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Cheekie Baby

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ABSTRACT

This thesis consists of practice-led research in the form of a full-length script for a feature film, plus, a 7000+ word essay (exegesis). A summary of the script is as follows:

Cheekie Baby, set in 1993, is the story of Cheekie, a 15-year-old Māori girl who grows up in the New Zealand bush, with her father Papa-Rob and no experience of the outside world. He dies suddenly, leaving Cheekie alone. She finds a letter and map from him describing a buried gold inheritance. Papa-Rob writes of his final wish for her to find a boy and make a family. She travels to Goldstown, a Wild West tourist town and encounters Ruia, a kind grandmother who offers her shelter. Cheekie approaches a boy but finds herself drawn to Nat, the wealthy town owners' beauty queen daughter. Cheekie and Nat find themselves attracted to each other. Nat offers to help Cheekie find her gold. They learn it may be buried in an eccentric English professor's garden or under Nat's father Albert's bank, in Plainsville. Cheekie learns Ruia is about to lose her home due to unscrupulous tactics by Nat's father. Cheekie is assaulted by Nat's jealous boyfriend Shane and bullied by mean girls. After Nat's beauty pageant, Cheekie is outcast and rejected by Nat over a misunderstanding. In her final attempt to save Ruia's home and gain back Nat, Cheekie dresses up as a cowboy electrician to perform her way into Albert's office and secure her gold. She is thwarted, but after another even more desperate attempt she is rescued by Nat in her moment of peril. They reunite and recommit to each other. Cheekie gains her sense of identity and a future.

The script is framed by an Exegesis which is a 7000-word essay on the subject of:

- (a) The genre and components of the script.
- (b) The development from synopsis to second draft.

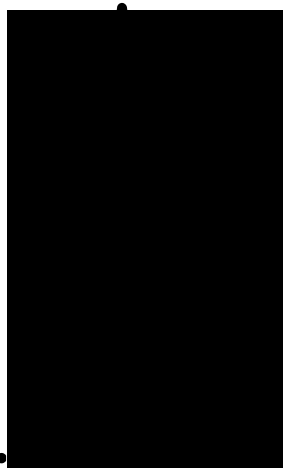
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ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

“I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.”

Signed:



EXEGESIS

In this exegesis, I will identify and analyse a selection of dramatic texts, comprising feature film screenplays. I will relate this analysis to the narrative of my original screenplay, *Cheekie Baby*, by comparing similar works, and exploring the differences and commonalities in genre conventions, story elements, script devices, character arcs, and themes that dramatise a similar core story.

Core Story

The term core story, or *core action*, refers to the key decisions and actions performed by the main character that drive the story on an emotional level. The core story in *Cheekie Baby* is a portrayal of the adolescent struggle between fulfilling familial and societal expectations and following the desire of one's heart. In *Cheekie Baby*, Cheekie is conflicted between whether to follow her father's and society's wish for her to find a boy and start a new family, or to follow her heart's desire to be with Nat, a girl. I have studied a collection of screenplays that dramatise the same or similar core stories and conflicts in different ways and will present an analysis of these texts. These include *Heavenly Creatures* (1994) by Fran Walsh and Peter Jackson, *My Summer of Love* (2004) by Pawel Pawlikowski and Michael Wynne, *Carol* (2015) by Phyllis Nagy, *Moonlight* (2016) by Barry Jenkins, *Call Me by Your Name* (2017) by James Ivory, and *The Half of it* (2020) by Alice Wu. For *My Summer of Love*, the script transcript was not available, so I will refer to the film format instead.

Commonalities

Protagonist

The protagonist is the character upon whom the entire story focuses. They make key decisions that affect the plot, thus influencing and propelling the story forward. For example: in *Carol*, the protagonist Carol instigates the possibility of communication and a potential future meeting with Therese, when she leaves her gloves behind on the shop counter. After Therese accepts Carol's invitation to lunch, and whilst they dine together, Carol invites Therese to visit her at her home, that same Sunday. The protagonist is also most often the character that encounters the most significant obstacles. Chiron in *Moonlight*, lives in a drug riddled area of Miami and endures constant bullying at school from his peers. He is tormented by Terrell, who in one scene challenges Kevin to '...Knock his faggot ass back down.' (Jenkins, 2016, p. 59). Kevin is forced to make a choice, whereby he punches and humiliates Chiron. This prompts Chiron to make a key decision, to get revenge upon Terrell, which ultimately changes Chiron's future and causes him to go to jail.

