Eric Collins

Evolution of Full Circle?
1915 – 2015, a Century of Screenwriting Lessons

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ERIC COLLINS So I'll see how it goes because it probably doesn't have that much to do with the initial logline that I turned in because I changed it before coming, perhaps to something that is more specific, pragmatic and informative and more useful for the workshop. Then basically while here I pretty much try to think of things, seeing how experienced you are in general and knowledgeable, to try to find ideas that all of you might not know. I'm sure most of you do. But I'll try to cross over and find some stuff that you don't know, some tools to use in mentoring, mainly to do with structure, different types of structure or different forms and stuff like that. However, I'll still talk about history. The points of history I talk about I think will be interesting, but also linked to writing and mentoring in different ways, and stuff like that.

So I have lots of papers to go through in case you want to talk a bit more about one thing, one subject matter or another. So don't hesitate if there's something that doesn't interest you, we can go through it faster.

One thing that I like a lot as a person is finding out, and being surprised when I find out, where things that I take for granted come from. So that's something that I've tried to look for, and that's why I'm interested in film history and screenwriting history, like: When was the first screenplay written? Where does screenplay format come from? Just to find out by curiosity often leads to things that I find are pretty useful when I write or when I work with people, because a lot of stuff is contextual and happens by chance.

Just to give you an idea of the types of things I mean by taking things for granted. If you look at women's high heels, does anyone know why women wear high heels or where they come from?

AUDIENCE Yeah, women are pretty short. [audience laughter]

COLLINS Yeah, but you have tall women. It's because of Iran, actually. When King Louis XIV thought he was the biggest kind of Europe – which was maybe a bit true at the time – he looked around at his peers. And it became a big deal with the Shah of Iran, who ruled all over Persia. So when the court of Iran came, all the men were wearing high heels. And the reason is because the cavalry was the biggest thing in Persia. So as a status symbol, you would wear high heels because it was a big thing to put on the stirrups so you could hold onto the horse and not fall. So all the nobles would wear high heels because that was to show that they were cavalry people, even if they weren't. So then it became the trend. In paintings, you see Louis XIV always wearing these big high heels and stuff.

Then at the time, there was a kind of 'garçon' fad, a bit like in the 1920s with Marlene Dietrich dressed as a man. They had the same thing back then, so the women started wearing the high heels to look like cavalry men, like French men pretending to be Iranian cavalry men. Then the men thought it was a bit effeminate to wear them, so they stopped. Maybe it was also to look taller than in a pragmatic way.

That's a kind of thing where I like to be a bit shaken up by things that I've never thought about. I hope to try to find a few things like that through film history tonight that might make you think in a different way about certain things that you've never really thought of just because they've always been there, whereas actually they haven't.

So what I wanted to go over, to start a little bit on history, is where does film come from. I'm talking just about cinema. You have lots of different landmarks. I think one of the important ones is in the 1830s Nicéphore Niépce, who is considered the first guy to do photography, mainly a bit like Gutenberg is considered the first to do printing because it was mobile printing that could be re-used and moved around. And Niépce basically because he could take pictures and print them and reprint them.

And then, I imagine you all know this, there was this big fight between Edison and the Americans and the Europeans, or at least the French with the Lumière brothers. I think Edison was around 1891, the first film. And the Americans in Hollywood and all think that Americans invented cinema because it's basically the first films that were shown with a little engine on stock and all. Whereas the French say it was the Lumière brothers, mainly because they were the first people to screen it on a big screen with an audience that all comes in and buys tickets to watch it together, which I find a bit funny because the French are defending something that's super commercial and seems very Hollywood-like.

But what I've always found interesting in that is that for me, it's always been some kind of symbol to be used in different ways of making films. You can probably analyse it in different ways. I don't know if it's too personal, too subjective or not, but the Edison thing was moving around these little boxes, and you have one person put his or her head into the little box, and put some money in and watch a film. So the idea is you could have a tent with a whole bunch of different stories and all. You have one person watching one film, and it can be repeated. Whereas for the Lumières, it's what has been for the past hundred years or so the more classical film, where we all go into a movie house and are all together.

This is something I've thought about a lot, even when working with people. One is a more explicit type of film. I use it as an example of a more commercial type of film. Do you want to write something that you want to have that can touch all these people at the same time? A bit like when we were reading Arash T. Riahi's screenplay, and were super happy in a way when lots of people laughed at the same moments.

That's one kind of symbol. And on the other end of the spectrum – and I think you can have films that blend the two together – you're aiming in a way to touch specific people with certain moments of something.

RIAHI It's interesting that this virtual reality is going back to Edison.

COLLINS Exactly. I was going to talk a little bit about my feeling that it's going back to more the Edison thing. And when you talked about the Optimus Rift glasses and all, I thought it was even more so that. But in a way, we've had it coming back for the past five or ten years through the Netflix-type of films and YouTube and watching films on mobiles. There's one pretty important way of looking at film in which you watch it all by yourself on your iPad and stuff like that. So that's something I don't know if you can use or not, but I sometimes talk about that with writers when I'm working on these two different kinds of schools of cinema that started, and one that kind of got put down, and the other became the big thing. And in a way, this other type is coming back.

