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Rising

Year Of Lodgement: 2017

School of Language and Culture

A thesis/exegesis submitted to Auckland University of Technology in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Creative Writing

Abstract

This thesis consists of a full-length screenplay for a feature film. A summary of the screenplay is as follows:

Rising is the story of Ezra (16), an average boy from a middle class family, sent away to St Augustine's Catholic boarding school for boys, due to his mother's (Jeanette) promotion. Ezra soon fits in with a group of boys, lead by alpha male Tony, and is even offered a university scholarship by the school dean, Father Mason.

However, Ezra develops a relationship with another boy, Gary, and after several erotic and tender moments their friendship begins to blossom into romance, bringing Ezra's safety and identity into question.

As Ezra's classmates misogynistic and homophobic behaviour gradually becomes more extreme, and his dissociation with the school's masculine "bro" culture grows, Ezra seeks out the guidance of Peter, a queer, gender-bending musician. Ezra begins to experiment with his appearance through lipstick, pearl earrings and a golden jacket, and continues chasing a passionate and intimate romance with Gary, until Father Mason catches them and informs Jeanette.

Jeanette makes its clear she doesn't want a queer son and threatens Ezra with his father's violence. Ezra becomes torn and beats up Peter, consequently forcing Peter to leave town, and leaving Ezra without a queer refuge. Despite this, Ezra and Gary are unable to fight their love and are soon caught by Tony, kissing in the forest. Tony lashes out at Ezra, and Gary is killed attempting to intervene.

Devastated, Ezra is threatened by Tony and Father Mason to keep his mouth shut. However, Ezra blurts out everything to the police, but is ignored when the other boys deny his claims. Trapped and isolated, Ezra breaks free by putting on his queer regalia and confronting Tony with a rifle before the entire school. Tony wets himself in fear, disempowering him, and Ezra is witnessed as unapologetically queer. Ezra leaves school and his family behind to begin a new journey.

Rising deals with masculinity and heteronormativity, and the expectations and consequences that they bring - the struggle of an emerging queer identity, and the cost one must pay in order to live as their true self.

The Thesis is framed by an Exegesis which is a 6000 word essay on the subject of:

(a) the genre of the Thesis

(b) the development process 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), more 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

Part One: Genre Analysis

Genre is a term used by screenwriters, producers, movie goers, and academics alike. Although for the latter there is a lot of ambiguity surrounding the term. Within the film industry the term genre is used by screenwriters to determine the structure and direction of their narrative; producers and distributors to determine whether or not there is an audience and how to market a film to said audience; and by movie goers, to choose the type of film they wish to see.

Genre is a schema (Lacey, 2016). Audiences walk into the theatre with previously established knowledge on the film's genre, garnered through years of moviegoing, thus making them genre experts (McKee, 2010). This previously established knowledge on genre and what to expect from certain genres (e.g. explosions in Action films) means the genre acts as a guide for moviegoers and attaches certain expectations, which must be fulfilled, to each genre (2010).

The audiences familiarity and fondness to the characteristics of each genre creates what has been labelled a "Genre Mindset" (Cleary, n.d.). This is when audiences watch a movie simply because they enjoy the genre. Regardless of whether or not the movie is actually good, the audience will enjoy said movie simply because they know and love the elements of the particular genre - such as the cheesy romance in a Romantic Comedy, or the battlefield scenes of a War movie (n.d.). Watching the expected elements of a film's genre unfold creates nostalgia for all other films the audience has seen in that particular genre (n.d.).

Because of the audiences knowledge of the conventions of each genre, films must be marketed correctly to ensure audiences know what they are getting. This is known as "positioning the audience" (2010). If a film were to be marketed incorrectly then producers and distributors run the risk of a dissatisfied audience slandering an otherwise good film, and losing money.

Due to the expectations and conventions surrounding each genre, the screenwriter has the task of remaining in the limitations of a genre while also creating something fresh, keeping the audience

entertained (2010). However, “the principle of Creative Limitation calls for freedom within a circle of obstacles” (2010). The limitations of a genre often push the writer towards different ways of thinking, enabling them to discover the greater truth of their story.

