyes WIDEN IN HORROR" (Meyer 2002, p. 23). In addition, Meyers' montage of Erica crying dramatically over Harry on page 100 is funny as it is so

absurdly embellished. These fantasy elements, while considerably exaggerated and farcical, are nevertheless based upon genuine people, recognisable to an audience.

We have explored and analysed the techniques of satire used by Congreve and Meyers to portray their female protagonists. Within the next chapter, I will discuss these techniques and Frye's theory in relation to my feature screenplay, *Yummy Mummy*.



## **Chapter 5**

### **How are theories and techniques of Frye, Congreve and Meyers of use to my project, *Yummy Mummy*?**

Within this chapter, I will explore Frye's theories of satire in relation to my feature film screenplay project, *Yummy Mummy*. The screenplay satirises marriage and parenthood and has a female protagonist. My screenplay project satirises unjust attitudes towards women's struggles to have both family and a meaningful career. I attempt to put a contemporary spin on some traditional themes of satire; marriage, the pretences of contemporary society and its judgement of women. Specifically, these relate to society's double standards around domesticity, parenting and employment. Other themes will include intimacy in marriage once babies arrive and the battle of the sexes. Let us now view a brief synopsis of *Yummy Mummy*.

#### ***Yummy Mummy* - Synopsis**

The set-up in act one sees journalist and superwoman, Lanie Goldstein, who appears to have it all; the perfect marriage and working life with husband and photographer partner, Felix, and now the impending birth of their first child. At her baby shower, Lanie discovers that the glossy magazine that she and Felix work for is struggling. Although she intends to give up work after the birth of their child, she offers to write one last article to help the magazine. Lanie insists that Felix cancel his planned golf trip with best friend and their editor, Steve, so that they can complete a magazine feature article on a revised Restoration comedy play before their baby is born. Conflict ensues when Felix is not happy with Lanie's decision. He thinks it would be in her best interest to rest in her last weeks of pregnancy. Lanie's plan to conduct an in-depth interview about the play's main theme of equality in marriage, with director, Ivan, is thwarted by Steve who insists that she instead interviews the self-absorbed lead actress, Savannah. The interview with Savannah does not go well as, rather than discuss the play, she is only interested in talking about herself. Ivan attempts to help Lanie with the story and he is shocked to discover that Lanie, an award winning journalist, intends to throw away her career to become a full-time mother. This crystallises Lanie's central dramatic problem. The inciting incident sees Lanie's interview

interrupted when she goes into early labour and is carried off the theatre set by Ivan and his theatre crew. Lanie gives birth to Jemima, a beautiful baby girl.

Lanie joins her best friend, Cassie's playgroup and meets a group of professional *yummy mummies* who show Lanie that it is possible to hold onto her career provided that Felix assists with the housework and baby. The act one turning point shows Lanie struggling to cope at home and with work after Felix sacks the housekeeper. After Lanie protests, Felix agrees that Lanie needs assistance and so, rather than put in his share of the housework and childcare, he arranges for his overbearing mother, Lillian, to help at home. Lillian moves around the furniture and criticises Lanie's housekeeping skills. Felix finally promises to look after the Jemima so that Lanie can complete her interview. Felix and Steve attempt to play golf with Felix carrying Jemima in a sling. Felix cannot concentrate on his swing with a crying baby and so he and Steve interrupt Lanie's interview so she can breastfeed Jemima. Felix and Steve enjoy drinks with Savannah. Lanie discovers that Steve has become romantically involved with Savannah and has changed the angle of her magazine story to be a puff piece about the actress rather than an in-depth look at equality in marriage. Lanie blames Steve for the magazine's poor sales by dumbing it down. The mid-point falls when he removes her from the magazine's feature writers' list. Lanie then threatens to leave Felix unless he improves his behaviour and help more at home but Felix walks out first.

In act two, Lanie stoically tries to carry on as a single mother but she falls apart, missing Felix. The act two turning point sees Lanie visit Felix, who has been living with Steve. She interrupts a fight between Steve and Felix over the state of Steve's untidy apartment. Steve threatens Felix's job until Lanie suggests a plan for saving the magazine by revising its format to include smarter, less condescending articles. Lanie is motivated by an attempt to reconcile with Felix and revise the magazine. She insists, despite Felix's protests, that they finish their article on the theatre company together, looking at the culture of marriage as she initially planned.

The climax falls at the opening night of the theatre company's latest play, Restoration Comedy, *The Way of The World*. Felix resentfully covers the opening night for the magazine with Lanie.

Cassie, who is babysitting for the night, is called to the theatre after Lanie accidentally steps in dog's poo and drags it through the theatre foyer. When Jemima sees Felix, she puts her arms out, crying hysterically. To Felix's horror, Lanie straps the baby to Felix in a sling. Lanie is motivated by the urge for Felix to assist with Jemima. Despite the initial awkwardness, Felix successfully photographs guests at the party and is surrounded by beautiful women who claim they "love a man who can multi-task." At the opening night party, after arguing about the play's content, how to achieve equality in marriage, Lanie and Felix, like characters in the play, agree to a proviso that each will give the other space, support each other's work commitments and equally attend to home duties and caring for their daughter.

The resolution shows Lanie made features editor. She successfully revises the magazine, adapting it to employ staff on a part-time basis, with an on-site crèche to make for better work/life balance. The magazine becomes the number one rating glossy. Just as Lanie feels as if she is finally getting on top of things, it appears that she may once again be pregnant.

Let us now look at Frye's theories relating to the principles of satire and explore how useful these have been to my project.

### **Frye's six principles of satire applied to my feature screenplay, *Yummy Mummy***

Frye's six principles of satire may be applied to my screenplay in order for it to be considered a satirical comedy. According to Frye, I should use wit or humour to attack certain injustices. My screenplay should be laced with irony or double meaning. In choosing which objects and belief systems to attack, I will be displaying my moral standard. Frye argues that for a work to be considered satire, these objects and unjust belief systems should also be degraded. Finally, my screenplay should include an absurd or grotesque fantasy element based upon a specific historical identity in order to be considered satirical. We will now look at how I have applied each of Frye's six principles of satire to my screenplay.

## 1. Use of wit or humour in *Yummy Mummy*

We have previously discussed how a satirical writer can effectively use humour to sway an audience's beliefs into his/her way of thinking and "bring the laughs over to our side" (Freud 1960, p. 103). We have also discussed how Congreve has shown his female protagonist in *The Way of the World* as one who understands the codes of conventional life and can use Frye's first principle of satire by using wit to tame her gallant into submission rather than purely attacking him. Within the previous chapter, we saw how the screenwriter, Meyers, shows her female protagonist, Erica, using wit and humour rather than mere aggression to attack her male support Harry's penchant for womanising, sexist behaviour and failure to commit to a relationship. Let us now discuss how I have used wit or humour within my screenplay project, *Yummy Mummy*.

