

RMIT University

Craig Batty

Dirty talk: scriptwriting, script editing and the creative process

Abstract:

Craig is a writer. And a script editor. And an academic. He is working as script editor on a series of short films that sit under the umbrella title of *Dirty Talk* – comedy dramas in the mockumentary form about couples’ sex lives. Whilst trying to write his own film, he’s grappling with style and tone in another writer’s screenplay – namely whether or not having the manslaughter of a lollipop lady as the reason for the protagonist being in prison is, in his words, too camp. He is also thinking about the creative processes that take place during the development of a film script, and how they might be made visible. *Dirty Talk: Scriptwriting, script editing and the creative process* is a multi-narrative work that weaves together the screenplay, the writing of the screenplay and the editing of another writer’s screenplay, and in doing so draws attention to the creative and pragmatic decisions that influence the creation of a screenplay. These include inspiration, writerly interactions with characters, peer review and the pressures of industry conventions.

Biographical note:

Craig Batty is Associate Professor of Screenwriting at RMIT University, where he is also Creative Practice Research Leader for the School of Media and Communication. He is a screenwriter, script consultant and script editor, with experiences in short film, feature film, television and online drama. He is author, co-author and editor of eight books, including *Screenwriters and Screenwriting: Putting Practice into Context* (2014), *The Creative Screenwriter: Exercises to Expand Your Craft* (2012), *Movies That Move Us: Screenwriting and the Power of the Protagonist’s Journey* (2011) and *Writing for the Screen: Creative and Critical Approaches* (2008).

Keywords:

Creative Writing – Screenwriting – Script editing – Creative process

1. INT. OFFICE ROOM - MORNING

CRAIG, an early-30s practitioner-academic, sits at his home office desk, Skyping on his laptop with UK-based writer SARAH, early 40s.

Sarah listens intently whilst Craig speaks keenly.

CRAIG

Yeah, so, we kinda felt that ...
it was just ... tonally speaking,
a little bit light.

(beat)

As in, funny, but kind of ... I
don't know, maybe too camp?

SARAH

Right ...

CRAIG

It's just that when you say
'lollipop lady', it's really
funny. You know? Let alone when
you imagine one.

SARAH

Ok, so did you have ... [any
ideas about something else?]

CRAIG

Like, the colour of the outfit.
PVC, or whatever it is. The
lollipop itself, of course.

(beat)

He's got to be in jail for
something pretty bad, like you
write. We just weren't sure about
the tone. It needs to be more ...
I don't know ... poignant? Middle
class? Not so camp.

SARAH

I can have a think, and then ...
[give you some ideas.]

CRAIG

We changed it anyway.

(beat)

Only slightly.

Awkward pause as Sarah waits to hear the change.

CRAIG

A child.

(beat)

In a wheelchair.

Craig smiles. Sarah looks to the corner of her eye.

2. EXT. STREET - MORNING

Craig walks down a cafe-lined street with his laptop. He chuckles to himself.

3. INT. TRENDY CAFE - MORNING

Craig sips on a hot skinny latte as he looks at his laptop screen. He goes to type something, then pauses. Pensive.

4. INT. COLOURFUL BOUDOIR-STYLE LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Craig walks around the room, as if looking for clues. He touches the fabric of the sofa. Lifts a cushion and sniffs it.

Suddenly, LOTS OF MEN arrive. They start to populate the room - sitting on the couch, on each other's laps, etc.

Craig is overwhelmed for a moment. He scans the men, careful not to catch anyone's eye.

LIAM, a wispy, thin camp guy, late 20s, throws himself across the men sitting on the couch. He laps up the attention - and he clearly wants to get groped.

TERRY, a rugged sporty-looking bloke, late 30s, hovers in the corner. Lost in his own thoughts.

Craig looks at Terry; then Liam; then Terry again. He squints his eyes - an idea is forming.

5. INT. TRENDY CAFE - MORNING

Craig takes a deep breath and starts to type, determined.

6. INT. COLOURFUL BOUDOIR-STYLE LIVING ROOM - EVENING
(SCREENPLAY)

TERRY, a rugged sporty-looking bloke, late 30s, sits with his arm around LIAM, a wispy, thin camp guy, late 20s.

LIAM

A real eye-opener.

(beat)

In more ways than one!

TERRY

Never thought I'd like it so much. Not something you often ... well ... with ...

LIAM

(slightly bitter)

Totally wasted on women. Not as if it'd lead to anything.

Awkward look from Terry: maybe it already has ...

LIAM

(quick to change the subject)

It was like learning a whole new language for Terry, bless him.

(camp)

A whole new tongue to master!

Liam giggles into Terry, though Terry tries to keep straight-faced.

TERRY

(innocent)

Rimming was just the start.

