

## What characters learn and what they never will

This session was written by Lucy for The Script Factory's *I ♥ screenwriting course* presented at BFI Southbank, June 2013. The teaching points in this lecture are mostly illustrated with reference to the following four films:

*Argo* (dir. Ben Affleck, scr. Chris Terrio, 2012)

*Sightseers* (dir. Ben Wheatley, scr. Alice Lowe & Steve Oram, 2012)

*Up in the Air* (dir. Jason Reitman, scr. Jason Reitman & Sheldon Turner, 2009)

*Animal Kingdom* (dir./scr. David Michod, 2010)

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Screenwriting lore dictates that characters should learn life-improving lessons through their experiences. Pardon our French, but that's bullsh\*t! In many films the external challenges the character faces are so great that it's imperative that they are equipped with the necessary attributes to tackle those obstacles from the outset. In other movies the characters remain obstinate despite what life throws at them and their inability to change is exactly what the film is about. This session examines how to chart convincing character journeys and, if your character does need to overcome a flawed attitude to life, how to ensure that the difference in whom they are at the beginning and end of the film is clearly marked.

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By far the most vital way that an audience literally gets on board with what's at stake in a story is through the characters. This is because we generally go to see films in order to have an emotional experience. There are probably exceptions but, on the whole, we don't buy tickets because we want to be educated, we are not hoping to improve our minds or learn a lesson – we are going to the cinema to have a vicarious experience through watching characters **do stuff**.

That stuff may be way beyond our own experience of life - we are unlikely to become exfil specialists (*Argo*) anytime soon - or it may be scarily close to something we have done or could have done (perhaps getting pregnant at 16 like *Juno*) or it might be the chance to indulge in a fantasy such as killing people that annoy you (*Sightseers*). The **specifics** of the story give rise to the kinds of characters that you need, to ensure that the audience will jump on board. We can't have Jay from *Animal Kingdom* charged with getting the houseguests out of Iran, and Tony Mendez (*Argo*) is unlikely ever to give a speech about freeing oneself from the weight of responsibility (*Up In The Air*). To some extent the kind of character that you need in your story is fairly obvious. What isn't necessarily so obvious is what you do with that main character over the course of the story; so this character session, I am looking at the notion of 'change.'

The character's desire or need for something to change becomes the imperative that drives **every** screen story but this has somehow got muddled with the actual character changing. The situation changing and the character changing are very different things and in terms of developing the main character it is crucial that you know this and know the difference.

The first thing to think about is this: what is, in fact, the most important change in your story? Is it the change in the situation that the character is affecting? For example, the need to extract six American embassy workers out of Iran? Or is it the change in the character's attitudes to life, brought on by their response to a situation? For example, the need to value commitment? And, if it is the character's attitudes changing, is it a meaningful change caused by the events of the story, or just to complicate your options, is it a story wherein we learn more about the character as the story progresses but they themselves haven't necessarily changed?

**So just to be clear I am going to say that again; every story is about something changing. Your task is to know which type of change is the most important in so far as it gives the story its meaning.**

It may not be easy to pin point this in early stages, probably because it feels like every thing changes a bit and every type of change is relevant, but as you develop the idea be aware of what is the most significant change (character's attitude or the situation) as it will really help you write the characters that are fit for purpose.

Which of the four films that we asked you to watch DOES NOT chart a change in attitude of the main character?

*Argo* is a good example of a story where the situation changes thanks to the actions of the character. Tony Mendez was already the best in the business when the call comes from the CIA. He is equipped with everything he needs in terms of attitudes and skills to complete the task entrusted to him. It is exciting because the obstacles and antagonists he is up against are very powerful and very difficult and beyond the abilities of most of us; the point I am making is that Tony does not learn a life-changing lesson in Iran and no time is spent in charting a character journey because the story doesn't require one.

If you are working on this kind of story the most important job with the main character is to ensure that they are equipped with the attributes to do the job/the mission/the quest at the outset so we can enjoy them getting on with it.

*Sightseers* charts the character change of Tina from what feels like a put-upon mouse to a killer without conscience or remorse. Because the events that precipitate the change in Tina are unlikely to bring about this change in an ordinary person, we can describe this journey as one in which her character has been **revealed** over the course of the telling. The latent psycho is unleashed.

