Julie Writing Bible

My feature length screenplay, *Julie*, was written with the express intent of creating a summative project which demonstrates what I have learned while studying Visual and Performing Arts with Film Concentration at the University of Texas at Dallas, specifically film comedy, queer cinema, screenwriting, and the foundational knowledge I have learned across many different courses. I brought to *Julie*, too, my previous studies of Psychology at the University of North Texas, which helped to shape themes of attachment theory and limerence which pervade the story. This insight also allowed me to see the screenplay, much like in Cheryl Dunye's *The Watermelon Woman* (1996), as a means of creating an archive, specifically one of my father's life.

Though much of *Julie* is fictionalized or amplified, I believe the attachment to the real-life story of a young, directionless man in the late 1970s helped to add a realism the story might not otherwise have. At the same time, too, my studies of film comedy helped aid in this effort—specifically that of "animal comedy." The term "animal comedy" was coined by William Paul in his 1990 article, "Sound Comedy: The Rise and Fall of Animal Comedy" from *The Velvet Light Trap*. Paul described this comedy as having animals "never very far from [the plot], at least metaphorically, sometimes literally, and often are presented in strikingly similar ways" (Paul 73). The main influences—and the cause of its name: "Animal Comedy"—for the rise of this type of comedy were the films *Animal House* (1978) and *Porky's* (1981). Both films feature characters acting impulsively and grossly, giving in to their more animalistic instincts. In writing *Julie*, which is set in 1979, I began with the goal of alluding to animal comedy, as it imbued much of the comedic films of the era.

Allusions to animal comedy can be found in many scenes of the screenplay, as, as previously stated, it was considered heavily during my writing process. William, the screenplay's protagonist, is the main culprit of these types of impulsive, animalistic actions. Throughout the screenplay, he schemes, acts raucously, flails, drinks, does drugs, and makes other risky decisions. Still, his actions appear less extreme than something from *Animal House* and more similar to something from Richard Linklater's *Dazed and Confused* (1993) or *Everybody Wants Some* (2016), which—in my studies—I have also taken a critical look at. I found that, as I wrote and tackled topics beyond comedy, I wanted William to be a character audiences could root for despite his making a few poor decisions. This is why I chose to write William's character, more often than not, along the lines of mischievous rather than destructive. Like Linklater's approach to writing comedic characters in this era, I wanted to give him and others depth alongside their comedic moments.

William's best friend, the character of Ken, for example, felt important to me to write as a more grounded character. Though he is not the main character, Ken feels like the heart of the story. This was purposeful. William, as a character, is loosely based on my own father, but Ken, too, is based on someone: his best friend. Though much about the true story has become unrecognizable in my adaptation, I wanted two things to stay genuine: his queerness and his kindness. For me, it was difficult to pursue a story where I wrote a queer character as a side character, knowing—from my studies and from simple observation—that this is regularly the case in films, if the queer character exists at all. Still, I knew that Ken was an important addition and that it would be worse to write his identity out entirely than to write him as a side character. Instead, I focused on writing him well and without shame—beyond some of what was culturally expected at the time. In doing this, I consulted not only my past studies, but also additional

resources such as Michael Green's *Screenwriting Representation: Teaching Approaches to Writing Queer Characters.* I felt this source helped me greatly in developing Ken, as I had previously studied both queer cinema and screenwriting, but never a fusion of the two. It allowed me to think about the politics of representation, and even more importantly, the politics of misrepresentation. One thing Green wrote that stuck with me as I crafted the screenplay is that "even indie queer films tend to focus on sexuality as a subject, and like the 'women's pictures' of Hollywood's past, they tend to be confined to a few genres, such as melodrama and romantic comedy" (Green). I felt that this was a very astute observation that helped shape how I decided to represent Ken. Of course, his queerness is a part of his character, so it could not be ignored entirely, but I tried not to focus more on it than I did on William's heterosexuality. Outside of his queerness, I wrote Ken as a leader, a good friend, a lover of games and even slight mischief. I felt satisfied, in the end, with how I wrote him because the screenplay, too, in its entirety cannot be easily confined into the box of melodrama or romantic comedy. It is too unserious at times to be considered on par with melodramas such as *Gone with the Wind* (1939) or *Mildred Pierce* (1945) but possess too little actual on-screen romance to be considered a romantic comedy.