Another thing is the question: What is your audience? Is it the Lumières thing, where everybody can come in, or are you targeting a more specific audience? There's also – you probably all have this in mind as mentors, and I don't know how much you talk about it – the matter of the budget. I'm more of a writer. I've never been a producer or commissioning editor or stuff like that. But the main thing I talk about is putting a bridle on somebody who wants to write things, not to prevent them from doing what they think, but just to keep in mind the budget versus the potential market. If the guy has a super dark film, they will most likely not get a multi-million dollar budget. They should probably try to think a little bit about the feasibility.

In general, if we have time to go through all these different types of structural templates, my main feeling is that I like to use them as tools versus rules, meaning instead of using them as some template you have to fill in. Some people have troubles if you start telling them that in general you have to have this in the beginning, and this here and there. They react against the very three-act structure, Hollywood thing. One thing I find interesting is to use the three-act structure not as something you have to follow, but as a yardstick to look at what you're doing and where your story is at, and how you fit in there, rather than using it as some thing that you have to color in and you have to break here and such.

I think this is linked to what people think, which is what all these Syd Field/Truby/McKee books and symposiums are for, and what I think they actually do. I think they're more useful for people who don't write to make them understand writing, or people who dream of writing, and think there's a guide. And if they block it in like that, they'll have a screenplay. Whereas I actually do try to use it a lot with people I work with, but just explaining that it's not to be used in that way, but as some kind of graduation or something.

Obviously there are different types of tools that you can apply, and if one doesn't work like this, then you can do that. In general, I don't know how you are, but I like structure a lot. For me, it's a very useful tool for going from one place to another, but also something for making comparisons and for giving me some kind of sense of where I'm at, and a kind of framework. That's something I like.

I have a question for you: Does anybody know who formalised screenplays, and when the first screenplay was made as they're made today?

AUDIENCE You mean the formatting with typewriters and all that?

COLLINS Yes.

AUDIENCE I would guess in the 20s or 30s in America.

COLLINS Yes, exactly. Talking about typewriters is very funny. There are lots of super ads. If you're interested, maybe I can collect some and send them to you by Internet. Today you have Final Draft and other things. There are all these ads in the trade papers. And if you look at the trade papers from the 1920s, it's all: "Buy your new typewriter! It's lighter. You can write at the beach!" You can write your screenplay at the beach with such and such typewriter.

So the guy who created the screenplay as it is known today was called Thomas Ince. I find it interesting to tell you not only who and when but why it came about because it's interesting and it has repercussions. Maybe there will be no formats of writing that will come out because, like many things in history, this came about by chance. It wasn't designed for the writer and all.

Thomas Ince has a pretty interesting story. A pretty important figure in the history of moviemaking is Edison, who was probably an enormous genius, but whose main business was stealing other people's ideas. Somebody had an idea, and he would patent it just before the guy or patent around that person. So Edison got into film pretty early, but didn't think it was something of the future. So he made his machines and all. The big thing he went after when it started working was patenting the machines, like the little wheels, the little spigots that catch the stock and push it through the gate to project the film. He patented all that in the US. It cost something like $700 to patent it for the world, and he didn't want to spend that much money. So in the States, basically anyone who was filming with any kind of camera had to pay Edison because he had patented the inner workings, and he was allowed to tell them not to film and stuff. He had this army of private detectives who were running around, blocking anybody who was trying to shoot. [audience laughter] Seriously.

So a lot of people started moving out of the New York area. Film in the States mainly came from Broadway plays. They were adapting Broadway plays and going around New York and stuff. Then they started going to Florida and Cuba, and moved out west to California. And the big thing about Hollywood and California was that it was so far from Edison that they could be physically distant from all these guys who were saying: "Hey! You're filming. You have to pay!"

Ince is probably one of the guys who created so many things in Hollywood that he's not really known for. He went out to the West, sent by his dad, and found this enormous place, which is now the Culver City studios. But at the time it was in Topanga Canyon. It was a really big arena of so many thousands of acres that had only one entrance. There was only one way in. He thought it was cool because they could pay a bunch of security guards that could block people long enough to send somebody out to warn people in case it was Edison's people, so they could hide the cameras. The idea was that, it was really only that.

But then he said: Okay, we're all in here, and we have this thing we're going to shoot. Then he realised it was cool to do all the stuff at the same location. So basically he created the first Hollywood studio, and the kind of Taylorism in film. Before people would say: "Let's go and make a film." So they'd all go out and make wardrobe for this and that and do the film. And then it was finished, and they'd do another. But because he had this big place, the idea was to build sets all over, and have a big wardrobe department. It evolved pretty fast. As I said, it was Taylorism because you could have people shooting while you were prepping for the next shot. And you could have writers at different stages writing stuff and re-writing the dialogue of what was being shot, etc.

Then he moved in a kind of Wild West Show. It wasn't the Buffalo Bill one, but something like that. He said: "We have all these things, and you guys can come and live here for free, and we'll even pay you." That's why he became the king of the westerns, which was the first genre because he had these guys there, so they had to shoot all the time, and he'd pay them.

He's also the one who formatted screenplays. Before they were more like a kind of resume. I don't know if you've read some silent film scripts, but they would just describe what was happening. But he's the one who had specific numbered sequences. It was more in the treatment form before. It was broken down by paragraph. But he's the one who added: Number 1, number 2, interior, exterior, putting all the characters in boldface. Mainly it was a Taylorism kind of thing so the screenplay could be given to each department.

So that's kind of how screenplays were formatted, and they haven't really changed since around 1928. His big thing – and this is a big difference, also – was to produce exactly as written. And he himself had to stamp everything: “Produce exactly as written.” Up till then, there was a lot of ad libbing of the dialogue. The studio is him, the screenplay is him, the producer is not him, but he's

part of the two or three people who made the producer so important in film. It wasn't as important before. The front office people are the ones who standardised the screenplay.