I have shown my protagonist, Lanie attacking injustice by using wit and humour rather than sheer invective. For instance, in the *Yummy Mummy* act one set-up, on page 2, Lanie receives a wooden spoon and cookbook at her baby shower from a mysterious guest. When she discovers that the gift is from her husband and he is subtly taking a crack at the fact that she cannot cook, Lanie humorously whacks him on the bottom with the spoon. Later, on page 9, when Lanie considers returning to work once she has the baby, Felix argues:

FELIX

Motherhood is the most important job  
a woman can have. Tell me, who's going  
to cook, and look after the baby if you  
go back to work?

Lanie reaches into her bag and hands Felix the cookbook present he gave her earlier.

LANIE

Here you, go. There's a great osso  
bucco recipe on page 46.

Rather than attack Felix, telling him he's being sexist, I have shown Lanie using humour, subtly pointing out that he can also attend to their home.

In addition, just before the mid-point, on page 57, I have used wit and humour when Lanie tells Steve, her magazine editor, that his magazine is demeaning to women and he is no longer in touch with the female market. Steve offers Lanie an interview with the new Tourism Minister. Lanie expects that the interview will be about the new Australia Tourism campaign.

STEVE

No, what I've planned is really exciting. She's getting a total makeover. We want to help her shed that dowdy image she's been criticised for.

LANIE

Sure, that's what a woman in power needs. Another deconstruction of her dressing habits and in-depth analysis of her body weight. Like, the magazine's preoccupation with keeping a tidy house doesn't make us women anxious enough already? Let's just throw in a few eating disorders to make us feel really good about ourselves.

Later, in act three, on page 91, I again use humour when Lanie motivates Felix to contribute to the housework.

LANIE

I told you once before, a man with a vacuum cleaner is a sexy beast. A man holding a dishcloth is a panty dropper and a man who can cook, well he's obviously going to get "special" attention.

This principle of wit and humour is really useful to a writer of satire. Frye argues that "attack without humor or pure denunciation, forms one of the boundaries of satire" (Frye 1957, p. 224). Within earlier drafts of my screenplay, there were instances where my protagonist attacked her husband without using any humour and, after looking back on Frye's theories, I realised that I needed to go back and make these scenes funnier. For instance, on page 60, Lanie's attack on Felix was changed from, "Honey, this is a vacuum. It's for cleaning the floor and this little booklet tells you how it works" to "Honey, this is your daughter. She's the gift that keeps on giving. When she smells you need to change her." The latter speech uses Frye's principle of wit and humour to satirise the fact that Felix believes that fatherhood is all joy without any accompanying effort. It also satirises the fact that earlier in the screenplay, Felix was oblivious to the fact that Jemima's nappy needed to be changed. The additional use of wit and humour softens Lanie attack on Felix and satirises the injustice of his earlier line that "no man in my family has ever done housework."

Congreve and Meyers both portray their heroines using wit. Similarly, I have shown my female protagonist, Lanie, using wit and humour to attack her husband's lack of contribution to the housework and parenting. I have also used wit and humour when Lanie attacks her editor, Steve's chauvinistic and demeaning representation of women within his magazine. In addition, I have shown Lanie wittily attacking her mother-in-law, Lillian's double standards relating to women, their careers and home responsibilities. By observing and analysing this theory of Frye within Congreve's and Meyers' female characters, I have been able to ascertain how to use this sense of *attack* in such a way that uses less aggression and more wit and humour.

## **2. Focus Upon an Object of Attack in *Yummy Mummy***

Frye asserts that an “object of attack” is essential to satire (Frye 1957, p. 224). We have discussed how Congreve attacks many of society’s hypocrisies. In *The Way of the World* he attacks those who indulge in extramarital affairs and those who marry purely for money. In addition, he attacks people who adopt false affectations to succeed in society. Similarly, we have discussed how in the screenplay, *Something’s Gotta Give*, the author, Meyers, attacks those who are insincere and unjust in their attitudes towards women. Within my screenplay project, I have also attacked the unfair attitudes of those who believe that a woman should give up on her career in order to raise a family.

The principle of an object of attack by the satirist is an important one as we have seen how humour without attack becomes pure comedy, merely amusing us “with no aftertaste of derisive bitterness” (Highet 1962, p. 150). In chapter 2, we discussed Highet’s argument that the purpose of satire is, “through laughter and invective, to cure folly and punish evil; but if it does not achieve this purpose, it is content to jeer at folly and expose evil to bitter contempt” (Highet 1962, p. 156). The aim of my screenplay is to expose injustices relating to working mothers and so this sense of attack is essential in order for my project to be considered a satire.

My satirical screenplay project differs from a pure comedic screenplay as (according to Frye, Rosenheim, Worcester, Highet and Molière) it should have an object of attack. I have attacked and satirised particular injustices relating to women including:

- Those in society who believe that the woman in a relationship should take full responsibility for the children and housework, to the detriment of her career.
- Those in society that congratulate and praise a father who is seen to be undertaking traditional ‘mothering’ duties while taking for granted the fact that a mother does this role without necessarily receiving praise or thanks.
- The notion that a woman should concentrate on her appearance to the detriment of her intellect.

- An employer's notion that once a woman becomes a mother she cannot contribute to the work-force unless she works full time or undertakes menial tasks in a part-time role.

Let us now look at some scenes within my screenplay, *Yummy Mummy*, where I have attacked what I consider to be injustice.

I have shown my protagonist, Lanie, attacking her mother-in-law, Lillian, after the inciting incident in act one, page 28, for expecting her to have a tidy house when she is busy with a newborn baby.

LILLIAN

If you just tidy up a bit,  
I'm sure you'll find some space.

LANIE

I have a newborn, Lillian. Tidying  
up is optional. In fact, I've heard  
it said that a woman with a tidy  
house must be neglecting her baby  
in some way.

LILLIAN

I always had a spotless house.

LANIE

Hmm.

Lanie also attacks Lillian on pages 28-29 after Lillian attempts to dissuade Felix from contributing to the childcare.



LANIE

If Felix would just occasionally  
change a nappy that would help.

LILLIAN

Felix's father didn't have to change  
a nappy once.

LANIE

And now you're divorced.

Lanie attacks her husband, Felix, in act two, page 59, for not contributing equally to the home and expecting her to conform to a traditional housewife role.

