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Bottle Money and the Audience's Expectations of the Mystery Drama

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Abstract:

The objective of my exegesis is twofold. Firstly I want to explore the key elements of the mystery drama in an attempt to write a screenplay that lives up to the expectations of the genre's audience because, "constant exposure to a previous succession of films has led the audience to recognize certain formal elements as charged with an accretion of meaning" (Grant, 1995, p. 21). As a result I intend to study these formal elements, otherwise known as key signifiers, within the mystery drama, by looking at film exemplars within this genre and related literature. In particular, I will analyse *Winter's Bone* (Kranik, 2010), *Mystic River* (Eastwood, 2003) and *21 Grams* (Iñárritu, 2003), films that belong to the mystery drama genre. These films also contain themes of family, grief, guilt and revenge, which bring me to my second objective. I intend to explore how the mystery drama genre can assist me in the exploration of themes in *Bottle Money* explore the crippling effect that the disappearance of Emily's 6-year-old sister Amy has had, not only on her, but also on her family and the wider community. In particular I want to focus on Emily's 9-year-old niece Katy, who is denied her childhood because she has to take on adult responsibilities, and also local pig farmer Ben, who Emily's mother Katherine and many of the local townsfolk have accused of being involved in Amy's disappearance. I aim to research the structure of screenplays and contemporary theories of screen narrative to see how this can support my aim to write a screenplay that contains strong themes and falls within the genre of mystery drama.

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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.

1 Introduction

This exegesis frames my creative thesis, *Bottle Money*, in terms of my motivations as a writer, the wider genre of the mystery drama with which it shares elements, models of dramatic structure, and my plans for the script following completion of the programme.

1.1 *Bottle Money*'s Synopsis & Genre

Bottle Money is a small-town mystery drama set in rural New Zealand that focuses on three generations of women from a local family, whose lives have been shaped by the disappearance of their 6-year-old daughter and sister Amy, fourteen years earlier. The protagonist, 28-year-old Emily Wilde, reluctantly returns home after being absent for eleven years and discovers her family is still living in the shadow of their tragic past. Emily believes that uncovering the truth about her missing sister will help them move on, and more importantly, spare her 9-year-old niece Katy, from living within an environment based on hatred, fear and delusion.

Bottle Money falls predominantly within the genre of drama in its exploration of the breakdown of a family. However, because, “genres are frequently combined to resonate with meaning. To enrich character, and to create varieties of mood and emotion” (McKee, 1997, p. 92), I intend to use elements of the mystery genre to enhance the *drama* within *Bottle Money*'s narrative.

2 Mystery Dramas on Screen in Relation to *Bottle Money*

2.1 History of the Mystery Drama

Jule Selbo (2014) states that, “over the thousands of years of storytelling between Aristotle’s time and today, the drama genre emerged” (Selbo, 2014, p. 69) and “by the late 1800s “dramas” centered on explorations of human frailties, setbacks, familial discontent and investigations of self” (Selbo, 2014, p. 71). In the early 1900s silent melodramas often included elements associated with the crime genre, of which mystery is a sub-genre:

“accentuated character types conceived for the stage – outright heroes, ladies in distress, and villains with the stigma of leering eyes and large moustaches. With good folks wronged, those of strength and integrity would resolve the issues. Viewers enjoyed the villainy before the hero would conquer it, and through the darker character the beginnings of a tradition soon arose” (Sorrento, 2012, p. 9).

Regeneration (Walsh, 1915) is an example of the silent crime drama that follows the life of Owen, a young Irish American boy who’s forced into a life of poverty after his mother dies. As a result, Owen is forced to live on the street eventually turning to a life of crime. The benevolent Marie Deering eventually rehabilitates Owen. Contemporary audiences expectations of the drama and mystery genres have not altered much because, “constant exposure to a previous succession of films has led the audience to recognize certain formal elements as charged with an accretion of meaning” (Grant, 1995, p. 21). These formal elements, otherwise known as key signifiers are exemplified in the films *Winter’s Bone* (Granik, 2010), *Mystic River* (Eastwood, 2003), and *21 Grams* (Iñárritu, 2003), films that have influenced *Bottle Money*.

