

### Synopsis of *Adaptation's* Plot (in relation to *Story*)

In this appendix a plot synopsis is provided, for easier understanding of the thesis, even if one has not seen the discussed film. The following is an extract of the plot summary on the back cover of the *Adaptation* DVD: the film "seamlessly blends fictional characters and situations with the lives of real people: obsessive orchid hunter John Laroche, New Yorker journalist Susan Orlean, Hollywood screenwriter Charlie Kaufman, and his twin brother, Donald. As Charlie struggles to adapt Orlean's best-selling book '*The Orchid Thief*', he writes himself into his own movie."<sup>1</sup> Below, I will elaborate on the above in relation to the conscious and unconscious desires of the main characters, a concept explored in *Story*, while providing a summary of *Adaptation's* storyline in a more detailed synopsis (to make the concepts discussed in this essay easier to follow).

FCCK is a successful screenwriter but failure of a single person, and is suffering from something close to depression. He accepts the assignment of adapting Susan Orlean's book, *The Orchid Thief*, and wants to create a film about flowers that just exists – rather than something artificially plot driven. He can't act on his thoughts and feelings related to women, and his fantasies about them do not correspond to his everyday reality. He has a conscious desire to have sex/get a girlfriend and to finish his screenplay. At one point he wants to give up, but it "would be a terrible career move"<sup>2</sup> according to his agent. His unconscious desire is to change, in order to find self-esteem, be able to love and be loved. During the process of the film, he learns how to turn thought into both action and screenplay, by writing himself into the film and taking the advice of the fictional McKee and his own brother, Donald.

The fictional Susan Orlean is a successful, married New Yorker writer who travels to Florida to write about John Laroche, a renegade orchid expert/thief. Her conscious desire is to write an article, later a book, about Laroche. Her subconscious desire is to learn how to live and be fascinated, by abandoning her highly civilized New York(er) life for taking drugs and making love with Laroche. In the end, she is

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<sup>1</sup> <https://itunes.apple.com/us/movie/adaptation/id277049802?ign-mpt=uo%3D5> – 2014-12-17

<sup>2</sup> Kaufman, *Adaptation: The Shooting Script*, p. 51.

not prepared to lose that life, and creates the final path to her own destruction by trying to kill FCCK to protect her status in the eyes of the world.

FCCK and the fictional Orlean are the two main protagonists. The fictional Laroche is the subject of the fictional Orlean and all characters are the subjects of FCCK, including Orlean. FCCK and all other characters are the subjects of IRLCK.

The fictional John Laroche's conscious desire is to make money through unusual, unlawful schemes, related to orchids. He wants to show the state it is wrong in having arrested him for orchid theft, while pointing out a loophole in the law. His unconscious desire is to find someone to love and be loved by: the fictional Orlean.

Donald Kaufman is FCCK's twin brother, who currently lives with FCCK due to unemployment. He decides to become a screenwriter like his brother, and goes about this by following the teachings of the fictional Robert McKee and attending his seminar. His conscious desire is to write a hit screenplay and have fun. His subconscious desire is to be close to, and respected by, his beloved twin brother.

The fictional Robert McKee is a screenwriting guru. His conscious desire is to rid the world of bad stories, by getting screenwriters to follow his formal principles. He doesn't have an unconscious desire in the film – except perhaps also teaching his students how to live (while teaching them how to write).

Subconscious desires are less apparent and important for supporting characters, so they're mostly there for FCCK and the fictional Orlean, and in lesser amounts for the fictional Laroche, Donald Kaufman and FCRMK – in descending order. (For bit players, too many desires can become distractions in the overall plot of the film.)

The film that FCCK writes in *Adaptation* – regardless of its original intention – never just exists, but always deals with change and keeps changing. This is the lesson of the film; life is about change and adaptation – evolution. As is living it and writing it, as are movies. This transformative writing experience changes the way FCCK lives, just as the transformative experience of living changes the way FCCK writes (the third act is full of change). This is the main story.

*Story* is what IRLCK has researched and what FCCK puts himself up against, and then begins to live by. FCCK goes from unhappy and wanting to write an art film antiplot about life as stasis, to happy having written a Hollywood movie archplot about life as change (not being able to write the original idea of an art film constituting the failure). This is accomplished by FCCK himself changing and adapting, in order to become able to write *Adaptation*.

He is taken out of his mind and into his film, the active research for the movie takes him out into the world, which makes its way into the film; that is then made and released into the world. FCCK learns how to live in the process. As the film ends, he tells us the ending. We assume his film is a success since we watch the result.

*Adaptation* is about the process of writing, and how it changes people; the fictional Orlean is changed by her subject, Laroche, while FCCK is changed by his subject, Orlean. It is the writer, while writing, who seems the furthest from knowing how to live; even though they are the ones writing the stories of their subjects. The fictional Orlean and Laroche could be said to be cheating, by taking drugs, and are punished with destruction and death in the end. FCCK's film is in the end very much plot-driven. In its third act it is consciously shown to adapt to the ideas of FCRMK and Donald, along with FCCK's projected Hollywood ideals. This is portrayed parodically, as if it is doping. The whole film, however, reflects the archplot form that IRLRMK teaches. This is not consciously shown in the film but will be in this essay.