LANIE

I've got a better idea, with all  
your complaints about my housekeeping,  
why don't you stay at home and keep house?  
I'll go and find work on a magazine that  
takes women's issues seriously.

Frye argues that "To attack anything, writer and audience must agree on its undesirability" (Frye 1957, p. 224). Within Lanie's above dialogue and throughout my screenplay, I have attempted to persuade an audience that it is unreasonable for an accomplished character such as Lanie to give up her career to attend to her family and home on a full-time basis.

In the way that Congreve has included insincere female characters in his play as a direct contrast to his virtuous female protagonist, within my screenplay I have included the character of Savannah, a self-absorbed actress, as a contrast to my female protagonist. Unlike Savannah, I have shown that my female protagonist, Lanie, uses her mind rather than her appearance to get ahead. Society's unhealthy fascination with celebrity is a focus of the attack in act three, page

69, when Lanie tells Steve that he should ditch “the condescending articles and interviews with celebrities” and replace them “with smarter, more in-depth stories.” I have continued to attack the vacuousness and vanity of celebrities like the actress, Savannah, on page 70:

LANIE

Ah, Savannah, I hate to break it to you, but we’re all just a wee bit sick and tired of hearing about celebrities. Sorry, hon, but contrary to popular opinion, the magazine’s focus on celebrities has coincided with its flight down the toilet ... to coin a phrase.

Lanie also attacks the waitress in act two, page 53, for her unjust suggestion that she feed Jemima in the toilet rather than “offend” the other diners.

LANIE

Maybe your other diners would like to join me and my baby eating their lunch from the ladies room toilet.

Within subsequent edits, on page 54, I also decided to attack the waitress’s hypocrisy of wearing a low-cut top while claiming that it was wrong for Lanie to breastfeed in public.

WAITRESS

I told you, you can’t do that here. There are laws about public exposure.

Tiffany puts her cardigan around the waitress

TIFFANY

Cover up your rack then, love.  
Fortunately discrimination law  
recognises my friend's right to  
breastfeed.

Later, on page 56, Lanie attacks her editor, Steve, for demeaning women in his magazine.

STEVE

I show women in a positive light.  
Just last month we did a feature  
on that TV presenter from Getaway.  
Do you know that despite her busy  
schedule she still manages to keep  
a tidy linen hamper. Oh, I'm in  
touch with women's needs.

LANIE

A tidy linen hamper? Now there's  
something to aspire to girls.

Satire, in particular, is the perfect tool to persuade an audience (Rosenheim 1963, p. 309) and “bring the laughers over to our side” (Freud, 1960, p. 103). Initial drafts of my screenplay had Lanie showing a lot of aggression towards her husband and his refusal to support her. Drawing on the theories of Frye, Hodgart, and Worcester, I have now attempted to soften her attack with additional wit and humour. This will, I hope, cause an audience to be more sympathetic to the issues and injustices which I have chosen to assail.

### 3. Application of irony in *Yummy Mummy*

We have already seen how both Meyers and Congreve show irony when their characters avoid direct statement and either purposely or unintentionally evoke dual meaning (Gill 1994, p. 100). Meyers also uses irony in the plot of *Something's Gotta Give* when her characters fears become reality and they appear to be less than they are (Frye 1957, p. 40). I also intend to show similar irony within my screenplay project through the dual meaning of my characters' dialogue and also within the plot when, as Frye would describe, "experience is bigger than any set of beliefs about it" (Frye 1957, p. 229). There will be irony in the fact that life experience for my characters will be more valuable than their theoretical beliefs. Real life experience for my characters will outweigh their idealism about life. Let us now discuss in detail how I have used irony in my screenplay, *Yummy Mummy*.

Within act one of my script, on pages 7-8, we see the female protagonist, Lanie, sent to interview an actress for her magazine. Lanie uses irony after she discovers her husband, Felix and flirting with seductive actress, Savannah. During rehearsals, Savannah is chastised by director, Ivan, for being more interested in smiling at cameraman, Felix, than focusing on her lover in the play.

SAVANNAH

Sorry, Ivan but when Felix is  
here it makes it hard for me to  
concentrate ... on who my lover is.  
Why don't you come up on stage,  
Felix. I won't bite...

STEVE

Ivan, great to see you again.  
And this is Lanie.

FELIX

Lanie!

Felix, embarrassed at being caught out, knocks over a prop on stage and immediately tries to restore order.

LANIE

Yes, your lover, remember?

Lanie cleverly uses irony in her above words rather than directly accusing her husband, Felix, of flirting with the beautiful actress, Savannah. She also uses irony when on page 7 she loudly repeats Ivan's words describing Millamant and how she "tames her future husband into submission." This is ironic as, after Lanie catches Felix flirting with Savannah, she would also like to tame her husband into submission.

Later, on page 8, Felix is horrified to discover that Lanie is going to work right up to the time that her baby is due. Felix argues, "You're due in just two weeks. You need a break to settle into motherhood." Later, on page 9 when Lanie tells Felix she has rescheduled their photo shoot, Felix announces:

FELIX

No, can't make next week. Golf trip with Steve, remember?

LANIE

Well the golf trip will have to be put on hold now. We're due in two weeks, (kisses Felix) remember.

This is ironic considering the fact that it was Felix who originally noted the importance of Lanie's impending birth and now he expects to disappear on a golf trip. Frye would describe this ironic technique as "a pattern of words that turns away from direct statement or its own obvious meaning" (Frye 1957, p. 40). The Concise Oxford Dictionary (1985) would describe this technique as the "simulated adoption of another's point of view or laudatory tone for purpose of ridicule." Rather than Lanie stating that Felix is being hypocritical, she adopts his tone, subtly insinuating that he too needs a break to settle into fatherhood.

At the inciting incident on page 17, Felix is shocked that Lanie has gone into premature labour and exclaims:

FELIX

Lanie, what are you doing here?  
You're not due for another two weeks.

LANIE

Just think of it as our little project  
being brought forward.

This is ironic as they are both working on a photojournalist project together but Lanie also refers to their impending birth as their "little project." I have shown Lanie using irony rather than "direct statement" in telling Felix that he needs to settle down to his responsibilities of being a husband and father (Frye 1957, p. 40).

At the mid-point of *Yummy Mummy*, Steve fires Lanie after she accuses him of patronising and oppressing women through the demeaning articles in his magazine. Later, she uses irony when she chastises him on page 58, saying "silly me, I should have known, feminist ideology has no place on a women's magazine." Once again, I have shown Lanie avoiding the "direct statement" that women's magazines should have feminist rather than paternal ideology (Frye 1957, p. 40).