2.2 Contemporary Audiences' Expectations of the Mystery Drama

As previously mentioned, I intend *Bottle Money* to fit within the mystery drama genre. I intend to study the genres' key signifiers, that is, the conventions specific to, "settings, roles, events and values that define individual genres and their subgenres" (McKee, 1997, p. 86) to ensure that I satisfy the audience's expectation of the this genre. During my research I analysed *Winter's Bone* (Kranik, 2010), *Mystic River* (Eastwood, 2003) and *21 Grams* (Iñárritu, 2003), films that belong to the mystery drama genre. These films also contain themes of family, grief, guilt and revenge, and thereby, I also aim to explore how the mystery drama genre can assist me in the exploration of these themes in *Bottle Money*. Firstly I will discuss the key signifiers of the drama genre, followed by the key signifiers of the mystery genre:

a) Conflict at a crucial moment in the protagonist's life:

Contemporary audiences expect that a drama will have "a character or characters that are at a crucial moment in their lives" (Selbo, 2014, p. 70). This key signifier is illustrated in *Winter's Bone* (Granik, 2010) when its protagonist, Ree is faced with finding her missing father or risk losing the family home, exemplified by Sheriff Baskin's dialogue: "Jessup signed over everything. If he doesn't show at trial, see, the way the deal works is, you all gonna lose this place" (Granik & Rosellini, 2010, p. 9). *Mystic River's* (Eastwood, 2003) protagonist Jimmy is similarly in conflict at a crucial moment in his life when he discovers his daughter is murdered, exemplified by the script's action: "And Jimmy SCREAMS. Love and rage in equal quantities [...] Ropes of spit shoot from his mouth. Screaming" (Granik & Rosellini, 2010, p. 30). *21 Grams* (Iñárritu, 2003) also contains stories about central characters being in conflict at a crucial moment in their life. In *21 Gram's* there are three protagonists

due to the screenplay's multiple narrative structure and all three characters illustrate this key signifier: Jack Jordan has accidentally killed a father and his two daughters and is ridden with guilt, exemplified by his dialogue: "I saw those girls dying and I ran away" (Arriaga, 2003, p. 49). Christina Peck's husband and two young daughters have been killed by a hit and run and Paul Rivers falls in love with Christina, shortly after receiving her dead husband's heart during a transplant operation. During the study of these films I found that having a protagonist who is in conflict at a crucial moment in their life leads to the exploration of strong themes and emotions, like grief, guilt and revenge, which aim to promote audience engagement. To satisfy the drama genre audiences' expectations I intend to place *Bottle Money's* protagonist in conflict at a crucial moment in her life, in the hope this too, will enhance my audience's engagement. The conflict at a crucial moment in the protagonist's life is illustrated when Emily is asked to return home to her dysfunctional family after being estranged from them for eleven years to look after her 9-year-old niece Katy. Emily's conflict is demonstrated by her dialogue to Katy: "this is not going to be easy for either of us, but I'm here until your mum comes home." This key signifier that brings Emily into contact with her estranged family also supports *Bottle Money's* theme of *family*.

b) Strong emotions and themes:

The contemporary audience expects a drama to contain strong emotions and themes, because drama is defined as "a situation that is highly emotional, tragic or turbulent" (Hanks, 1990, p. 377), which aims to enhance audience engagement. This is exemplified in *Winter's Bone* (Granik, 2010) when Ree confronts members of her close and extended family, which in turn leads to rising anger and frustration

between the characters, illustrated by the screenplay's action: "Teardrop lunges at Ree, grabs her hair and pulls her face back to look at him. He leans his face in very close to hers" (Granik & Rosellini, 2010, p. 18). Christina's strong emotion of grief in *21 Grams* (Iñárritu, 2003) is also reflected by the screenplay's action: "*She looks downcast, in despair. She looks at her sister and drinks down all the tequila in her glass again*" (Arriaga, 2003, p. 58). I intend to satisfy the contemporary audience's expectations of the mystery drama by *Bottle Money's* by also focusing on strong emotional themes of grief, guilt and moral dilemmas within family relationships because, "dramas often dig into the essence of the human experience, exposing the interior obstacles that stall a person's ability to cope or move forward in life" (Selbo, 2014, p. 72). This inability to move forward in life is demonstrated by Katherine's dialogue to Emily regarding the disappearance of her sister: 'it's your fault. You should have looked after your little sister.' Emily's action reveals her feelings of guilt when she, 'marches into Amy's bedroom and pack Amy's clothing and belongings into black bin liners and cardboard boxes in a frenzied state.' This key signifier thereby also assists *Bottle Money's* exploration of the themes of family, grief and guilt.

c) Realistic characters:

Contemporary audiences expect the drama to set "up the character as an everyman or everywoman" (Selbo, 2014, p. 76). In other words, the drama has realistic characters, where "crises occur but daily necessities must be considered" (Selbo, 2014, p. 76) and this is necessary if the audience is to relate to and thereby engage with the protagonist. *Winter's Bone* (Granik, 2010) illustrates this in its opening scene by its representation of Ree and her sister Ashlee doing ordinary chores during

a time when their father is missing: “Ashlee helps her sister, REE, 17, hang laundry. Ree buttons Ashlee’s doll’s dress, hands it to her sister, and then picks up the full laundry basket” (Granik & Rosellini, 2010, p. 2). *Mystic River* (Eastwood, 2003) also has realistic characters, illustrated by Jimmy, who works in a small corner store he owns. He soon transforms from a happy, loving father to a grief-stricken father as he visits a local morgue and funeral home shortly after his daughter is discovered murdered. The script does not shy away from the reality of Jimmy’s situation, illustrated by his dialogue: “that’s what Katie looked like when I saw her in the morgue. Like someone put her in a bag and then had beaten the bag with pipes” (Helgeland, 2003, p. 43). *21 Gram’s* (Iñárritu, 2003) also portrays its characters in a realistic way, illustrated by Christina’s use of drink and drugs to numb the pain she feels following the death of her husband and two young daughters. Realistic characters create authenticity which leads to audience engagement because, “the more “real” the characters are and the more “real” their interaction are with the world, the stronger the specific knowledge component of the audience can be engaged” (Selbo, 2014, p. 76). I have attempted to portray realistic characters in *Bottle Money* through their responses to the situations and people they encounter: The bond between Emily and Katy will occur slowly and incrementally and will be tested throughout the narrative. I intend Katy’s reaction to her Aunt Emily to be a realistic portrayal of an independent youngster, who has had to look after herself for a long time, exemplified by her dialogue to Emily, ‘I’m not eating that shit,’ after Emily changed her diet from junk food to healthy salads. Emily too, hesitates to form a relationship with Katy, because she has shut herself off from her family in an attempt to block out the past. Emily’s inability to face the past is exemplified by *Bottle Money’s* action when she is unable to enter her missing sister’s bedroom:

“She pauses briefly outside the door with the sign ‘Amy’ but continues on.” Once again, this key signifier also helps me to explore themes of family, grief and guilt within *Bottle Money*.

d) Stories about family and community:

Contemporary audiences expect the drama genre to have a narrative strongly based around the main protagonist and their family where “life-shattering trauma occurs randomly, decisively and irrevocably, crippling the chances not just of those directly affected, but spreading to others in family and community” (Horne, 2004). This is demonstrated in *Winter’s Bone’s* (Granik, 2010) by its constant referencing to Ree’s family’s impending eviction from their home if her father is not found, alongside her desire to keep the family together, exemplified by her dialogue: “I’ve got those two boys and mom to tend to, man. I need him” (Granik & Rosellini, 2010, p. 21). *Mystic River’s* (Eastwood, 2003) story is also based around the protagonist and his family having to deal primarily with the death of Jimmy’s daughter Katie. However, the screenplay also deals with the nuances and struggle within families on an everyday basis, illustrated by Jimmy’s wife Annabeth’s dialogue to him: “you’ve got two other daughters. Don’t forget it” (Helgeland, 2003, p.14). Focus on the family is prevalent in *21 Grams* (Iñárritu, 2003): Jack’s wife and children are emotionally affected by his temper and abandonment, shown by Jack’s son’s action when he returns to the family home: “the boy walks up to Jack without looking at him, hugs him coldly and walks away again” (Arriaga, 2003, p. 89). I intend to support the drama genre’s focus on family within *Bottle Money* by concentrating on the interaction of family members years after the tragic event of the disappearance of 6-year-old Amy. I want to explore the different ways in which Amy’s mother and

two sisters have dealt with their guilt and grief and how this has affected the family years after the tragedy occurred: Emily's turmoil about the past has caused her to abandon her family and she now finds it difficult to form relationships. Her sister Rose's grief and guilt has resulted in her becoming a depressed alcoholic with suicidal tendencies, whilst her mother Katherine's grief and guilt has led to her desire for revenge. I also want *Bottle Money's* narrative to examine the effect this guilt, grief and anger has on the new generation, in particular Rose's 9-year-old daughter Katy. In addition, I want to explore whether the dysfunctional environment that she exists within can be altered, and if so, how?

I also want *Bottle Money* to support the drama's key signifier that suggests a narrative that goes beyond the family and spreads into the community. The audience's expectation of this is illustrated by *Bottle Money's* representation of Ben. His physical and emotional wellbeing have been damaged, having lived in a small, rural town for years under the suspicion of committing a horrific crime that he did not commit, exemplified by his dialogue, 'she took my fucking teeth' in reference to Katherine's previous beating that knocked his teeth out. As a result, my use of this key signifier of a narrative that surrounds 'family and community' also assists my exploration of the theme of revenge within *Bottle Money*.

e) Painful resolution:

Thomas Schatz (1981) writes, "The most significant feature of any generic narrative may be its resolution – that is, its effort to solve, even if temporarily, the conflicts that have disturbed the community welfare" (Schatz, 1981, p. 30). However, in drama the contemporary audience expects this resolution to also be painful because

this adds to a more realistic portrayal of the narrative, exemplified by Lenny Bruce's belief that "truth is what it is. Not what should be. Truth is what is" (Carney & Quart, 2000, p. vii). The painful resolution in *Winter's Bone* (Granik, 2010) is illustrated when Ree pulls her father's bones from the lake. The painful resolution appears in *Mystic River* (Eastwood, 2003) when Sean kills his childhood friend Dave out of revenge, only to be told by the police the following day they have found the killer of his daughter and Dave was innocent. The painful resolution is revealed in *21 Grams* (Iñárritu, 2003) when Paul, knowing his body is rejecting his new heart, dies from a self-inflicted shotgun wound. In studying these examples of drama, I found that their painful resolutions support Jule Selbo's (2014) belief: "even if, at the conclusion of the narrative, problems are worked out for the betterment of the protagonist's situation, there may still be pain and suffering that lingers within the story, and possibly into the future of the story" (Selbo, 2014, p. 71). This suffering ultimately creates a more realistic portrayal of the characters, which in turn engages the audience. To fulfill the contemporary audience's expectation of a painful resolution in *Bottle Money*, Rose drowns during the third-act's climax, which also supports my use of the themes of grief and guilt within *Bottle Money*.

f) Solving a mystery by investigation:

The contemporary audience expects that the mystery's narrative contains both "an event that takes place that is inexplicable" (Selbo, 2014, p. 61) and a protagonist who, "journeys to discover the truth" (Selbo, 2014, p. 61) of that event. *Winter's Bone* (Granik, 2010) illustrates this through Ree's dialogue and action when she tells Sheriff Baskin, "I'll find him," before setting off on a quest to question her extended family about the disappearance of her father (Granik & Rosellini, 2010). *Mystic*

River's (Eastwood, 2003) characters Sean and Jimmy also attempt to solve a crime as they search for the murderer of Jimmy's daughter, Katie, exemplified by Jimmy's dialogue: "I'm going to kill him, Katie. I'm going to find him before the police do and I'm going to kill him" (Helgeland, 2003, p. 64). *21 Grams*' (Iñárritu, 2003) characters Paul and Christina search for Jack, the driver who killed Christina's husband and two daughters, illustrated by Paul's conversation with the private investigator, who he hired to find Jack: "did you get what I asked for?" (Arriaga, 2003, p. 76). These journeys to discover the truth aim to draw the audience into the narrative and I intend to fulfil this mystery genre's key signifier by creating a protagonist who needs to solve the mysterious disappearance of her 6-year-old sister Amy. In doing so, this investigation aims to propel the plot forward and also create suspense, which is another key signifier of the mystery genre. This key signifier also forces *Bottle Money's* protagonist to face her family's past tragedy, which thereby gives me the opportunity to explore the themes of family, grief, guilt and revenge.

g) Suspense:

As mentioned, another expectation the contemporary audience has in relation to the mystery genre is the repetition of suspense, because it "is the key...it knocks away the routine of our lives with its swift thrill of action" (Sorrento, 2012, p. 6). This suspense is exemplified in *Winter's Bone* (Granik, 2010) by the rising conflict between Ree and the members of her community during the search for her father, illustrated when she visits her Uncle Teardrop: "he lunges at Ree, grabs her hair and pulls her face back to look at him. He leans his face in very close to hers" (Granik & Rosellini, 2010, p.18). Suspense is also evident in *Mystic River* (Eastwood, 2003), demonstrated by the dialogue that repetitively refers to Dave's contact with Katy on

the night she was murdered, illustrated when Jimmy tells Celeste, “I know he saw Katie the night she died, but didn’t tell me about it until after the police had questioned him about it” (Helgeland, 2003, p. 94). This draws the audience into the investigation of Katie’s murder, prompting them to question Dave’s guilt. *21 Grams* (Iñárritu, 2003) also uses dialogue to create suspense, exemplified when Christina says, “I’m going to kill him...I’m going to kill him,” in reference to Jack, the driver who killed her husband and two daughters, which prompts the audience to feel suspense in relation to the coming together of these characters. I aim to demonstrate suspense in *Bottle Money*’s in part by its representation of the two main suspects in Amy’s disappearance, Ben and Billy, as “monsters,” exemplified by Katherine’s dialogue: ‘that monster took our little Amy. *Bottle Money*’s enhances Ben’s “monstrosity” by his appearance: he’s “unshaven and has a star-shaped tattoo on the side of his neck,” because Thomas Sobchack (1995) believes “characterisation in a genre film often uses the shorthand of iconography. We know a person by what he wears as opposed to what he says and does” (Grant, 1995, p. 107). The use of suspense in *Bottle Money* is also crucial to its theme of revenge, because this theme needs suspense to be explored fully.