Just to be clear about this, *Sightseers* is a black comedy. Which means that its treatment of death is irreverent. So rather than be shocked, we are invited to enjoy the gruesome acts of murder. And this type of comedy is not intending for us to extrapolate life lessons – we are in on the joke. The purpose of the film is to entertain.

Whose story is it? Ultimately it is Tina's story of a particular brand of personal empowerment. It is also a road movie and uses the episodic structure of the genre and the convention of collapsing the relationship at the centre of the story under the pressure of the journey.

The basic story idea is that Tina and Chris are newly met, in love and are going on a sightseeing tour to some significant places in the north of England. At the outset we are really rooting for Tina to get away from her weird and needy mum and have some fun with her boyfriend. She seems to be a typical downtrodden mouse and we completely ignore and dismiss her mother's warnings. Mum actually says the words, *it's not safe, too fast, too soon, I don't like you, murderer and accident* within the first 7 minutes of the film.

The inciting incident of this film is a guy dropping litter. Chris is (rightfully) horrified by the cavalier action and calls the guy on his behaviour. Getting no response he has a very big reaction to this, which escalates as he sees the guy do it again. There is a moment of doubt, perhaps, that mowing him down and killing him was a tragic accident, but we have been primed for the darkly comic tone. However, Chris and Tina's celebratory shag is not how all of us would react after witnessing that death!

And so we head into the second act not quite sure who these characters are now. Their dramatic goal is to simply have a good holiday and not let anyone spoil it. The question hooking us is less straightforward – we have some intrigue about what else might

happen to provoke Chris, and we start to look for the clues. And perhaps we are wondering will they get caught?

We are treated to the next gruesome episode very swiftly. And unfortunately the class war with Ian and Janice is going to end badly for the Poshingtons. They are just too smug and annoying and Chris simply hunts Ian down to kill him. As Tina hears about the missing man and dog she starts to work it out and confronted with the photographic evidence on Ian's camera asks Chris outright, Did you kill Ian?

This is both the midpoint and surely... for Tina, a good moment to quit. But Tina does the opposite. She is won round to Chris' worldview and the following night in the restaurant Tina announces her character change: *I get it; it's about personal empowerment, thinking outside the box. I don't want to go back in the box. When you think about it, reducing life spans reduces emissions, therefore murder is green.* And there is a genuinely happy moment in the restaurant until Chris foolishly snogs the bride to be.

Tina's character change is confirmed as she follows the bride out and tips her over the ravine, an act which Chris doesn't agree with and which precipitates the beginning of the end of the relationship.

As much as we can extract meaning, Chris's murders are linked to the philosophy that his victims are all rather annoying and deserve to die. That obviously doesn't hold up to much scrutiny but he has a bit more order and principle behind his actions and is driven by a need for justification.

Tina, on the other hand, has blossomed into a basic psycho. As she takes off in the car with Chris in the caravan careering to the end of the second act, she deliberately pulls

over *into* the jogger, which is deeply shocking even in a comedy. And Chris says: You are sacked. I don't need you.

They drive to the journey's end near an aqueduct. Martin the carapod man turns up with the lost dog and, just to confirm the change in Tina, she behaves like a sex-crazed psycho and when Chris doesn't react to defend her honour she literally pushes Martin off the cliff.

With the caravan in flames behind them, the pair head to the aqueduct to jump off at the end of a brilliant holiday. But now unsurprisingly, Chris jumps and Tina lives on.

Rather than offering a meaningful story, *Sightseers* generates its comedic tone by ensuring that Tina's response and behaviour is completely at odds with what we would do and what we would expect. In this way the writers reveal the character of Tina in the course of the telling so that the final scene is the only one in which she does what we now anticipate.

We are always going to learn a bit more about characters as any story progresses so don't get confused, I am talking about **character revelation** as a specific story design. If you are working on this kind of idea, be conscious of putting the clues in early on so that we don't feel cheated. Can we go back and enjoy watching out for the clues? For example, did Tina kill Poppy on purpose??!! A more serious version of this type of character revelation is a film like *Side Effects*.

Okay – so we have an example of a story where the character doesn't change (*Argo*) and the kind of story where the character doesn't change through learning a lesson, but rather they are fully revealed to the audience as part of the design. In either of these kinds of story your job is to ensure that you don't get distracted with life lessons – it's all about plot. Make sure the characters are fit for purpose at the outset by ensuring they

are equipped with the attributes they require and if you are revealing character, the clues are there for the audience to figure it out.