AUDIENCE There's this rumor that someone just stole the cameras from Edison, and that for Edison it wasn't good to follow them. That's why Hollywood was chosen.
If we get into it, it's connected to a German, Carl Laemmle, who also fled Edison and went to California. I thought he was the first one to establish the studio system. But maybe there were parallel studios because they were all fighting Edison. Laemmle went to court because of Edison. And after a few years, he won. Then everything was free again.

AUDIENCE In the early crime films they had treatments that were something like 360 pages long.

COLLINS Maybe. Often you find, for example, Niépce probably really truly invented the zone. And then there's a guy in Germany that's not considered the inventor of pictures because Niépce did it in January of 1834, and somebody he had no contact with did it three months later on his own.

As I said, I don't know what impact it has on us, but it's something I wonder about, how it came about that screenplays were invented kind of as a production tool. I've always wondered if one day it's going to change. Is something going to happen that changes even how screenplays are done. I was wondering if at some moment HTML or something is going to change it.

Do you have resistance when you're working with people who feel very blocked by this three-act structure?

AUDIENCE Of course. Someone says: "I don't care about that stuff" almost every time.

COLLINS I'll try to look at some other types of things that are pretty old also. I think the first 'how to' books appeared around 1910, which is quite early. It was a crazy time because you had all these ads: "Become a screenwriter. Buy your typewriter." There are two books that are quite famous. One was published a bit late by a woman called Anita Loos. She's quite famous for writing *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*. Not the Marilyn Monroe version, but the one before. She was a kind of real-life Carrie Bradshaw from *Sex and the City* at the time because she was writing this thing in *Harper's Bazaar*, a kind of thing about blond women seducing these guys and stuff. She also wrote *Intolerance*, the big Griffith film. I think she started writing at nine and sold her first screenplay when she was thirteen. She wrote her whole life, and died at ninety. She's a bit like the Lilian Gish of screenwriting.

Well she wrote a very interesting book, which is *How to Write a Photoplay*. I think you can find a free PDF on the Internet. One thing that is super interesting is you have pretty much the same things that you have in McKee and Truby and all the three-act structure. It's a little bit less formalised, but it's like: You have to have a strong beginning, a middle, and end. I wrote down the terms she uses, but it's very close to the 'inciting incident' or whatever. She has her own words.

I think what's considered the first big one is by Winthrop Sargent around 1910 or something. It's quite interesting to see that if you read her [Anita Loos'] book, which is about silent films, it's pretty close to a book you could use today as a guide to how to write a screenplay, including the information – which I find a bit crazy – about how to write a title and how to write dialogue, which is odd because she was writing silent films. But in a way, all the tricks on how to write a good inter title are the same as for writing dialogue. She explains that an inter title should not show what you have on film. You write differently than the image. You put in humour, and stuff like that.

You all know this, of course, about Aristotle, I imagine, and *Poetics* and stuff like that. I don't know how you feel, but I feel that this three-act structure is something that's very valid. You don't have to use it as something that you have to follow, but as something to at least give you a guideline of where you're at. So if I'm working with someone who's reticent with that, I try to use it as a tool that you can play around with. But I also try to show that it's something that pre-dates Hollywood, or today's Hollywood, a lot.

I don't know if you know Gustav Freytag. He has this thing called the 'Freytag Pyramid'. Are you familiar with it? This is before Anita Loos and everything. We've moved back to playwriting. He worked a lot on Greek tragedy and Shakespeare. If you don't like three-act structure, it's something you can get around. Basically Freytag's pyramid has this rising action or thing and the climax, and then the descent. So it's a kind of set up and pay off. Just think of tools you can use to shake people up a bit or to open them up to using the equivalent of the three-act structure without feeling imposed upon.

I've been working on a French film that's being shot in China. The director is doing a series, so I think the feature film is going to be done in three years or something. But the idea is with a Chinese main character and a French main character, and it's set in China, but they speak French. I was trying to discover what historical Chinese storytelling is. There's something I found that I think is quite interesting. It's called 'Kishōtenketsu'.

AUDIENCE But I think that's Japanese.

COLLINS Sorry, it might be a Japanese word, but this structure is used in Korea, in China and in Japan. It's kind of a pan-Asian type of storytelling that's at least Medieval. I found it very interesting because it's not the Aristotle set-up. It's introduction, development, then a series of three twists, with twist number three being the most important, and then the 'yama' which is the climax.

AUDIENCE 'Yama' means mountain.

COLLINS Okay, so then it would be the peak. Thank you. And then the 'ketsu' is the conclusion. So basically it's a five-act structure: you have the introduction, then you have three sort of central acts with one being bigger, and then a conclusion.

So I thought that might be something that's interesting to work with if you're working with Asian film, as I was, or just working with people to see that there's not only all this Aristotelian, old, dead, white Greek people, but also there's these old, dead, Japanese or Chinese. I don't know how you feel, but there's always this kind of 'Coca-Cola' question: Does Coca-Cola sell cola everywhere because they sold it, and now they're so big because our taste is attuned to it? Or is there something in Coca-Cola that works with the human taste buds of, let's say, that 3 or 5 act structure? Is it because some people started using it thousands of years ago that it became big, or is there something that inherently appeals to our desires in storytelling there? I don't know, but I found it quite interesting that in China you had a whole school of writing that developed apparently with no interaction.

