

The structure of conflict in "lantana"



In the film Lantana, Ray Lawrence builds both internal and external conflict between characters using various film techniques; in turn, such conflict acts as a catalyst for many characters in reaching a turning point for change.

Major conflict is caused between the relationships (Leon and Sonja, Nik and Paula, as well as Valerie and John) which in turn has repercussions in the lives of those around these paired characters. Leon and Sonja experience disloyalty and dispute that affect Leon's professional career; Nik and Paula, conversely, have a trust in their relationship which triggers change in surrounding relationships when they are defiant in the face of adversity.

Finally, John chooses to turn his back on Valerie with dire consequences, in a decision which finally causes his internalised issues to resolve.

Leon is introduced as a heavily troubled man who insists on ruining his own life: cheating on his wife, overworking, and initiating domestic conflict with his family. However, within a climax of conflict with Leon and his wife, Leon is forced to change his ways. In early scenes, Lawrence frames Leon alone in shots that are representative of the isolation of this character. Furthering this chaos and isolation that Leon is experiencing, Lawrence takes his shots from a handheld camera, introducing instability into the footage. It is established clearly that Leon is dishonest and disloyal to his wife, often causing him to be out of sync with his wife on many issues; Sonja states that she would "Like to go" while Leon complains "I'm tired." As Leon conducts the investigation into the disappearance of Valerie Somers, he begins to change, as Lawrence uses close-ups to show the transition of emotion. For instance, Lawrence uses an extreme close up of Leon as he listens to his wife confess to Valerie that she would still love him regardless; the shot is designed to

show his emotion as he realises what he has ruined. The audience further and explicitly sees the realisation of his mistake and how he still cares for the family, as well as the progressive reintroduction of Sonja into shots of Leon – contrasting with the instant removal of Sonja from shots of Leon. Lawrence finally cuts from an extreme close-up showing Leon's sorrow to an overhead view of Sonja lying with Leon. This is a change confirmed by the closing scene of the couple dancing, which serves to signal the change that has indeed occurred, resulting in a positive resolution.

Conversely, Nik and Paula are presented as a stereotypically happy couple, in a direct contrast to the other main relationships. While these characters are financially struggling, Lawrence uses several shots of the young family playing and relaxing together on the front lawn. Importantly, trust plays a key role in their relationship, meaning that when Nik is arrested and accused of murder conflict is temporary and quickly resolved within the couple. When Leon places Nik under arrest, shots are presented by Lawrence with slow pacing and slow transitions – symbolic of Nik's calmness, knowing that he has done nothing wrong. Conversely, Paula is shown to be in a hectic state of mind and unsure of herself through the use of hard, quick cuts from a handheld camera. This changes when Paula hears Nik say, " I didn't touch her, I didn't babe"; at this point, transitions are slow and the camera stabilizes. This device has a profound effect on Leon, who later confesses his disloyalty to his wife after witnessing the trust in Nik and Paula's relationship. However, the changes do not stop there; moments later, Paula is asked by her neighbour Jane O'May, " How do you know he didn't [commit the murder]?" She simply replies, " he told me," her calmness emphasised

with this use of a close up, in turn leaving Pete and Jane contemplating their attempts to revive their relationship.

“ United by grief,” John and Valerie have witnessed a world filled with horrors: “ you don’t lose a daughter like Elenor without damage done.” They already experience conflict occurring within their relationship because of John’s internalisation of issues, resulting in the dissipation of love in their relationship; John explains to Leon that their relationship “ was held together by grief, not much else was left.” Major conflict occurs however when Valerie is in her time of need and John knowingly turns his back on her – unknowingly leading to her death. It is established that John’s way of coping with the death of his daughter was to dissociate himself and internalise his issues. Valerie’s unfortunate death causes even more internal conflict to be built, through the guilt which John is shown to struggle with. Lawrence frames as John separate from other characters, and if John is in the same frame, he has his back turned away, creating the appearance of separation. Furthering this setup, Lawrence employs extreme close ups, as when John is leaning over the balcony after his informal interrogation, showing sadness and offering an empty expression. John finally reaches a point of change when he opens up to Leon – the first character he is framed with apart from Valerie, highlighting to the audience that he is in deep regret after convincing himself that she died because he refused to connect with her. Lawrence closes with a long shot of John overlooking the sunset, emphasizing to the audience that he realises that it is too late and that he knows he now has to live with that guilt. That said, when he opens up to

Leon, John shows that he may have finally learned his lesson and will open up to those who still care about him.

Ray Lawrence uses several key cinematic techniques to effectively build various and interlinked conflicts between the multitude of central characters. This conflict occurs internally as with John, as well as with Leon and Nik's personal relationships. Each and every one of these conflicts, however, acts as a direct catalyst in one form or another for change, often having widespread effects.