

PUT TO RIGHTS

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A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF FINE ARTS

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN FILM
YORK UNIVERSITY
TORONTO, ONTARIO

May 2016

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ABSTRACT

Put To Rights is a family drama about three brothers and their attempt to prepare for a traditional Easter barbecue for their hometown's Greek Orthodox Church. Yanni Vlaos, the youngest brother, goes through a journey of self-discovery as the events leading up to Greek Easter force him to confront his negative memories about his father and empathize with his brothers' needs to save their family restaurant and reconnect with a community they have abandoned. *Put To Rights* examines the relationships of brothers and fathers and sons in a first generation Canadian family. It is a highly personal story that is partially adapted from my own life and centers around concepts of the Canadian hybrid identity, masculinity, memory, brotherhood, family, and the motivations behind abusive patriarchal figures.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing *Put To Rights* would not have been possible without the guidance and support of the following people:

My life partner, Amanda Hamilton, has been my sounding board throughout this entire endeavour and without her keen ear and intelligence I fear that I would not have learned to trust myself as an artist.

My mother, Nicole, my brothers, Kristian and Ryan, and my cousin Nicholas, have been tireless in their emotional support when writing this story and never failed to read a draft. Their encouragement gave me the strength to push forward.

My first two writing mentors, Dr. Alden Turner and Dr. Catherine Hunter of the University of Winnipeg, taught me the foundations of craft for which I will always be grateful.

Genevieve Appleton has been an essential mentor in advising me of the path I must walk to become a professional screenwriter, producer and filmmaker.

And finally, my thesis advisor, Amnon Buchbinder, whose advice, creative spirit, and integrity, has reminded me that artistry is a pattern of existence you represent in every aspect of who you are. And if you spend enough time completing the pattern you may just get lucky enough to discover something about your work and in turn yourself.

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INTRODUCTION

This contextual document will chronicle my thought process as a writer in developing the feature length screenplay *Put To Rights*.

I will begin by discussing my agenda. When I wrote the first variation of this story back in 2006, I saw the possibility of a larger scope thematic within the narrative. My curiosities lead me to research masculine psychology and psychology in general, hero myth structures and archetypes, Canadian identity from a personal and anthropological perspective, and cognitive patterns of abuse victims.

Next, I continue by explaining my personal healing. Consistently, this document carries forward the idea of my growth as a human being and I reveal to the reader some of the episodes from my abusive childhood. Learning to cope with these memories has in-turn progressed the multidimensional development of my screenplay *Put to Rights*.

The following section of the document questions masculinity and its properties and masculine psychology in order to better understand the development of the characters of *Put To Rights*. To help craft these characters in a three-dimensional fashion, I based much of their mannerisms on the men from my family and the Greek community I had very little contact with as a child. This

combination of psychological research and real-life adaptation has been the key element to my process as a writer.

I then proceed to discuss the characters of *Put To Rights* in greater detail and explain how I came to conclusions regarding their motivations. My conclusions eventually changed the story's thematic structure from one of tragedy into one of restoration and forgiveness. Delving deeply into my personal inspirations, I reveal the foundations for these characters and shed light on their real life counter-parts who helped in my own development from childhood into adulthood.

Building from the personal growth experienced by my characters, I talk about theme and explore how *Put To Rights* developed from a tragedy into a narrative that now revolves around concepts of resilience, forgiveness and restoration. I spend much of this section divulging to the reader the evolution of this change which was influenced by my own life as I began to see my abuser - a great source of inspiration for the screenplay's antagonists - in a more objective, empathetic light, rather than from the perspective of a victim.

Lastly, I discuss specific cinematic story influences that help to formulate aspects of my craft and guide my structural decision-making in telling the story, as well as offering some final thoughts.

THE WRITER'S AGENDA

The first iteration of *Put To Rights* was a four-page prose piece titled "The Sacrifice". The narrative arc was basically the same as the flashback sequences in the eventual screenplay and centered on a father trying to teach his son the concept of sacrifice. Many of the actions were the same, except in the short story, the young boy asked his father if he could switch places with the puppy. When I finished the piece, I realised that I had come across a story that was personally significant, and that touched me deeply.

Inspiration struck me during a conversation I had with my brother about the whereabouts of our father. I started to reminisce over the few memories I retained, (most had been repressed), and recognised the possibility of exploring certain topics. I formulated two main ideas that remained constant in every version I wrote.

First, my main focus was to explore the journey of young, first-generation Canadian males when transitioning from childhood psychological-processing into adult psychological-processing.

Second, I was heavily invested in wanting to chronicle the emotional path of abuse victims.

