

FOUR WEDDINGS AND A FUNERAL CHEAT SHEET

[Romantic comedy (true love); ensemble structure with multiple subplots]

[Basic composition principles: 1) Repetition is the heart of art. Watch for repetition of all kinds: large structural repetitions, subplots, thematic passages, bookends, motifs, anaphora, epanalepsis, anadiplosis, tie-backs, simple word repetitions. Distinguish also between repetitions that work to organize the whole work and those that are used to organize smaller segments only. Note also how repetitions are varied to keep them fresh. 2) Strict time control. 3) Plots are organized into clear, simple steps. 4) Each step, event, or event sequence has a simple informing desire and some dramatic interference. The informing desire varies and can be quite simple. E.g. In the the movie's third segment, Charlie must simply not be late meeting David. Many small dialogue scenes begin with a simple question. The interference can take many forms as well: not-answering dialogue, scene crunches or interfering scenes, speech impediments (in this movie), suspensions, nested scenes (a version of parenthesis, or what I call in a different jargon nested globs), intercut scenes. Often the desire/interference structure can be expressed grammatically as a but-construction. 5) Clear announcement of thematic material. In a movie, this has to take place in dialogue.]

1. **Overture:** Music closing with the words “when every happy plot ends with a marriage knot.”
2. **Wedding #1** (Broken up into segments: waking up and getting to wedding, wedding, reception, post-reception. Each segment then broken up into separate steps and scenes.)
 - a. alarm clock motif (note how it repeats and varies throughout; call it a species of anaphora)
 - i. Note how the lateness+alarm clock anaphora is used in a series of parallel structures to introduce the various characters economically
 - b. wedding invitation+time switch device (time control)
 - c. lateness motif
 - d. wedding ceremony (ring issue; meringue word repetition starts up)
 - i. The chief technical problem here is that weddings are all the same. The writer had to invent technical ways of creating

dramatic interest in each wedding ceremony. Obviously, the ceremonies are all cut down one way or another. But also note the different other devices that make the weddings interesting. In this case, the device of the scene crunch: while the ceremony is going on, Charlie also has to find replacement rings.

- e. wedding photo motif
- f. walking to reception (Gareth/Mathew thematic scene structure established)
 - (1) Secondary subplot (Bernard and Lydia) starts up and goes through preliminary steps, leads to second wedding
 - (2) David's romantic subplot starts up

g. PLOT: CHARLIE MEETS CAREY

h. bookend devices: Hen's brother and the demented old man

- i. speech motif (Charlie; sheep word and image repetition begins; note suspension in speech)
- j. -PLOT: CHARLIE AND CAREY IN BED BUT SHE LEAVES NEXT DAY (Note word play in sex scene, esp. the repetition of "skulk".)

Speech rhetoric: Charlie begins with a joke narrative, leads to a suspension ("there are now skeletons...or so I thought"), followed by a moment of truth-telling about himself and his awe of people who get married, then the suspension ends: "But now back to Angus and those sheep."

Sex scenes: difficult to write; three different strategies offered in this movie. 1) word play over sex scene, e.g. skulking; 2) scene crunch (Charlie trying to be alone while Lydia and Bernard have sex); 3) elided.

3. **Wedding #2** (Broken up into: waking up and getting to wedding, wedding, reception, post-reception)

- a. alarm clock
- b. wedding invitation+ time switch
- (1) Bernard and Lydia subplot advances
- c. lateness
- d. wedding ceremony (mispronunciation gaffes)
- e. wedding photos
- f. PLOT: CHARLIE SEES CAREY BUT SHE'S ENGAGED
- g. speech (Tom's travesty of Charlie's speech)
 - (1) Fiona's subplot (dialogue scene)
 - (2) Scarlet's subplot (dialogue scene)
 - (3) David's subplot advances (meets love interest)

- h. PLOT: CHARLIE AND CAREY IN BED AGAIN
4. **Non-Wedding Interlude Segment** (Broken up into: waking up, wedding dresses, list of lovers, conversation with David, Charlie's near declaration of love.)
- i. Note here how the wedding motifs are dragged into a non-wedding segment: invitation, wedding gifts, trying on wedding dresses, etc.
 - b. alarm clock
 - c. wedding invitation
 - d. lateness
 - e. PLOT: CHARLIE ALMOST SAYS HE LOVES CAREY (lovely word repetition begins)
5. **Wedding #3** (Broken up into: wedding, reception)
- a. invitation
 - b. lateness (this time not comic)
 - c. wedding (truncated by Charlie's lateness; note the point at which he enters the wedding ceremony and how this segment of the ceremony is repeated in the next wedding)
 - d. Gareth/Mathew thematic scene
 - (1) Scarlet's subplot (meets Chester)
 - (2) Fiona's subplot (admits love to Charlie)
 - (3) Hen's subplot (new boyfriend)
 - e. speech (Carey and Hamish)
 - f. PLOT: GARETH DIES
6. **Funeral** (Funeral and post-funeral dialogue)
- i. Note how the language in this segment turns the funeral into a wedding: the church setting, the various tie-backs to ongoing plots, the opening words of Mathew's speech, the dialogue between Tom and Charlie in which Mathew and Gareth are identified as being married
 - ii. Note also the way the comic motifs are omitted: no alarm clock, lateness, no time switch (because the funeral follows so

- quickly upon Carey's wedding)
 - b. speech (Mathew)
 - c. Tom/Charlie thematic dialogue on true love (thunderbolt repetition begins)

- 7. **Wedding #4** (Broken up into: waking up and getting to wedding, non-wedding, aftermath and real not-wedding)
 - a. alarm clock
 - b. invitation (note suspension)+time switch
 - c. lateness
 - d. bookend devices: Hen's brother and the demented old man
 - e. PLOT: CHARLIE MARRYING HEN, BUT CAREY SEPARATED
 - (1) Fiona subplot advances
 - (2) Scarlet advances
 - (3) Tom subplot advances (meets Deirdre)
 - (4) First marriage couple advances (now have twins)
 - (5) Second marriage couple advances (Bernard is "exhausted")
 - f. Mathew/Charlie thematic dialogue in vestry
 - g. wedding (interrupted by David; note use of suspension)
 - h. PLOT: CHARLIE PROPOSES TO NOT-MARRY CAREY; SHE SAYS, I DO

- 8. **Epilogue**
 - a. multiple subplots end in marriage (except for Fiona)

Some definitions:

Anadiplosis: "Repetition of the last word of one sentence, or line of poetry, as a means of (sometimes emphatic) liaison." Dupriez

Epanalepsis: "Repetition at the end of a clause or sentence of the word or phrase with which it began." Lanham

Parenthesis: "The insertion of a segment, complete in meaning, and relevant or irrelevant to the subject under discussion, into another segment whose flow it interrupts." Dupriez

Suspension: A narrative moment when some crucial information is promised but held back till later in the action.

Tie-Back: Textual reference back to earlier material in order to remind the reader, create rhythm and add textual density.

Anaphora: Multiple repetitions of the same grammatical construction at the beginning of successive textual elements.

But-construction: Grammatical construction using the word “but” or some cognate to create dramatic interruption, interference, or contrast at the level of a sentence.

Notes prepared by Douglas Glover