It is also ironic that Lanie, a woman who has insisted on sticking to her birth plan of a natural birth, aggressively demands drugs when in the agonising throws of labour at the inciting incident in act one, on page 20. Frye would describe this technique as Lanie “appearing to be less than one is” (Frye 1957, p. 40). This coincides with Frye’s phase two of satire whereby “stereotypes and belief systems are irrelevant when set against real life” (Frye 1957, p. 230). Lanie believes that she should have a natural birth, however, when “real life” presents her with the excruciating pain of labour, her “belief system is irrelevant” and she ironically and forcefully demands drugs. Felix also ironically appears “to be less than one is” (Frye 1957, p. 40). In act two, on pages 63-65, I show Felix, the man who refuses to do housework, tidying up his mate, Steve’s house. Felix also turns into a nagging wife, telling him off for the way he keeps his home. This role reversal is ironic as it is usually Felix’s wife, Lanie, who complains about the state of the house. The Concise Oxford Dictionary (1985) would describe this as a “perverse arrival of event or circumstance in itself desirable, as if in mockery of the fitness of things.

Consider the irony in the following speech by Lanie to her baby daughter, Jemima, as she tells her a bedtime story on page 65:

LANIE

And then the handsome prince  
arrived to take the princess  
to the ball but the princess  
said “I’m sorry, I have to  
study for my medical exam” and  
the prince said, that’s ok, I  
find women with brains extremely  
attractive. You keep working,  
I’ll fry you up a schnitzel.  
You have to keep your strength up,  
you know.”

This speech is ironic as some characters in the screenplay have intimated that it is the woman's role to keep her husband sustained while he works. Lanie ironically reverses these roles so that her daughter will in future aim high and concentrate on her education rather than on the traditional fairy-tale themes of romance. It is also ironic that the prince finds "women with brains extremely attractive" as the feeling within her magazine and in most traditional fairy-tales is that women who attend to their looks and neglect their brains are attractive. Within the above speech, I have employed The Concise Oxford Dictionary's (1985) definition of irony, that being the "simulated adoption of another's point of view or laudatory tone for purpose of ridicule."

Frye claims that "satire is militant irony: its moral norms are relatively clear, and it assumes standards against which the grotesque and absurd are measured" (Frye 1957, p. 223). This is featured within Lanie's speech above. I have satirised the idea that women should concentrate on their physical attributes and ignore their intellect as I consider this notion to be absurd.

Frye also argues that "satire is irony which is structurally close to the comic: the comic struggle of two societies, one normal and the other absurd, is reflected in its double focus of morality and fantasy" (Frye 1957, p. 224). Once again, my screenplay and in particular the speech above, displays these qualities. I have comically shown the struggle of Lanie to keep her career relevant in an imaginative and absurd society that believes that a woman's role is in the home.

#### **4. Implicit moral standard in *Yummy Mummy***

We have observed how the author, Congreve, In *The Way of the World*, shows what Frye describes as the satirist's moral standard by treating those who indulge in extramarital affairs and those who marry purely for money with disdain. He also shows his moral standard when he compares these corrupt characters with his virtuous female protagonist. In addition, Congreve shows his personal moral code by attacking those who are insincere or adopt false affectations in order to succeed. We have also seen how the screenwriter, Meyers, displays her "moral standard" when the "chauvinist older guy" (Meyers 2002, p. 108) in *Something's Gotta Give*,



Harry, is punished with a heart attack for fooling around with a younger girl and then, after not being able to commit to female protagonist, Erica, ends up lonely and miserable.

As a writer, I also show my moral standard when the character of chauvinistic editor, Steve, discovers that demeaning women does not pay. As a consequence of Steve's patronising attitudes, his magazine loses its readership. He also discovers that dating shallow women leaves him alone. Drawing on Frye and Meyers, it may be observed that, even when my moral judgement is revealed, I do so with a certain degree of amusement, using "wit and humor" (Frye 1957, p. 224). Let us now discuss how I display my moral standard throughout my screenplay, *Yummy Mummy*.

According to the theories of Frye and Rosenheim, I should draw on my own moral standards in choosing subjects to attack in my screenplay. As Rosenheim argues, satire is an effective tool to expose what my moral standards lead me to believe is evil or unjust (Rosenheim 1963, p. 307). It may be considered unfair that many women have to accept that they should take on menial roles at work once they have children. From 2010 people in Australia caring for children under school age may request workplace flexibility. Employers are not legally obliged to grant a request but anti-discrimination laws ensure that they must not discriminate on the basis of family or carer's responsibilities (Kind, 2010 p. 5). It may be considered discriminatory and also illogical that many employers do not allow women to take on a part-time role within the company so that the company can still benefit from her experience but the woman can have flexibility to care for her baby. In addition, perhaps it is ridiculous that women are often judged on their looks rather than on their intellect or achievements. Is it right to assume that childcare and housework should be the female's responsibility? According to feminists such as Germaine Greer, the male in the relationship should be equally accountable for these responsibilities, particularly if the female is also working. Greer, in her 1999 text, *The Whole Woman*, argues, "The few men who do a hand's turn around the house expect gratitude and recognition, so sure are they that, though it is their dirt, it is not their job" (p. 141).

The fourth *Australian Work and Life Index* study, based on a University of South Australia survey of 10,000 people over four years, reveals that Australians are less happy than ever with

their work-life balance. The problem is particularly acute for women. Two-thirds of women working full time and half of all men say they are frequently rushed and pressed for time. Working mothers are under the greatest strain, with seven out of 10 reporting feeling almost always rushed and under pressure (Browne 2010). I have attempted to reveal aspects of this problem for women within my screenplay.

Consider the dialogue on pages 28-29 which shows Lanie's character psychology and reveals my moral position concerning the need for a father to share in child care.

LANIE

If Felix would just occasionally  
change a nappy that would help.

LILLIAN

Felix's father didn't have to  
change a nappy once.

LANIE

And now you're divorced.

I have used humour in the dialogue above to show my moral belief that a husband should equally contribute to the care of the baby, where possible. I have also shown my belief that a husband should equally contribute to domestic duties. This is outlined within Lanie's speech to Felix below on page 38.

FELIX

But you're a mother.

LANIE

And you're a father so be  
a good hubby and clean the house

LANIE (CONT.)

while I get some writing done.

I am revealing my own moral code as author through Lanie in her belief that both husband and wife should be responsible for the housework. It should not just be expected that housework is the wife's job.