With these thoughts in mind I went about exploring ways to mould the story into a larger chronicle, but many of my first

attempts did not feel natural and were eventually shelved. And then in 2009, after attending an actual lamb slaughter for Greek Easter celebrations with members of my own family, the full scope of the narrative arc of a story within a larger chronicle made itself apparent.

Interestingly enough, because this event was somewhat traumatizing, the beginning iterations of *Put To Rights* were tragic; Yanni was bullied into killing the lamb because his older brothers felt him incapable of being a responsible adult. Both Taxi and Peter, but Peter especially, wanted to make a man out of Yanni because he had little to no sense of what that meant.

My desire in writing the story in this fashion stemmed from asking myself whether I would be capable of doing the slaughter for my family if the need arose. And because the event was so iconic, the men who had brought me on their day's adventure so masculine, I began to view the entire process as a rite of passage - something that was never properly replicated within my life, but something I experienced inadvertently nonetheless.

THE CONCEPT OF MANHOOD

What does it mean to "be a man" in our day and age? Robert L. Moore's book "King, Warrior, Magician, Lover: Rediscovering the Archetypes of the Mature Masculine" describes how accepting and embracing masculine nature is of paramount importance at this time in our history. Moore claims that our lack of positive, mature, masculine aggression has stunted the growth of males in the Western world thanks to the missing rite-of-passage transition in our Western culture.

Our Western cultural practices have all-but-forgotten about an essential episode of psychological growth - the rite of passage - which has left several generations of males lacking the knowledge for best-practice decision-making in adult life. The rite-of-passage episode at the climax of one's childhood is a cornerstone for transitioning into adulthood. Due to a lack of inclusion of the rite-of-passage within Canadian culture our concept of manhood has been formulated on negative masculine aggression (from the shadow archetypes of the adult masculine) present in much of our media.

Without this vital ritual, as Moore suggests, males become stunted in their growth and are thus more susceptible to the shadow archetypes of their psyche. In his book, Moore describes men as having lost their touch with their inner masculine selves, which stunts their psychological growth, due to "pseudo-

initiations" attempting to emulate the rite of passage ritual.
(Moore, 5)

In Canada, there are no death/rebirth simulations or practices, defined as culturally Canadian, that help bring boys into manhood. Therefore, I purpose that a rite-of-passage in Canada is one of two events, if present at all, in a teen's life:

1) It is predestined by archetypical guardians who have continued the cultural practises in rites-of-passage ceremonies from the old country.

2) It is an anomaly event borne from trauma.

Possibly, my own rite of passage could be looked at as an event that took place when I was sixteen years old. After having endured years of extreme physical, emotional, and psychological abuse, I'd found myself at a crossroads - was I going to stand by idly, or did I have the courage needed to make a change?

It was a school night. I was asleep, but was woken instantly when my mother burst into my room shortly after 1:00 AM. It didn't happen often, she rarely came for my protection despite having been constantly beaten to a bloody pulp, but this evening was an extreme case.

My Mother flipped on the light in my room and I woke instantly. Tears and blood smeared her face. I didn't ask how she had gotten away from him, but I made a decision that night to never let it happen again.

I told her to find us a place to live the following day and to not come home. I would protect and care for my younger brothers and I would make sure they were safe while she found us new living conditions. I picked up a baseball bat I kept under my bed and told her to stay in my room. Then, I went and sat on the stairs.

After a few minutes of waiting, my father appeared. He wanted to get past me, wanted to finish what he had started. But I wouldn't let him up the stairs. He made a move and I swung the bat so hard in his direction that I put a hole in the drywall. He stared at me for a moment and when he realized I was serious with my threat, he stood perfectly still and watched me for several minutes. A smile became barely visible from the corner of his mouth.

I sat on the stairs all night, waiting. He came and went more than a few times to see if I had abandoned my post, but I had not, did not, for the remainder of the evening and into the early morning.

Despite it being my decision to have taken up this responsibility, it was not a ritual; it was not planned, and it was not purposeful as part of my development.

I wanted Yanni in *Put To Rights* to have had a moment similar to my own rite-of-passage in his backstory, but I wanted him to have failed it, whereas Peter and Taxi experienced a pseudo rite-of-passage invented by their father, making them not as whole as they would have been, had they experienced a more formal ritual.

For me, fully developed male characters experience a stunt in their psychological growth at some point during their chronicle (their life before the events of the story being told). (Buchbinder, 68) These characters' shadow archetypes have control over their actions during the story and as such, their behavioural patterns must be overcome and altered in some fashion within the story for psychological growth (their need) to occur.