Academics and theorists debate over the meaning of the word genre, or if it has any meaning at all. Film theorist Andrew Tudor states “unless there is world consensus on the subject [...] there is no basis for assuming that a western will be conceived in the same way in every culture. [...] Genre is what we collectively believe it to be” (Grant, 2012). This could explain why Western and Eastern cinema markets rarely overlap - you cannot market to a culture you do not understand. However Tudor goes on to say genre terms aren’t completely useless as “genre directs our attention to the sublanguage within [a film]” (2012).

The genre of my screenplay is ‘queer coming-of-age.’ Other films within this genre include *The Way He Looks* (2014), *Mysterious Skin* (2004), and *C.R.A.Z.Y.* (2005).

Queer coming-of-age films are more popular than ever, with films such as *Blue Is The Warmest Color* (2013) and *Moonlight* (2016) being the focus of festivals and award shows in recent years - *Blue The Warmest Color* winning the Palme d’Or at Cannes (Cannes Film Festival, 2013) and *Moonlight* being nominated for 8 awards at this years Academy Awards (Nordyke & Lewis, 2017). It is because of films like these that queer coming-of-age stories are recognised as a genre by the film industry and film critics alike.

While reviewing *Being 17* (2016), a French queer coming-of-age film, Peter Debruge, Variety’s chief film critic, stated “gay stories remain a genre and are marketed as such” (2016).

Many other films, such as *Don’t Call Me Son* (2016) and *Closet Monster* (2016), have also been recognised by film journalists as being apart of the queer coming-of-age genre (Wheeler, 2016). It is this recognition which cements the existence of the genre.

Furthermore, film makers such as Emily Robinson - who described her short film *Virgin Territory* (2016) as a “queer, questioning coming-of-age story” (Bendix, 2016) - and Israeli director Michal Vinik - who considers himself apart of the genre - also add to the cementation of the queer coming-of-age genre (Russel, 2016). As does Stephen Dunn (director of *Closet Monster*) and Gregg Araki

(director of *Mysterious Skin*) who both discuss their films as being apart of the genre (Cerniglia, 2015; Abraham, 2015).

As previously mentioned, queer coming-of-age films are marketed as such with distributors such as Peccadillo Pictures - *Tomboy* (2011), *Departure* (2016), *Holding The Man* (2016) - a UK based distributor, specialising in the release of queer films, particularly coming-of-age films (Peccadillo Pictures, n.d.). Queer coming-of-age films are without a doubt recognised by the film industry.

One of the first notable films in the queer coming-of-age genre is *The Special Friendship* (1964), which tells the story of 12 year old Catholic schoolboy's close friendship with an older boy. *The Special Friendship* is credited as being one of the few films of the era "that gets anywhere near to portraying gay love with much the same poetry and believability as the great male-female love stories in cinema" (Travers, 2007).

Another of the first notable films made in the queer coming-of-age genre is *You Are Not Alone* (1978), a Danish film directed by Lasse Neilsen and Ernst Johansen, which is considered to be a cult classic (The Sky Kid, 2009). *You Are Not Alone* garnered a lot of controversy at the time of release, for discussing adolescent same sex relationships as well as showing full frontal shots of underage actors (2009).

It wasn't until the 1980s and 90s in which the genre really took off. Films like *Another Country* (1984), *Beautiful Thing* (1996), and *Get Real* (1998), looked at the joys and difficulties of schoolboys falling in love with one another. Whereas *My Own Private Idaho* (1991), a cult classic notable for River Phoenix's performance, followed the lives of two young street hustlers.

Gender identity also became of focal point of the genre. *Boys Don't Cry* (1998) was widely discussed, both for being a true story about a transgender man, Brandon Teena, and for being an excellent film, with some critics lauding it as one of the best films of the year (Tatara, 2000). *My Life In Pink* (1997) also addressed transgender issues, this time through the eyes of a child.

Later, the genre went on to explore queer youth experiencing less conventional issues, such as *Mysterious Skin*, which followed two young men dealing with their sexuality as well as suffering post-

traumatic stress disorders. And *The Way He Looks*, a Brazilian film about a blind teenager discovering feelings for his classmate. Other notable films include *Blue Is The Warmest Color*, *Heavenly Creatures* (1994), *I Killed My Mother* (2009), *Pride* (2014), and most recently *Moonlight*.

