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Let Go Of Your Hands

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for the degree of Master of Creative Writing

ABSTRACT

This thesis consists of practice-led research in the form of a full-length script for a feature film; plus a 10,000-word essay (exegesis). A summary of the script is as follows:

Let Go Of Your Hands is a coming-of-age film centred on the family and sibling dynamics of a mixed-race, Chinese-Pakeha household in present day Aotearoa. Siblings, Katie and David Leung are forced to reconcile with their identity and culture before Katie leaves the country for a prestigious opportunity. But little does the family know that Katie is desperate to find a way out of this opportunity, and David is secretly dealing with his wife's pregnancy – leading the siblings to question their connection to their culture, language, parents, and each other.

The script is framed by an Exegesis which is a 10,000-word essay on the subject of:

- (a) the genre of the script
- (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), 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

Candidate Signature:

Let Go Of Your Hands

EXEGESIS

EXEGESIS PART ONE

Introduction

My thesis is creative practice as research, comprising a creative artefact (a screenplay) accompanied by a critical component (an exegesis). This conforms to AUT University's guidelines for a 'Format Three' thesis, as described in the Postgraduate Handbook 2021, which states 'practice does not serve to illustrate theory but is more appropriately understood as the site of research; the exegesis relates directly to the practice-oriented work and as such does not have a research topic or question of its own; the purpose of the exegesis is to elucidate and clarify the relationship between the central concept, key contexts, relevant critical context' (pp. 109-113). Accordingly, in my exegesis, I provide a discussion which overviews the creative work, which will include:

- § A synopsis of the creative component and an explanation of my intentions
- § A review of key texts relevant to development of the creative work, in the form of a comparative analysis
- § A detailed description of the process and methodology used, and a reflection on the outcomes of this creative practice as research
- § Discussion of theoretical and critical context where relevant

The central theme of my screenplay is: The Internal Wants of One's Self vs The External Pressures of Culture, Family and/or Society. *Let Go of Your Hands [Let Go]* focusses on Katie and David Leung, two mixed Chinese siblings who struggle to understand their culture and self as separate from their parents. While David has rejected his parents and culture, distancing himself as much as possible, Katie has immersed herself

so deeply in her parents dreams that she can no longer differentiate herself as a separate entity.

For part one of the critical component, I will be considering my screenplay in the context of six other dramatic texts, focussing on the way these texts dramatize the same central theme as my own work. I aim to compare and contrast the way these scripts use different techniques, goals and perspectives in dramatizing this theme, exploring how these commonalities and differences relate to my own screenplay. The films I will be discussing are: *Whip It* (Cross, 2009); *Turning Red* (Collins & Shi, 2022); *The Meyerowitz Stories (New and Selected)* (Baumbach, 2017); *Joker* (Phillips & Silver, 2019); *A Separation* (Farhadi, 2011); and *Shrek* (Elliot, Rossio, Stillman, & Schulman, 2001). I will be referencing the screenplays for these films, unless stated otherwise.

2 Purpose, Takeaways, and Meanings

The central theme of these films is between internal wants and external pressures. The specification between internal and external is important because this theme is connected with larger cultural and social issues beyond the characters' control. Often, the internal want is a secret and kept hidden away from other characters, with the protagonist often feeling shameful or embarrassed. While the protagonist knows that this want will be fulfilling for them, they worry about social, cultural or familial pressures that ultimately warn against these wants.

The characters that embody this theme are often outcasts, outsiders or minorities. This is important for the central purpose of these films as a critical commentary on the pressures of society, culture and family. For Katie in *Let Go*, she wants to independently find herself and her identity away from her parents. However, Katie feels pressured to do

the opposite of what she wants because of external cultural pressures to be respectful of her parents' sacrifices. Similarly, David wants to live without the scrutiny of his parents and their cultural attitudes towards his chosen life. Thus, the theme is connected with larger social ideas of cultural pressure.

Because these external difficulties become a continuous obstacle for the character, they will often lie in order to maintain a sense of control in both worlds - the external pressure and the secret want. The irony of these two worlds is that the secret want does not always align with what the character needs, which adds a third layer of tension into the film's purpose. For an example, Shrek wants to live by himself in his swamp, but the truth is he actually needs love and connection. Mei wants to be a good daughter, but she secretly needs to be accepted fully as herself. Often the initial wants of the character are informed by societal or familial pressures, further exploring the way external pressures warp individual identity and wants.

With regard to audience interpretation and emotional/intellectual impact, the audience is encouraged to investigate the nuances of social pressure and particularly the way these pressures impact personal desires and identities. Roger Ebert describes *A Separation* as: 'a film in which every important character tries to live a good life within the boundaries of the same religion' (Ebert, 2012). A key concept in this citation is 'trying' to live life but having 'boundaries' to navigate. The boundaries in these films can span cultural to religious to gender to familial, ultimately questioning how external pressures can stop people from living an authentic life. Emotionally, the audience may leave with a feeling of solidarity and empathy for the characters on screen, thus prompting us to have a more critical look at social pressures around us. Furthermore, this type of film often inspires a sense of empowerment,

encouraging audiences to consider breaking free of the social constraints in their own lives: ‘cinema is one of the most efficient tools of cultural change, creation and development’ (Moosavi & Dehghanharati, 2020). In this sense, the takeaway of these films is to encourage movement away from oppressive social and cultural idea and inspire audiences to navigate their own external pressures with more confidence and solidarity.

3 Attitude / Tone

The attitude in a film is the tone used to dramatize a theme or subject. Because the central theme is focussed on the dichotomy between personal wants and social pressures, the tone often blends realism with tongue-in-cheek humour in a dramedy way. This satirical tone is important as it supports the central takeaway of these films: showcasing the absurdity of socially imposed pressures and obligations in the hopes of encouraging change. Themes concerning social change are often paired with a satirical tone as it provides a ‘mode of assessing the socio-political system in a society’ (Olaniyan, 2015). Satire forces audiences to question what is considered familiar or normal. Thrall et al states that satire is ‘a literary manner which blends a critical attitude with humour and wit to the end that human institutions or humanity may be improved’. This is distinctly evident in almost all the films we are analyzing. Even in a psychological thriller such as *Joker*, there is an element of humour and surrealism in the film’s attitude.

However, it must be noted that this absurdist and tongue-in-cheek tone is never done with the intention to hurt. Because these films consider real world pressures, each film must be careful not to cross into Schadenfreude comedy territory. The purpose is not to make fun of social pressures, but rather to bring them to light - to isolate them and shine a spotlight on their nuances: ‘The best satire does not seek to do harm or damage by its ridicule’ (Harris, 2004). This is can be evidenced in *The Meyerowitz Stories*: ‘The withering

wit is tempered here by a warmth that makes the film as moving as it is brilliantly comic’ (Travers, 2017). The significance of this comment is the fact wit and warmth work together to create an honest sort of humour. These films are not about laughing at another culture or family, but rather finding empathy and familiarity in their struggles. The tone is clearly very connected to the overall purpose of these films.