I'll give a couple of examples of formats. If you want me to talk about them, I can go into a little bit more detail. You can look them up if you're interested. Or if we have enough time, we can come back to them afterwards. This one is purely Japanese. It was apparently used in writing, storytelling, and plays. It's something called 'Jo Ha Kyu.' It's Japanese for "introduction, break, fast." That's something I've found interesting working with people who are rabidly anti-Hollywood and don't want a film to start super fast with a big explosion and things moving really fast. If they want a long, softer development, this can be helpful. This 'Jo Ha Kyu' form is used in 'Noh', in

which the beginning is quite slow. You have a very long introduction, and a slow building up of the drama over the main three or four parts. It's quite a lengthy exposition. Then things have to be really shaken up on a large scale, and the tempo really speeds up.

There's always the question: What can you write today? With some of the people I work with, their reference is to the commercial films of today. But if you look at the American films of the 1970s, you had a lot more time to bring things out, like in [Michael] Cimino's *Heaven's Gate*, where the story develops really slowly.

AUDIENCE Maybe Tarantino read that.

COLLINS Maybe. He's into Asian stuff.

So this is stuff I've used in my own writing. Do you know [Elisabeth] Kübler Ross? She was a Swiss woman who worked a lot with near death experiences and death and stuff because of the people she was tending to in World War II. She has the five stages of grieving, which are: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.

This is something I find you can use to build maybe an entire structure of a screenplay or when working with your characters. It doesn't have to be about loss or death. This is mainly about your own impending death or death in general, but it could be about losing a house or a job, and you could structure a film around this with an inciting incident that's evident in the beginning, and then the reaction of that person running through the film. The big thing about Kübler Ross's work is that this is a kind of human reaction when you're facing a big event. At first you're like: This can't happen. I don't believe it. Then you fight against it, and you kind of get depressed, and so on.

These are some more sequential structures. What I'll get to in a minute is the hero's journey to try to see where it comes from. And framing, if you want to get away from the three-act structure when working with people. My idea is to go back into history a little bit. I thought of that when Louis was talking about the aborigines. Something I found a bit depressing fundamentally is when you said they have this camp where they feel good enough to write together. There is apparently this kind of oppression in filmmaking.

I think there are two things. It looks very monolithic. This has always been there. But if you start looking into the matter, you realise it hasn't. The other aspect is a bit like when I asked where the screenplay comes from. It doesn't actually come from writers but from a producer, whose goal was to stamp "Direct as written!". What I mean by that is often my feeling is that these big things that do probably crush minorities and gender aren't a whole thing that evolved on its own, but were probably brought on by certain groups of people at one moment or something, and are things that you can probably shake up.

For that I have another question. Do you know who the first real screenwriter and real director were? If you talk about the very first films, they were not narrative films. They were more like documentaries or portraying reality. But do you know who made the first narrative film that she wrote? Her name is Alice Guy-Blaché. She's way more interesting creatively than Ince.

A little funny thing about Thomas Ince is this conspiracy theory about his death. I think he was around forty. He died after being on Randolph Hearst's yacht with Marion Davis. He got sick, and took the train and disappeared. They found his body in a hotel. Everybody thought Hearst had murdered him because he was trying to go out with Marion. It was a big Hollywood thing that was in the news for three years.

So Alice Guy-Blaché is a super interesting woman, who was Léon Gaumont's secretary. Gaumont was the guy behind the Lumière Brothers financially. She attended the first screening in Paris of the film of the train entering the La Ciotat station. She saw all that. The Lumières and Gaumont got all excited, and they started doing travel channel stuff, sending people all over the world to film monuments to show, doing scientific films. This is pretty strange because we never see these films, but they showed how to do experiments and stuff like that. She said she wanted to do fiction, which they thought was super stupid because nobody would be interested in that. [audience laughter] Famous last words.

So if she did her secretarial duties, she was allowed to borrow the camera, and to shoot film. There's a little bit of a quibble because of the dates, but now it's considered to be the first narrative film to have been written and shot. You can see it on YouTube. In English it's called *The Cabbage Fairy*. It's from 1896. The original title is *La Fée aux Choux*. It's super funny. These films are really short because basically they were one-reelers. It's like three or four minutes. You have this woman who doesn't look like a fairy at all. And you have these fake cabbages. And she's picking up babies from behind these cabbages. Then she drops a baby and kicks it to the side. It's pretty interesting because she's the one who had the idea to write narrative film. They weren't interested in that. But obviously it did become something a bit bigger than they thought.

I think she directed about a thousand films herself. Then she went to America. So she's also the first female producer. What I found interesting is that she was the first person to write and shoot a narrative film. She also did the first 'making of', which I actually find more interesting to see than the little cabbage film, which is a little funny and for us completely non-narrative. But the first making of is really incredible because the camera is set in the back of this big studio, and you see all these people in big dresses and stuff. So she also directed the first making of.

This is a bit off mentoring, but thinking about this and minorities, all through the beginnings of film, she [Alice Guy-Blaché] was not a freak phenomenon. At least fifty percent of screenwriters were women. You had an enormous number of directors who were women. A lot of producers were women. It was the beginning of the sound period. Do you know why?

AUDIENCE The bigger equipment. When women started, like in Italy, Elvira Notari was one of the big ones. She did everything on her own – camera, production. As soon as it got more complicated and more money was involved, men took over.