There are several key story elements that signify the queer coming-of-age genre. Firstly, queer coming-of-age deals with the transition from childhood to adulthood, which is distinguished by the protagonist having to make significant decisions about their future (Benyahia, 2006). In *The Way He Looks* (2014) Leo begins making plans about studying abroad. He also must make the decision to come forth about his same-sex feelings for his friend Gabriel. Another signifier of the genre is the theme of emerging queer sexuality (Benyahia, 2006). In *C.R.A.Z.Y.* (2005) Zac must first come to terms with being gay and then face the homophobia that comes with it, including seeing a therapist to “cure” his homosexuality. In *Mysterious Skin* both Neil and Brian must come to terms with being sexually abused as children, and deal with the different effects it has had on their sexualities - Neil chasing after middle-aged men and prostituting himself, and Brian being unable to engage in intimacy at all.

The central character/s are usually male and tend to be in their mid-teens (Benyahia, 2006), which is the case for *The Way He Looks*, *Mysterious Skin*, and *C.R.A.Z.Y.* (however in recent years it has become common to have a female protagonist e.g. *Blue Is The Warmest Color*, or *My Summer Of Love* (2004)). Coming of age films also “tend to rely on dialogue and emotion rather than physical action” (Benyahia, 2006). This is notable in *The Way He Looks* with the protagonist Leo asking his best friend whether or not he’s attractive, and later when Gabriel lies then confesses to Leo that he remembers kissing him when he was drunk. Coming of age films also often take place within a short span of time, e.g. summer holidays, or, in the case of *The Way He Looks*, a school term (Benyahia, 2006).

Robert Mckee (2010) notes that “[the audience] enters each film armed with a complex set of anticipations learned through a lifetime of moviegoing” and therefore is already a “genre expert.” This being so, a contemporary audience’s expectations of the queer coming of age genre would draw from elements commonly featured within previous films of the same genre, such as a teenager dealing with issues surrounding their sexuality that brings them into adulthood. While this can aid the writer, as they know what themes, characters, and devices etc, to put in their coming of age screen-

play, it can also back them into a corner. The audience expects what they already know of the genre but they also expect something fresh and exciting (2010).

Queer coming-of-age films of the past commonly featured protagonists who assimilated with a heteronormative society (e.g. *Beautiful Thing*, *Get Real*), and aside from liking other boys, lacked any palpable queer identity. These stories were often purely focused on ‘coming out’ and featured a happy ending (possibly due to the less-accepting times). Nowadays queer coming-of-age film audiences expect far more diverse representation - gender, sexuality, ethnicity - that are enriched in queer identity, that extends past simply liking someone of the same sex.

My screenplay, *Rising*, contains many of the elements that are key signifiers of the genre. Firstly, my protagonist, Ezra, is a teenage male attending boarding school. Secondly, Ezra is discovering and coming to terms with both his queer sexuality and his gender identity. Living in a hostile environment, Ezra comes up against severe homophobia which forces him to quickly mature and enter an early adulthood. This entering into adulthood is signified by him accepting his sexuality and making the decision to honour his true queer self by confronting his adversaries and leaving school to start a new life. The decisions Ezra makes are also greatly driven by the emotional impact the world around him has on him - Gary’s love brings forth Ezra’s homosexuality and forces him to deal with it; Ezra and Gary’s uncontrollable feelings for each other forces Ezra to take a stand against his adversaries; and Peter’s understanding of what it’s like to be a young person struggling with their identity guides Ezra to embrace the golden jacket and his gender identity.

Rising provides a fresh perspective on the genre as it breaks away from the gay-victim-trope common in queer coming-of-age films. While Ezra is certainly the victim of the times and the actions of others, he doesn’t play the victim. He fights. Not only does he fight, but he fights by embracing his queerness, as opposed to assimilating. It is uncommon to see male’s embracing queer feminine identities as strong and brave. Furthermore, *Rising* is set in New Zealand, and examines the masculine “bro culture” of New Zealand youth and how a queer identity fits into it, something that has yet to be seen. The sad but hopeful tone is also realistic and therefore more relatable to the audience.

Part Two: Script Development Process

(A) Emotional Truth

The emotional truth of *Boys* is staying true to one's identity. Ezra sacrifices his education and the opportunities offered by living within the norm in order to live as his authentic self and honour those he respects and loves, and the values they have taught within him. Ezra's acceptance of his own queer identity is also an act of political warfare, as by defying his adversaries and the heteronormative expectations they uphold, Ezra is preserving his queerness and taking a stand for those who matter to him and his newly discovered queer community.

(B) How did your screenplay develop from initial concept to a first draft?