But now we move on to character change by which we mean the character's values, attitudes or worldview is altered as a result of the story.

As a way in to this, I invite you to think about the perfect world wherein we always learn by our mistakes the first time. Anyone do that?

A few years ago I got an invitation in the post to apply for a Marks and Spencer Credit card that earned points which could be turned into vouchers to buy pants and simply by applying I would get £20 pounds worth. So, I did and duly filled out my details. A week later I got a letter refusing me the card and it was already a bad morning so I decided to call them and ask why they had solicited my business if they were going to turn me down. When they asked my name: Lucy Scher, Miss or Mrs? In a fit of pique I said DOCTOR, assuming I would never do business with them again. But it turns out it was an admin error and I could be approved on the spot and so a week later my card arrived embossed with my new title Doctor Lucy Scher.

Unfortunately, I had handed that card in to a hotel bar one evening to run a tab when a man decided to have a serious nose bleed. It's a cliché but it's true... I was dragged away from my table by an anxious maître d' (who had noted my status from my credit card) to attend to this chap. It was only as I was standing in the men's loo did I realise what had happened and though I tried to be helpful, passing loo roll etc, I was saying "No! I am not that kind of doctor."

I managed to get out of the loo and back to my (admittedly 3rd glass of) wine in time to tell my friend what had happened. We were still sniggering away when the maître d' came back to say sorry for the misunderstanding and to ask what kind of doctor I was.

This is the moment to learn a lesson and tell the truth, right? Did I? No. I made it worse. I said I was a Doctor of Latin. Oh my god, sayeth the maître d' and started to talk in Latin to me. He was really surprised that I didn't speak back. So he tried again. So I had to backtrack again 'when I said Latin, I meant English.' Ok, lets go.

Obviously, that is a rather lovely bar I will never be able to go back in for the incredible shame I have. Yet again I learned that if you are going to lie make sure it's not a stupid one (or perhaps I learned...it is better to tell the truth??)

When a story charts a character's change in attitude it is generally teaching the character an important lesson about life. The problem with needing to learn lessons is that the audience has most likely already learnt them all (ie we do know it is better to tell the truth) either through personal experience of something similar or we 'theoretically' know the right thing to do in any given situation. It therefore stands to reason that we may not want to sit through a film teaching us a lesson about life that we already know. But, judging from your smiles and engagement in the M&S credit card debacle I hazard that you are willing to sit through the story knowing that I am going to learn that old chestnut again and it doesn't make you switch off...

And this is an interesting conundrum about character and character change: which lessons are we willing to sit through again and why?

We used to get scripts from ad execs who had given up their well-paid copy writing jobs to write smart, funny screenplays about a character who comes to learn how meaningless commercialism is. We can safely say that we don't need to sit through a film to learn this one again. Reject. We also get scripts where the character realizes that if you don't try you won't get anywhere, and that script isn't going anywhere either. Yet, we are happy to watch a character learn that life doesn't always go to plan, or that commitments can be rewarding.

The difference between understanding that commercialism is soulless and understanding that commitments are challenging but rewarding is this: the first realization is one that springs from a NAIVETE about life. And it is an important interrogation of your **adult** character that the lesson they have to learn is not because they were naïve. (We will allow a bit of naiveté / idealism from younger characters).

Let's probe that a bit deeper. We know that commitments can be hard, that relationships involve compromise, and that sometimes it feels like it would be easier and happier without it all, but we also know that it matters, it's worth it. The fact that we know this and know how complicated it can be means we are not naïve.

To figure out that the world isn't always fair, or shopping doesn't bring happiness betrays a lack of sophistication, and an element of credulity that actually speaks of the writer processing their own issues rather than writing a story for an audience.

The first two important points in stories about a character changing are:

- The lesson that the character has to learn over the course of a story has to be one that the audience are willing to witness again.
- Because the character cannot be naïve, the value or worldview that is to be challenged by the story must be very dear to the character – they must be totally sincere, with 100% conviction.

We can put that another way: because we humans don't learn or change very quickly or easily, when you have a story where the character IS changing their attitude, the things that bring about that change are the main events of the story and what it is about.