My personal beliefs may also be guiding the direction of Lanie chastising her editor, Steve, in act two, page 58, for his demeaning magazine content.

LANIE

You think you're tapping into women's interests? Magazines like *Affectation* run by men like you just work to keep women firmly oppressed. Why don't you just call your magazine *Oppression* because that's what you're working so hard to create.

I have shown my moral standard in satirising the fact that my protagonist, Lanie, has chosen to return to work almost immediately after her baby is born in act one. A woman needs a certain amount of time to bond with her baby before she goes back to work. I have suggested how difficult it is for Lanie to concentrate on her work when her young baby demands her attention on page 32.

Lanie goes into her study, clears a car seat box out of the way, sits at her desk, in front of her computer and begins to read "The Way of the World." She writes some notes until she hears Jemima crying.

LANIE

What? It's only been five minutes.

I have also emphasised a viewpoint that status symbols are meaningless in Felix's proviso to Lanie below in the climax in act 3, page 97. He demands that she has:

FELIX

No girlfriends whose sole aim  
is to intimidate you into buying  
expensive and soon to be outdated  
fashion just to keep up with them

In the examples from my screenplay outlined above, I have attempted to screen my moral position with humour. Even if an audience does not share my moral judgement, as a satirist I would be "content to jeer at folly and expose evil to bitter contempt" (Hight 1962, p. 156).

Within the previous chapter, we saw how Meyers displays her morals by presenting the double standards of the society in *Something's Gotta Give* who think that a single older man is "a catch" whereas a single older woman is a "spinster" (Meyer 2002, p. 19). Similarly, within *Yummy Mummy*, the society shows its double standards by labelling a man who commits to his career at the expense of his family as *ambitious* whereas a woman, such as Lanie, acting in the same manner would be considered as *neglectful, irresponsible* and *selfish*.

##### **5. Reduction or degradation of character or belief system in *Yummy Mummy***

We have discussed how in *The Way of the World*, Congreve reduces and degrades characters he thinks are hypocritical, insincere, vain and egocentric. The author, Congreve, also debases the attitude that a woman is subservient to her husband. The screenwriter, Meyers, in *Something's Gotta Give*, ensures that female protagonist, Erica's sister Zoe reduces the incorrect belief system and injustice that an older unmarried woman is called "an old maid, a spinster" (Meyer 2002, p. 19) whereas someone like Harry who has never married is considered "illusive and ungettable

...a real catch” (Meyers 2002, p. 19). Meyers also reduces the belief system of men who are threatened and afraid of productive and interesting older women. Erica’s belief that she should cover herself up to be protected is also degraded. In addition, Harry’s belief that he should play the field and never need settle down is shamed by the author, Meyers, when he ends up miserable and alone.

Similarly, within *Yummy Mummy*, I have attempted to debase the notion that it is a woman’s role to be fully responsible for her home at the expense of her career. I have also degraded the unfair belief system that men are not responsible for housework. As per Frye’s theories, and similar to the character of Harry, in *Something’s Gotta Give*, I have shown my male support, Felix, as an example of an “Omphale archetype” (Frye 1957, p. 228), finally succumbing to his wife’s bullying. Similar to Zoe, in *Something’s Gotta Give*, my female protagonist, Lanie, degrades the idea that women in power should be judged on their appearance. She also ridicules the belief that the height of a woman’s achievements should be to keep a beautiful home. Additionally, Lanie belittles her boss, Steve’s condescending attitude towards his female readers. Let us now discuss in greater detail how I have reduced and degraded characters and beliefs within *Yummy Mummy* which I believe are unjust.

Within my screenplay, I have attempted to degrade the notion that it is a woman’s role to be fully responsible for her home at the expense of her career. In act two, on page 36, Tiffany degrades the idea that a mother should be happy to give up her career.

LANIE

I promised Steve I’d finish this article and then it’s motherhood for me all the way. I’m going to have dinner ready when Felix comes home from work, I’m going to keep an immaculate house and I’ll never write another article again.

Lanie bursts into tears.

TIFFANY

Not another career dumping martyr.

LANIE

(hysterical)

I'm going to be a full-time mother.

LEORA

Mother, martyr same thing.

Felix, the husband in my screenplay, is an example of what Frye describes as the “Omphale archetype” (Frye 1957, p. 228), being bullied by his wife. Lanie is fed up with Felix’s reluctance to undertake housework and help look after Jemima and so she is motivated to degrade and patronise him on page 60.

LANIE

It's time for you fellas to put  
in your share of the work.

(patronising)

Honey, this is your daughter. She's  
the gift that keeps on giving. When  
she smells you need to change her.

The debasement of Felix’s unfair belief system that “No man in my family has ever done housework” (Tofler 2010, p. 60) is complete just before the act two turning point on pages 65-68. Felix rolls up his sleeves and dons an apron to clean Steve’s messy apartment and cook dinner.

Ironically, it is Felix who becomes the nagging wife when he briefly moves in with his friend, Steve.

Steve enters the apartment. Felix, still with his apron on is checking the lasagne.

STEVE

Hi honey, I'm home.

Steve playfully gives Felix a kiss on the cheek. Felix is not impressed and disgustedly wipes his cheek.

FELIX

And what time do you think this is?

STEVE

Sorry, we had drinks after work.

FELIX

Well you could have rung to tell me you'd be in late. I have a lasagne in the oven which has probably dried out by now.

We have discussed how, in Restoration comedy, a male character is often bullied and *degraded* when his wife has an extramarital affair. Correspondingly, we have shown how in *Something's Gotta Give*, Meyers gives other examples of what Frye describes as the "Omphale Archetype," (Frye 1957, p. 228) when male support, Harry, is degraded and emasculated after his heart attack, dressed in a hospital gown, almost a feminine garment. Similarly, in the scene above, Felix is degraded and emasculated, dressed in an apron and wearing kitchen gloves. This is much like the

Greek myth of Hercules who served Omphale and may have been humiliated by wearing women's garments.

In act two, page 35, I have degraded the type of mother who doesn't work and has a nanny to take care of the children so that she can spend her time keeping up appearances with an addiction to fashion and gruelling beauty regimens.

CANDICE

It's like I told Connor just the other day, "mummy organised the nanny to pick you up because mummy loves you."

TIFFANY

You are such an amazing mother.

Naturally, I wrote Tiffany's line above with my tongue firmly planted in my cheek.

I have debased the idea that a woman should not breastfeed in public. In act two, when Lanie is asked by a waitress to breastfeed Jemima in the toilet, on page 53, she responds furiously, degrading the notion that a woman should shut herself away when breastfeeding. See dialogue above on page 100. Lanie also degrades the idea that women in power should be judged on their appearance when Steve suggests they do a makeover of a female politician before the mid-point on page 58. See dialogue above on page 95.