(i) Synopsis

1970s, England. After being expelled, Ezra (16) is sent to a Catholic all boys boarding school. Pressured by his parents, Ezra tries his best to fit in with his new classmates, led by a tyrannical Tony, and gain good grades. Soon Ezra develops feelings for his friend Gary and after a few drunken encounters, Ezra and Gary both realise their mutual attraction to each other and begin a secret romance. Ezra befriends a local, exotically dressed man, Peter, who helps Ezra realise his sexuality. However, Tony begins to suspect Ezra's sexuality and makes him the target of his terror with Peter, the local "poof", consequently beaten up.

Ezra and Gary continue to pursue their relationship but are discovered by the school dean who calls Ezra's mother, Jeanette, who threatens Ezra with violence from his father unless he behaves. Despite this, Ezra and Gary are unable to fight their feelings towards each other. While on a camping excursion, Tony witnesses Ezra and Gary kissing and later attacks Ezra, with Gary being accidentally killed while intervening. A devastated Ezra is told to keep quiet by the dean, that his life will be ruined if he doesn't. However, pushed to breaking point, Ezra vengefully attacks Tony with a bat, only to spare him at the last moment. Betrayed by school and family, Ezra leaves to find a new life.

Thematically the story deals with masculinity - what it means to be male and what gender roles and norms Ezra is expected to adhere to, and what happens when somebody challenges these gender concepts. *Rising* also deals with sexuality. Both coming to terms with one's sexuality and the effects a hostile environment can have on that. The space between masculinity and sexuality also explored through the themes of heteronormativity and queer spaces - will queer persons always have to escape to queer spaces in order to fully be themselves? Will queer identities ever be allowed to be apart of society? The themes of love, both maternal and romantic, and breaking the system is also discussed.

(ii) Development

Between writing the synopsis and writing the beat sheet several significant changes were made. Firstly, the synopsis had no definitive first and second turning points, meaning a dramatic question could not be answered. Therefore I had to establish a clear third act structure within my beat sheet in order to create a dramatic question. Secondly, the relationship line between Ezra and Gary felt unresolved and that it was only beginning to blossom as the story was ending, thus was expanded within the beat sheet. A new character and relationship line was also created between Ezra and Olly. The role of the antagonist, Tony, also needed to be more clearly defined within the beat sheet.

As stated, the original synopsis for *Rising* lacked a dramatic question. In response I formulated the new dramatic question "what effect is Ezra and Gary's relationship going to have on Ezra and the people and world around them?". I felt this question was appropriate as my original idea was a coming of age love story and therefore needed to remain at the core of the story. I also wanted masculinity, heteronormativity, and queer identities to be key themes within my story, thus needed the effect a queer relationship and identity has on a hostile environment to be a key part of my story.

Since the dramatic question centred around Ezra and Gary's relationship line, I needed to fully develop that line. In the synopsis the line ends just as it's beginning and consequently we don't get to see the effects the antagonist has on the relationship and vice versa, nor are the concepts of queer identities and relationships given room to be explored - which are key themes. Furthermore Ezra's relationship with Gary is what brings about his change and growth, and enables him to challenge the system and adversaries, and resolve his inner conflict, thus answering the dramatic question and

completing Ezra's character arc. Therefore the audience needs to see the the relationship line flourish in order for the ending to occur and be believable.

The role of the antagonist, Tony, was also furthered in the beat sheet as there was no major confrontation between Tony and Ezra nor any resolution, thus the climax was unable to occur, making the story incomplete. Also a strong antagonist presence is needed for the dramatic question to be fully explored.

When writing the revised beat sheet several more major changes were made. The character Olly, who was featured in the first beat sheet, was completely cut from the script. A new character, the man in the golden jacket (aka Peter), was created, and the turning points made stronger and more defined.

The character Olly was written as a friend to the protagonist Ezra, who eventually committed suicide due to bullying. He was seen as a demonstration of what could happen to Ezra if he challenges the system and comes out of the closet. I removed Olly because he relationship line was distracting and taking screen time away from the main relationship line between Ezra and Gary. Also, since Gary dies in the revised beat sheet, it would have been repetitive to have both relationship lines end in death. Had I simply changed it so Olly didn't die, perusing the Ezra/Olly line further and creating a new role for Olly in Ezra's arc - Ezra wouldn't runaway and abandon his friend at school - would deter from the central story.