Each of the protagonists in my chosen selection of films, has an aspect to their character that influences their internal struggle, against familial or societal pressures. They do not fit the expectations of the norm and are in some way emotionally incomplete. In *Call Me by Your Name*, seventeen-year-old Elio experiences a feeling stronger than any he has felt before but finds himself unable to express or talk about his feelings with anyone, for fear of shame and rejection. In the predominately Catholic setting of 1980s Italy, Jewish Elio is urged to conceal his true feelings for Oliver. In the scene when Elio alludes to his attraction towards

Oliver, Oliver tells him ‘Look, we can’t talk about such things, we really can’t’ (Ivory, 2017, p. 36). In the second act, Elio is more forward towards Oliver and begins to show his true feelings; thus, beginning his first serious relationship. ‘Elio reaches for Oliver in a quick, desperate move, lets his hand rest on Oliver’s crotch.’ (Ivory, 2017, p. 43). In *Moonlight*, the protagonist is shown at three stages of his life. As a boy he is called *Little*, as a teenager he is Chiron, his real name, and as a man he becomes *Black*. Chiron as the boy Little, projects a false toughness, and is forced to suppress his true nature, because of growing up black and poor in Miami. Over the years he tries to figure himself out. He learns from both Kevin and Juan the importance of protecting himself. This is made evident when they offer protection to him, in differing ways. Little is offered protection by Kevin when Kevin encourages Little to wrestle, to make him stronger. Kevin says ‘See, you just gotta show them niggas you ain’t soft.’ (Jenkins, 2016, p.14). Chiron grows into Black and is finally able to let himself accept his true feelings and open. We see this in the final scene when he is finally able to reveal his sexuality to Kevin.

Similarly, in *Carol*, Carol struggles to abide by the societal norms of the 1950s, suffering from heteronormative female suppression. She receives constant pressure from her husband Harge, to conform. An example of this is expressed when he says, ‘What? You’re going to spend Christmas with Abby? Is that it? Or with your - shop girl?’... ‘I put nothing past women like you’ (Nagy, 2015, p. 45). In the end, Carol cannot bear it any longer, and finally breaks free from heterosexual expectations. Carol gives up custody of her daughter Rindy, and desperately asks Harge what use is she to Rindy, or them, if she is living against her own grain. (Nagy, 2015). Without saying it, Carol rejects being damaged any longer, choosing

not to live the false heterosexual and heteronormative lifestyle. In *The Half of it*, Ellie Chu battles every kind of prejudice as the only Asian kid in a small town, in modern day America. Despite being the outcast at school she uses her grit and mastery of language, to overcome her inner and outer obstacles.

Antagonist

‘The antagonist is the person, place or thing standing in opposition to the protagonist, in the way of his or her achieving the goal.’ (Russin & Missouri Downs, 2012, p. 66).

A commonality between this family of films and my narrative is that there is not always a single antagonist, but rather more societal and/or familial antagonistic forces. This in turn creates an inner conflict, with the possibility that the protagonist may never be able to achieve their objective of finding a sense of self-worth. Therefore, this inner antagonistic conflict must be overcome before the protagonist can achieve the greater self-worth they desire. The group of films I have chosen also share a romantic component, and can be classified as romantic comedies, or a mix of genres; one of which being romance.

The point is that true love can only bloom when deceptions are cast aside, when the protagonist reveals all and makes himself vulnerable in the presence of the antagonist. *This exposure is actually where the protagonist exhibits greatest power, because honesty is the one quality that will win over the antagonist.* (Russin & Missouri Downs, 2012, p. 229).

The antagonist in *Moonlight*, is the tough, drug-riddled society that Little grows up in, and feels he must conform to. Later, as a man, we see Black shed the protective shell of his drug dealer persona, for Kevin. In Kevin’s diner, Black removes his

gold grillz and then confesses his true feelings for Kevin. This is reflective of his transition into adulthood and his emotional growth, as he is allowing himself to be vulnerable and finally overcoming his inner conflict. In the same way, Carol struggles against an antagonistic society and class structure that perceive her as a threat to the norm. Hague, her husband, as an antagonist, represents not only familial pressure but also the pressure from society to conform to heteronormativity. True life teenage characters, Juliet, and Pauline, in *Heavenly Creatures*, live and behave in ways in their own fantasy world, which conflicts with their parents and society in New Zealand. Pauline's mother Honora is perceived as an interfering authority figure antagonist for the girls, and especially for her daughter. This conflict ultimately has devastating consequences, as Pauline instigates the plot to overcome the obstacle of her mother. Honora as an antagonist escalates Pauline's violent thoughts and behaviours. After Honora receives a letter from Pauline's school saying her standard of work is slipping, Pauline states she is doing her own writing. Honora says 'These stories are not going to get you School Certificate! You don't seriously think anyone's going to publish them?' Pauline replies 'What do you know? You wouldn't know the first thing about writing. You're the most ignorant person I've ever met!' (Jackson & Walsh, 1994, p. 62). Pauline, conscious of her antagonist writes in her diary 'Anger against Mother boiled up inside me as it is she who is one of the main obstacles in my path. Suddenly a means of riding myself of this obstacle occurred to me. If she were to die...' (Jackson & Walsh, 1994, p. 75).

In contrast, Ellie in *The Half of it* faces antagonising high school cliques who do not understand her and undergoes an internal struggle against her developing self-

awareness. She begins as a cynical teenager, loveless and trapped in a conservative small town, but soon realises her attraction to Aster Flores runs deeper than expected. Ellie's antagonising force is the fear of being publicly exposed about her true feelings for Aster. This threat escalates as she writes more letters pretending to be Paul, increasing the dramatic tension. Eventually she is exposed in front of the whole church, Paul, and Aster. However, her worst nightmare coming true ultimately results in her opening up to Aster before leaving for college, and therefore bravely overcoming her inner torment and struggle.