Put To Rights relays the importance of manhood and mature masculinity as a quality of universal need by having the Vlaos brothers confront their shadow selves through altruism. Yanni, Peter and Taxi all reframe their thoughts on masculine aggression over the course of the story by coming to the same conclusion about their father: he was just a man.

CHARACTERS

The characters of *Put To Rights* all developed out of my memories growing up in a Greek-Canadian family in combination with my research on masculine maturity and psychology.

I come from a family of three brothers. My father had two brothers. Even my uncle had two sons. Our family is predominantly male and growing up in a hyper-masculine family unit has heavily influenced the core characters in all of my writing.

From a young age, I always found the male psyche to be heavily associated with aggression. Most if not all of my writing centers around characters attempting to understand and overcome their own insecurities/inadequacies concerning their masculine selves by having to overcome a process of demonization that gives them strength, but weakens their overall masculine resolve.

Masculine archetypes come in many classical forms as suggested through Joseph Campbell's writings in "The Hero With A Thousand Faces". The mentor figure in particular plays a central role in helping to psychologically prepare and aid the hero in their quest. However, the figure of the mentor can also combine with several other archetypes in order to fulfill their purpose. On many occasions, the men of my family have all served as the mentor figure, but also as threshold guardians, allies and

occasionally, the trickster. No one particular character from *Put To Rights* is any one man from my family, but rather, each character contains archetypical traits that are essentially found in every male on the Greek side of my heritage.

The size and shape of these brothers was also important to me because all of the men in my family are quite large and physically powerful. I freely adapted many of their gestures, mannerisms and speech patterns to justly represent a generation of men charged with the responsibility of keeping traditional practices alive. This pressure, placed on my father and my uncles, served as a backbone for earlier drafts and motivated character actions in the latest drafts as subconscious psychological stressors.

Peter is the full blown epitome of shadow-energy masculinity. He's aggressive, overbearing, and dominant, but at his core he is sensitive, kind, and always thinking of others - positive traits that he masks through his bravado. But Peter is injured and when injured, the best of generals, according to Sun Tzu, will retreat and regroup. Thus, it is due to Peter's medical condition that he desires to rejoin the estranged Greek community. Peter is the epitome of masculinity because of the choices he was forced to make, because of the lessons Gus taught him. Peter only understands one thing; to be a man is to be physically powerful. To be capable of protecting your loved ones

means to have the ability to destroy whatever stands in your way.

In the first iterations of *Put To Rights*, Peter was even more of a bully to Yanni than he is in the current draft. This made him somewhat cartoonish in that his actions were consistently violent, negative, forceful, and altogether villainous. My mistake was to think that my main antagonist did not have a heart whatsoever and was blinded and indoctrinated into the male machismo attitude of so many of the Greek men I had grown up with. However, the nearsightedness towards Peter's character was only amplified by my own understanding of my father; every Greek man was a vile, unruly tyrant who ruled his family with an iron fist.

Over the first few years of workshopping Peter's character I began a process of self-growth that is still going on to this day. I once saw my uncles, (my father's brothers), in a similar light to my father. As I got to know these men better, I realised that not every masculine authoritative figure was an abusive, totalitarian ruler of his household. They have their faults (as we all do), but they are not intentionally cruel individuals.

When I needed a more humanistic approach to Peter's character I looked toward my uncles for inspiration. Alcoholism is a problem in my family and I wanted to address this issue

with force. Peter's violent outbursts in the script are due to his inability to deal with the relationship he had with his father, Gus. It made the most sense that Peter would repeat the sins of his father by continuing to favour drinking because he had not dealt with the underlying issues of his own childhood. This is why he is the most violent of the three Vlaos brothers.

Taxi represents the ambitious, businessman sense of my family. A good businessman knows how to be a diplomat. Taxi maximizes this aspect of his intelligence to run the restaurant, but he also uses this skill to effectively micromanage his brothers. He is calculated and fair, capable of being an aggressor, but he does not use his aggression to get what he wants. A gentle giant with a gold heart and a good head on his shoulders, Taxi is the even keel, solid rock, for his brothers. However, Taxi's character could benefit from further development. Subsequent drafts of *Put To Rights* will increase Taxi's presence by insinuating his desire to be a successful restaurateur.

Taxi's backstory lays groundwork for his desire to acquire a post-secondary education. My intention in doing this was to imply how much more successful the restaurant could be if Taxi had a degree in business management. Although this draft does not fully do this thought justice, the sparks of this thought

are present and could be fleshed out further with a few adjustments to dialogue.

Yanni represents my generation because his academic ambitions (and struggles) are at constant variance with the weighted responsibilities that bear down on him both culturally and with regard to family loyalties. The children of first generation Canadians have many familial responsibilities, such as the pressure to uphold familial and cultural traditions. But these traditions also require adjustments in order to be properly assimilated into a generation of culturally hybridized individuals.