In contrast, if these films do not have a tonal sense of humour and wit, they cross over into tragedies, which are centered around the struggle and ultimate downfall of a character at the hands of society. This difference of attitude and tone is evident in *A Separation* and it clearly impacts the purpose of the film. I have included *A Separation* as a point of comparison with not only the other films, but also my own screenplay. The attitude of *A Separation* remains serious and tragic, never using humour or wit to emphasize the central theme. The effect of this is a totally different emotional takeaway for the audience.

While it can be speculated that the difference in *A Separation*’s tone is because it is dealing with religious and political obligations, this is not always consistent with other media in this genre - *Jojo Rabbit* (Waititi, 2019) explores political pressures during the Holocaust and *Derry Girls* (McGee, 2018-2022) considers the religious tensions between Protestants and Catholics during The Troubles. Therefore, I believe the tone of *A Separation* is because of the historic timeline - *Jojo Rabbit* and *Derry Girls* occur some time after the political events take place. Conversely, *A Separation* was made in the midst of Islamic political unrest and cinematic censorship:

At a time when filmmakers in Iran are under more pressure than ever — Jafar Panahi and fellow director Mohammad Rasoulof were handed lengthy prison sentences late last year as well as a 20-year ban on making films, and the House of Cinema, a non-governmental organisation that served as a filmmaker’s guild in Iran — Farhadi has had to walk a line to

avoid censorship. “What’s the point of making a movie if it can’t be seen by the 70 million people in my home country?” he has asked. (Mohammadi, 2012)

With this in mind, it is difficult to imagine the film having the same impact, or perhaps even having the same chance of being made, if done in a satirical tone. With political unrest happening at the time of Farhadi’s film, his choice to use a more serious narrative attitude is understandable within the context of the Iranian film landscape. There needs to be a level of distance between the subject and humour: ‘Very painful or highly taboo subjects require a great deal of distance in order to feel funny’. The lack of temporal distance between the subject matter and the creative work is why *A Separation* is not done in a tongue in cheek tone. However, because my screenplay, like *Turning Red* or *Whip It*, explores a general, almost timeless concept (culture and family), rather than a specific political event, there is no need for temporal distance - satire and humour is acceptable. Furthermore, the purpose of *Let Go* is to draw attention to the absurd reality of these familial and cultural customs. Thus, the tone aids in reflecting this purpose.

4 Narrative Structure and Script Devices

The narrative structure of these films are all linear with very few experimental non-linear elements. Even in *Meyerowitz Stories*, which is rooted in past regrets and unresolved emotion, never uses flashbacks. Rather, we are introduced to the familial pressures on each child in the present. *Turning Red* uses fantasy elements to reconcile the past with the present, but again does not use non-linear flashbacks.

Pacing is often fairly quick and moves from escalation to escalation in a fast paced way – this is also connected with the tone as satirical and witty. Regardless of whether the time frame is over 1 month or 1 year, a common trait is quick pacing. I note this is for two

reasons. The first is so that we can grasp the family or cultural dynamic as soon as possible and thus frame the film within the contextual external pressures of the family, society or culture. If an escalation happens almost immediately, we can understand the pressure on the protagonist easily. Secondly, this is to create more tension between the two facets of the main character's existence – the internal want and external pressure.

The escalations are both external and internal events that widen the rift between personal wants and external pressure. Usually, the first escalation is completely external - this is because the character begins their arc as naive or unable to fully realize their dreams themselves. The first external escalation is 'the push' that the character needs to move out of their comfort zone and understand their own self more. In *Shrek* it is the quest to rescue Princess Fiona - a journey that Shrek would not have gone on without the forced quest of Lord Farquaad. In *Turning Red*, the boyband coming to town is a clear escalation as it introduces the tension between Mei's want to be a good daughter and her secret want to be a normal teenager. In *Whip It*, the beauty pageant introduces the tension between Bliss's want to roller derby and her mother's want for Bliss to be a beauty queen. Narrative escalations in these films are about furthering the rift between internal and external wants, and forcing the character into situations where these wants may collide. The suspense and dramatic tension of these films come from the delicate balance between outward self and secret self - the self that fulfils societal expectations and the self that fulfils personal expectations. This is important for the narrative structure of the film as it leads to a third act climax where both of these worlds collide and the character must make a necessary choice between succumbing to external pressures or exploring their personal wants. This choice creates the tension needed to propel the story to its concluding question: Will this character get what they want/need? Without this moment of tension, the audience may feel

that the character has not sufficiently undergone the experiences and struggles needed to grow by the end of the film, thus leading to a sense of dissatisfaction. The overall narrative structure of this genre (exemplified in the six films discussed in this exegesis) can be summarized via the following mutual structural elements:

1. Character has resigned themselves to the external pressure.
2. Character experiences a destabilization that leads to the discovery of a new, secret self.
3. Character tries to balance their new self with their old self.
4. The two selves are forced to collide, often leading to upset with other external members of the society, family or culture. This is the low point of the film.
5. a: The character reconciles with either their self, their family, or both and leads a more true and fulfilling life (*Shrek*, *Whip It*, *Turning Red*, *The Meyerowitz Stories*).
b: The character does not reconcile with their self or family and the pressure of both the secret want and the external obligations has led them to lead an unfulfilling life (*A Separation*, *Joker*).

Furthermore, there is usually a single, pinpointed goal for the character. This goal is often in stark contrast to the external societal pressures and is sometimes not even immediately, consciously realized by the protagonist. The dramatic irony of these films is that often the audience knows the goal of the character before they realize it. Dramatic irony is a common feature of these films, as it is important for the character to initially be clueless as to what would help their personal growth journey. The narrative arc of the films moves in a linear form towards this single goal, forcing the characters into uncomfortable situations that lead to steps towards this goal. This also heightens the tension as the character's goal is vastly different to their external circumstances. Conflict in these films is a mix of external,

internal and interpersonal. As previously discussed, the takeaway of these films is to investigate the external and internal pressures of characters. To achieve this takeaway, there needs to be both external and internal conflict in these films. External conflict is necessary to introduce the cultural, societal or familial pressures, whereas internal and interpersonal conflict is necessary to explore the growth of the character and their movement towards a more personally fulfilling life. Furthermore, because these films, by nature, consider interpersonal pressures, it would be incongruous to only showcase external conflicts. The interpersonal conflicts are what create tensions between the external (culture, society, gender), the interpersonal (family and friends who embody or enact these external pressures) and the personal (the protagonist who is going through a change or realization). All three of these conflicts must be present for a satisfying character arc and narrative structure. The personal conflict is also crucial because it gives insight on the difficulty of the character's change and decision. The decision between maintaining an existence that is externally validated and choosing to chase a personal want or dream must be a personally conflicting choice. If there is no personal conflict then the character's choice and subsequent growth is not interesting nor compelling for the audience.