2.3 Structure of *Bottle Money*

“The function of STRUCTURE is to provide progressively building pressures that force characters into more and more difficult dilemmas where they must take more and more difficult risk-taking choices and actions, gradually revealing their true natures” (McKee, 1997, p. 105). I intend to achieve McKee’s (1997) idea in *Bottle Money* by using the three-act structure, dramatic tension, turning points, multiple choices for the protagonist and a changing point-of-view, because I intend that these

structural components will support the key signifiers of the mystery drama genre, and thereby satisfy this genre's audience's expectations. Furthermore, the structure will also intend to assist my exploration of strong themes within *Bottle Money*.

a) Three-act structure:

Bottle Money's structure follows the traditional three-act structure because this structure "builds in a fast pace and rising suspenseful chronological build to closure" (Aronson, 2010), which in turn, supports the mystery drama's key signifiers of increasing conflict and suspense.

b) Dramatic tension:

There are two main parts to the "engine" of *Bottle Money*, that is, what creates dramatic tension within the screenplay's narrative? The first part is Emily's plan to change Katy's dysfunctional physical and emotional environment. She does this initially by attempting to 'fix' her alcoholic and mentally unstable sister Rose so she can be a better mother to Katy. When this fails, Emily takes over Rose's role of 'mother' to Katy. This plan causes dramatic tension between Emily and her family, because the independent Katy, at first does not want to be 'mothered' by Emily, exemplified when she tells her to "fuck off." Tension is also created by Emily's plan as it cause Rose to feel threatened and jealous, illustrated by her emotive language to Emily, 'Don't tell me what's best for Katy. I'm her mother, not you!'

The second part of *Bottle Money*'s "engine" is Emily's attempt to help her family move on from living in the past in relation to the disappearance of Amy. In the beginning, Emily does this by removing her missing sister Amy's belongings from

the family home, which have remained untouched since she went missing. This creates dramatic tension between Emily and her family, who want Amy's things to remain untouched. Another way Emily helps the family move on from the past is by trying to discover the 'truth' about Amy's disappearance, in the hope this will create closure. This places Emily in contact with suspects, creating tension whenever they meet, exemplified when Ben says, "Your fucked up family's been hounding me for fucking years" and when he drags Emily "by the hair and pushes her towards her car." Although the tension shifts when the audience discovers that Ben is potentially innocent of the crime, conflict continues to remain present, because of the audience's inability to determine the unstable Ben's response to Emily's repeated allegations towards him. This tension within *Bottle Money's* engine ultimately supports the mystery drama's genre's signifiers of emotion, conflict and suspense.

c) Turning points:

Thomas Sobchack writes, "The most important single aspect of the genre film that gives it this compact sense of shape is the plot" (Grant, 1995, p. 106). As a result I intend to create a plot that has multiple turning points in order to support the signifiers of the mystery drama genre:

- i) First-act inciting incident: The inciting incident, otherwise known as a disturbance to the character's normality "acts to give a protagonist a problem that over the course of the film will answer, either happily or otherwise" (Aronson, 2010, p. 68). This disturbance occurs when Emily receives a phone call from Child Youth & Family Services requesting she return to her family home in rural Sunnydale to look after her 9-year-old niece Katy, following the unsuccessful suicide attempt of her sister and Katy's mother, Rose. As a result, Emily plans to come home briefly and return

to the city as soon as Rose returns home 'fixed' so she can look after Katy properly. This inciting incident supports the drama genre's need to have a protagonist in conflict at a crucial time in their life.

- ii) First-act turning point: The first-act turning point is "the surprise that turns into the obstacle [that] turns plans upside down" (Aronson, 2010, p. 99). This occurs when Emily realises Rose has returned from hospital 'unfixed,' causing her to stay in Sunnydale longer to try and 'fix' Rose herself, so Katy will be safe. This turning point will allow me to explore strong themes and emotions throughout the second act, thereby supporting another of the drama genre's key signifiers.
- iii) Second-act turning point: The Second-act turning point has two parts: the first part "is the protagonist's worst possible moment" (Aronson, 2010, p. 108) in relation to the protagonist's plan and the second part is when, "the protagonist decides to fight back." (Aronson, 2010, p. 108) in relation to their original plan. The worst thing that can happen occurs in *Bottle Money* when the emotional and unstable Rose abducts Katy, because Katy's safety has become paramount for Emily by this stage of the narrative, due to their increased bonding. Emily's decision to fight back occurs when she races to find Katy and this fight is "vital to maintain suspense" (Aronson, 2010, p. 108) for the audience, which supports one of the mystery genre's key signifiers.
- iv) Third-act climax: "The climax is the story's major dilemma resolved in one make or break moment" (Aronson, 2010). This occurs in *Bottle Money* when Emily finds Rose and Katy in the river and she makes the decision to save Katy from potential drowning, which also creates suspense and reveals the character's emotions.
- v) The resolution: The resolution is "the need to demonstrate the new normality" (Aronson, 2010, p. 115). *Bottle Money's* resolution occurs when Emily takes Katy back to live with her in the city, following Rose's death. Although Rose's death