When the story is about a character changing their attitude it is really helpful (in terms of where to start) to introduce your character to us in the opening scenes so that we understand that they hold a particular viewpoint or belief or that they exhibit a very distinct lifestyle choice. Ideally, you'll want to create a situation in which the way the character behaves clearly establishes a specific way of thinking about a specific aspect of life.

Ryan Bingham really likes his life up in the air and we know that from the choices the writer made in the opening scenes: a voice over sequence in which Ryan lays out his priorities for us. The story is going to challenge and test the values he lives by and ultimately lead to a change in his views.

And this is how:

Ryan is an **employee**. He is required to do what his boss says and he is forced on the road with Natalie, someone who is young, with a naïve optimism about life and the confidence to challenge his philosophy. She thinks he is ridiculous. We may assume that ordinarily Ryan would dismiss her and her ilk, but he is invested in showing her how important it is that they do the job of firing people face to face. The story requires him to look after her and comfort her. Firstly, over the suicide threat for the sacked employee and then when Brian leaves her by text message. He quite naturally adopts the mentor role and though he is awkward in comforting her, he is nice to her.

It is when Natalie confronts Ryan about his 'casual' treatment of Alex, that he is prompted to invite Alex to be his date at his sister's wedding. He says for the first time "I don't want to be alone." And Natalie's role is over. She slips out of the story until the very end.

The crisis in this story is Ryan being tasked to talk to Jim, his future brother-in-law, and convince him that marriage is the most important thing in the world. **It's a brilliant**

**moment.** Jim more or less spouts a dumb version of Ryan's own motivational speech and Ryan is forced to counter it with an argument that is simple and true – all those important moments in your life? Were you alone?

As he says good bye to Alex at the airport she says with appropriate innuendo *call me when you get lonely* and Ryan says, out loud...I'M LONELY.

The shift in Ryan's character is confirmed when he is unable to deliver his next motivational speech about jettisoning all commitment. He goes to find Alex. In a sublime twist of irony, Alex is in fact married with a family. So, Ryan has learned that relationships are the good stuff of life, but it's too late for him – he was parenthesis.

The story tidies up its loose ends and puts Ryan back on the road and up in the air, but the change in the character is utterly convincing. When it is broken down, it is not immediately dramatic big stuff that precipitates the change, but a very carefully managed sequence of challenges that necessitate a response from the character.

When I was thinking about this session – what characters learn and what they never will – I tracked back through my script notes of stories I have worked on that were in this range – characters who are challenged and change, and I noticed that my notes reflected two common and opposite problems:

**Firstly**, the character is not sympathetic enough so it is hard to see how an audience will get on side with the journey.

The experience of reading this kind of script is that it feels didactic – like we are being told something we already know about a character who is not like us, rather than a cathartic, enjoyable journey.

**Secondly**, the main character is too sympathetic and the experience of reading this kind of script (to put it bluntly) is boring and pointless.

In the first case when the character is not sympathetic enough it is really important to check that you are not trying to tell us something that we already know through a naïve character – if your character has to learn that being gay is okay by not being a bigot and learning to respect others we are going to switch off. We know this. You could potentially write this story in a specific community or a specific period in time but make sure you translate the concerns of that time or community to a modern audience so that the experience of watching the film is more than observational.

If you are convinced that you have an interesting attitude change to explore and you feel, or have been told, that your character is not sympathetic enough, then the task is to ensure that we believe the character deeply, that he/she truly cherishes the value the story is challenging. In real life we are generally able to see other peoples' points of view. For example, I am a very committed vegetarian and I really would prefer that we don't have meat in the house. However, my partner likes road kill and nothing thrills her more than a barely dead animal on a hot plate. But we are normal people and therefore respect each other's point of view: she compromises by eating veggy when we are home alone and I compromise by allowing meat when we have guests. But if you translate this compromise principle to a screenplay you will lose all the potential for conflict. You have to have character/s who are polarised – who feel very strongly about vegetarianism, winning, freedom, control and the reasons why these values matter so much to them. Ironically the way we do this is to restrict the characters' ability to **empathise**.

Do not let them see the other points of view. If he or she is a committed vegetarian they simply cannot allow meat in the house, ever because... actually this example falls down because it is a bit ridiculous and we quickly lose sympathy. However, if you give the character a commitment that we both understand and, in some way, also makes them

vulnerable you can create a much more sympathetic character. So, for example, a student who is committed to working all hours. This character is vulnerable to burn out, disappointment and loneliness, in this case we both understand the commitment (empathise) and have sympathy – he or she deeply believes in this. This kind of character is on a journey to learn something that the audience is willing to witness again; that compromise and balance are good to achieve.