COLLINS That's my feeling. It has to be some male power thing. When sound came out in the 1930s, there was more money to be made.

It's more of an American saying about "dead, white men" ruling over everything. But my feeling is that they are also re-writing history and making us feel as though it has always been like that. Whereas it hasn't. It's the same with the three-act structure. While it has always existed, other structures have existed, too. Maybe you can shake this up.

Are you all familiar with the 'hero's journey'? I thought it was really cool the 'heroine's journey'. Do you know the book by [Christopher] Vogler called *The Writer's Journey*?

COLLINS His book is based on [Joseph] Campbell. Vogler is like the other big Hollywood thing that the studios like to go after, basically because he was important in writing *The Lion King*. So he has all these different archetypes and the structures and so on. The Vogler book is often held up as the way to write a screenplay. Vogler takes his work from Joseph Campbell, who was a kind of theoretician. He met Krishnamurti, and spent a lot of time with Krishnamurti. Therefore, there's a lot

of influence from Sanskrit and India. And he did a lot of research on myth and the Jungian archetypes.

In general, my feeling is that it's pretty good to try to go back instead of taking these things that have been formatted for film – which I think are actually quite good – but to try to go back to the root that the person used to make his format for film. You find a lot more interesting things there. Obviously, when you take this, and you want to format it for something else, you're going to reduce it and push stuff to the side. So it's already pretty interesting to go back to Campbell, who wrote *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Or even to go back further to the Jungian archetypes, which I think is pretty interesting to use for character development, and to folk tales. I'll talk a bit about the Sanskrit aspect of it.

There's something I use that I've never seen anyone else in film use. I come from literary studies. Where I was studying in France, the university kind of changed in the 1970s, and developed a very heavily linguistics-oriented approach. I don't know if you know Vladimir Propp. He's someone I studied a lot. I use his structures a lot in writing and in mentoring. I don't know if it's better than others, but because it's something that's not really used and there's never directly been a book using Propp for film, I use him as my 'prop', my prop department.

Again, I'm trying to focus on when you're mentoring people where you have some problems with the structure. Obviously if you don't, then there's no use, but it can be helpful in trying to get people who are reticent to using a structure to use some kind of structure because this is not normally used in film.

Propp is pretty important in the field of linguistics. He lived around the same time as Eisenstein. He was a very important teacher all the way until his death. He never fell out of grace. One of the things he did was to research folk tales, and break down folk tales into segments. You can look him up. What's also interesting in using Propp is his grid or format. It won't work on all films, obviously, but it is about folk tales, so there are a lot of films that can follow it. Compared to other structures such as the five-act structure, where you can do this and this and this, basically the people putting out the structure are telling you that when you have a story you have to have all these different elements. Whereas Propp is a little bit more like an alphabet.

This was published in the 1930's. Each folk tale is a proposition. Each folk tale will have all the elements of the alphabet that he gives you. He had a whole series of thirty-one segments, which are pretty much in sequence. His idea is that each story you have will have those elements. But each story doesn't have to have all of the elements, which is something I find nice when you're working with people who say: "I just want to tell my story! I don't want you to put me in this box." So instead of using a box where you have to use all of these elements, let's take this toy box, where you can take out whichever ones you want.

It's always super complicated because he uses alpha, beta, gamma, etc. for the blocks. And inside 'A' for different variations of Beta, for example, and then one, two, three. So it's pretty funny to read because he transcribes fairy tales, and it's like "Beta, A, 1", etc. I'm pretty sure he was really happy reading all those great stories. [audience laughter]

There's a pretty funny tool on the Internet where you can do your own fairy tale by entering all these propositions and all that.
http://www.stonedragonpress.com/vladimir_propp/propp_generator_v1.htm.
Basically it's stuff like you have Alpha as your starting situation. And Beta will be what he calls the hero. Most of the time you do have a hero. And then under Beta 1, he's a reluctant hero, or he's a pro-active hero who will go on the journey himself, or he'll be called to go on the journey. Then you

have the interdiction, which can be a law such as "No women are allowed to become soldiers", or it can be a villain who is taking money from everybody and stuff like that.

What I find interesting about Propp is the fact that you can play around with which parts of the structure to implement in your story, which gives a lot more freedom to the people if you're working on that aspect. And you do find a lot of Propp in Campbell's work.

Since we're talking about Campbell, he had a big relationship with Krishnamurti, and worked a lot on Sanskrit myths and stories. When you're talking about working internationally, there's a lot more non-western influences, like from India. I was working on a film that was to be shot in Iran because the action takes place in Iraq, and it's with French and Indian money.

AUDIENCE Are these three or four or five-hour screenplays?

COLLINS Oh, no, but they could be. In the Arabic world, there’s the Doha Film Institute, Dubai, Bahrain. Apparently there's a desire to have a more international film industry coming out of there. So I started working with young directors, which is pretty interesting because they're super revolutionary. One is doing a film about a nine-year old girl who burns her hijab. So this is something I've been looking into because their desire is to make international films. And their big question is how can they tell stories that are geographically and culturally close to what they feel is their narrative or their way of talking.

Film actually came quite late to the Arab world because the British Empire didn't have people doing a lot of stuff out of there. One thing that they tell me today is that they are more interested in just having people evolve and do things. Right now I'm talking more about the Arabic world, when I'm working with Doha and Bahrain and stuff. How can we have this? What we like is just to have people in a situation, and that situation changes, but it's very episodic and all. But we want it to still be international.