Joker is an interesting example of why these three conflicts are necessary in conjunction. *Joker* does not employ any personal conflict, rather choosing to only have external and interpersonal conflicts. This leads to the audience being unempathetic to Arthur Fleck's struggles and makes the character feel as though he has no autonomy in decisions: Arthur is only being acted upon, rather than independently deciding to act in response to unjust external pressures. The problem is that the exploration of societal oppressions and pressures necessitates a personal conflict. At no point does Arthur make a conscious decision to either succumb to social pressures or follow his personal desires. We

never gain any insight into Arthur's personal conflicts, rather, we watch external conflicts escalate to a point of hopelessness. There are no realizations for the character and thus no justifications for why we need to care about their potential growth. *The New Yorker* comments extensively on this: 'Joker is a viewing experience of a rare, numbing emptiness' (Brody, 2019). The 'numbing emptiness' seems to arise from the fact that viewers become desensitized to the protagonist's suffering at the hands of only external conflicts. There are no internal moments of insight, change or realization.

5 Protagonists

The protagonists are often high energy and fairly naive. Even the grown children in *The Meyerowitz Stories* present themselves as emotionally stunted in several scenes:

```
Matt shouts across the vehicle.

      MATT
      That's right, I don't take after
      you. None of us do. You had to
      be the only artist in the family.
      And it doesn't matter that I make
      money because you don't respect
      what I do!

Harold climbs in the car.

      HAROLD
      What do you need my respect for,
      the world respects you because you
      make money.

      MATT
      (throws up his hands)
      Ugh, I want to punch YOU in the
      nose!

Matt runs around to the driver's side.

      HAROLD
      I know you think you can treat me
      this way because of your money.

      MATT
      It doesn't matter how much money I
      make, you make me feel like a big
      piece of shit because YOU DON'T
      CARE ABOUT IT!

Harold starts the car.

      MATT
      But you also actually DO! You're
      privately obsessed with it. You
      know that I BEAT you! I BEAT YOU!
```

(Baumbach, 2017)

The introduction of these characters as 'unworldly' and not yet matured, regardless of age, is important for both the narrative arc and protagonist arc. The character arc is

towards a final moment of growth or realization. In order for this to feel satisfying, the character must begin the script at a point in which the growth or realization feels impossible. In contrast, *Joker* and *A Separation* present protagonists that are not necessarily naive, but are rather not yet disillusioned by the society around them. Their growth and realization leads to a moment of disenfranchisement, whereby the character can see the truth of the world they live in:

MURRAY FRANKLIN
You have a problem with Thomas
Wayne, too?

JOKER
Yeah. I do. Everything comes so
easy for him.

MURRAY FRANKLIN
And what's wrong with that?

JOKER
Have you seen what it's like out
there, Murray? Do you ever actually
leave the studio? Everybody just
yells and screams at each other.
Nobody's civil anymore. Nobody
thinks what it's like to be the
other guy. You think men like
Thomas Wayne, men at ease, ever
think what it's like to be a guy
like me? To be anybody but
themselves.
(shaking his head, voice
rising)
They don't. They think we'll all
just sit there and take it like
good little boys. That we won't
werewolf and go wild. Well, this is
for all of you out there.

(Phillips & Silver, 2019)

Even in *A Separation*, the characters are naive about their social status in comparison to poorer, lower class citizens. Arthur in *Joker* is naive about the way he can follow through with societal expectations and achieve his dreams. The important commonality is that protagonists all start off naive and conclude in a more knowledgeable space. Whether this conclusion is positive or not, all the characters in these films follow the same narrative arc.

Ultimately, the characters start off in a place that is stifling. In *Whip It*, Bliss feels rejected and alone in her parents' wants for her. In *Turning Red*, Mei is introduced as a traditionally good Chinese daughter, but feels unable to have normal teen experiences. *Joker* shows Arthur being oppressed by the judgement of society. Because *A Separation* and *Joker* consider oppressions beyond the family unit - political, religious and societal - it may feel unrealistic to show a growth in which the character positively removes themselves from the external obligations – these films consider larger pressures than a family discussion. Therefore, a character disillusionment arc emerges in *A Separation* and *Joker*. The character growth is inverse to the other films and they conclude not with a positive growth or realization, but a disillusioned realization. However, the key commonality is that the characters still begin with less understanding of the world around them - whether this leads to disillusionment or fulfilment is not important. What is important is the fact the character undergoes a 'truth realization' whereby they realize the impact of the external pressures.

In *Let Go*, the character arc begins with Katie at her least autonomous and most naive. She clearly has no space to do things for herself, as evident by her mum repacking her suitcase. Throughout the film, she follows the same movement as discussed in the other films – through a series of escalations, Katie learns to separate herself from the external obligations around her, thus undergoing the necessary 'truth realization'.

6 Secondary Characters

Secondary characters are often 'push' characters: They are friends or family that encourage the protagonist to move towards their goal. A perfect example of the 'push' character is in *Shrek*. Without Donkey, Shrek would not have undertaken any of the new or uncomfortable experiences that ultimately lead to his happiness and positive growth.

DONKEY
Ohh! You're so wrapped up in
layers, onion boy, you're afraid of
your own feelings.

SHREK
(os) Go away!

DONKEY
There you are , doing it again just
like you did to Fiona.

(Elliot, Rossio, Stillman, & Schulman, 2001)

These characters often voice moments of introspection and wisdom. Without the secondary character, it would be impossible for the protagonist to grow. Because we are introduced to the main character as naïve or lacking in necessary skills, the secondary character is often confident and acts as a guide for the protagonist. Even in *Turning Red*, Mei's friends act as an ensemble secondary character that provides confidence and encouragement to Mei during her period of growth and change.

The Meyerowitz Stories is particularly interesting because each sibling is both a main character and secondary character simultaneously. In this way, Baumbach accurately portrays the realism of sibling relationships, showing that they are the encouragement, introspection and confidence that the other sibling needs. In *A Separation*, the daughter becomes the necessary secondary character, offering a voice of truth at times when her parents are caught up in societal pressures.

Nader is busy working with Termeh on her math homework.

NADER
He sells it for 200 tomans a
kilo. If he uses 270 kilograms
of flour a day... write down 270...
how much is his daily income?
Meaning how much profit does he
earn a day? So how do we
calculate this?

TERMEH
Did you lie?

Nader is shocked at hearing Termeh say this.

NADER
What?

TERMEH
You lied.

(Farhadi, 2011)

The secondary character, such as Termeh, is also often a child, or has a childish way of being unabashed by the truth. It is this sense of truth that is necessary for the protagonist to grow. The secondary character also wholeheartedly wants the protagonist to succeed or make the right decision towards positive growth. They often are a manifestation of what the protagonist wishes they could be.