Imagery

'Imagery in film, specifically *key images* are the symbolic visual moments in the script that can sway the audience with emotion. They can be represented by an object, action, or scene that epitomises a metaphor or motif.' (Hellerman, 2020).

Motifs are recurring elements that appear multiple times throughout the story. They are ultimately used to help support the theme of the story (Waywell, 2021). In

Moonlight, water is an important symbol; providing a backdrop, setting, sound and feel. Water is present in all the key moments in Chiron's life, for example, when he learns to swim as a boy. In a moment of tender masculinity, Juan, acting as a father figure, teaches him by supporting his head in the water. In contrast, there is a scene where Little is home alone, pouring huge pots of boiling water into a bath. The hot water is a metaphor for his heated home life, with his mother's aggressive, drug affected moods - portrayed in Chiron's nightmares. The audience sees him splash water on his face, and bury his face in the sink with ice, after he's beaten or has nightmares. He also splashes water on his face at key moments of reflection.

Another pivotal moment is Chiron's first sexual experience with Kevin, which

takes place on the beach at night to the sound of waves. The final scene, sound, and image of the film is of Little in the ocean, under the full moon, looking blue. The colour blue corresponds with water, and moonlight, expressed in the line ‘running around catching up all this light. In moonlight... black boys look blue. You blue...’ (Jenkins, 2016, p. 20). Blue as a colour is linked to consciousness and intellect, depth, stability, and trust. These ideas are subconsciously conveyed with the colour motif.

Call Me by Your Name uses orange coloured summer fruits - apricots and peaches - as symbols for latent sexuality, the fruits of love. Oliver guzzles apricot juice and tries to impress Elio and his father by explaining the origins of the word *apricoca*. Elio also uses a peach as a sex toy, whilst fantasising about Oliver. Fruit appears in myths from around the world and is often used as a symbol of abundance, associated with the goddess of fertility, plenty, and the harvest. It can also represent earthly pleasures and temptation, as it does in the scene with Elio and the peach. The nude male torso is also a symbol in this film. Oliver is aroused while viewing a slideshow of Greek nude male sculptures, with Elio’s father. Then the audience sees the uplifting of a Hellenistic male torso sculpture from underwater. The impossibly curved male sculptures allude to an ambiguity of form and desire, without *straightness* (Sachdeva, 2018). Oliver and Elio are either shirtless or have their torso partially revealed for a lot of the story, tempting each other. Nude sculptures are said to represent that one’s values are intrinsic and true, as underneath it all there is nothing to hide. Nakedness was seen as a heroic state by the ancient Greeks (Brouwers, 2018). French romantic novels or philosophical

scripts are placed throughout the story, as a symbol of the burgeoning romance. Both Elio and Oliver appreciate the books, as if a metaphor for their own state.

Similarly, in *Carol*, photography and photographic prints are used as symbols of the shared looks or moments of voyeurism that Therese and Carol have throughout the film. There are many scenes where they cannot say what they really feel and can only look at each other; often through windows, mirrors, glass cubicles or phone booths. The symbol of photography is used to represent a way of capturing a moment and is something that draws them closer as Carol supports Therese's craft by buying her a camera. Then ironically the similarly voyeuristic act of someone taking a sound recording of them in a motel threatens to push them apart and destroy them.

In *My Summer of Love*, the swan symbol is used as a symbol of romance. The swan is an ambiguous symbol of light, love, romance, death, transformation, poetry, and melancholic passion, and is often represented in ballets and operas. The symbol of the swan is also linked to inner beauty and self-love (Clifford, 2021). Birds also symbolise freedom. Tamsin plays *The Swan* by Saint Saëns on the cello, and the two girls often dance in a languid balletic fashion. Tamsin comes from a higher social class and admits that she is seen as a *bad influence*. She talks of Nietzsche, the Mona Lisa and Edith Piaf to impress Mona, and observes her as if she may be the ugly duckling swan coming into herself, saying to Mona 'God you're quite beautiful' (Pawlikowski, 2004, 34:27). Mona lives in a pub named *The Swan*, which ironically is wretched, failed, and ugly, and she must pack away all her mother's beautiful porcelain swans into a box. The girls have a kind of melancholy

passion in their relationship. There is a legend that connects the swan to the waters of the underworld and many cultures say the swan is linked to loss of love. It can also symbolise a soul mate. For Mona this is Tamsin, as seen when she declares, 'We're gonna spend the rest of our lives together... If you leave me, I'll kill you.' Mona replies 'If you leave me, I'll kill you... and then I'll kill myself.' They both then declare 'I love you.' (Pawlikowski, 2004, 1:01:21-56).