Lanie is also motivated to devalue the belief that the height of a woman's achievements should be to keep a beautiful home. She does this by degrading Steve's condescending attitude towards his female readers in act three, pages 69-70.



LANIE

Well how about, for a start,  
ditching the condescending articles  
and replacing them with smarter,  
more in-depth stories. No hip women  
want to be told that the height of  
achievement is keeping their home  
narrative belongs in the 1950's.

Frye argues that the author may degrade an unjust person or devalue an incorrect belief system. (Frye 1957, p. 233). As per Frye's theory, I have devalued the "fossilized belief" that a woman's place is in the home. I have also broken up the "stereotypes" and "oppressive fashions" of women only interested in their appearance and breeding (Frye 1957, p. 233). This notion is reinforced by women's magazines, such as *Affectation Magazine*, which reinforce these stereotypes. Lanie degrades the contents of this magazine to its editor, Steve. In addition, the character of Lanie learns that she has not cut out to be a full-time housewife. Unlike the "pedantic dogmatism" (Frye 1957, p. 233) of her mother-in-law, Lillian, Lanie is not a bad mother, she just has priorities other than devoting herself fully towards her baby and home. She asserts that women should aspire towards a career first and love second within her nursery rhyme to her daughter, Jemima on page 65 (See dialogue above, page 105).

Frye asserts that "true comic irony or satire ... defines the enemy of society as a spirit within that society" (Frye 1957, p. 47). As outlined above, I have degraded those in society who hold back the spirit and progress of women. As according to Frye and Hodgart and Mast, I have degraded unjust people and devalued incorrect belief systems so that my protagonist can escape to a more peaceful and agreeable environment (Frye 1957, p. 233; Hodgart 1969 p. 115; Mast 1973, p. 6). I have devalued society's beliefs regarding appropriate housekeeping roles for women and men. I have also exposed the protagonist's unreasonable work environment that makes it impossible for experienced women to continue working once they have children. In addition, I have debased a magazine that marginalises women. In doing so, my protagonist is able to negotiate and discover a suitable work and home environment for herself.

## 6. Application of a token fantasy which the reader can recognise as grotesque or absurd in *Yummy Mummy*

We have previously seen how Congreve uses his grotesque female characters as a counterpoint to the integrity of his heroines. For instance, in *The Way of the World*, the author, Congreve, compares the virtuous Millamant with his monstrous supporting women, most of whom are having extramarital and illicit affairs. Meyers also displays Frye's principle when female protagonist, Erica, who Harry appears to think of as an old shrew, is forced to give him mouth to mouth resuscitation. In addition, Meyers' montage of Erica crying dramatically over Harry in act three is incredibly funny as it is so absurdly over-the-top and farcical.

Let us now discuss how I have applied grotesque or absurd fantasy to my screenplay, *Yummy Mummy*. All of my characters have been satirised in one way or the other for their grotesque and absurd notions and behaviour. Lanie is satirised for her absurd notion that she will be happy throwing away her award winning career to become a full-time mother. Similarly, Felix's idea that he can play golf with a young baby strapped to him in a sling in act two, page 46, is absurd and farcical.

Felix plays terribly over the following dialogue as Jemima in the sling interferes with his golf swing.

FELIX

It's a piece of cake, mate. Got the little woman at home looking after me. Nothing has really changed.

Felix goes to swing. The ball ends up in a lake.

Felix is also absurd to believe that his life will not change once he is a father and that his accomplished and well-educated wife will throw away her career to become a full-time mother

and housewife. It is absurd to presume that “being a housewife and mother is the most rewarding job that a woman can have” (Tofler 2010, p. 38).

Felix’s mother, Lillian, is also a grotesque character who feigns care for her granddaughter by aggressively demanding that Lanie give up alcohol and cheese when she breastfeed. She then rudely attempts to eat Lanie’s camembert herself. Overbearing Lillian shows a lack of respect for her daughter-in-law, insulting her house-keeping skills and interfering in Lanie and Felix’s domestic issues.

Lanie’s absurd friend, Candice, is satirised for her grotesque obsession with fashion and status symbols. Consider the following dialogue on page 34.

CANDICE

I only have to think about keeping myself nice. It’s a full time job, you know. The appointments are overwhelming. Personal training, manicures, haircuts and shiatsu.

LEORA

(Sotto voce)

Not to mention botox.

The character of Candice is a fantasy figure, however, she is not completely imaginary. We all know women who obsess with fashion and what is “in.” This coincides with Rosenheim’s assertion that punitive satire distinguishes itself from pure comedy “by the presence of *both* the historically authentic and the historically particular; in the absence of either, the satiric quality disappears” (Rosenheim 1963, p. 312). He claims that the satiric is lost when the object of attack by the author is entirely imaginary or when it cannot be assigned specific historical identity. Frye’s and Rosenheim’s theories relating to “fantasy” are of interest to my study. As per Frye’s theories, the characters in my screenplay are fictitious and include an element of fantasy. As

according to Rosenheim, however, in order to be satirical, the characters in my satire are also based upon a particular historical identity. The character of Candice, for instance, is based on any number of immaculately dressed, four-wheel-driving school mums who an audience may recognise.

Another example of this notion of fantasy is the character of Savannah. She is a heightened celebrity character, grossly focussed on beautifying herself to the detriment of her intellect. She bizarrely hooks onto anyone who she believes will help her further her career and fame. She is a farcical fantasy character based upon any number of starlets featured in women's magazines today.

The character of the magazine editor, Steve, and his demeaning attitude to women is particularly grotesque and imaginary and is based upon an archetypal sexist figure. Steve's magazine patronises women by insinuating that they should concentrate on their appearance, their home and entertaining. Even when interviewing accomplished women, Steve prefers to concentrate on their "dowdy appearance" (Tofler 2010, p. 57) rather than on their achievements. Steve is a "token fantasy" character whose sexist ideology is both grotesque and absurd.

In *Something's Gotta Give*, screenwriter, Nancy Meyers, paints a picture of love interest, Harry, as an over-the-top and grotesque serial womaniser. Similarly, I have exaggerated the character of Felix to be vehemently opposed to undertaking housework, considering it to be a woman's role. I have also embellished the character of Steve to be a monstrous and farcical example of a single male, keeping a messy house and refusing to settle down. Lanie's friend, Candice, is a grotesque example of a *Yummy Mummy* with an over-reliance of baby sitters and an unhealthy obsession with fashion, beauty and status symbols.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Conclusion**

Frye's theories have been of great use to the analysis of case studies and to writing my satirical screenplay project. The process of writing the previous chapter and, once again, analysing Frye's theories relating to satire has given me subsequent focus for future edits.