In taking away Olly's character I created space for a mentor-like figure, the man in the golden jacket, or Peter. Peter was an important addition to the script as he introduces Ezra to a queer lifestyle, and introduces Berlin as a queer space within the world and a place/life Ezra can leave school for. The original beat sheet's ending was too ambiguous, as the audience didn't know where Ezra was leaving school for (was he going home?), but Peter gives the ending more directing without altering it. Furthermore, Peter challenges the gender norms of the heteronormative world, a key theme, and gives Ezra the golden jacket - a symbol of Ezra accepting himself.

The turning points were also altered in the revised beat sheet, making them stronger more pronounced, helping to establish and answer the dramatic question. The first turning point was changed to Gary's hair catching fire and his and Ezra's hands touching as they extinguish the flame. This

moment allows for tenderness and also forces their feelings to the surface in a very public way, thus setting up the antagonist's line too. It also very distinctly asks the the dramatic question. The second turning point was also changed to Gary accidentally dying. This was because the second turning point needed to bring Ezra to his absolute lowest point, and the most difficult thing for Ezra is to lose Gary. The new turning point also enabled a new ending that made more sense - no longer was Ezra leaving Gary, the boy he loves, behind at this awful school.

Within in the first draft the only two major changes made were Gary being accidentally burnt alive and Ezra no longer smashing Tony and Luke's heads in, instead showing them mercy.

In my revised beat sheet Gary died from being pushed by Tony and hitting his head on a rock. In the first draft Tony smashes a flaming torch into Gary's chest, igniting Gary's clothing and burning him alive. I made this change because I wanted the second act turning point to mimic the first (Gary's hair catching alight). Also, the bigger the second turning point the bigger change the climax will bring. Tony causing Gary's death is unforgivable in the audiences eyes, thus would justify a bloody revenge on Ezra's part. However, since Ezra no longer smashes Tony's head in, as he did in the revised beat sheet, but shows compassion, his actions become even more heroic.

(C) How did your screenplay develop from first to second draft?

(i) Synopsis

1970s, England. Due to his parents not having enough time for him, Ezra (16) is sent to an all boys Catholic boarding school. Ezra tries his best to fit in with his new classmates, lead by a tyrannical Tony, but struggles with the school's masculine "bro" culture. Soon Ezra develops feelings for his friend Gary and after a few drunken, erotic moments, the pair both realise their mutual attraction to each other and pursue a secret romance. Ezra befriends a local, exotically dressed man, Peter, who helps Ezra realise his sexuality and gender identity. However, Tony becomes suspicious of Ezra and makes him the target of his bullying, with Peter, the local "poof", consequently beaten up.

Ezra and Gary continue to pursue their relationship but are caught in an intimate moment by the Dean. Ezra's mother, Jeanette, is notified and makes clear she doesn't want a queer son. Gary also loses his confidence, preferring to live a "normal" life than be a target. Despite this, Ezra and Gary are unable to fight their feelings and soon make love. Eventually Tony witnesses the two kissing and attacks Ezra. Gary is killed while trying to intervene. Devastated and angry, Ezra is threatened by both the Dean and Tony to keep quiet. Ezra obeys and tells the investigating detective nothing. Feeling isolated and trapped Ezra snaps and confronts Tony and his classmates with a rifle, but at the last moment spares them, realising it would make him just like them. Ezra leaves his school and family behind to find a new life.

Thematically the script is dealing with masculinity and the expectations that come from a macho, heteronormative environment; coming to terms with exploring one's sexual identity; gender and queer self-expression and how the heteronormative world effects it; the cost of being your true self; and the concept of walking away from the system. Ultimately the script is about Ezra's sexuality and gender identity - can he be himself and publicly acknowledge his relationship with Gary, and at what cost will this come?

(ii) Development

Before entering into the second draft phase I made several significant changes to the script. These changes included taking Ezra's character development further back and exploring his self expression more; developing Jeanette's character more; altering Ezra's relationship with his father, Greg; adding a queer sex scene; changing the final confrontation between Ezra and Tony; adding a police investigation into Gary's death; altering the immediate lead up to the second turning point; altering the Dean's character; and changing up the ending's order or events.