In *My Summer of Love*, the girls' whole summer is a construction of performed melodrama. Similarly, in *Heavenly Creatures*, Pauline and Juliet create their own fantasy world of *Borovnia*, where they create alternate identities for themselves as *Charles and Deborah*, and role play their relationship. Juliet tells her mother 'Mummy... Pauline and I have decided that Charles and Deborah are going to have a baby. An heir to the throne of Borovnia.' (Jackson & Walsh, 1994, p. 27).

Heavenly Creatures is loaded with symbols and imagery like horses, Mario Lanza, ships, soldiers, uniforms, colours - in particular red, bridges, and bricks. The arts are used in varying ways, as symbols throughout this collection of films; from books and music read by Elio, to the cello played by Tamsin, the guitar and piano played by Ellie Chu, photography by Therese, and the clay sculptures or drawings of horses and unicorns made by Juliet and Pauline. The effective use of these symbols and motifs as described, enhance connection to the story themes and add deeper levels of meaning to the narratives.

Genre

My family of films are all LGBTQI, romantic drama, feature films. Most are also combined with another genre, such as coming of age in *Moonlight* and *Call Me by*

Your Name; true crime/thriller in *Heavenly Creatures*; indie thriller / comedy in *My Summer of Love*; and comedy in *The Half of it*. Some feature characters experimenting with young love, like Tamsin and Mona, and some, like Carol and Chiron, are more mature protagonists who are sure of their sexuality. We know this when Chiron as Black opens to Kevin, and when Carol releases Therese at one point and then Rindy at another. Ellie Chu is young, but nevertheless smart and clear on her sexuality by the end of the film, and Elio although young has been through the most powerful relationship of his formative life. We know this when we see him at the end of the film in front of the open fire in tears, still heartbroken over Oliver months later.

Differences

Script Devices

A script device is any method or technique that is used in a narrative to move the plot forward and get the story across. Each film in my family of films uses differing variations of these devices. In *Carol*, a voiceover device is used when Carol and Therese are separated, and Therese receives letters from Carol.

Voiceover adds dramatic weight to the scenes and is effective in conveying how Carol feels while writing the letter, despite her absence on screen. Hearing the emotion in Carol's voice, allows the audience to empathise with Therese. *The Half of it* also uses the device of voiceover. Ellie narrates the opening scene, and voiceover is used between her and Aster as they read their letters back and forth. This is used effectively over the sequence of Paul and Ellie reading letters together, whilst doing tasks, or in moments where we see Ellie alone secretly thinking about Aster. This narration reveals more of Ellie and Aster's private thoughts and

personalities, that would otherwise require additional scenes to reveal, or else could not be exposed as they would never speak this way in person to each other. In *Heavenly Creatures*, Pauline narrates her letters and diary entries throughout the entire film, which are the actual real-life writings of Pauline and Juliet. This gives the audience a view into the diarised fantasy world of the girls' minds, and greater insight into the disturbing, romantic pantomime they create.

Flashbacks can convey context about plot, characters, and setting. Flashbacks are used in *Carol* to take us back to the beginning of Carol and Therese's romance, before moving us forward, to the same place at the climax of the movie. In the first act flashbacks are used to orientate the viewer with how and where Carol and Therese met, and to relay information about what inner and external forces they have against them.

Heavenly Creatures employs the device of dreams and extreme fantasy scenes. Clay figures come alive, as do the unicorns and horses that Pauline draws. The use of dreamlike and fantastical imagery enhances the darkness of the story, style, and genre of the film, by dramatising the disturbed nature of Pauline's mind. The third act of *Moonlight* reveals that Chiron has nightmares. His mother Paula tells him he has always had trouble sleeping, when he visits her in rehab. Chiron simply calls it bad dreaming (Jenkins, 2016). Paula ironically offers to counsel him through his bad dreams. This shows us how he is haunted by his lifelong internal struggle to accept himself, his inability to open, and the emotional distance between Chiron and his mother, despite the fact they do love each other.

Ellie and Paul's letters back and forth to Aster, are shown in a montage of short scenes, portraying the progression of time in which Ellie and Paul do reconnaissance by stalking Aster to become more familiar with her, with the aim of securing a real-life date. By utilising the montage device, more information is delivered to both the characters and audience in a short frame of screen time. For example, spying on her at the movie theatre they discover Aster likes a good slasher movie. It can also be used for comic effect, as this is when Ellie starts coaching Paul on how to court Aster: 'We don't have time to school you on everything Aster thinks "you" are, so we have to be selective. Deep vs. broad-based learning' (Wu, 2019, pg. 40). The script soon after features a Rocky-themed training montage of Ellie schooling Paul. A particularly effective scene using the device of intercutting between two locations at the same time to create tension, is scene 113 on pages 61-63, where Ellie, pretending to be Paul, communicates with Aster via text, during Paul and Aster's date, as she watches from inside Paul's truck parked outside Sparky's Diner window.

Relationship to my script

From analysing the commonalities and differences between this family of films, I have been able to understand the key elements that create the core story and integrate them into my script, *Cheekie Baby*. As Mernit (2020), states about building a compelling romantic comedy protagonist, 'If there's any one thing that the most popular movie heroes and heroines have in common, it's their all-consuming want, their burning desire- for love, for justice, for success'. (p. 112).