Being a hyphenated Canadian produces much confusion about identity among first and second generation Canadians. Christopher Stuart Taylor describes the situation perfectly in his article "Marginalizing Identity: The I and the Other of a Second-Generation Canadian":

"As a hyphenated Canadian - African-Canadian, black-Canadian, but, most importantly, Barbadian-Canadian I find it difficult to hold myself to one specific culture. My life is a hybrid of a multitude of pasts and histories. I am Canadian, but I am not Barbadian. I am Barbadian, but I am not Canadian. I have a strong lineage to both cultures and countries. I was born in this country, have lived in

this society my entire life, and believe wholeheartedly that I am Canadian. Nonetheless, my parents' Barbadian nationality and the Barbadian community in Canada have influenced who I have become. Barbados is the body of the car, while Canada is the engine." (Taylor, 129)

Am I Greek?

Am I Canadian?

When I was a kid, we had an assignment in school to draw the flag of our parents' home country. I was excited. I drew up the Greek flag. I brought it home. I showed the drawing to my father and he yelled at me. I should have drawn a Canadian flag because after all, he was Canadian now, even though we celebrated the traditional Greek Orthodox holidays.

This cultural confusion represents my generation. Yet, we are a generation of Canadians proud to be culturally hyphenated, even if it does cause an identity crisis at times, because it enriches our lives. With these thoughts in mind, I wanted Yanni's character arc to lead him from a place of contempt, where his frustration with the past blinded him, to a place of empathy for those he considers his antagonists, thus making him capable of overcoming the identity crisis and growing because of it.

Nicholas and Stavros serve as representations of the Greek community I never got to fully know as a child. We had contact,

maybe once or twice a year, but we never went to Greek Church, and never participated in Greek community events. I never went to Greek school either. My father decided it wasn't a good idea because of the discrimination he experienced when he moved here. He didn't want his children to have to go through the same conflicts.

However, over the past decade, I have made my own attempts to reconcile with the Greek side of my family. I worked for my uncle for seven years over the course of my undergrad and will always be grateful for the opportunity to reconnect with men I had fond memories of. I have met many members of the Winnipeg Greek community over the past few years and in combination with memories of the Greek community from my childhood, I molded Nicholas and Stavros. I wanted these characters to have a real effect on the way Yanni felt about being Greek. These men are traditionalists, but in the most profound sense. Like the shamans of aboriginal tribes, these men hold the keys to the cultural traditions that can be assimilated by first generation Canadians.

Gus' character development has been the most drastic and vital change in the process of writing this story. Starting out as a one-dimensional villain, Gus became a much fuller character when I went through a personal transformation with regards to how I feel about my own father.

I've already stated that I thought of my father as a villain, but seeing him in any other light felt impossible until the summer of 2015.

Images and Voices of Hope holds a Narrative Summit once a year in New York where media professionals from around the globe come to discuss a genre they call "restorative narrative." Structurally, traditional media outlets concentrate on trauma without fulfilling any resolution. They do this in order to generate sales. The ultimate goal of *Images and Voices of Hope* is to change the focus of storytelling in popular media into one of resilience, rather than trauma and tragedy.

With the *Biology of Story* project, I travelled to New York in the summer of 2015 to shoot a documentary on the Restorative Narrative genre. I spent the entire weekend at ivoh's narrative summit in somewhat of an existential crisis as I relived elements of my own childhood traumas through the psychology of the summit's many workshops and lectures. But the reflective quality of the summit gave me new insights. For the first time, I started seeing my own father less as the antagonist of my story, and more as the protagonist of his own story.

I realized that in earlier drafts of *Put To Rights*, I was doing the same thing with Gus' character that I had been doing in real life; I made a villain out of Gus because I could not understand my own father's motivations. When I started thinking

of my father's motivation being Love, as foreign a notion as it may seem given his actions, in turn, Gus' character became multilayered.

Gus wants nothing more than for his sons to have it all. When he discovers that Yanni may have a learning disability he is desperate to "fix" the issue himself. The frustration and aggressive outbursts Gus displays stem from his mental illness, which, much like my own father, skews his intentions in the eyes of others. Despite the sincerity of his motivations, his actions are then misinterpreted as malicious by Yanni.

Dean represents those second generation Canadians who have been fully indoctrinated into their cultural heritage and view it as exclusive.

I have known Greek men for years, despite not being integrated into the Greek community. Those Greeks that I did know, the boys who did go to Greek school, cherished their heritage and behaved at times as though they were a part of something bigger than themselves that the "other" would have a hard time fully comprehending.