A polarised character also enables you to generate the anticipation of conflict, and you can more easily create the tension between who the character is at the beginning and who they become at the end.

**Restricting the character's ability to empathise is a really useful note to remember in these kinds of stories.**

On to the second problem – when the character is too sympathetic. Obviously, you want us to be sympathetic to your central character and this can lead to reluctance to effectively **betray** them – by making them do stuff that makes us wince. However, I think you have to **betray your characters** so that they have somewhere to go: you can take them and us on a journey to end up as a person we admire and like. (If you haven't seen it, check out the film *Win Win* as a brilliant example of a sympathetic character doing something shockingly bad near the beginning of the film and going on a journey to learn what he should have done instead.)

On this point cast your mind back to the film *Juno*. She's sassy and smart BUT in an extremely vulnerable position that we see her being a 'little Viking' about. We have heaps of sympathy for her.

There is a great moment towards the end of the film when Bleeker tells Juno that she's been a bit of an arse towards him. Effectively it's a great 'betrayal' of Juno. She might

be dealing with this grown up stuff ok but she's screwed up being a teenager. Juno is a character that absolutely needs our sympathy loaded up at the beginning and if your story is constructed like this, think about a way to undercut that sympathy at some point later in the film. It will serve you well.

If you are charting a story wherein the character changes their attitude it is really important that you do one of these two things – either polarise the character's attitude and values so they have a deeply held position and are unable to see other points of view, or find a way to let them act without integrity – without the audience hating them – for which they **know** there will be consequences (in other words, not a naïve act.)

If you have ever had to step in to stop kids fighting or had that rather awkward experience of being confidante to both partners in the middle of a relationship crisis, then you will know that there is more than one side to every story. Your decisions in designing a story are about how many sides of your story are you going to tell. You will mostly have one main character but there are multiple access points in their story to consider.

A really useful way to think about this in terms of the characters is to think about a trial; the case (story) is put from two opposing 'points of view': the Prosecution and the Defence will build their respective cases and call witnesses to testify in support of their version of the 'truth'. And each side will call the testimony of the other's witnesses into question by suggesting one of the following:

- The witness is only in possession of partial knowledge
- The witness is lying (or at least concealing something crucial)
- The witness is unreliable, i.e. something in their own world-view predisposes them to see events in a certain light

You can use this idea when you are designing a cast of characters – who knows what, who is acting without integrity, who only sees the world in a particular way. You know the ‘whole truth’ because you have created the story.

This is a good moment to mention BACKSTORY which may affect a character’s version of the story.

If you develop a character biography you will have a mass of information about their past experiences. Having invented or discovered so much the temptation is to use it all. This is a mistake. Just as bio-pics often include episodes of a character’s life simply because it happened, writers often include information about a character simply because they’ve thought of it. Before you start writing you want to reduce the biography to essentials.

In principle, character back-story is the significant incident or events in the past that motivate the character. Because the past is unavailable as **direct action** the only way to reveal it is in the present of the film. The character’s worldview is determined by the things that have happened to them.

We need to know from as early on in the film as possible who we are supposed to be rooting for in the story. One of the most important ways to do this – so don’t forget! - is to simply allow the audience to spend time in their company. It is always a good discipline to try, as far as possible to construct the film around your main character, to consciously limit the number of scenes that they are not in. A story that is allowed to wander anywhere it wants will rapidly become a meaningless mess because the audience will lose their sense of who is at the centre of events.

Decisions about whether you can or should tell your whole film entirely from the point of view of the main character will be influenced by all the same things as the decisions

you take about how to start the film and introduce your protagonist. Generally speaking, the more a film is concerned with the struggle taking place **inside** a character, as they have to recalibrate their attitudes, the more likely it is that the protagonist will be in the vast majority, if not all, of the scenes in the film.

Let's look at some of the very practical techniques that enable you to write characters with whom the audience can empathise and/or sympathise.

The greatest power that the screenwriter has over the audience stems from the way in which s/he releases information to them.