Furthermore, it is important to note that there is often a crucial falling out with the secondary character. The falling out is important as it often represents the tension between true self and false self – external pressures and internal wants. In *Turning Red*, Mei fails to stand up for her friends when her mum blames them for ‘corrupting’ Mei. In *Shrek*, Shrek believes Donkey has betrayed him. The significance of the falling out is that it becomes a core moment of growth for the protagonist.

The conflict often occurs when the main character reverts back to a former self after having made important strides in personal growth. The secondary character, who genuinely wants good for the main character, shows disapproval at this negative growth. However, this is all important for the character to realize their old self is wrong. A reconciliation is made, often directly before the final act and then the protagonist must make a crucial choice for themselves. In the final act, the secondary character is present as a form of support.

Overall, the secondary character is a supportive force of encouragement. They provide insight and guidance for the main character, ultimately pushing the protagonist to grow positively. Even in *Joker*, Arthur’s relationship with Sophie is his positive encouragement – even though it is revealed that this interaction has been hallucinated, Sophie is still the ‘push’ character.

7 Genre

Though the genre of these films range from comedy to drama, I would argue that at their core, they are coming-of-age or right-of-passage films. The purpose of these films is to show the character's movement away from external pressure, ultimately leading to maturity and a development of the individual self. Each of the characters starts off either lacking in autonomy or knowledge and, through a series of personal conflicts, realizations and escalation, the character grows. This is the blueprint for a coming-of-age film.

However, not all of these films are in the format of a traditional coming-of-age narrative, particularly regarding the age of the characters. This is important to note as, in my own screenplay, I want to show the way different cultures and families undergo right-of-passage experiences at different times. In essence, the right-of-passage is the realization of self vs society/culture/family/religion and the enacting of this autonomy. This can happen at any age or stage of life.

I regard *Whip it* and *Turning Red* as coming-of-age films, and *A Separation*, *Shrek*, *Meyerowitz Stories*, *Joker* as right-of-passage films.

Whip It and *Turning Red* are traditional coming-of-age films. They 'dramatize situations and events that bear upon the child's initiation into new domains of psychosocial experience and the adolescent's and postadolescent's encounters with the pleasures and perils of modern life' (Schimdt, 2002). Both films are centered on adolescents and focus on typical teen situations such as parental pressures, first love, sex, underage drinking, and so forth. The external pressures of teen coming-of-age films usually come from parents or family and the narrative structure follows the adolescent rebellion away from familial structures. However, these two films are unique because they show the way parents can

embody wider social pressures – gender expectations in *Whip It*; and intergenerational trauma and cultural obligations in *Turning Red*. Overall, these two films fit much more obviously into the coming-of-age genre.

Shrek and *The Meyerowitz Stories* are right-of-passage films in the sense that they follow an older character who is learning to separate themselves from external forces, going through several necessary experiences for maturation. *The Meyerowitz Stories* is particularly interesting because it shows the parental and familial expectations that can still linger past childhood. The film shows the late coming-of-age of the three Meyerowitz children. With their father's ailing health, the children learn to not only separate their dreams from their father's dream, but also to learn how to live by themselves. This film provided a strong inspiration for *Let Go* as it showed the way coming-of-age films can include different experiences and cultures. *The Meyerowitz Stories* shows that this theme can be relevant at any age. It explores adult children going through a delayed period of growth and learning, later in life, to separate the self from the parent.

Furthermore, *Shrek* presents the right-of-passage genre through the style of a children's animated film. In *Shrek*, we are introduced to a character who is oppressed by societal pressures and discriminations. After undergoing a series of uncomfortable, but necessary experiences (friendship and love), Shrek grows in ways that are unimaginable from the beginning of the film. Ultimately, *Shrek* is a right-of-passage film that charts the growth of a character away from external pressures and towards a truer and more autonomous sense of self. While it can be argued that all films chronicle the growth of a character through a series of uncomfortable obstacles, I believe that what makes a film distinctly a right-of-passage film, are the obstacles the character endures. If the obstacles are highly specific and contextual, it is not a right-of-passage film. However, if the

obstacles are universally understood as stages of maturation (first love, sex, attraction, drinking, etc), then this is a right-of-passage film. The audience must immediately recognize that the character is going through a universally understood right-of-passage experience. Regardless of the age or even humanness of the character (Shrek being an ogre), we understand the obstacles in the film to be ones that universally encourage maturation and growth.

Although this could be a somewhat contentious opinion, I believe *A Separation* and *Joker* can still be considered right-of-passage films. The difference is that these films are set against a backdrop of social injustice. In these films, the character's growth is to do with seeing the world realistically. The positive growth from the other films is shrouded by personal conflict. The characters cannot achieve their wants because of societal obligations or oppressions. Therefore, the right-of-passage is a disillusionment with the world around them. The central theme - the personal want vs the external want – merges with political or social comments about oppression and we are confronted with this theme from a different perspective. The character is now exploring their sense of self in relation to an unjust world around them. However, the core of these two films still show characters that are forging their own identities and in this process, either lose or find themselves. For these two films, the right-of-passage experiences (divorce in *A Separation*; bullying in *Joker*) uncover too much injustice in the world and the characters further lose themselves.

Therefore, we can see that all of these films fall within the coming-of-age or right-of-passage genre. They all present character/s that are introduced as needing to go through necessary life experiences to grow and separate themselves from external forces, whether that be parents, family, culture or society. The interesting divide is in the way these genre can yield different conclusions. I will talk more about this in the following section.

8 Endings

The concluding arc for these screenplays can be either negative or positive. Because the films are considering the way a character both acknowledges and separates themselves from external forces, there is a clear division between films that consider familial external forces and societal external forces. Familial external forces often lead to a positive conclusion and character growth, with the final moments being focussed on showing the character in a scene of independence or change:

He picks up the plate of cookies--

HAROLD (O.S.)
Pick a day. Except for next
Saturday, L.J. is coming up for
lunch, so you'll need to find
something to do, but you can go to
a movie or, I think there's
bowling.

Danny throws the plate of cookies onto the ground,
startling everybody including himself.

DANNY (to the nurse's aide) Sorry.
HAROLD Danny! What are you doing?

Danny stands in the doorway.

DANNY
Sorry, Dad, I didn't think that
would be so loud.

HAROLD
See if you can rescue some of the
cookies from the porcelain.

DANNY
I'm leaving now, Dad. I'm going
to drive back to the city--
(again to the aide)
You'll be here, right?

NURSE'S AIDE
Yes.

DANNY
I'll clean this up, don't worry.
(back to his Dad)
And then I'm going to LA to see
Matthew.
(and to himself)
"I love you." "I forgive you."
"Forgive me." "Thank you." "Goodbye."