Therefore, Dean embodies the most poignant memories I have of boys and men my age that allowed their "Greekness" to define their personalities, often to the point of cliché. They are overly aggressive, womanizers, and can behave in a sleazy fashion, often resulting in confrontation.

A note about the three women who appear within the script and have very minor speaking roles: I am conflicted about their characters as representatives of the clichéd nature of female roles within film. However, the roles of these overused archetypes are vital to the reactions of the male characters they interact with.

Rather than Stavros throwing himself at the Woman in the restaurant while Yanni serves the party, he rejects her and chooses his family. One of the points of this scene is to show that Greek men are actually more respectful of family and monogamy than their mass media huge libido stereotypical counterparts.

The run-in with Litza is supposed to shed light on Yanni's character and how he actually feels about the Greek community. He is respectful of her and when she brings up Greek community gossip, he doesn't respond negatively or berate her need to do so. This is a tell-tale sign of Yanni's character. Although he is indifferent, he is not negative towards her or the community itself.

Lastly, the encounter at the coffee shop with the Cashier is meant to show how ineffective the male Greek stereotype actually is in garnering female attention. As a magnified representation of the Greek stereotype in this instance, Peter

is rejected by the Cashier, while both Yanni and Taxi are treated with respect simply by being themselves.

In earlier drafts of this story Yanni had a fiancé. In other drafts Yanni's mother was still alive! I have gone through many possible scenarios on what I should do with the female presence in the story and one thing became abundantly clear; I wanted to understand more about the male characters because a better understanding of them meant a better understanding of my own father. In concentrating on a male only cast I have neglected the female presence, and will pursue a possible solution to this within future drafts. However, due to the nature of my endeavor, my findings have been life altering. I've begun to see the men in my family as individuals rather than the narrative I had previously imposed. I took this new understanding of my familial male role models, applied it to my characters, and began to view them all as protagonists of their own stories.

GENRE AND THEME

When I first started writing fiction at the university level I always wrote in the genre of family drama, usually with a moralistic thematic and psychological twist, that contained an abusive parental figure and two siblings. Much of my writing was autobiographical and I did my best to structure my memories with narrative tools to make them complete stories.

I have been obsessed with the brother dynamic, the parent-child relationship, and the grandfather-grandchild relationship for most of my writing career. Family interconnectedness can leap generations and the bonds that form can be life-defining. I wanted to express these relationships as the bonds that have helped make me who I am today.

When I was a child, I went to my best friend's birthday party. It was a rare occasion because I wasn't allowed to see friends outside of school. I remember watching this boy and his father interact and it was the first time in my life that I knew there was something strange about how I viewed men; I did not fully trust them because of the ability to be violent aggressors.

For years, I have consistently explored vile, angry, confrontational male characters within my writing because the motivation behind these angry individuals has always fascinated me. Understanding the motivations behind the shadow's actions is

the key to transformation for many of the characters I have worked with throughout my writing career. These personal observations, that I've spent years psychologically analyzing, have given me the main focus for the subject of the themes in *Put To Rights*.

My interest in masculine psychology has led me to other subjects that have focused my thematic structure because these other subjects have all been tightly interwoven with the ethos of the mature masculine. Religion and religious practices, stemming from family connections, led me to experience firsthand a lamb slaughter for Greek Orthodox Easter traditions. My uncles brought me to the farm, explained the process of the slaughter, but slaughtered the lamb themselves (which I witnessed firsthand). My cousin was there as well and the both of us agree that the experience was traumatizing.

I asked my cousin how he would break down his trauma, how would he quantify what he felt was traumatizing, and he began by describing the beats: the drive up to the farm and the discussion of topics we were so unfamiliar with, the roughed out, dirty, state of the farm, the farmer's mannerisms and routine with the animals, the blood and guts factory that was the barn, and finally, the killing of the lamb itself. When I asked him if he'd do it, if he'd slaughter the lamb if need be, his answer was the same as mine.

It wasn't a simple "no".

After our discussion, I asked myself, how important were these traditions to me? What would I do if faced with having to carry forward my cultural heritage? Would I have the strength to commit the slaughter myself?

Most, if not all of my writing stems from a place where I question the limits of my own actions due to my reactionary tendencies stemming from the tainted view I have of reality in light of my abusive childhood. At times, I wonder if I can trust the logic of the way I experience things, knowing wholeheartedly that my reactions to particular events could simply be a by-product of my past.