Firstly I started by taking Ezra's character arc further back. In the first draft he was already rebellious in the very first scene, which made his transformation less great - it's just a rebel rebelling. Thus in the second draft he began as more reserved and willing to fit in. Then, as the story progressed, he began to come out of his shell more and learnt to stand his ground in order to stay true to himself. Ezra's self expression was also developed through Ezra playing with his appearance -

hair, earrings, clothing - several scenes, in order to show him coming into and exploring his queer identity.

Secondly, several key relationships were changed. Previously Jeanette had no underlying reason for her insecurities and want for a normal, everyday family and life. Thus within my second draft it became that her marriage was falling apart. I also altered Ezra's relationship with his father, Greg, so that his father became less abusive, and more incapable of understanding and connecting with his very different son. This was because the father's abusive brute-like nature was quite cliched, particularly in a queer coming-of-age narrative.

To raise the stakes in my second draft, I added a police investigation into Gary's death. One, because it seemed implausible that there wouldn't be a police enquiry into a young man being burned alive in a boarding school. And two, because it brought about several morally ambiguous dilemmas. If Ezra is to tell the police Tony is responsible for Gary's death then Ezra will be publicly out, possibly resulting in incarceration or a police record and definitely resulting in a lower standard of living for Ezra - the 70s were far less accepting of queer people. Furthermore, Gary's family will also find out about their relationship and Gary's sexuality - something Gary didn't want. However, if Ezra doesn't tell then Tony is getting away with his crimes (for which Ezra feels partly responsible), retaining his power, and Ezra won't be staying true to himself.

Next I made changes to the second major turning point. Before, in the lead up to Gary's death, the boys were attempting to kill Ezra via setting his tent alight. However, it didn't seem believable that this group of schoolboys would go to such extremes and kill another classmate. Thus it was changed to them attempting to beat Ezra up and scare him into submission, a more fitting a plausible scenario.

The role of one of the antagonists was also changed. In the first draft the Dean was far more cruel and sadistic, whipping Ezra with the cane and shouting him rather manically. But this was too similar to Tony's character traits, and I was basically doubling-up on the same character, just giving them a different name. In the second draft I made the Dean more patient and (seemingly) kind-hearted, and his attitude towards Ezra's queerness to be less aggressively confrontational and more of disappointment.

Lastly, the ending was reworked. Ezra originally confronted Tony with a bat in his bedroom, went to attack him, saw Tony's fear and backed away. In the second draft Ezra confronts Tony with a rifle in front of the other boys, and brings him to the point of wetting himself and begging for mercy. This change was made because Tony needed to lose his authority and power in a very public and humiliating way. As previously stated, Ezra not telling the police of Tony's crimes would mean Tony gets away. But Ezra needed to disempower Tony in order to avenge Gary, and honour and stand up for his queer identity without further endangering himself, which is apart of his character arc. Having Tony wet himself in fear in front of his classmates takes away his power. And having Ezra see his fear and choose to show mercy, thus breaking free from the cycle of abuse, takes even more power away from Tony and demonstrates that you can walk away from the system.

Furthermore, the order of events within the ending was rearranged in order of what was easiest (in comparison) for Ezra to face/overcome to what was hardest. Firstly, Ezra said goodbye to Jeanette; secondly, he stood up to Tony; and thirdly, he put on the golden jacket and accepted and embraced his queer identity. This was done in order to achieve tension right to the end - what is hardest for Ezra to face is what the audience are waiting to see most.

The emotional truth of *Rising* is staying true to one's identity.

Ezra sacrifices his education and the opportunities offered by living within the norm in order to live as his authentic self and honour those he respects and loves, and the values they have taught within him. Ezra's acceptance of his own queer identity is also an act of political warfare, as by defying his adversaries and the heteronormative expectations they uphold, Ezra is preserving his queerness and taking a stand for those who matter to him and his newly discovered queer community.

(D) How did your screenplay develop from second draft to polished second draft?

(i) Synopsis

1970s, New Zealand. Ezra (16), an average boy from a middle class family, is sent away to St Augustine's Catholic boarding school for boys, due to his mother's (Jeanette) promotion. Ezra soon fits in with a group of boys, lead by alpha male Tony, and is even offered a university scholarship by the school dean, Father Mason.

However, Ezra develops a relationship with another boy, Gary, and after several erotic and tender moments their friendship begins to blossom into romance, bringing Ezra's safety and identity into question.