Frye's principle of "wit or humor" which is "essential to satire" (Frye 1957, p. 224) has been intrinsic to my screenplay. It has allowed invective to be kept to a minimum. Concentrating on this principle of satire ensured that I included more humour and wit to my protagonist's attack of particular characters and their belief systems. Without a focus on wit or humour, my screenplay would have been very heavy on the assault of injustices but would have lost its amusing touch. An audience may be less likely to be open to the issues which I have attacked if I portrayed these without using wit or humour. Satire, in particular, is the perfect tool to persuade an audience (Rosenheim 1963, p. 309) and "bring the laughs over to our side" (Freud, 1960, p. 103).

Frye's principle of "object of attack by the satirist" is also integral as he argues that "attack without humor or pure denunciation, forms one of the boundaries of satire" (Frye 1957, p. 224). I have aimed to write a satirical comedy rather than a broad comedy so this sense of *attack* has been fundamental. Subsequent drafts have allowed me to focus even more upon the issues which I have intended to attack. I was able to revisit these themes and include scenes and situations which presented them in a humorous, satirical way.

The sense of *irony* within my screenplay gives it an additional layer of wit. Frye defines irony as "a pattern of words that turns away from direct statement or its own obvious meaning" (Frye 1957, p. 40). In this capacity, by using irony an audience is able to derive pleasure from reading between the lines and the screenplay's hidden layers of meaning. Several of my scenes benefitted from the addition of more subtlety and irony. For instance, my protagonist was able to attack injustices placed upon her by her husband, mother-in-law and editor using irony rather than the sheer aggression that she may have showed in earlier screenplay drafts.

My *implicit moral standard* is what drives me to write satire. Without a particular moral standard or point of view, a work cannot be considered satirical as Frye argues that “The satirist has to select his absurdities, and the act of selection is a moral act” (Frye 1957, p. 224). I have used my moral viewpoint to choose what type of people and injustices I wish to satirise.

Frye’s principle of *reduction or degradation of character or belief system by the satirist* gives a satirical work its sting. As per Frye’s theory, I have degraded those in society who hold back the spirit and progress of women. I have devalued the “fossilized belief” that a woman’s place is in the home. I have also broken up the “stereotypes” and “oppressive fashions” of both men and women who believe that women should only be interested in their appearance and breeding (Frye 1957, p. 233). By degrading and reducing a character or belief system, I was able to attack, laugh at and therefore satirise them.

Finally, Frye’s principle of *a token fantasy which the reader can recognize as grotesque or absurd* gives the satire its fun. My characters are based upon real people but they are heightened with a grotesque or absurd fantasy element. This often leads towards a sense of fun and humour with a fine balance between what is real and what is imaginary. An audience can laugh at some of my more bizarre characters while being judgemental of their grotesque qualities. For instance, an audience may laugh at the fact that the character of mother-in-law, Lillian, takes away Lanie’s gift of rich cheese citing that it is harmful to a breastfed baby. When Lillian then starts eating the cheese herself, however, an audience may become judgemental about where Lillian’s real motives lie. Using Rosenheim’s theories, I have also given these characters “historically particular” qualities (Rosenheim 1963, p. 318). My characters are heightened fantasy figures but they can be recognised as genuine people. It is then possible to laugh at them while judging them for being unjust or insincere.

Within my screenplay, I have attempted to move beyond what Russo describes as the “grotesque” female (Russo 1994, p. 65). I do not intend for my heroine to be humorous merely because she is considered grotesque. By using Frye’s principle of wit and humour within my heroine, she may also be found to be humorous as a consequence of her clever and funny dialogue. By examining

the dialogue of Congreve's and Meyers' heroines, I was able to apply similar wit and humour towards the female protagonist in my screenplay.

I have observed and analysed all of Frye's six principles of satire in the female protagonists in Congreve's comedies. According to Young, the point of view of Congreve's female protagonists is that they should have the same measure of freedom and equality as men in the social world as well as within the marital relationship. Congreve's view of feminine independence has been of relevance to my project. According to Young, the female characters in Congreve's plays must prove themselves equal in the marital relationship and within society. Similarly, the female protagonist in my screenplay project must battle for equality within her marriage and re-establish her professional role to fit in with motherhood but still be rewarding and worthy of her talents. By observing and analysing Frye's principles of satire in Congreve's female characters, I aimed to create a satirical female protagonist who is witty, independent and determined to be treated with equality by her husband, employer and society. Like Congreve's heroines, my protagonist has done this by making light of injustice and satirising the grotesque and prejudiced. By using Frye's satirical principles of wit, humour and irony rather than sheer attack, my protagonist has come out as the victor rather than victim.

Congreve's inclusion of a proviso scene between Millamant and Mirabell in *The Way of the World* assures that Millamant will receive "equal privileges in marriage with those of her prospective husband" (Young 1997, p. 223). In addition, Millamant appreciates that devotion and understanding cannot be one-sided. If Millamant demands respect and freedom from Mirabell then she must also respect his needs and desires within their relationship. I have paid homage to Congreve within *Yummy Mummy* by also including a proviso scene between my protagonist, Lanie, and her husband, Felix. This insures that the couple agree to an equal share of parenting and housekeeping and they respect each other's privacy and need for freedom.

Douglas Young, in *The Feminist Voices in Restoration Comedy* (1997, p. 1), claims that Congreve, Wycherley and Etherege wrote female protagonists who were not deceived by appearances. "While they reflected the real world's ideas and conventions, they also condemned

some of the injustices and weaknesses of that world and offered alternative modes of social conduct that were far ahead of their time” (Young 1997, p. 1). Similarly, my protagonist, Lanie, learns to stand up to the injustices forced upon her by her editor, Steve, and tell him that his magazine patronises and oppresses women. Although her outspokenness first leads to her losing her job, she is eventually able to bargain with Steve to create a stronger magazine which respects and values women.