(Baumbach, 2017)

Films about societal external forces are more likely to show tragic endings, whereby the recognizing of external pressures and attempting to untangle oneself leads to a downfall. Because these pressures are societal, the characters realize they are unable to truly escape these pressures and this leads to a negative growth. In the case of *Joker*, Arthur's only escape from the external pressure and the only way to truly be autonomous, is to remove himself fully from society. However, in removing himself, he becomes a criminal. For Arthur, his right-of-passage is in the realization that he will always be treated poorly. In *A Separation*, the characters are forced to reconsider their perspectives on status, wealth, gender and religion. However, they too conclude that they cannot escape these pressures – the separation of self from societal pressures is larger than just separating oneself from parental pressures. Unlike *Joker*, the characters in *A separation* resign themselves to the society they live in and conclude in the same place they begun, only disillusioned now.

Therefore, while the endings may seem to vary greatly, they are clearly linked to the expected character and narrative arc. The idea of a character beginning in a place of naivety, undergoing necessary life experiences, and finally emerging with more knowledge of oneself, is evident in all of these films. The difference lies in the format of the external forces. If the external pressures concern family or parents, the characters have a positive ending. This is simply because it is easier to separate oneself from these pressures. However, if the external pressures concern larger concepts such as society or politics, the characters have a negative ending. The only outlier is *Shrek*, but I believe the positive ending is to do with its genre as a children's film, in which a positive growth is necessary for this format of films.

9 **Motifs**

The motif of want and desire is common to all of these scripts. It is usually present in the dichotomy of ‘what do *I* want’ in comparison with ‘what does everybody else want’. As discussed in the previous paragraph about genre, these films deal with coming-of-age concepts. Because of this, the distinction between self and other is central to the script. The dramatization of this theme often pitches the personal want against the external want. In *Turning Red*, Mei begs her mum to let her go to the 4* concert (personal want) but her mum immediately refuses (external want). In *Whip It*, the opening scene of Bliss trying to get blue dye out of her hair (personal want) in order to look presentable for her mother’s beauty pageant (external want).

Often, the motif is introduced as a hierarchy, with everybody else’s wants in a higher status than the protagonist’s. However, as the film progresses, and the main character sheds expectations from other characters or social obligations, the hierarchy inverts. Traditionally, the ending will showcase the character either putting what they want first and making a clear decision towards this. At the end of *Shrek*, Shrek’s choice to marry and live with Fiona explicitly shows Shrek prioritizing his own wants. In *The Meyerowitz Stories*, Danny drops his father’s plate of cookies and states that he is going to LA to meet his brother. This is a clear visualization of him finally putting his wants over his father’s.

Conclusions

A critical discussion of the films *Whip It*; *Turning Red*; *The Meyerowitz Stories (New and Selected)*; *Joker*; *A Separation*; and *Shrek* illuminates several commonalities and differences. With the central theme in mind, I have provided an in-depth exploration of a range of films, considering how my own screenplay fits into this discussion. Script devices are very similar, with a linear movement towards a certain goal. There is rarely voice over

narration, experimental structures or flashbacks. Conflict is threefold, combining external, interpersonal and personal conflicts together. Attitude is often satirical and tongue-in-cheek. However, if the film is considering specific current events, it is usually serious in tone. Protagonists battling familial or cultural pressures often follow a line of positive growth, moving towards autonomy and maturity. Conversely, protagonists battling larger societal and political pressures often have a disillusionment arc. These films ultimately aim to inspire change, encouraging audiences to consider the social structures around them that may be damaging to their sense of self.

EXEGESIS PART TWO

Introduction

In the second part of my exegesis, I will reflect on my creative practice as research. This will include the intentions, experiments, conclusions, decisions, and dramatic narrative of my screenplay.

I will first provide a brief synopsis, highlighting the core elements of my story. Then I will consider more specific elements within my screenplay, such as the intentions, world of the story, protagonist, antagonist (or antagonistic forces), and dramatic tension. This section will explore how I have both implemented and experimented with core storytelling elements in my own work. Overall, I will be reflecting on the decisions and creative intentions I have made in my screenplay, *Let Go of Your Hands [Let Go]*.

2 Synopsis

The synopsis establishes the core elements of a story, giving the audience an overview of the characters, the setting, the conflict, and the conclusion. The importance of a synopsis is to ‘give the reader a full, if brief, account of the whole text so that they can follow its main points without having to read it themselves’ (Newcastle University, 2023). It is crucial that the synopsis gives a ‘full’ account of the text and is not a teaser or trailer of the narrative. As Brindley (2009, p.4) states:

‘The generally accepted idea of a synopsis... deals in 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. The last is crucial; the key element of any synopsis is a clear indication of the story’s structure. That is, how the story begins, develops and ends.’

2.1 Synopsis for *Let Go*

Let Go explores the relationships, pressures, and cultural identities of a mixed race Hong Kong Chinese-Pakeha family in present day Aotearoa New Zealand. Daughter, Katie Leung, is at the airport ready to go to Oxford for her PhD in Asian Studies. She is proud of her heritage and makes huge efforts to maintain a connection to her cultural identity, including succumbing to cultural and familial pressures. However, Katie has an epiphany at the boarding gate that this is not what *she* wants, but rather what *her parents* want. Realizing that she cannot go through with this, she runs out of the airport only to be too struck by cultural pressures to admit the truth to her proud parents. Making up a lie that she cannot board the plane without her birth certificate, the family rush back home to try and find it so Katie can board the next day.

Meanwhile, older brother, David Leung, who has chosen to have limited contact with the family and is not proud of his mixed heritage, is unwillingly present for Katie's farewell. During an awkward reunion with the family, he secretly discovers that his wife is pregnant. Suddenly struck by the realization he will not have anything to culturally pass down to his child, David goes on his own search for a lost gold chain that was passed down to him by his father.

The siblings end up using a photograph that has both the birth certificate and gold chain displayed to find the objects. Through this photograph, they visit several culturally and personally significant spaces, bonding over their shared understanding of being mixed and the pressures they face to maintain a connection to their heritage. While David finds his necklace, Katie cannot find her birth certificate. After Katie gets drunk at a karaoke place and admits she doesn't want to go to Oxford, David realizes there may be more to Katie's story. This is confirmed when, taking Katie home, David finds her birth certificate underneath her

bed. However, he also finds an unfinished graphic novel chronicling Katie's experiences in the family.

When Mum reveals she has solved the (non-existent) problem, Katie explodes and says this is not her dream but theirs. Angry and disappointed, her father reveals he wanted to go to Oxford but sacrificed this dream for his family's economic needs. He comments that both his children are disappointments. While Dad has stormed out, Katie and David end up talking about their struggles. Reconciling with their father and expressing the pressure they feels, Katie ultimately decides to still get on the plane. She maintains that she has worked hard for this and will still go. David, disappointed, slips the graphic novel into her suitcase. When on the plane, David makes a point to ask his parents to come for dinner with him and his wife, making the first step to reconnect.

The ending shows Katie on her stopover in Hong Kong. Finding the graphic novel in her suitcase, she decides not to get onto her flight to England. She sits down at a park in Hong Kong and starts to finish her drawings.