The first thing I tried to look into was *One Thousand and One Nights*, and how the structure of that narrative is, and things like that. That's something I didn't know, but maybe you do. It's called 'frame storytelling'. This is pretty new to me. I thought it was really interesting. A film you have probably all seen that is very close to a 'frame story' is *Forrest Gump*. The main idea of the 'frame' structure is you have a narrative that goes through the film like the film's backbone, but it's actually not important.

So in *Forrest Gump*, it starts out with him sitting down on the bench, and he's telling a story. It's not the story in the story. It's a little bit different. Often you can have both at the same time. So he's sitting on the bench with somebody, and he starts telling a story. Then you'll see that person changing all the time. The idea is that yes, he's telling his life story, but in a way, all these different segments are linked by a bit of a fake thing of this guy sitting on a bench telling the story. So our focus is on each of the stories. It's true that in the case of *Forrest Gump*, you do have an evolution of his life story, which is basically like in *One Thousand and One Nights* with Scheherazade.

The story of *One Thousand and One Nights* is that the king's sister-in-law cheated on his brother. The king's really upset. Then he finds out his wife cheated on him. So he decides that to combat this he's going to marry a virgin every night, and kill her after they make love. So to stay alive, she [Scheherazade] tells him a story. He's riveted by it, then he gets tired and falls asleep, so they don't have sex and she's still a virgin, and can go on and tell another story.

This framing is something I've been trying to work with because it has this inherent Arabic thing from *One Thousand and One Nights.* Apparently the guys are quite interested in that. And it seems

as though it's something that's close to what they still have today as a kind of cultural way of telling stories, in which you can have lots of different episodes that are linked by a kind of meta-story that actually isn't really an evolving story. It's like the *Forrest Gump* thing, where the guy is just sitting there and telling a story.

Just to throw in a fun thing that I've found kind of interesting. What's considered the oldest written narrative in the world is a parchment from the pharaoh Cheops called the 'Westcar Papyrus'. It's from around 2000 BC, and has five stories that don't have anything to do with one another except in their theme. If I remember correctly, they're stories told about different priests, who are doing miracles for different things. Each one is told to the Pharaoh by a different son. But the narration is that you have a pharaoh who sees his sons, and each one wants to tell him a story. So that's the meta-thing. But the interest and the suspense is in all these stories, which are all completely different.

Just to give you an idea, you have both *One Thousand and One Nights*, which is a kind of constitutive thing in the Arabic world, but it's also the structure of the *Mahabharata*, which I haven't read, so I'm taking this on faith. So I'm trying to learn more about that while working with the people from the Gulf States.

I find this really interesting for what is becoming an increasingly important kind of writing, at least in France and the USA, which is series. When doing research on the 'frame story', I had the feeling that a TV series is a bit like that. You have a concept or meta-story. There are lots of different kinds of series, but you do have a knot in which you have a police precinct or a family or something, and you have one kind of line that is evolving or not evolving. Then each week you have one episode. Here I'm talking about the ones in which the weekly episodes aren't linked. Apparently this structure is linked to the oldest form of storytelling or something like that.

I was wondering what kind of type of structure Sami narratives or aborigine narratives have that you were talking about before.

Now since I'm French also, I wanted to take a quick look at the 'auteur theory'. Is this something that comes up when you're working with directors?

AUDIENCE Yes.

COLLINS France is very special because when [Francois] Truffaut came out with his big article in 1954, it really shook things up a little bit worldwide. In France it's still very, very strong. I've had situations where I meet a director and I talk about his film, and the guy says: "Oh, my God, I would have loved to work with you or *any* writer!" And I say: "Well why didn't you?" And he says: "Because I wanted to, I don't know how to write, but the production company forced me not to take a writer because directors *have to* write their own film." This is something that's still very, very strong in France. It's really strange because most of Truffaut's films had two or three screenwriters. But there's a big thing in France that a film *has to* be written by a director.

AUDIENCE Some of the major companies like EuropaCorp are just American development style.

COLLINS Yeah, he's very special. Luc Besson is completely apart. Like, for example, in France, he just got a *César d'honour* that he did come and pick up. It was an honorary one, not for a specific film. Normally a lot of his films get twelve nominations then win only something like best poster or something. He produced *Taxi 1, 2* and *3* and *Transporter* and stuff. I might have my figures wrong, but I think eight of the ten most profitable films in French history were written and produced or written, produced and directed by Luc Besson. So they thought they should honour the guy. But

he's really off to the side. He created his own studio and stuff like that. He's the one who brought the tax refunds to France. So if you now want to shoot in France, you can get the tax back. He basically said if the French government doesn't create tax refunds, I'm going to go and shoot in Hungary. So they decided to offer them.

Anyhow, if you're working with people in the auteur theory who absolutely do not want a co-writer – maybe you feel the person is a good director and not a bad writer, but he's not up to the level as a writer – it might be helpful to know a little bit about the auteur theory. A lot of people think it means the director has to be the writer, in which case Luc Besson or James Cameron would be the epitome of auteurs because they write, direct and produce and all.

AUDIENCE In the States, in series and sitcoms, if you're the writer, you're now expected to also direct. It's not the same thing, but…

AUDIENCE With all those successful series like *Breaking Bad*, the writers don't direct. They're the show runners, and they have the whole vision.

COLLINS But also the writer has more power. In France, the director has the power, at least in feature films.