As Ezra's classmates misogynistic and homophobic behaviour gradually becomes more extreme, and his dissociation with the school's masculine "bro" culture grows, Ezra seeks out the guidance of Peter, a queer, gender-bending musician. Ezra begins to experiment with his appearance with lipstick, pearl earrings and a golden jacket, and continues chasing a passionate and intimate romance with Gary, until Father Mason catches them and informs Jeanette.

Jeanette makes its clear she doesn't want a queer son and threatens Ezra with his father's violence. Ezra becomes torn and, along with the other boys, beats up Peter. Consequently forcing Peter to leave town, leaving Ezra without a queer refuge. Despite this, Ezra and Gary are unable to fight their love, and are soon caught by Tony, kissing in the forest. Tony lashes out at Ezra and Gary is killed attempting to intervene.

Devastated, Ezra is threatened by Tony and Father Mason to keep his mouth shut. However, Ezra blurts out everything to the police, but is ignored when the other boys deny his claims. Trapped and isolated, Ezra breaks free by putting on his queer regalia and confronting Tony with a rifle before the entire school. Tony wets himself in fear, disempowering him, and Ezra is witnessed as unapologetically queer. Ezra leaves school and his family behind to begin a new journey.

Rising deals with masculinity and heteronormativity, and the expectations and consequences that they bring - the struggle of an emerging queer identity, and the cost one must pay in order to live as their true self.

(ii) Development

While in the planning stage of my polished second draft I made several key changes to story. These changes included alterations to Ezra's arc of transformation and the resistance he makes; raising the stakes for Ezra; altering the relationship line with Tony and further exploring the relationship line with Peter; and further exploring the theme of social injustice.

Firstly I made changes to Ezra's arc of transformation. In the second draft Ezra was far more comfortable with his emerging queer identity, and playing with his appearance. This took away from the character's inner conflict. In the polished second draft, Ezra battles with his queerness - trying on lipstick, throwing it in the bin, then fishing it out of the bin; blaming his actions on alcohol; making sexual advances towards Peter, then beating Peter when he's rejected and confronted with his relationship with Gary. This enabled me to show the grappling effects this heteronormative world was having on Ezra. Furthermore, by making Ezra's struggle greater I made the ending more dramatic and climatic - his queer transformation is greater and more heroic because he's done more to earn the golden jacket.

I also changed the way in which Ezra behaves in private versus how he behaves in public - a subconscious dropping of the mask. Ezra's more tender and feminine side, shown when he is alone with Gary, contrasted with the rougher, one-of-the-boys way he behaves in public, enabled me to demonstrate how gender norms are learnt behaviours as opposed to a natural/normal state of being.

Secondly, I raised the stakes for Ezra by adding Father Mason offering a scholarship and early university entrance because of his mathematical abilities. This meant Ezra had more to lose in pursuing his relationship with Gary. It also made the ending more climatic, as Ezra is making a greater sacrifice when he reveals Tony killed Gary to everyone and subsequently walks away from his school life.

Next I made alternations to the relationship line with Tony by making him unaware of Ezra and Gary's relationship right up till the second act turning point, and having him threatened by Ezra and Gary creating their own world without him. This shift-in-view of Tony not knowing or suspecting Ezra's sexuality till the second act turning point, created more tension and escalation. It also enabled more focus to be put on Tony's growing influence over the other boys. We see Tony introduce girls, guns, alcohol and violence, which gives Tony a following, and power. We also see Tony threatened by Ezra and Gary creating a world of their own, which Tony has no control over. This increase in Tony's control over the school makes for a far bigger obstacle for Ezra to overcome, and in turn, a more climatic ending.

I also made changes to the Peter relationship line by adding a scene in which Peter tells Ezra about his past and his challenges living as a queer person, and also the freedom in which he found by staying true to himself. Peter has always been a mentor figure but in previous drafts he failed to tell what Ezra needed to know - Who is Ezra? Why's Ezra drawn to/hanging around Peter? Thus by having Peter share his past - bullied at home and school, and that by learning to stop running and stand proud, he challenged the people and system opposing him - Ezra is given answers to these questions, which aids in his transformation.

Lastly, I further explored the theme of social injustice by having Ezra reveal the truth about Gary's death to the police and school, only to having Dylan (Ezra's roommate) and all the other boys deny the allegations. This is a major defeat for Ezra as the boys heteronormative world (in which queer equals wrong) is placed above truth. Also, even in the extreme circumstances of a death, Ezra is viewed as less-than.

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