7. INT. TRENDY CAFE - MORNING

Craig licks his lips to clear latte froth. He takes the teaspoon and scrapes the bottom of the glass, all the while looking at his laptop screen.

A moment, then he looks outside to the passers-by. The sun is shining and there's life going on out there.

Craig sits back and arches his shoulders. Takes a deep breath. He picks up the food menu but something outside catches his eye. He squints as a MIDDLE-AGED MANICURED WOMAN walks by, carrying an equally manicured small dog.

Craig slowly puts the menu down and, thinking deeply, begins to type again.

8. INT. COLOURFUL BOUDOIR-STYLE LIVING ROOM - EVENING
(SCREENPLAY)

Terry and Liam are now sipping from china cups. Liam is delicate whereas Terry has trouble handling his.

LIAM

I must confess, I really loved training him up. Still do.

TERRY

I'm getting there, eventually.
It's not ... [that easy].

LIAM

You're telling me! I've always been the passive type - so they tell me - but there was just something about ...

TERRY

I like cuddles, too.
(beat, embarrassed)
It helps.

Liam leans forward and puts his cup down.

LIAM

It's like, his aggression ...
finally, something I can control.
(to camera)
Does that sound weird?

Terry suddenly remembers something.

TERRY

(to Liam, soft eyes)
Tell them about when we met.

LIAM

(horny)
You might have to turn that thing off in a minute!
(beat)
Unless you want to make a star of me?!
(beat)
Us.

Terry holds Liam's hand, as if to calm him down.

TERRY

It was the night of the funeral.
Which I know sounds *really* bad.

LIAM

I'd been on a double-back
long-haul to San Fran, so
naturally I was gagging for a
good night out.

TERRY

(sincere)

I'd kept it back for so long. I
mean, how could I go out looking
for ...

He glances towards Liam's groin, then quickly back at the
camera when he realises what he's done.

TERRY

... when she was on chemo?

LIAM

(directly to camera)

There was both a sadness and
desperation in his eyes.

(beat)

Not to mention a huge bulge in
his shorts!

TERRY

I'd been in a suit all day.

Liam leans forward, excited, almost overshadowing Terry.

LIAM

It was the hardest and longest
fuck I'd had since I was fifteen!

Terry winces at this comment. Liam sits back and grabs hold of
Terry's hand - but it all looks quite rigid.

LIAM

He held me in his arms. I
could've gone again but I was on
standby and a call came through.

Terry puts his other hand over Liam's, to soften the grip.

TERRY

He felt so ... gentle.

LIAM

Lagos.

Liam gives a confident, slightly knowing look. Terry just looks awkward.

9. INT. OFFICE ROOM - AFTERNOON

Craig sits down at his desk and opens up his laptop. He goes to his e-mail and sees one from Sarah: the subject line, 'Crossing Patrol Operative'.

He opens the e-mail. It reads:

Hi Craig.

Good to chat earlier! Sorry about the connection problems - must have looked like one of those dodgy ads where young babes (!) repeat the same lewd act every 5 seconds!

Anyway ... just on the CPO aka Lollipop Lady thing, I had an idea. What if it were an old lady instead? Or maybe a cyclist? Just thinking - tonally, as you say! - does a sick kid seem a bit ... well, sick?!

Might just be my conscience. Not sure. I'm just having visions of that one from Glee, which doesn't help! (Have you seen it?)

Let me know anyway. Maybe ask Simon to see what he thinks?

*Toodlepip!
Sarah x*

Craig ponders for a moment. He goes to Google and types in 'Glee wheelchair'. He looks at the images that come up.

He goes back to Sarah's e-mail and hits 'reply'. He types:

Hi Sarah!

Thanks for your thoughts. Thoughtful, as ever! I get your point - maybe I/we don't have a conscience! - though am wondering if killing a cyclist or a granny (granny on a bike?) is a bit 'basic'? Is it funny? Or just dark? Had a look at Glee and can see why you're

concerned. But don't worry, we won't make the kid that old. Or as ugly! Let me ask Simon ... leave it with me.

Interestingly, maybe - or maybe not - it's helping me to think about my own script. Tone versus credibility, etc. Good for the script editor to be writing too, don't you think? To try and create a series style.

Craig x

He hits 'send'.

10. EXT. BALCONY - AFTERNOON

Craig sits on his balcony, which looks out to the bay. He makes notes on a piece of paper:

Love. To be loved. What is love? Love 'vs' sex. What is sex? Sex trainee? Where does love fit into all of this?

He suddenly remembers something and takes out his mobile phone. He types a message to Simon:

Hey, Simon. Hope the text doesn't wake you - afternoon over here. Spoke to Sarah about her script. What are your thoughts on the wheelchair kid? Is it offensive or is it what we want, tonally? Just thinking about Julie's testicular cancer and Karen's sex cage. Craig :-)

He hits 'send'.