Protagonist

The protagonist in my script, Cheekie, faces the same core story as she struggles to choose between whether to conform to societal and familial pressure to be a certain way, or to follow her heart's true desire. It is Cheekie's navigation of the new world she is thrown into, that creates this internal conflict and drives the action throughout the script. Cheekie quickly learns that there are distinct gender and sexual roles in the world of Goldstown, like Carol experiences in 1950s America. She first discovers that what she feels for Nat is not accepted by society, when she meets the saloon ladies in Goldstown, and they tell her about boys. However, Cheekie cannot deny her feelings and is constantly drawn to Nat despite Papa-Rob's and society's wishes for her to be with Danny, or another boy. After everything falls apart for her, she bravely throws caution to the wind to get her gold from New Bank, to save Ruia's home and be worthy of pursuing Nat again. This is like how Carol pursued Therese throughout the story, then asked Therese one last time if she would like to live with her. There are common elements between the ways the protagonists fight back at the end and overcome both their inner and external conflicts, in all the films. All these narratives have a focus on the inner world of the protagonist and use metaphors and motifs to convey similar themes.

Antagonist

In the same way that Ellie, Chiron, Carol, Mona, Elio, and Pauline have societal and familial antagonistic forces pushing against them, creating an inner struggle, so too does Cheekie. Her antagonists are Papa-Rob, with his final wishes, and society; both the real and performative worlds of Plainsville and Goldstown. Furthermore, as Papa-Rob's wishes come from the grave, Cheekie feels extra pressure to honour

him. The glamour of Nat's family and lifestyle is purposefully opposite to Cheekie's, as this raises the stakes for her journey to make her own truth and ultimately choose Nat. She is a fish out of water, like Ellie, who must overcome being stuck in a small town, and like Chiron, who grows up in an environment that does not accept his sexual orientation.

Motifs

A motif is a specific repeated narrative element, which supports and informs the theme and can be presented in many ways, such as a colour, symbol, physical item, music, or line of dialogue. As previously mentioned, *Moonlight* uses water as a powerful motif to bring more emotional depth to the narrative and allow the audience a greater connection to Chiron. *Carol* uses photography, or captured images, as a motif to support the theme of *yearning* or *looking*, as Carol and Therese are under pressure from society to act and look a certain way to fit in. Motifs of books, music, or art appear in all my chosen films. Elio, Ellie, Paul, and Tamsin all connect to their world through education and literature. In *Cheekie Baby*, I have chosen to use several motifs. Books are prevalent in Cheekie's world, highlighting her desire to be informed, learn, and grow. Gold is also a key motif. Gold symbolises success, value, and power, and relates to the physical location. In search of the gold Cheekie and Nat ironically become literal *gold diggers*. Cheekie's headdress symbolises her unique identity, courage, and native heritage. The cowboy costume is a gender, identity, and role-play motif. Electricity is also used as a motif to symbolise sexual chemistry, magnetism: the power of attraction, and the forces of nature, which also connects to the natural setting of the countryside and bushland.

Synopsis

The generally accepted idea of a synopsis is that it summarises the basic narrative elements of the script, such as *who*, *what* and *how*, ‘but also establishes the other major characters and their lines of conflict; what is at stake for these characters, the setting in time and space, and the major turning points of the story.’ (Brindley, 2009, p. 4). It should tell the complete story and give the reader a sense of the characters, by including their key choices and actions. *Cheekie Baby*, set in 1993 New Zealand, follows the story of Cheekie, a 15-year-old Māori girl who lives in the bush, with her father Papa-Rob, having never seen the outside world. After his sudden death, Cheekie discovers a map revealing buried gold - her inheritance - along with a letter stating his final wish for her, that she makes a family of her own. Cheekie is presented with a *Call to Adventure*, and can no longer remain in the *Ordinary World* (Vogler, 2007). She arrives in Goldstown, a Wild West tourist town, and believes it is real. Here she encounters a caring grandmother, Ruia, who takes her in. Cheekie tries to find a mate to fulfil her father’s last wish, however instead she finds herself smitten by the town owner’s beauty queen daughter, Nat, and cannot help but pursue her. Nat is also intrigued by Cheekie. However, the soon-to-be-crowned *Miss Central Plains*, is set to head off to university with her boyfriend Shane; meeting Cheekie is not in her plan. Nevertheless, Nat offers to help Cheekie find her gold, and the two of them embark on a journey to Plainsville; the real town nearby where people are not as kind as they seem. They discover Cheekie’s gold is either at the house of an eccentric English professor, Mildred Pomeroy, or buried under Nat’s father, Albert Drummond’s bank: *New Bank*.