Let Go is centered on exploring the theme of personal wants vs external pressures within the context of mixed-race and Asian identity.

3 Intentions

One of the main goals in *Let Go* is to frame the coming-of-age genre within a cultural context. Katie and David are in their early 20s and 30s respectively, yet are still learning to separate their own wants from the pressure of their parents and culture. In a Western society, this would be seen as fairly late for coming-of-age. However, this is normal in East Asian societies: 'for young women growing up in Hong Kong, the data create a picture of very delayed transitions to adulthood, with a variety of experiences

occurring while they are still living with their parents' (Achmad et al., 2007, p.164). As a mixed-race Hong Kong Chinese woman myself, I often find that well known coming-of-age films are not always relatable to other cultures. Films such as *The Breakfast Club* (Hughes, 1985), *Superbad* (Rogen & Goldberg, 2007), *Ladybird* (Gerwig, 2017), and *Edge of Seventeen* (Craig, 2016), seemed to summarize the coming-of-age experience as one of sex, drugs, and rebellion, rarely taking into account the nuances of puberty in ethnic households.

While traditional milestones are still present in non-Western coming-of-age experiences, there is also the added layer of cultural identity and racism. This is evidenced by Gay (1994) who states that American middle school educators must understand the 'additional dimensions for African-American, Hispanic, Asian-American, and Native-American youth because of factors of race and ethnicity' (p.1). With regards to the cinematic landscape, I identified a gap in coming-of-age media that authentically showed ethnic and mixed race characters. While there has been a noticeable boom in the last five years - *Turning Red* (Collins & Shi, 2022), *Ginny and Georgia* (Lampert, 2021), *Never Have I Ever* (Fisher & Kaling, 2020) - these still followed the traditional format of a young, often teenage, protagonist going through a difficult rebellious stage in school. I am interested in showing the 'delayed transitions to adulthood' of East Asian communities.

Another important intention was to portray a multi-ethnic family and platform the genuine experiences of mixed-race individuals. Mixed-race representation in cinema is statistically low, with Asian and Pacific Island (API) communities explicitly asking for more mixed-race representation. In the 2021 Coalition of Asia Pacific in Entertainment (CAPE) study for API in the entertainment industry, it was found that 'the most common suggestions from respondents surveyed is to see more portrayals of mixed-race and multi-ethnic

characters and families’ (p.3). This lack of representation, coupled with my own lived experiences as a mixed-race Asian individual, has hugely shaped my script. Showcasing a genuine mixed-race and multi-ethnic experience is an important consideration in *Let Go*.

4 The Audience

When creating an original piece of work, it is important to consider how the audience will respond. Using Ted Hope’s terms, I must consider what the audience will ‘take away’ from the story. The main take away of *Let Go* is to explore the nuances of Asian culture, mixed-race identity and family pressures.

Intellectually, I want audiences to question their understanding of ‘normal’ coming-of-age experiences and milestones. By reshaping Western cinema’s portrayal of the coming-of-age genre, audiences can become more open to other cultures and cultural experiences that may differ from their own. Furthermore, I want audiences to challenge their preconceived ideas about multi-ethnic and cultural households. By exploring an authentic Asian family dynamic, *Let Go* will provide an intellectual takeaway of confronting ideas about family, coming-of-age, culture and mixed-race identity.

Emotionally, it is important for the audience to feel empathy for the character’s experiences. Because *Let Go* is about a cultural experience that may not feel immediately universal, empathy creates a connection between the unfamiliar experience and the audience. Representing the Asian and mixed-race experience in a way that evokes empathy will allow audiences to gain insight into a different culture. In order to provide true representation, I believe the takeaway should focus on encouraging audience to empathize with experiences that may be different to their own.

A key image in *Let Go* that visually embodies this takeaway is actually in the argument between the family near to the end of my screenplay. In this scene, it has just been revealed that Katie does not want to go to Oxford and is only doing it for her parents. Simultaneously, the parents find out that David is having a baby with his wife. There is a burst of emotion and hurt between each family member. The crucial moment in this scene is the fact that each family member talk past each other. There is the language barrier of the father, the cultural barrier between the parents and the intergenerational cultural barrier between parents and mixed-race children. The argument is strongly emotive and summarizes the nuances of multi-ethnic and mixed-race identities in a way that is rarely seen in cinema. The characters try to explain their emotions but their dialogue is refracted through cultural and language barriers.

I was personally inspired by the final scene in *Everything, Everywhere, All At Once* (Kwan & Scheinert, 2022) where Joy and her mother struggle to connect, stumbling through their different languages and cultures. The scene was deeply evocative and showed the dynamics of Asian familial relationships through a lens of compassion and empathy. Inspired by this, I used empathy as the driving force to explore the nuances and complexities of mixed-race and multi-ethnic identities.

5 The World of the Story

The world of the story is the context, setting, and space that the narrative and characters exist in. McKee (1998, p.69) defines the world of the story as its ‘setting’:

‘A story SETTING is four-dimensional – period, duration, location, level of conflict...

PERIOD is a story’s place and 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.’

In ‘level of conflict’, McKee defines the potential levels as ‘inner, even unconscious conflicts’, ‘personal conflicts’, ‘battles with institutions in society’, or ‘struggles against forces of the environment’, and says ‘your story maybe sit at any one or any combination of these levels’. This definition is relevant to my screenplay as the levels of conflict in *Let Go* are directly relevant to the society and environment. The narrative of the story is driven by visiting spaces that manifest culture, memory and identity. Thus, the connection between setting and conflict is highly relevant to my own story.

Furthermore, Douglas (2011, p.187) distinguishes between the *setting* and the *world* of the story, when talking about the TV series *House* (Shore, 2004-2012) and *ER* (Chrichton, 1994-2009):

‘No one would mistake *House* for a show about Chicago. Instead, House’s world is his diagnostic unit in this hospital; and within that, the internal landscape of House’s need to overcome “a world of pain” (his own) propels the stories. And no one would mistake House’s hospital for the one in *ER*, although it was also in Chicago.’

This citation captures an important distinction between the world of the story and the literal setting. Despite *House* and *ER* being both literally set in Chicago, they become different TV shows because of the world of the story – the ‘internal landscape’, the beliefs, and cultures.

5.1 The World of *Let Go*

I will be using McKee and Douglas’ definitions to assess the world in *Let Go*. The period and location is present day suburbia in East Auckland, New Zealand. This area was not only chosen because of the population of Asian immigrants in East Auckland, but also because of my personal experience living in this area. The duration is three days. The level of conflict combine the ‘battles with institutions in society’, ‘personal conflicts’ and

‘unconscious conflicts’. The Leung family unit is the central setting of the screenplay. The rules, culture and operation of this family set the ‘internal landscape’ of *Let Go* and distinguishes this story from others set in East Auckland.