As I wrote the screenplay, I also consulted other resources on screenwriting to ensure that I was expressing my ideas clearly and correctly. One of these resources was Jack Epp's "Screenwriting is Rewriting: The Art and Craft of Professional Revision." This source acted as another helpful guide for my focus when writing. Often, when I consult resources in my writing, I like to hand-pick specific quotes that resonate with what I am trying to accomplish in my work and remind myself of them frequently. In Epp's book, this quote was: "In independent films […] the main character's personal and emotional journey is more prominent and important than the plot's twists and turns. The focus of independent films is usually on the main character's

emotional issues and dysfunctional relationships. In either case, there must be balance between plot events that entertain and plot events that pressure the main character's story" (Epps 49).

Keeping Epp's words in mind, striking a balance between slow and fast—comedy and drama—became very important to me in my process of writing *Julie*. Stories that are very character-focused can often drag in the opinion of some audiences. In my writing, I attempted to combat this by offering scenes of levity and fun in between scenes of anxiety, angst, and listlessness. Whether I truly accomplished this balance is not up to me to say, but I did make a concerted effort, placing fast-moving, quickly cut scenes immediately following longer, slower scenes. I believe this added, too, to the incongruous nature of the screenplay, and in turn, to the comedy. The film's plot, I must admit, felt tropey at times. It was never my goal to stray from this, however, as I was writing with my film education and influences in mind. Rather, I just wanted to make—maybe not the overall arc of the story, but what would come next—a surprise.

The meat of the story, though—though paradoxically lacking in presence—is the character of Julie. This simple fact is what brings William's feelings into the territory of limerence. After only a handful of interactions with Julie, he seems to project this idea of who she secretly is onto her, viewing her as the dream girl who may save him from his indecision. Julie, too, despite not knowing William, seems to view him in a similarly deluded way, as someone who could potentially hold the same ideals. The problem with this, and the problem with limerence in general, is that it is a simple projection, not a true reflection of compatibility, as William later learns.

Limerence, though, is often a very normalized behavior in film, especially in romantic comedies. I've come across this theme much in my studies; though, unlike in *Julie*, the ending is typically happy and picturesque, illustrating to viewers that a deluded mindset will get them their

dream partner. Wyatt Moss-Wellington discusses this in depth in "The Emotional Politics of Limerence in Romantic Comedy Films," defining limerence as "state of intrusive obsessive thinking and intensity of passionate feelings toward a limerent object (a partner or love interest)." Within the realm of film, Moss-Wellington discusses limerence as a plot point in conjunction with audiences' feelings of pathos. Frequently imagining yourself in the role of this limerent protagonist as a direct result of constant exposure to this trope coupled with—more often than not—an unrealistic happy ending, normalizes this experience to audiences (Moss-Wellington). Just like representation within queer cinema, I believe that writing comes with a responsibly, even if that responsibility is not recognized or considered by the author. It is easy to call these films "just fun" while simultaneously feeding audiences the idea that limerence is normal. There is much representation in film that comes with a responsibility that is rarely addressed, and while every trigger cannot be accounted or adjusted for, I found it very interesting to explore the reality (and destructive nature of) of limerence in writing the fictionalized world of *Julie*.

I also found it interesting to look at the screenplay as an archive of sorts. I was inspired to do this by Cheryl Dunye's *The Watermelon Woman,* which I have studied in multiple film courses throughout my time at the University of Texas at Dallas. The simple fact is this: my father is dead. Any stories I know of his, that weren't written or recorded in some way, were told to me upwards of two years ago and likely have been revised with each hazy re-remembering of details I didn't experience firsthand. I decided to have fun with this in the writing of *Julie*, however, by filling in blank spaces and exaggerating certain stories and characteristics, inventing new characters and events, in order to (re)create a lively, younger version of my father who still had time to conjure new hopes and dreams. Because even though he was, by his own account, at

this time of his life, "wracked with indecision and a lack of purpose," these were also the times he cherished the most.

Really, *Julie* not only serves as a coming-of-age event for William, but also for me. Writing the screenplay allowed me to marry the knowledge and passion I have of and for film studies with the love I have for my father, the joy I experience in recounting his stories, and the interest I have in psychology, especially when it comes to screenwriting. I believe the project to be a great representation of what I learned during my time at the University of Texas at Dallas, both inside and outside of school.

Julie Writing Bible Bibliography

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