11. INT. COLOURFUL BOUDOIR-STYLE LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Craig sits on a chair opposite Terry and Liam.

CRAIG

So I'm thinking if we play it lewd, it might have more pathos.

LIAM

What's that?

TERRY

As long as they get it. That's the point, right?

LIAM
Essentially, it's your story,
Terry.

Liam looks a little lost - it's not usual for him to be sidelined. Terry notices this.

TERRY
What about Liam?

CRAIG
I think he needs a climax, too.

LIAM
Now we're talking!

Craig ignores this comment.

CRAIG
It's a story about union - I think. You're together, but you're not.

LIAM
He loves me ... doesn't he?

TERRY
What about grief?

CRAIG
I'm thinking guilt. As in, feeling like you're betraying your ... well, ex wife.

LIAM
Who else is in the series?

CRAIG
(slightly frustrated)
A retired couple. And older man and a younger woman. A couple who've fallen on hard times, and she has to sell her body to pay the mortgage.

TERRY
What kind of series is this?!

LIAM
The type I like!

CRAIG

It might seem smutty, but it's actually about emotional journeys and subtext. What people say and do, versus what they're really thinking and feeling.

LIAM

(tongue-in-cheek)

Sounds like there's a lot of feeling going on ...

Terry playfully slaps Liam's wrist.

CRAIG

Sex is a frame, but the meat ... the content is about people's choices, and facing up to what's working and what's not.

(beat)

I think.

Terry ponders for a moment.

TERRY

I think I get it.

(beat)

But you will ... do it tastefully, won't you?

Craig looks at Liam, who's stopped listening.

12. INT. COLOURFUL BOUDOIR-STYLE LIVING ROOM - EVENING
(SCREENPLAY)

Terry's now sitting alone on the sofa.

TERRY

He was really keen to show me all he'd learned himself. How it works for ... 'us' lot ... He decided on this A to Z thing.

(beat)

We got stuck on 'S' for quite a while, but ...

Liam re-enters with a tray of chips and dips.

LIAM

It's quite hard to suck and spank
at the same time - you need a
good few days.

TERRY

(to Liam, warmly)
D'you remember the snuggling?

LIAM

That was nice.
(beat, matter-of-fact)
A night of nothing before we
started on the tea-bagging.

Liam offers Terry the tray of chips and dips. Terry falters
for a second from Liam's comment, before quickly grabbing a
handful of chips.

LIAM

(to camera)
You should've seen him in his new
underwear. Wow!
(beat)
That was the letter 'U'.
(beat, to Terry)
No offense, but she had shocking
taste in the undercarriage
handling department.

Terry smiles, obligingly, but then looks away, as if he's
trying to conceal a sudden sadness. Liam dips a chip several
times before gulping it down.

13. INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Craig is in bed. Just as he turns the light out, a text comes
through from Simon:

*I think it's fine. And it's not as if we have to film
it. The actress can soften any possible cruelty?*

Craig writes a reply:

*My thoughts exactly. Let's not worry about offending.
Good night!*

He hits 'send'.

14. INT. TRENDY CAFE - MORNING

Craig is in the same cafe as before. He's eating avocado smash with bacon. He looks at his laptop screen intently.

15. INT. COLOURFUL BOUDOIR-STYLE LIVING ROOM - EVENING
(SCREENPLAY)

Terry's now sitting on the edge of the sofa. Liam is laid out, his legs resting on Terry's lap. It looks a little awkward.

TERRY
(not really joking)
Sounds like all we've done is
have sex!

LIAM
Grab it while you can, big boy.

TERRY
(to camera)
But you know what, it's about
trust ... and power.

Liam lifts his legs in the air, sexually.

LIAM
Yeah, baby! I do trust your
power!

Terry's awkward for a moment. Then ...

TERRY
Maybe we can do the A to Z thing
again ...

LIAM
(to camera)
Somebody tame the tiger!

TERRY
... but ... well ... this time
with a more emotional slant?

Liam sits up.

LIAM
Not the crying baby thing again?

TERRY
(world of his own)
Afternoon walks ... bedtime
stories ... chats ... cuddles ...
chats and cuddles!

Liam's confused. He glances towards the camera, awkwardly,
embarrassed. Then back to Terry.

LIAM
Don't you find me attractive?

16. INT. TRENDY CAFE - MORNING

Craig stops typing for a moment. Thinks hard.

17. INT. COLOURFUL BOUDOIR-STYLE LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Craig walks over to Terry and Liam.

CRAIG
This is the key line of the
scene, ok?

LIAM
Is he going to say no?!

CRAIG
Precisely!

Liam looks scared - but Terry thinks he knows what's going on.

CRAIG
I mean, yes, he does find you
attractive. But this line is
about you. Your vulnerability.
What you're really saying is ...