The cultural setting and milieu of *Let Go* is very important to the screenplay. Rooted in Asian culture, duty and respect are highly valued qualities, particularly respect for the sacrifices of elders. There is an lineage-based hierarchy in *Let Go* where the wants of the parents ultimately veto the wants of the children. Disrupting this hierarchy implicitly means disrespecting one’s parents, lineage and culture. Success and education are also valued by the Asian cultural setting, especially by the Leung familial setting, coming from a low-class, low-education background. I also touch on the gender-based hierarchy of Asian cultures in my screenplay, briefly exploring the duties of the daughter in comparison to the son. Overall, duty, respect and success are of high value. Disrupting the lineage-based hierarchy and putting the wants of oneself above elders are of low value.

6 Protagonist

The protagonist is the central character in the screenplay – the one who drives the action and whom we empathize with. Aronson (2010, p.79) writes that ‘Conventional narrative is all about the protagonist’s journey’ and goes on to list these identifying markers of the 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 highpoints ...’

Because *Let Go* is closer to an ensemble or dual protagonist script, it is necessary to consider other definitions of ‘protagonist’. Truby (2007, p.57) disputes the idea that the protagonist be conceived of as an individual and rather explores the protagonist as part of a ‘web’:

‘The single biggest mistake writers make when creating characters is that they think of the hero and all the other characters as separate individuals... [Instead] think of all your characters as part of a web in which each helps define the others. To put it another way, character is often defined by who he is not... All characters connect and define each other in four major ways: by story function, archetype, theme, and opposition.’

This is highly relevant as my screenplay is centered on the potential breaking down of a group (family), as well as the quest of a protagonist.

6.1 The Protagonist in *Let Go*

I will be assessing the motivation, stakes, and arc of protagonist, Katie.

6.1.1 Motivation

Katie is an early 20s mixed race Hong Kong Chinese-Pakeha student. We first meet Katie as she boards the plane to Oxford to begin her PhD in Asian studies. Katie has two conflicting wants – to make her parents proud by going to Oxford, but also to get out of going to Oxford because she secretly does not want to go. What she needs is to have the space away from her parental and cultural pressures to discover herself. Her inner goal is to become an artist in Hong Kong.

The key strategy Katie uses is avoidance and compliance. Because her want is in direct contrast to her parents, she feels that actively working towards her own desires is a disrespect of her parent’s sacrifices, and she feels conflicted to admit her wants. Because of this, Katie

avoids being direct with her wants and lies about things to get out of them. This is evident in the fact Katie would rather lie about needing a birth certificate to avoid boarding the plane, than outwardly tell her parents the truth.

6.1.2 Stakes

The stakes are the loss of Katie's identity and her family. As a mixed-race person, Katie's cultural identity is tied to her family. She feels that disrespecting her parents is a disrespect of her Asian father and thus, her own identity. Katie feels that by refusing to do what her parents want (and refusing to enact the character of a good Asian daughter), she is giving up a part of her identity. Furthermore, Katie is close with her father and has a good relationship with him. She feels that he will no longer be proud of her if she does not fulfil his expectations. Another layer of stakes, is in the fact Katie often feels overlooked by her parents in favour of her brother. She feels that the only way to gain her parents attention is to continuously make them proud.

The stakes escalate every time Katie visits old places from her memory and realizes more what she wants but also more that this may disappoint and disrespect her parents. The separation of herself from her parent's expectations is terrifying for Katie and the more she learns about herself the less she can go back to who she was.

6.1.3 Arc

This is the kind of story where the character changes. As this is a coming-of-age story, the focus is on the character becoming more independent by the end of the script. Katie is introduced as naïve and lacking in autonomy - She focusses her energy into fulfilling her parent's wants and cultural pressures. By the end, Katie has made choices for herself and taken a step towards a life that she wants to lead.

7 Antagonist

The antagonist, or antagonistic force, is the entity that opposes what the protagonist wants. They ultimately create the obstacles that stand in the way of the protagonist and their goal. Antagonists are commonly thought of as individuals that antagonize the protagonist. However, McKee's (1998, p.318) definition of an antagonist is particularly significant because it explores the way an antagonist is a force that pushes the protagonist to grow and the story to become more solid:

“Forces of antagonism” doesn't necessarily refer to a specific antagonist or villain. In appropriate genres arch-villains, like the Terminator, are a delight, but by “forces of antagonism” we mean the sum total of all forces that oppose the character's will and desire... A protagonist and his story can only be as intellectually fascinating and emotionally compelling as the forces of antagonism make them...’

7.1 The Antagonist in *Let Go*

The antagonist force in *Let Go* are the parents. The pressure of the father proves to be an antagonistic force to both Katie and David's personal and career wants, however their mother is an antagonist force to their identity wants. Both parents try to oppose Katie's wants for her own sense of autonomy, using guilt tripping tactics to encourage her to stay part of the cultural and familial unit. The parents' constant conversation about lack of opportunities, childhood suffering and financial stress are all guilt tripping strategies.

However, these tactics are not consciously employed and do not have a malicious intention. Both parents use guilt tripping tactics unconsciously, believing that their suffering and culture necessitates an inherent family hierarchy. The critical turning point in my screenplay is the parents' moment of realization that these tactics are harmful. Ultimately, by

the end of the script, the antagonists (parents) are confronted with the fact they must change in order to maintain the relationship with their children.

8 Dramatic Tension

In this section, I will discuss how dramatic tension, or suspense, is generated in my screenplay. This will include describing how my choice of character turning points has been used to build tension throughout.

Dramatic tension can be defined in terms of plot and/or character. The plot-line tension is derived from a character's need. This need is the ultimate question of the narrative. Mamet (1991, p.64) writes that the audience wants to know the answer to a question posed at the start of the story: 'The solution of the problem posited at the end of the experience is the end of the story.' In a later work, Mamet (2005) clarifies that the question posed has these components:

- '1) WHO WANTS WHAT?
- 2) WHAT HAPPENS IF THEY DON'T GET IT?
- 3) WHY NOW?'

These plot questions are the basis of dramatic tension and are important to maintaining the viewers' attention. Crucially, the audience feel a tension between the character's needs and the narrative conflict that make it difficult for the character to achieve this need.

Character tension can be divided into two subsections: dramatic tension derived from the relationship line, and dramatic tension derived from the inner line. Using the relationship line to create tension means audiences are focussed on the connections and conflicts between

characters, rather than within the character's internal self. Aronson (2000, p.16) writes that television series generate interest by centering on a family, or group that functions *like* a family, and presenting threats to or conflict within that family:

[A] successful series television presents a 'village' - a community with its own style and concerns... A group of compelling characters which functions like a family and demonstrates a range of ongoing problems, conflicts and ambivalences that are capable, if necessary, of being revisited every episode for three to five seasons.