I am in a state of continually questioning the self because I imagine many outcomes as a defence mechanism, but I find psychologically analyzing the possible scenarios that I envision to be a great source of inspiration for my writing. In the past, I focused much of my work on tragic outcomes because I felt that the drama (and specifically the tragedy), was in line with my own life's philosophy. However, as I have grown older my instincts have led me into a calmer mental state where my work has been guided by ideas of resilience in the face of traumatic events.

I am now more interested in writing from a place of restoration, where "a fish out of water" protagonist is placed

under the duress of male oppression and is put through a series of traumatic trials to test his or her will. Through the aftermath of the trauma, the protagonist has an epiphany of higher purpose which in turn causes him or her to experience psychological growth.

Over the past few years the protagonists of my stories learn to assimilate/defeat the trauma of their experience by viewing it in a different, empathetic light that enables comprehension of their antagonist's motives. Once the fear and mystery of the shadow's actions are relieved, the protagonist can then understand the antagonist and defeat their inner demons rather than the manifested external ones.

Structurally, I am heavily drawn toward the hero's journey as a guideline. Psychology is a major theme in *Put To Rights* and dominates most of my work in general, but it is the archetypes that interest me most. The hero's journey contains many archetypes that pass knowledge to the hero through interaction. Utilizing character types such as the mentor, the tyrant, spoiled prince, the good knight, I developed masculine character prototypes that I made into whole characters through adaptation of the members of my family.

Put To Rights is structured in three acts. I utilized both the structure from Joseph Campbell's "The Hero With a Thousand Faces" and Amnon Buchbinder's ladder rung metaphor from "The Way

of the Screenwriter" to redefine an understanding of how, not when, the turning points within the narrative take place in order to raise the stakes for Yanni, Peter and Taxi.

The journey of the Vlaos brothers is regulated by the opportunity that presents itself to volunteer for preparing the Greek Church's Easter barbecue. All three brothers have a stake in doing this: Yanni hopes that it will help him win the church "Socratic Scholarship" (based on a real scholarship offered by St. Demeterois Church in Winnipeg, Manitoba); Taxi is interested in hosting the barbecue in order to garnish new business for the restaurant and; Peter wants to host the barbecue because he longs for a reconnection due to his health scare.

However, accomplishing the barbecue also allows each of the brothers to heal and rectify an understanding of their father from a more realistic, objective perspective - instead of placing him on a pedestal, (as Peter and Taxi have), or completely demonizing him, (as Yanni has).

Yanni's knowledge of psychology is the key to Peter fully understanding the motivations behind his father's actions. But, Peter and Taxi's understanding of the positive aspects of masculine aggression (and partially adopted by them) is the key to Yanni's ability to empathize with the memory of his father as well as the brothers who emulate his behaviour.

Empathy plays a key role in having Yanni's goal change from completing the Easter barbecue out of selfish reasons for wanting to accomplish the task out of love for his brothers. As Yanni recalls the flashbacks his understanding of the present becomes less clouded with judgment as he analyzes his memories in conjunction with the events leading up to the day of slaughter. Yanni's self-actualization occurs because he finally adds up the truth of Gus' apparent psychosis - he was trying to do what was best for his son, the best way he knew how. After Peter's heart attack, which sparks Yanni's last memory in the hospital, Yanni realizes that if Peter loves him, then in turn, his father, (for whom Peter is a stand-in), probably loved him as well.

FILM INFLUENCES

Although many films have influenced my ideas on how to communicate the story for *Put To Rights*, the following five films in particular helped to influence my decisions: *The Return*, *Last Orders*, *Reservoir Dogs*, *Galaxy Quest* and *American Beauty*.

Each film helped with something specific, and when I was in doubt of certain choices I was making, I looked toward these films to help influence some of my decisions.

The Return, a Russian film by director Andrey Zvyagintsev, is a huge inspiration of mine for its slow pace and minimalist style, and was an obvious story choice with regard to the two brother characters and the aggressive patriarchal antagonist father. *The Return* is a coming-of-age story where the youngest brother, Ivan, goes through a rite of passage; he transitions from boyhood into manhood once he is capable of standing up to the patriarch.

Ivan's progression goes from cowardice to courage, as he is put through several tests of manhood throughout the film. From being forced to confront a bully, to pushing the car out of the mud when it is stuck, Ivan's attempts at accomplishing the tasks before him always end in partial successes. This allows him to grow psychologically throughout the film and accomplish the feat

of defeating his father and protecting his older brother, Andrey, by the film's conclusion.

One of the issues I had in developing *Put To Rights* was the limited character journey that Yanni went through in earlier drafts. In earlier versions, Yanni was bullied into killing the lamb which broke his spirit. Rather than slowly indoctrinating cultural principles into his Canadian identity, Yanni was forced to conform in a way that demonized his heritage. As the story developed and I looked for better ways to make the Canadian hybrid identity a positive concept, I realised that Yanni's character journey needed to change in order to reflect this.