creates a sense of tragedy, the final scene of Emily and Katy jumping into a swimming pool together whilst laughing offers the audience a sense of hope for Katy's future and supports the drama genre's key signifier of a painful resolution.

d) Key choices facing the protagonist:

Linda Aronson (2010) states, "Film consists of movement in all ways: physical, emotional and spiritual. In screenwriting, story is movement and our characters move through their own mental landscape" (Aronson, 2010, p. 49). I have intended to create movement in *Bottle Money* by writing a plot that causes its main protagonist to make continual choices, which results in propelling the narrative forward. This movement ultimately supports the mystery drama's signifier of conflict and suspense within the screenplay. Furthermore, it asks 'who is this person? ...The only way to know the truth is to witness him make choices under pressure...as he chooses he is' (McKee, 1997, p. 100) which supports the drama genre's key signifier of realistic characters.

Bottle Money's protagonist Emily has to make key choices as whether or not to:

- Return home to Sunnydale after escaping her dysfunctional family eleven years earlier.
- Stay longer in Sunnydale after realising Rose is 'unfixed.'
- Take on the temporary role of 'mother' to Katy.
- Confront Rose about her alcoholism and lack of parenting to Katy.
- Visit her mother Katherine in prison and confront her about the dysfunctional environment in which Katy is being raised.

- Disobey her mother Katherine and pack up Amy's untouched belongings from the family home.
- Confront the past in an attempt to discover what happened to her 6-year-old sister Amy, who disappeared whilst in her care.
- Follow leads that suggest her childhood beau Elwood's brother Ben is guilty of causing Amy's disappearance, knowing this will create conflict between her, Elwood and Ben.
- Confront her sister Rose, when she sees evidence suggesting her involvement in Amy's disappearance.
- Forgive Rose for hiding the truth about Amy's disappearance.
- Find Katy and save her from drowning.
- Give up her solitary life and become Katy's fulltime 'mother'.

e) Point-of-view (who knows what when):

Although *Bottle Money's* main protagonist is Emily, she is not present in the first six pages of the screenplay, and is unaware of the dysfunctional environment in which her 9-year-old niece Katy is living, or the unfolding crisis that occurs shortly after the beginning when Rose attempts to kill herself. I have arranged the point-of-view in this way to enhance the audience's knowledge of Katy's dysfunctional environment so they are drawn into the emotional drama, whilst also highlighting Emily's isolation from her family, which aims to suggest to the audience potential conflict when Emily and Katy later meet.

The audience is given a clue that someone in Emily's family may be involved in Amy's disappearance when Katy digs up Amy's yellow sunhat from the garden in a

tin box just past midpoint, long before any of the other characters know this information. I have arranged the point-of-view in this way to create dramatic irony for the audience, that is, ‘the irony occurring when the implications of a situation, speech, etc., are understood by the audience but not by the character’ (Hanks, 1990, p. 377). I wanted Emily to be unaware of this information to increase the tension and conflict between Emily and Ben when she investigates the possibility of him being responsible for Amy’s disappearance. This is intended to also create suspense for the audience when the hat is later revealed in the presence of Emily and Rose.