My analysis of the screenplay, *Something's Gotta Give*, has given examples of how satirist, Nancy Meyers, has applied all of Frye's principles of satire in her screenplay. There are parallels between the protagonist of Erica and the heroines in Congreve's Restoration comedies. Like Erica and her sister Zoe, Congreve's women display “An implicit moral standard” (Frye 1957, p. 224) relating to how they believe they should be treated by society and men in particular. They are all prone to attacking and degrading those who do not fit their moral codes. The heroines of Congreve's comedies also reject the traditional view of women as subordinate and inferior to men, endorsing instead a relationship based upon the freedom and equality of both sexes (Young 1994, p. 251). Specifically, in their dealings with men, they all may display “Omphale” tendencies whereby the man is “bullied or dominated by women” (Frye 1957, p. 228). The women are also shown to test the loyalties and constancy of the valour of their men. Meyers has shown her female protagonist to be smart and witty by comparing her to the shallowness and insincerity of her male counterpart. Similarly, I endeavoured to demonstrate the strength of my female protagonist's convictions by contrasting her with the superficiality of her editor and other more shallow women.

Screenplay writing differs from writing for literature or the stage. Screenplay writing is used to create a feature film for the screen. The type of action which can be portrayed on the screen cannot always be portrayed on stage or in novel format. By observing and analysing how Meyers has used satire, in particular for the screen, I was able to apply her techniques towards my screenplay.



For instance, I observed, analysed and discussed how Meyers satirised the idea that her female protagonist was happy living alone without a love interest. Meyers uses Frye's principles of "reduction or degradation" and a "token fantasy" in the scenes where she humiliates her protagonist with exaggerated crying and despair after she discovers her love interest dining with another woman. Similarly, I attempted to show my female protagonist humiliated after she loses her job and her partner walks out. My protagonist was reduced to working as a receptionist and degraded with a number of embarrassing physical incidents. By using Meyers' screenplay template, I used action rather than words to show the humiliation of my protagonist. This *degradation* was important to show my protagonist's humility. Similar to the protagonist in Meyers' screenplay, I wanted to show my heroine as a strong and feisty woman, however, I also desired that audiences could sympathise and relate to her.

Sol Saks, ex-Network Supervisor of Comedy at ABC, in his excellent instructional book, *The Craft of Comedy Writing* asserts that those who are oppressed may use humour to outwit the enemy. Saks argues, "More admirable and gratifying is the historical use of humor by the oppressed themselves to alleviate intolerable persecution... When women and homosexuals, in their worthy, unequal, and so far serious fight for equality start to use humour in their battle, they will begin to outflank the enemy... Jokes by the victims themselves are sensitive as well as purposeful. We use wit to enlist the help of a third party against an antagonist. Ridicule is a powerful weapon. When used insensitively it is often cruel. When used against injustice it can bring the malefactor to his knees quicker than physical force" (Saks 1985, p. 19). This research has shown how satire may be used positively to bring out injustice in the battle for equality for women. Within my screenplay, the heroine uses humour in her battle against the oppressive beliefs of her employer, husband and mother-in-law.

My early research found little theory relating to the techniques involved in writing satire for the screen featuring a female protagonist. Film critics and theorists, along with audiences and actresses, have also identified the need for screenplay comedies which feature strong female protagonists of the ilk of the 1930's screwball comedies. I trust that my research and project has begun to answer the need for the tools and techniques required to write a satirical screenplay with

a strong female protagonist who “makes the jokes” (Denby 1997, p. 2). In addition, by using satire in my screenplay to focus on the plight of young couples and in particular working mothers, I have attempted to make a statement about contemporary marriage roles and parenthood by featuring a female protagonist that is spiritually and intellectually matched to her male counterparts.

### **Directions for Future Research**

Frye’s theories have been described as difficult (Hart, 1994, p. 2). He has been accused of building a system for others in *Anatomy of Criticism* without performing the practical application of his theory. I trust that my research has attempted to decode Frye and demonstrate how to practically apply Frye’s theories towards the writing of a strong, satirical female protagonist for the screen.

This theoretical methodology may also be applied to the writing of strong, satirical female protagonists for the stage. I have shown how Frye’s theories relating to satire may equally be applied towards the writing of satirical literature, theatre and feature film. The principles of satire which have been outlined within my research may also be applied to the creation of feature film and theatrical satire featuring a male protagonist.

We have seen how Frye’s theory relating to the principles of satire can be of benefit to a writer of feature film satire. The observation and analysis of Frye’s six principles of satire in the female protagonists in my case studies have also assisted in the writing of feature film satire featuring a strong female protagonist. Frye’s theories go further to describe the principles of other genres. These include Comedy, Romance and Tragedy. Future research may apply Frye’s principles towards the writing techniques of other feature film genres featuring female protagonists.

This research has attempted to analyse, examine and discuss aspects of creating strong comedic roles for women. Future research may specifically feature writing female protagonists for romantic comedy screenplays. Australian feminist film theorist, Felicity Collins argues that

Frye's phase of comedy "requires the bride to be little more than the hero's prize ... bereft of her own desire." For the future of the genre of romantic comedies, female protagonists must progress to be more than the pining female and/or damsel in distress.

Feminist theatre historian, Susan Carlson argues that in most comedies "the status quo is disrupted, and in the upheaval of role reversals the woman characters acquire an uncharacteristic dominance. Women in power, or a group of women in power, are funny because they are so out of the ordinary" (Carlson 1991 p. 17). The role of comedic female protagonist will come of age when women or groups of women holding power are no longer considered to be funny but just another normal representation of women. These women will derive their status with the addition of personal qualities of wit and humour rather than meekness and resignation. Frye argues that "in Old Comedy, when a girl accompanies a male hero in his triumph, she is generally a stage prop" (Frye 1957 p. 173). With future research, comedy screenplays may feature women in integral roles and not as mere "stage props."

Future research may also look at the techniques involved in applying Frye's theories of satire, comedy, romance and tragedy to feature film screenplays and theatrical plays featuring a male protagonist.

According to literature historian, Matthew Hodgart in *Satire*, "Satire on women is a comic recording of deviations from the ideal ... and traditionally it has been centred on the cardinals of docility, chastity and modesty" (Hodgart 1969, p. 81). My research has explored and outlined how future feature film satires on women may progress to showing the ideal heroine as strong, witty and a more than equal match to her male counterpart.

Frye has been criticised by some as being difficult to understand and that his theories, although groundbreaking are often tricky to apply. My research, has aimed to interpret and analyse Frye's theories of satire so that they can be of benefit to a writer of satire. In his essay, *Reflections in a Mirror*, Frye states that he hoped that his Theory of Myths would "serve as a guide to practical criticism" (Krieger 1966, p. 137). My research has been concerned with the methods involved in

writing satire rather than criticising it. This research has attempted to apply Frye's and others theories of the principles of satire to discover the methods involved in writing satirical comedy for the screen. I also anticipate that this research may lead to the writing of stronger comedic screen roles for women.

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