Cheekie learns that Ruia is about to lose her house to New Bank, because of Albert's unscrupulous tactics. Nat and Cheekie get together, which provokes a jealous Shane to assault Cheekie. After Nat's beauty pageant win Cheekie is publicly humiliated and rejected by Nat after a misunderstanding. Now alone and miserable, Cheekie is determined to save Ruia's home and win Nat back. She dresses up as a cowboy electrician and uses this façade to perform her way into Albert's office, to dig for her gold. Her efforts are thwarted. However, Cheekie tries again, using her fancy dress and skills to achieve her goal, by cashing in half fake, half real gold, cheating the bank at its own game. Nat learns the truth; that Shane kissed Cheekie, not the other way round, and comes to Cheekie's rescue in the bank, just as Cheekie is in peril of being caught. They reunite and recommit to each other. In her final decision, Cheekie must choose between following Papa-Rob's wishes or her own desires and identity for her future. Her identity is challenged as she grapples with understanding what is true and real versus what is performative. Themes of fatherhood, gender roles, identity, truth, and ownership are explored in this coming-of-age romantic comedy story.

World

McKee (1997) defines the world of the story as the setting.

A story's SETTING is four-dimensional- Period, Duration, Location, Level of Conflict... PERIOD is a story's place in time... DURATION is a story's length through time... LOCATION is a story's place in space... LEVEL OF CONFLICT is the story's position on the hierarchy of human struggles. (pp. 68-69).

The story opens at Cheekie's home, an old Forest Service house deep in the West Coast bush. The story takes place over a few weeks in the summer of 1993; mobile technology is burgeoning and homosexual relationships are not readily accepted. The off-grid, physical setting creates a kind of bubble for Cheekie and her father. Papa-Rob has created a school/camp/training ground for Cheekie, in an attempt to fulfil her needs as a precocious, creative child. However, Nellie, the occasional supply delivery person, recognises that Cheekie needs more. Papa-Rob has kept them together as a family unit, whilst evading the law. He overcompensates by training Cheekie like a drill sergeant.

When Papa-Rob dies, Cheekie is left unprepared for the *real* world. Papa-Rob's letter, revealing the gold and his final wishes, leads Cheekie to Goldstown. As a tourist enterprise, Goldstown features re-created saloons, a museum, gold panning activities, souvenir shops, information centre and guided tours. All staff dress in Wild West costumes. Cheekie initially thinks this is the real world. Ruia, a charitable Māori woman, or 'the term employed by Joseph Campbell, the *Wise Old Woman... or Mentor* archetype' (Vogler, 2007, p.39), takes Cheekie into her humble home outside of the town, complete with electricity and appliances; a new experience for Cheekie.

Plainsville, another important setting, is a contemporary style town, fifteen kilometres from Goldstown. Plainsville is plain looking, reminiscent of *The Stepford Wives* (Oz, 2004). People are motivated by appearances and business, with smiling facades, but are fake or insincere in their behaviour. Beauty and conformity are a must, a notable contrast to Goldstown which centres around

performative drama and allows young people to play up. In Plainsville, ambition and prosperity are valued. People fear humiliation or shame from not conforming.

Nat's mansion, outside Plainsville, represents everything that was absent from Cheekie's world. The Drummond's have excess and buy into the pressure to outperform. Nat's childhood experience was dictated by social and familial pressures to be the most competitive, successful, perfect straight girl; effectively following in her mother's beauty queen footsteps. She achieved it with ease, until Cheekie made an impression on her. Both Cheekie and Nat share an inner struggle to conform to hetero-normative roles.

Theme

The Ordinary World is the place to state the theme of your story. What is the story really about? If you had to boil down its essence to a single word or phrase, what would it be? What single idea or quality is it about?... What are you trying to say? (Vogler, 2007, p. 95).

The predominant theme in my script is the teenage struggle between fulfilling family and societal expectations and following one's true desires. There are also themes of identity, gender and role-play, and acceptance. This could be described as a story of a person trying to become complete. Both Cheekie and Nat share a similar struggle, and level of unconscious awareness of their burning need to be themselves. Nat, however, thinks she is in control of her life and choices, until she meets Cheekie and realises she feels something more. For Cheekie, the world is her oyster and yet she has no idea of what her own desires could be, until she meets Nat. Cheekie must learn that Papa-Rob had his own flaws and weaknesses before

she can see that she can follow her own truth. Discovering Papa-Rob may not be her biological father, that he concealed the truth from her and kept her hidden away deliberately - almost selfishly - shows Cheekie that he was potentially holding her back. She can only be true to herself once she accepts, she can make her own choices and is the driver of her own destiny.

Hope (2014) defines theme in terms of audience response: 'How do you find the theme? What do you want the big takeaway from the movie to be remembered for the audience? What do you want them to remember intellectually, and what do you want them to feel emotionally?' (p.65). I wrote this story as a metaphor for the experience of being a teenager, emerging from a sheltered upbringing, in an era when knowledge was limited and having the experience of going into the world with a somewhat broken compass and discovering harsh truths of the outside world. I was interested in exploring how a fictitious character in a more exaggerated expression of this experience would fare. I was attracted to the idea of a character having high expectations placed upon them, without realising the full consequences of what it means, and then discovering that this task is almost impossible to achieve. A unique girl with no experience of boys being asked to go out and find a mate and have a child in a world she does not understand, only to then discover that she is gay, felt like an interesting set of conflicts for a character and story. I was also drawn to exploring how society defines, and is prejudiced towards certain gender roles, and exploring what is truth and reality within human relationships and communication. I also wanted to tell a mainstream lesbian/LGBTQ coming of age romantic comedy, suitable for a wide audience, as I believe there is a need for more stories in this genre.