The Return offered an excellent example of character development that is archetypical, especially for a psychological transition; Ivan goes from being a coward (incapable of making the leap from the water tower in the beginning of the film) to courageous (beating his fear of heights at the end of the film). In order to take *Put To Rights* into the new genre that was forming out of my character's development, Yanni's journey needed to reflect a change from negative to positive. In the beginning of the screenplay, Yanni is selfish and incapable of doing something for another person. By the end of the screenplay, Yanni learns the meaning of altruism when he completes the slaughter for his brothers - especially Peter.

From *Last Orders*, by director Fred Schepisi, I studied the use of flashbacks and how they were made effective without seeming as exposition. Adapted from a novel, *Last Orders* delves into the story of Jack through the memories of those people closest to him. The flashbacks all revolve around the character's memories of Jack in conjunction with events of the present. However, each "set" of flashbacks associated with any one particular character are also cohesive narratives in and of themselves. The present, which takes place on the day of scattering Jack's ashes over a road trip to the sea, is only a small portion of the film in its entirety. Each flashback within the film gives the viewer access to a reflection on Jack's character and how he affected those around him. What makes the flashbacks so effective is their execution; one character will bring up Jack and another will respond, after which, the character who responded will have a moment of reflection regarding their observation of Jack and the scenario/comment made about him.

Yanni's process, his reflection on the memories of Gus and the traumatic events that caused the Vlaos to split off from the Greek community, is very similar to the characters of *Last Orders* in that Yanni also tries to piece together an understanding of his father and his motivations in order to confirm his own character's resolve. Much like in *Last Orders*,

Yanni concludes his analysis of his father, and therefore himself, by claiming the "[He] get[s] it now", a statement which is supposed to rectify his understanding that Gus didn't hate him, nor did Gus wish him any harm, he was simply trying to help his son the best way he knew how.

While the flashbacks in *Put To Rights* only come from Yanni's perspective, my goal was to make them as effective as possible with regard to Yanni's understanding of Gus, rather than all three brothers' separate understandings. The film is about Yanni and his experience with Gus and how his view of these memories changes as he empathizes with his brothers' reasons for wanting to hold the Easter barbeque for the church; Peter wants the comfort of family and community (driven by his illness and sense of mortality) and Taxi wants to maintain the restaurant not only for personal gain, but as a method of keeping Gus' legacy alive.

One of the biggest questions I asked myself while developing the story was whether or not to keep the flashbacks at all. They are themselves a short film. However, they were not always as complete a story as they are now. In earlier drafts, Gus was a bigger tyrant and his motivations were unknown. I added a few scenes to the flashback sequence (the first one outside the church, the last one at the graveyard) in order to

make the flashbacks themselves a complete plotline, capable of standing alone, much like the flashbacks in *Last Orders*.

The other film I conducted research on structurally to make the flashback sequences more cohesive was *Reservoir Dogs*.

Although the genre, writing style, and narrative structure of *Reservoir Dogs* is much different than that of my script, the use of separate timelines, used to unveil the backstory of a robbery gone south, work effectively as a plot device due to their completeness with regard to narrative structure; each flashback in *Reservoir Dogs*, much like in *Last Orders*, serves as its own story unit within the larger scope of the film which compiles a greater understanding of each character. This concept - of maintaining a complete, cohesive, narrative within events of the past - is vital for flashbacks to work as more than exposition.

By fulfilling a story arc (beginning, middle, end) flashback sequences become microcosmic events that represent the present's macrocosmic problem. In *Put To Rights*, the flashbacks reiterate the importance of family, tradition, sacrifice, heritage, and love, all of which are subjects the Vlaos brothers, but especially Yanni, come to new conclusions about by the end of the screenplay.

In *Reservoir Dogs*, all of the flashback sequences, (which are more expositional because their tie to the present has nothing to do with a character reminiscing), are also connected

to a complete narrative. Only through the entirety of the flashbacks in *Reservoir Dogs* can we predict how the narrative of the present will play out. The foreshadowing effect of the past reflects in absolute certainty the outcome of the present; Mr. White will protect Mr. Orange against anyone, even if he is the rat, because he wants to believe he is a good man. This concept is also something I attempted to include in *Put To Rights* for dramatic effect with regard to the trans-generational trauma present in the Vlaos family. Yanni is opposed to accepting his father in the beginning of the story. However, Yanni's educational pursuit is actually caused by his memory with the puppy - a direct correlation to his father's fear of having been "othered".