Furthermore, Weston (2003) puts the 'emotional event' at the heart of the story, which she defines as an important 'emotional transaction' that changes the relationship between characters:

'How are the characters different – or what has changed in their relationship – from the beginning...? *Events* are not just the incidents of the plot. An *event* is truer than the text. It looks beneath surface, as a shift in the emotional lives of the characters. It is the ultimate subject choice... It's *what happens* in the story.'

Using inner conflict to create tension means audiences are focussed on a character's relationship with themselves - their 'character arc' and whether they change - to generate suspense. Cleary (2004) asks: 'What inner need eats away at them until they change in response to it? What does the protagonist need to understand if they are going to be ok?'. This concept of understanding whether a protagonist will 'be ok' is crucial to the dramatic tension in a screenplay. By definition, the protagonist elicits empathy and compassion from the audience. Therefore, the audience is waiting to see whether they will feel comfortable or satisfied in 'leaving' the character at the end of the film – usually marked by an understanding that the character will 'be ok' beyond the timeline of the film itself.

8.1 Dramatic Tension in *Let Go*

I will be dividing my discussion of dramatic tension into plot line, relationship line and inner line. I will identify the steps by which tension escalates in my script by exploring the set-up, turning points, moments of truth, climax, and resolutions.

In *Let Go*, the central question, or what the audience is waiting for, changes between the different lines. On the plot line, the audience is waiting to see if Katie will find her birth certificate and go to Oxford; on the relationship line, the audience is waiting to see the reconciliation between the siblings and the confrontation of their parent's behaviour; and on the inner line, the audience is waiting to see whether Katie breaks free from parental pressures, and if David makes a decision to reconnect with his family. On a combined inner line, the audience is waiting to see if both David and Katie resolve the difficulties with their cultural identity. These three dramatic questions are introduced throughout the set up in pages 1-25.

On Page 2, Katie states that no one knows 'what' she is when she does not straighten her hair. This immediately indicates a conflict in her identity – how she appears to other people vs how she feels inside (inner line). The second part of this dialogue, that Mum prefers Katie with straightened hair, sets up a conflict between Katie and Mum (relationship line). The inner line is further explored on page 15, where Katie is explicitly shown not wanting to go to England, despite doing so for her parents:

INT. BATHROOM – MEANWHILE

Katie in the cubicle with her pants down. She has her head in her hands. She takes a deep breath.

KATIE

It's just 4 years in England.
You'll make everyone happy and
proud and then you can do whatever
you want with your life. 4 years.
Easy. You can do it.

The establishment of the family relationship line begins on page 2: There is a conversation between Mum, Dad, and Katie that shows the awkwardness around the older sibling, David:

MUM
David?

KATIE
Is that David?

DAD
Is he here already?

Dad fumbles with the stereo, trying to connect the phone.

KATIE
I didn't know he was coming

DAD
Put him on speaker

This interaction, coupled with David's own reaction to the family on the following page 3, solidifies a dramatic tension in the relationship line:

David watches them scramble for Katie's passport. It's in her backpack. He does not alert any of the family of his presence. He doesn't want them to see him. Or maybe he secretly wants them to-

The obvious tension between these characters set up a question on the relationship line where the audience is not only waiting to discover what has happened, but whether the family will reconcile in some way during the film.

The last dramatic question to be established is the plot line question. The plot tension is created between pages 21-24. Here we see Katie realize that she cannot go through with her parent's wants, but also cannot imagine disrespecting their sacrifices by admitting this to them. On page 25, we are fully introduced to the plot line question: How will Katie keep up this lie to her family?

Her parents have proud, expectant faces. They've done so much for her. She can't let them down, but she can't go either.

MUM
Let's go to the gate together. You
can't miss this.

DAD
This is a once in a lifetime
opportunity, let's go. Don't be
scared.

KATIE
I'm NOT scared, I just...I just.

What? MUM What? DAD

KATIE
I couldn't get on the plane
without...

Lightbulb moment.

KATIE (CONT'D)
...a birth certificate

Perhaps what is particularly tense about this plot line question, is the fact audiences implicitly know the answer from the beginning of the film: it is impossible to maintain this lie. Therefore, not only is the audience tensely waiting for an inevitable conclusion, but they are also waiting for the confrontation of this inevitable conclusion. Because a high level of tension occurs on all three lines around the same time, this helps to elevate dramatic tension and conflict in the script.

8.2 Turning Points in *Let Go*

I will now discuss the main turning points for Katie, exploring why each moment is a 'point of no return' for the character's growth.

1. Katie's conversation with the mixed child, Lucy, at the airport gate. Here, Katie realizes what she has given up to please her parents. Being confronted by a mirror-image of her younger, more innocent self, Katie ultimately realizes she cannot go through with this decision.
2. Katie's choice to lie about the birth certificate is the moment where plot line and inner line tensions collide. Unable to be honest to her parents, Katie makes a decision that

fuels the plot of the script – needing to find her birth certificate. However, she has knowingly sent her family on a wild goose chase to avoid the truth.

3. Katie's conversation with Tracey, a mirror image of a future self, makes Katie realize she has to make a decision. This is a moment of truth for Katie, where she realizes that she has changed and nothing can be the same again. This moment occurs just after the middle of the script.
4. Katie's revelation to David that she does not want to go to Oxford shows a moment of true honesty towards someone. Although she is not sober, this is still the first time she has told anyone what she genuinely feels. This is the 'end section' climax of the film where momentum starts to build. At this point in the timeline, Katie is meant to go to board a second flight the next day and the siblings have just spent the whole day looking for her birth certificate. The addition of this revelation into the mix means that there is one more secret (David's knowledge of the situation) to keep, which signals to the audience that something is bound to spill.
5. Katie's final choice to still go to England to 'find herself', but not to study is her first step to an genuine and independent life. While the audience feels somewhat fulfilled with this decision, they know that this turning point is not the end of the script yet.
6. Katie's final choice to stay in Hong Kong during the stopover and finish her graphic novel is the resolved ending point that is satisfying for the audience. Here, Katie has changed markedly since the beginning of the script. The dramatic tension is resolved on all three lines, with Katie finally being honest to her family and herself about what she wants, reconciling with her brother and also making an independent choice.

As demonstrated, my script contains several key dramatic questions on the plot line, relationship line and inner line. These questions are ultimately related to Cleary's (2004) statement: 'what inner need gnaws away at them until they change in response to it? What

two impulses are they torn between? How conscious of this are they?’ and much of the plot line action also revolves around these inner questions of character needs. Because of the focus on inner needs, I have discussed the way protagonist turning points elevate dramatic tension in the script, identifying the different points of no return for protagonist, Katie.

Conclusion

In part two of my exegesis, I have reflected on my screenplay, *Let Go of Your Hands*. I have explored relevant theoretical concepts in Screenwriting and demonstrated knowledge of these including intention, the world of the story, protagonist, antagonist and dramatic tension. Furthermore, I have shown how my own screenplay both embodies and experiments with these conventions.

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