There are different elements I want the audience to take away from the story.

Intellectually, I want them to remember the concept of how we communicate, be it through truth or otherwise, and the idea of karma playing a role in all our lives; that everything is connected and has an effect. I also wanted audiences to remember that finding one's voice and following one's heart is always the best idea. I hope the audience will reflect upon their time as a teenager and remember the impressions and impact that societal and parental pressures had upon their own personal experiences, and the choices they made or perhaps did not make.

Emotionally, I want the audience to feel empathy for the characters or share a level of understanding in the choices they make or have made, to lead them to where they are, in the time and place of this story.

A key image which embodies the big takeaway of the story is the image near the end, when Cheekie, dressed as a cowboy, cashes in half fake gold aiming to pay off Ruia's mortgage, and is at risk of being caught out. Nat comes to her rescue and saves her in her big moment of peril. In this moment, Nat chooses Cheekie and understands her desperate need and predicament. She also better understands her own power in this world. She has learnt the truth about what happened with Shane and so, makes her choice about her real feelings for Cheekie. This is a heartfelt moment where Nat and Cheekie both play a role and meet in the middle. Cheekie is on one hand defrauding Albert's bank with half fake gold, but on the other hand Albert most likely has her real gold buried under his building and he unscrupulously was about to take Ruia's home. Karma and the stars align for both

girls in this moment. They both role-play to solve Cheekie's immediate problem and gain back their relationship at the same time.

Protagonist

The film is the protagonist's story, the protagonist is who the film is 'about'... The protagonist drives the action that makes the decisions. The protagonist is not passive and reactive... The protagonist is the person whose head we are inside, whose shoes we are in and with whom we identify... The protagonist is central to the film's dramatic high points... (Aronson, 2010, p. 79).

Cheekie is my protagonist. She is a bright, precocious, but naïve fifteen-year-old who lives in the bush with Papa-Rob, whom she believes to be her biological father. Her mother Aneta died when she was very young.

Motivation

After the death of Papa-Rob, Cheekie has no purpose until she discovers the letter and map, he left for her. She wants to please him even after he has died. Her motivation is to fulfil his wishes and take a chance on her future, placing her trust in his guidance. Her goals are to find her gold inheritance, then find a mate and have a baby. However, she does not realise that what she *needs* is to uncover her *own* inner desires and sense of identity, by following her *own* path in the outside world. Her strategy is naïve, going in headfirst and asking the first boy she meets. She declares her intentions immediately with Chip, which scares him off. With

Danny she takes a less aggressive approach, and he becomes hopeful of something more. Unfortunately for him, soon after their meeting Cheekie changes focus and has her mind fixed on Nat. Later, in the story at the Miss Central Plains after-party, Cheekie does take a chance to kiss Danny, to test her levels of heterosexuality; the radar does not even read.

Stakes

There are numerous things at stake for Cheekie, including her future, her security, and her identity. She is alone without a family, formal education, or financial support. All she has is a handkerchief of gold, and a horse. She *must* find her inheritance and a partner. When she arrives in Goldstown she meets Ruia and is offered a safe place to stay. This is however threatened when Cheekie learns of Ruia's potential homelessness. *Emotionally*, what is at stake for Cheekie is her sense of self-esteem, identity, and belonging. She has lived a semi-structured hippie lifestyle in the bush, away from judging eyes, without needing to define or question her understanding of gender or identity. Simply put, she has been a child. Now she must be an adult. The stakes escalate for Cheekie once she finds herself falling for a girl. Then she discovers that Nat is everything she is not. Nat has a boyfriend, who abusively kisses Cheekie then lies about it. The stakes are further raised when Cheekie learns her gold is under Nat's father's bank. Cheekie is taken to her lowest point emotionally in the moment when she hits the concrete slab in Albert's office and realises there is no way she is going to get her gold; or anything else she had hoped for, as this is *after* she has lost any hope of being with Nat. In this moment, Cheekie has lost all hope and her goals seem impossible to achieve.

Arc

This is a story where throughout the story, the protagonist changes. Cheekie begins the story as a carefree, precocious, naïve character who sings and talks to plants.

Previously obedient and devoted to Papa-Rob, his death throws her into a depression. At the end of the story Cheekie has changed, becoming confident, self-assured, and clear in what she wants and who she will become. She wants to go to school, is sure that she likes Nat, and is willing to commit to her. She also knows that she is brave, creative, and enterprising, after her daring escapades at New Bank. She is a fighter and does not give up. She fought back when the *mean girls* took her on, and when Shane kissed her without consent.

Antagonist

An antagonist is the force of a story that the protagonist contends with, whether it be human, natural or supernatural. Every protagonist needs an antagonistic force. Derived from the Greek word *agonizesthai*, “antagonist” literally translates to English as “to contend with... An antagonist means trouble for the protagonist... of a story. (Heckmann, 2020).