TERRY
Don't leave me. I need you.

CRAIG
Yes, good. Sex aside, you, Liam,
need Terry. Need. You're actually
nothing without him. No offense. This
is where you enter the inmost cave ...

Liam raises his eyebrows.

CRAIG
(annoyed)
Stop it!
(beat)
And you realise who you are. And
for the first time, Terry sees
who you really are. He knew it
anyway, but here, you let him see
it for the first time. Probably.

TERRY
This is good.

CRAIG
It'll all change in production,
I'm sure, but here's the intent
anyway. The director can tease it
out. He's good. We work closely
on understanding the story. And
refining the tone.

Terry and Liam look at each other - sounds ok?

CRAIG
Ok - here goes ...

18. INT. COLOURFUL BOUDOIR-STYLE LIVING ROOM - EVENING
(SCREENPLAY)

LIAM
Don't you find me attractive?

Terry just smiles affectionately. He strokes Liam's face.

LIAM
I thought you loved me?

Terry kisses Liam's forehead, very tenderly.

But Liam is lost. He starts pulling at his clothes, self-
consciously.

Terry looks at the camera.

TERRY
I've got a lot to learn ... but a
lot to give, as well.

LIAM
(softly, afraid)
I need it ...

TERRY
(to Liam)
It's yours. Forever.
(beat, to camera)
I said that to someone before.
But forever only lasted a few
years.

It suddenly dawns on Liam that he's been quite silly in front of the camera.

TERRY
(to Liam)
Let's have it all.

Liam nods; he can't bring himself to speak.

TERRY
Not just sex.
(beat)
Plenty of sex ...

Liam smiles, but in an understanding kind of way.

TERRY
... but not just sex.

A tender moment as Liam and Terry embrace.

Screen fades to black.

TERRY (o/s)
Hey, you know we kept getting
stuck on 'Z'?

LIAM (o/s)
Yeah ...

19. INT. OFFICE ROOM - AFTERNOON

Craig reads an e-mail. A reply from Sarah:

Hi again!

Ok, let me know. You know the series, of course, and Simon is directing. Just think about the politically correct brigade! Is there a modern day version of Mary Whitehouse, by the way?

Skype soon? Oh, hang on a minute ... (why do we still

write e-mails in the order we think, when we can cut and paste?!) ... what about a parking inspector, someone like that? Kind of sad, but kind of ironic? It'd make me laugh if I saw it!

Sarah x

20. EXT. STREET - AFTERNOON

Craig walks down the street with a bag of shopping. He notices a PARKING INSPECTOR on the other side of the road.

Craig pauses to watch him for a moment. The parking inspector is friendly, spending more time saying hi to people than checking the meters.

Craig squints at this, looking slightly unimpressed. He walks on.

Just as he's about to turn a corner, a woman in a mobility scooter careers towards him. He's taken aback - literally and conceptually.

A beat, then he has an idea.

21. INT. OFFICE ROOM - AFTERNOON

Craig is frantically typing a reply to Sarah:

Hey!

On reflection, you're right. Tonally, it's probably a bit screwed up. Simon and I have given it a LOT of thought - be assured! - and we came up with a great solution ... an old woman in a scooter! You know, those mobility ones. I don't think it's as sick as a child? Also, yes it's clear that she's old - but viewers might (hopefully?!) also get the impression she's disabled in some way. Which is great!

I'll make the script amendment and send to Simon. He's hoping to cast next week. Thanks for your efforts!

Craig x

He hits 'send'.

END OF SCRIPT

Research statement

Research background

This work sits within the emerging field of screenwriting practice as research, and more specifically, the screenplay text as research. Inspired by recent debates about the value of screenplay creative practices and artefacts within the academy (Millard 2010, Baker 2013, Batty 2014), the work is situated as a text that not only speaks about screenwriting research, but also performs screenwriting research through form and content. As a screenplay, the work also sits at the intersection between creative writing research, which is firmly embedded in the academy, and screen production research, which has yet to find its own discourse in the academy.

Research contribution

As a multi-narrative work that weaves together the screenplay, the writing of the screenplay and the editing of another writer's screenplay, the screenplay draws attention to the creative and pragmatic decisions that influence its creation. These include peer review, inspiration, writerly interactions with characters, and the pressures of industry conventions. Found in both the screenplay's content and its form, these aspects present an intertextual work that is aware of its origin and its purpose, including its place in the academy.

Research significance

This work is one of only a handful of published 'academic screenplays' in the world, and builds on the author's extant published works of a similar style and purpose. It is significant in that its research contribution is evidenced through both content and form. Furthermore, it works on the level of reflexivity, meaning it can be viewed as a research tool as well as a research outcome – speaking as much about screenplay development as it does screenplay content and form. This gives it further importance within an academic context.

Works cited

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