There are only 3 options:

- The character knows something that the audience does not
- The audience and the character have the same information
- The audience knows something that the character does not

But the choice that you make between them is crucially important because what the audience feels moment to moment during the film is largely dependent on what they **know**.

### **The Character Knows Something That the Audience Does Not (CURIOSITY)**

This used to be a really common problem in the scripts that we read – a whole host of back-story was held back about why the character was in this particular predicament and the denouement was the revelation of all that history. The basic experience in reading a script that is structured like this is boredom. It's about as interesting as someone saying I have a secret but I am not going to tell you. There are exceptions, of course, where a story can hold our interest through an intriguing situation, or the film is all about a secret or an event in the past that needs uncovering and resolving now.

However, more usefully for you is to think about moments when this type of release of information is useful; when a character acts in a way that we do not immediately understand, like Jay towards the end of *Animal Kingdom*, and so we are curious to find out what they are doing and why. Think about containing the generation of intrigue and delivery of insight within a single sequence. Curiosity alone will not keep your audience hooked for long in most stories.

### **The Audience and the Character Have the Same Information**

This generates empathy. This is a very common way in which information is released: the audience discovers something at the same time as the character. The writer puts us in the character's shoes, ensures that we see what they see, know what they know, feel what they feel – hence the reason this is described as creating EMPATHY from audience to character.

We are with Ryan when he rings Alex's door bell.

### **The other option is when the Audience Knows Something That the Character Does Not And in this way you create dramatic irony.**

This is what happens in those scenes the main character is not in: you are taking the audience somewhere else in order to show them something to which the character is not privy but **is something that will have an effect on them at some later point in the story.**

“We need to do something about Jay” says Mama Smurf rather chillingly.

A skilful use of dramatic irony keeps the audience emotionally engaged in the story because we have a piece of information that places the character under some kind of threat or vulnerability. At its most extreme the sympathy that we now feel for the

character is so intense that we want to shout out and warn them but all we can do is sit it out and wait for the moment when they catch up with us.

I don't know if any of you have seen *Silence of the Lambs* recently enough to remember it, but right near the beginning of the film we see Clarice take part in a training exercise in which the FBI recruits have to storm a room where hostages are being held. And Clarice fails. If that had been a real situation then she would be dead because she failed to check her blind spot behind the opened door.

Fast forward now to the end of the film when Clarice is alone in the murderer's house, it's dark and she seems to have to go through an interminable number of doors trying to find him or his victim. That pursuit sequence is additionally tense because we previously saw that this is a situation that Clarice isn't confident in, and it makes you want to whisper instructions to the screen 'check behind the door, check behind the door.'

Always remember that the audience is absorbing everything you are showing/telling them and assuming that it will have an impact on the main character they are following. If this turns out not to be the case the audience will feel at best confused and at worst cheated.

The positive point is that we retain information so have confidence that once you've told the audience something about a character then they will remember it. Films are so economical that we assume that everything there is pertinent, so unless something is deliberately shrouded in ambiguity we don't reserve judgment to see if what you tell us or show us about that character is really true: we'll believe it and it will inform our response to them for the rest of the film.

And so to conclude:

When you are designing characters that are fit for purpose the most imperative question is what is the most important **change** in my story? If the change is about the situation rather than the character do not get distracted with life lessons – they are probably unnecessary and much less important than ensuring that the character is equipped with the right attributes at the start.

If the most important change is the audience fully understanding the story because the character's true self is revealed over the course of the telling, again don't get too distracted by life lessons; it is important to ensure that the clues were there, or the purpose is to entertain.

If the most important change is within the character, firstly you need to be specific about what aspect of the character's attitude changes, because you will need to plot relevant story events that directly challenge that way of thinking in order to set the character on a course of change. Think about the moment that first prompts them to re-consider their attitude. What else needs to happen to back that up? Think about whether there is a crisis point in the film in which the character needs to make a clear-cut choice between doing what they would have done before and what they now know they must do.

And think about in the resolution of your film what the audience will need to see in order to understand the change that has occurred. You want to avoid writing that kind of dialogue in which your character says 'Oh well, you see I'm a changed man now, ever since...' Rather, you may want to echo the situation we saw at the beginning of the film, so we can witness first hand the contrast between who the character was and how they now behave.

And on that note I am going to do exactly what I usually do: have one more coffee, even though I know it keeps me awake if drunk after lunchtime and I will regret it a lot tonight.