Just very briefly, the auteur theory came in 1954, when [Francois] Truffaut wrote a big article that basically was an attack against the French establishment and the way of making films before. It's true in [Jacques] Rivette's auteur theory that you're only an auteur if you write your own material. Of course, Rivette had screenwriters, but anyhow.

There's a guy called André Bazin, who was a very famous theoretician of film in France. He's the one who established the auteur theory. I think this is helpful if you're working with a director who doesn't want a co-writer, because his theory is that an auteur is a director whose films you can recognise. His thing is basically who cares if you wrote it totally, in part, or not at all. The important thing, which I try to use with directors who are very reticent and are fighting having a co-writer for fear that they might take over the script, is to go back to Bazin's definition of an auteur: If you have enough of a vision and visuals or a story that when you make this film and the next one, there will be something there where people can recognise that it's a film of yours.
I don't know how it is in other countries, but in France it's always an enormous fight. In France, screenwriters are non-existent. You're never invited to Cannes, even if you win the best screenplay award. It's the director who goes to get the award, and they don't like you to appear and stuff like that. This is mainly because of this 'Young Turks' thing of Truffaut and all of them.

I wanted to finish with two things that I thought were pretty interesting because they happened at around the same time. Again they're two completely different ways of writing: Eisenstein in the Soviet Union in the 1930s, and the first modern screenwriters in Hollywood, like Ben Hecht, Herman 'Mank' Mankiewicz, the older brother of the director Joseph Mankiewicz. Eisenstein worked mainly on the editing aspect, but it's maybe something quite interesting for films that are along the lines of 'poetic' documentaries. A lot of his work isn't translated or was translated very late because there were a lot of directly political references, quotes by Stalin, and stuff like that. It was kind of a problem publishing him in the West. There are two big books by him, which are *Film Form* and *Film Sense.* They have more to do with editing.

The first job of screenwriters up to the talkies, i.e. up through the 1920s, was to write the story, sometimes based on a novel or an original story. Then you gave that to the director, who would then shoot images. Then you took his images, and cut them into your edit. So the screenwriter's

job was what we now consider screenwriting and editing. The idea was that the person was in charge of the story.

The reason I mention this is because Eisenstein was more about editing. But it's something I find useful as a mentor in super specific cases because he's very theoretical and symbolic and poetic. Eisenstein's big thing was juxtaposition, and the idea that you don't really write a story. Maybe you have a story, but the main thing of the writing is to have a specific scene in A that has to be followed by a scene in B, because only with those two scenes side by side will the power come.

If you're working with somebody who has a very auteur perspective and is making an arthouse film, maybe it can work. Reading a little on that can be interesting because he writes about things like the metric – like poetry, short, long, things about rhythm. He's one of the first theoreticians of film to write these big books on film theory. All his different ideas are quite interesting, and they can apply to writing.

On the other side in Hollywood, you had these guys who became the first big writers: Mankiewicz, who wrote *Citizen Cane*, which is considered a landmark, and Ben Hecht, who's considered the big screenwriter who won all the awards. They were basically hired because they were liars. It's a really interesting thing when you go into the history of these guys because you had [William] Faulkner at the same time. So you had this guy Faulkner, who was such a great writer but was never able to write a screenplay. But it's actually interesting if you look into his life because that was his dream. He struggled and wrote story after story, and wanted to sell a screenplay. You get the impression he was more interested in becoming a Hollywood screenwriter than a novelist.

Then you have the Ben Hecht/Mankiewicz guys, who dreamt of writing a big novel like Faulkner. They wanted to be authors, and became screenwriters making tons of money, and sending these memos to the guys saying: "Whatever shit I give you, you'll pay too much money for." They had a real disregard for their work. But while Eisenstein was getting into poetics and theorising stuff, these guys were basically hired because they were newspaper people, and both of them were famous for writing fake stories. But they were really big and never left their office. People tried to sue them because they wrote stories about trams that derailed and crushed people. They'd go downstairs and give $5 to a bunch of people and ask them: "Can you run down the street and yell, and I'll take a couple of pictures." Then they'd write this thing that never happened at all.

I've never seen this written anywhere, but my feeling is that they were probably hired for that, which is for me the very commercial Hollywood thing – that's what we want. These guys probably knew what would scare people, and sold lots of newspapers, and knew how to fib, and were tricksters and so on. They were also really good at writing headlines for their stories. One of Ben Hecht's things, to give you an example, was a dentist who had been arrested for raping a patient while he had gassed her and she was passed out. And Hecht's title was "Dentist Fills Wrong Cavity." [audience laughter] Stuff like that.

That's not really about mentoring, but I thought it was kind of interesting that it was all the glitter, trickster, liar guys who were brought in to create the big Hollywood of the 1930s.

So, to summarise, my idea was to try to play with history, and to see its repercussions on today's writing. Then to go through different types of structure historically. Basically first with the western three-act structure, and then going through the western fairy tales and into the eastern countries. Do you have any questions?

AUDIENCE What's your take on Laurie Hutzler's emotional toolbox of templates for characters?

COLLINS I honestly don't know too much about them. I know her quite well. She's from Wisconsin, like my family. I know people who have worked with her. I've never worked with her directly myself. The impression I've had and what others have told me is that it's a very, very good specific tool, in that they felt it was very good for shaking things up. There's a bit of an American way, and she sells herself quite well, which is extremely valid, in that she kind of sells it as something that will work on everything in every aspect. My feeling is that that's not really what it does. But it's a very, very good tool to apply or maybe take things from it, or to see how it shakes things up. ETB Screenwriting.