Cheekie has two antagonistic forces against her. The first is the pressure or need to fulfil parental wishes, pushing against her natural desires. Cheekie knows she is not ready to have children but is unquestioningly compliant to Papa-Rob, and believes he knows best until she realises, he did not know or tell her everything. Papa-Rob returns as a ghost to check on her progress, which adds extra pressure from beyond the grave. He teases her about kissing a girl as if it was a mistake, ‘What’s going on with you and punching these boys? I thought I’d given pretty clear instructions... but I see you’ve been kissing a girl? I mean, I wasn’t expecting

that... but, whatever floats your boat.' (Foster, 2022, p.63). He sends conflicting messages, which causes Cheekie to doubt his wisdom. Papa-Rob compels Cheekie to look for a mate or a boyfriend, like it is just another physical challenge. Cheekie lacks social experience but is highly skilled in physical and survival challenges, so she takes this task on, as just that - a task. She approaches boys as if they are to be part of a sporting challenge, not an intimate long-term relationship. She does not have a full grasp of the feelings involved until she meets Nat and experiences new feelings of sexual attraction. Over time she is consciously aware of her feelings for Nat, and yet has an inner conflict questioning whether she could have the same feelings for a boy. The other antagonistic force is societal expectations. The 1990s small New Zealand town is not particularly open to homosexual relationships or people that do not fit the norm. The saloon ladies encourage Cheekie to find a boy and have a baby, telling her it's the best thing for girls like them, with fewer options in life. Cheekie, with her unusual look and upbringing, as well as her dawning realisation that she could be lesbian, is not typical for the Goldstown or Plainsville communities. She does not fit in, and people like Shane ensure that she knows this, by saying 'What's going on with you two anyway? You *freak!*' (Foster, 2022, p. 59). She is bullied by Nat's friends, the *mean girls*, at the Miss Central Plains afterparty which escalates into a brawl on Nat's big night. This also shows Cheekie she is not accepted by the community of girls her own age, adding to her inner conflict and feelings of exclusion.

Dramatic tension

"In romantic comedies, the real subject matter is the power of love...Wrestling with love can force a character to grow or to resist growth, but either way, *love's*

effect on the central character is what drives the story.” (Mernit, 2020, p.21). The audience is primarily waiting to see if Cheekie will get Nat, and secondarily if she gets her gold. Dramatic tension or suspense is generated by the external challenges faced by Cheekie and by her actions, but what drives these actions is her inner conflict. The source of the inner conflict are the challenges faced by the antagonistic forces of parental expectation and societal pressure to conform to heterosexual norms. She wrestles with these forces, creating tension over what choices to make. Suspense is generated by building up to the ultimate crisis of Cheekie potentially losing not only Nat, but her gold and new home with Ruia, therefore any hopes for a secure future and sense of identity.

The set-up ends and the story properly begins when the inciting incident occurs and Papa-Rob dies. Cheekie then discovers his letter and map. At this point she makes her first decision whether to follow his wishes or ignore them. This decision will take her to a whole new world, where she will see and experience things she has never seen before and will be irreversibly changed by. The next major turning point is the following: ‘Nat goes to hide Cheekie’s gold nugget under her top. Their hands inadvertently touch. There’s a BOLT OF SEXUAL ATTRACTION between them. They reel in shock and lock eyes.’ (Foster, 2022, p. 35). This is a major turning point as Cheekie realises she feels sexual attraction for Nat. The discovery of her sexual identity as lesbian alters everything, including her goal of finding a husband and mate. The next major turning point comes at the midpoint when Nat impulsively hugs Cheekie, and they kiss. This is a defining moment. They both acknowledge and act on their attraction. Cheekie has stepped into the realm of becoming sexually active. The lowest point for Cheekie, or *dark night of the soul*

moment: a term often used to describe a painful and extremely difficult period in one's life, begins from the moment when Shane goes to kiss her. Cheekie reactively punches him in the face. The escalating tension develops and brings Cheekie to her lowest point when she is involved in a brawl at Nat's pageant. 'SECURITY intervenes. People ogle. Cheekie's a mess. Her headdress is on the floor. Nat's parents glare at her, horrified. Nat's humiliated... Nat, angry, looks away... Security drags Cheekie out...' (Foster, 2022, p. 79). In this moment Cheekie has lost Nat and any hope of retrieving her gold. This is significant as Cheekie is now at a place where she could give up or keep fighting for her true desire. This leads the audience into the final climactic point, when Cheekie takes things in her own hands, dresses up as a cowboy, and goes into New Bank to trade fake and real gold. Although disguised, she looks young, and the teller is suspicious. Nat saves her by acting, pretending Cheekie is a fellow classmate and friend, and intimidating the teller. Nat also takes the opportunity to apologise to Cheekie. This reaffirms Nat's desire to be with her and gives Cheekie another chance. Dramatic tension is resolved on the final two pages when Ruia's debts are paid and Cheekie and Nat openly display their feelings and commitment to each other.

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