Although *Galaxy Quest* seems like an unlikely choice considering its genre, pacing, and style, I have always felt that the story was extremely well constructed in light of particular screenwriting and storytelling philosophies. Structurally, *Galaxy Quest* follows the narrative arc of the hero's journey and contains excellently executed turning points not because of an add-water structure, but because the characters are multidimensional.

Jason Nesmith is a glory-hog who only thinks of himself. When he receives a rude awakening in the beginning of the film in the bathroom of the comic convention, (that he's a washed-up

actor from a dead television series), he doesn't handle it gracefully. His selfish nature is so intense that when faced with a true dilemma - that of what to do concerning Saris when he first appears - Jason is oblivious to the ramifications of his decision. It is this hubris that eventually brings carnage down upon the Thermians and almost gets their entire species obliterated. In light of Jason's desire to recoup his fleeting fame, he remains oblivious to the limits of his former glory. It is not until he is confronted with the truth that he makes the selfless decision to save the Thermians. Every turning point in *Galaxy Quest* takes place because of Jason's motivation. It is not a recipe. It is a reasoning process that allows story events to unfold.

I wanted *Put To Rights* to have similar progression with regards to plot events. I wanted the turning points in *Put To Rights* to take place because of Yanni's desire to win the Church scholarship, which evolves into wanting to complete the slaughter (and in turn the Easter barbeque) for his brothers. Much like Jason, Yanni goes from one end of the psychological spectrum to the other. His reasons for finally slaughtering the lamb come from love, rather than selfish desire.

My final major film influence is Alan Ball's *American Beauty*. Contextually, the main focus within most of my filmic studies centers around characters and their motivations

influencing the plots events. In *American Beauty*, my focus revolved around Colonel Fitts and his relationship with his son. One of the big questions regarding Fitts' character is the meaning behind his advances toward Lester near the end of the film. My belief is that Fitts is homosexual, and his attempt to reconcile the confused relationship he has with his son begins in his advance toward Lester. However, when Lester politely informs Fitts of his sexual preference, Fitts feels he has no other choice than to hide the truth to protect himself, not his son.

I wanted Gus to rebuke Yanni in much the same fashion that Fitts does his own son. I wanted Gus' frustration to stem from the hope that his son was not like him. Gus shows recognition of his own illness in the scene at the church when he recognizes grabbing Dean as being an inappropriate response. Gus' biggest fear is to appear as the "other". If Yanni does have a learning disability, this would place him in a similar category, subject to a similar fate.

Colonel Fitts attempts to win his son over many times throughout *American Beauty* by forcing his son, Ricky, to conform to his psychotic logic regarding everything, including homosexuality. Ricky is essentially Yanni as a child, with an inability to refuse the father due to fear. However, Ricky becomes the Yanni that we know at the beginning of *Put To Rights*

when he has defeated the father and gets himself kicked out of the house.

Although Ricky never gets to reconcile with his father during the course of *American Beauty*, Yanni does within the course of *Put To Rights*. Yanni starts on the negative end of the psychological spectrum because he lacked the necessary reconciliation with his deceased father - much like Ricky. However, at the end of the *Put To Rights*, Yanni is ready to forgive his father and sees the true motivations behind his actions which allows him to move forward and progress out of the shadow archetype of his masculine self.

CLOSING REMARKS

This document was supposed to serve as a statement to my process, my inspirations, and my influences, but, it also serves as a confessional of sorts. I have revealed to the reader that the development of this story was incumbent on my growth as well. Without being capable of diffusing the demonization of my own father, I would have never been capable of tackling the same process with Peter and Gus as characters nor give Yanni the emotional arc he now has.

I think one of the saddest things about writing this script is the inability to share it with my father, despite my many painful memories. It is a shame what has happened to him. He is slowly dying in a government-run hospice facility in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Multiple sclerosis has degraded his body. He can barely speak, barely move. The last time I went to see him he didn't know who I was and mistook me for his brother. I've asked myself if I think he'd like *Put To Rights*, and a part of me nowadays thinks he would, but the real power behind my growth is not that I believe he'd like the story, but that I'd even care to wonder if he would.

Because much of the script is adapted from real life and also somewhat biographical, it has been a painstaking process in that I was forcing myself to relive some of the trauma from my childhood while working with this story. At times it made the

writing bleak and difficult, but in the end the process has been healing and enlightening.

During my interview for acceptance into the screenwriting program I remember telling the committee that my number one goal if I got into York's graduate program was to work on making my antagonists relatable--less villainous and one-dimensional. I believe that this script does just that and I am proud of the progress I have made in my writing through the trials and tribulations over the last few years in my personal life and education.

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