AUDIENCE You talk about this frame story, and you compared it to *Forrest Gump*. I was thinking about *Krems,* for instance, where you have a setting which is equal to all the main persons in that story. Is that not a frame story? I think it was very interesting to find this mix of genres and methods because I think that's happening a lot in filmmaking today.

COLLINS I'd have to read the finished screenplay, which you guys know more about. My impression is that it's more one story with a multiple vision upon that story, a bit like the *Rashomon*-type structure. What is your feeling?

AUDIENCE It's more like a puzzle that comes together at the end of one version.

COLLINS *Slumdog Millionaire* has a bit of a frame also. The guy who's playing, and there are the whole stakes – is he going to win or not win. Then the police question him. And on each of his questions, they say, "How do you know it's a $500-" and you've got one story. Then you go back and they ask: "Well how do you know this?" And then he tells another story.

AUDIENCE We had this discussion about how accessible all these new ways of writing manifest according to Lee Mulvits. I found this very interesting because it's about how you really penetrate into good stories, which are often mixed. It's like all these inventions in music. You know there's this mix of experimenting like that with genres and things like that. The same is happening in the film business.

COLLINS I think so, yeah. Linda Aronson's *The 21st Century Screenplay* might be something that you'd be interested in. There's a lot about multi-plots.

AUDIENCE There are four or five parallel plots, and they meet at some unexpected point.

COLLINS That's something that might be interesting for you to look into.

AUDIENCE Could you give us an example of a film that is based on the Kübler Ross structure, because I found that quite intriguing.

AUDIENCE There's an indigenous play called *The Seven Stages of Grieving*. It uses that as an overlay. Historically there's been a number of waves of political and governmental intervention in indigenous lives in terms of policy information. It's a beautifully written play. This absolutely uses anger, denial, grief, bargaining, acceptance, whatever their lives are. This has been used narratively before.

COLLINS I use it for characters within a film for the whole character arc.

AUDIENCE Is this something you can put on everything?

COLLINS No. It's the same feeling I have about Laurie Hutzler. I prefer that you have lots of different types of templates or things to see how your story idea fits to it and how we can move it to fit, and to see if it's worth it or not, and what we can take out of it. I prefer to work more that way than to say there's one structure that you have to have something fit in. I might use it to shake things up, then retain part of it.

AUDIENCE I grew up with a Syd Field kind of background. Essentially what I took away from Syd Field's books is not just the structure, the plot points, etc., but the importance of characters – unique, believable, memorable characters.

COLLINS That's true.

AUDIENCE I think that's sometimes more important than the plots. If you look at any action film, most suffer from characterisation. You don't feel, you don't have any empathy for the hero or anti-hero.

COLLINS I agree. It's a kind of a balance in that structure is super important. It's a bit of a silly metaphor, but it's like a skeleton. And if you don't have a structure, I think it's pretty hard to carry the people through the film. But what people will actually remember isn't the structure, but this thing that you have to have to bring your message and your characters across unconsciously because other people might break out. But what people do remember are the characters and the emotions. So voilà.

AUDIENCE Could you tell us some more about the Sanskrit approach, the Indian style, because you left that out a bit?

COLLINS That was the framing. *The Mahabharata* is about framing also. That's what I said. I haven't read *The Mahabharata* yet, but apparently it's built on framing like that with a kind of long narrative that tells different stories.

AUDIENCE I witnessed this once in Kerala. There was a play that took twelve hours to develop. It was the story of a frog and a person. They made minimal movements, and everyone was sitting there and was totally excited. And I didn't understand one thing. But they didn't move or anything.

AUDIENCE This isn't directly about structure – the thirty-six dramatic situations.

COLLINS Yep! That was my little extra. That's what I call 'Polti's Kama Sutra'. Maybe a lot of you know this already. He was a French guy called Georges Polti, who was a playwright. He worked with Goethe and all. And he wrote a book called *The Thirty-Six Dramatic Situations*. It's a bit like Propp saying any story in the world fits one of those dramatic situations. 'There are some that are similar. He has like 'seeking revenge' or 'seeking justice'. I find it pretty interesting if you're working with someone who's not very clear about what story he wants to tell. If you take those, and you take out the dramatic situations that you think might fit that are close to his, and you take four or five and have him or her see how the story will work if it's a story of revenge, and you look at what Polti says about revenge – does it fit? I think it's an interesting tool.

AUDIENCE Thank you for these new things. It's all very complex, and it's impossible to talk about history in such a short time. None of these models can be taken and applied to one film. But if you know a lot of them, then we can use them for different stories and some elements. Eisenstein, for example. There are so many details. For example, his theory of the 'third eye'. And if you learn about it and understand it, you can work with it. He says the first eye is the camera, the second eye is the eye of the viewer with a social background, and the third eye is what you as the writer or

director can do intentionally in the film. For example, make the wigs uglier so people realise it is a wig; it's not really the king. And create irritation in that. And if you know about this theory, then you think about this possibility of putting this stuff inside that irritates people. In the *Nouvelle Vague* it was there. And Tarantino works with it, and so on.

AUDIENCE This Japanese dramaturgy – this Kishōtenketsu – is really interesting. For example, in my opinion, one of the greatest masterpieces ever, ever made in film history is *Sansho the Bailiff* by Mizoguchi. I don't know if anybody knows it. It's really a masterpiece. And it's based on a structure like Kishōtenketsu.

COLLINS Thank you very much.