Emily becomes aware of Rose’s involvement in Amy’s disappearance near the end of the second-act when Katy walks into the bathroom wearing Amy’s hat. I have organised the revelation of the hat at this time because it heightens the conflict between the sisters, who are both present at the time, because this propels the plot forward by prompting Emily to force Rose to reveal the truth about her involvement in Amy’s disappearance, which in turn then leads to her abduction of Katy and thereby suspense.

Katy and Rose’s time spent at the motel following the abduction is seen through Katy’s point-of-view. I have arranged the scene in this way so the audience feels Katy’s vulnerability and impending danger whilst in the care of her drunk and unstable mother, creating suspense.

2.4 Successes and Difficulties in Achieving my Research Aim

In my aim to place *Bottle Money* within the genre of mystery drama, so that the contemporary audience's expectations of that genre are satisfied and my themes of family, grief, guilt and revenge can be explored I have had to make various changes during the creation of my screenplay.

Bottle Money's protagonist 'in conflict at a crucial moment in her life' is exemplified by Emily's request she return home to look after her niece Katy, following Rose's suicide attempt. Initially, Emily's mother Katherine was living in the family home and I realised that the need for Emily to come home was not strong enough. Therefore, I decided to put Katherine in prison, to place more pressure on Emily to come home, even though she had been estranged from her family for years. This change also supported my exploration of the themes of family, grief and guilt.

Bottle Money's 'strong emotions and themes' are illustrated throughout my screenplay. However, after writing my first draft I realised that the protagonist Emily and the antagonist Katy were rarely in scenes together. Therefore, to enhance the use of strong emotions and themes I restructured the narrative, so Emily and Katy are forced to be together for most of the screenplay and thereby have the opportunity to create conflict and explore my themes of family and the crippling effect that a past tragedy has had on their lives.

Bottle Money's attempt to create 'realistic characters' is reflected by the character's responses to people and situations during the narrative. However, after writing my first draft, I felt that the characters Ben, Tommy and Jimmy were becoming

caricatures. I attempted to change this firstly, by removing a fistfight scene that's overall tone was comical and secondly, by adding more nuances within the characters' lives, exemplified during the family dinner scene, where background information about Jimmy and Tommy is exposed, and also by illustrating the physical and emotional damage Ben has endured, illustrated during the false teeth scene at his pig farm.

Bottle Money's 'stories about family and community' was found to be lacking after writing the first draft, because I discovered that my emphasis was placed mostly on Emily's family. Therefore, I attempted to include the story about the 'community' but focusing on the character Ben and the townsfolk's attitude towards him, with the intention of reflecting how he has been affected by Emily's family's tragedy.

I struggled with how to write *Bottle Money's* 'painful resolution,' because I felt uncertain how the audience would cope with Rose's drowning in the third-act. Originally Rose survived her second suicide attempt, but I believe changing the ending to Rose dying creates a more authentic portrayal of a woman who is unable to fully recover from the tragic circumstances of her past, especially when she had little support after the event because her mother was also suffering too much to cope.

I felt *Bottle Money's* attempt to include the 'solving of a mystery by investigation' was successful. However, I found that during my first draft Emily's time spent investigating outweighed the time she spent with her family, which prevented me exploring the themes of family, grief, guilt and revenge to their true potential. As a

result, her investigation became more organic, occurring during her interaction with local people, whilst in the presence of Katy.

I feel *Bottle Money*'s suspense was successfully established through my use of plot and characterisation. However, I made changes along the way to heighten the suspense. An example of this was my decision to reveal Amy's yellow sunhat shortly the second-act's mid-point. Originally this revelation was going to occur during the second-act turning point and Emily and the audience would discover this vital clue in relation to Amy's disappearance at the same time. However, I chose to create dramatic irony by revealing this information to the audience long before Emily, so they would be encouraged to feel suspense leading up to its later revelation to Emily. In addition, this placement of the audience's knowledge of the hat aims to create further suspense for the audience when Emily goes investigating in the 'wrong' direction.

3 Discussion/Conclusion

3.1 Emotional truth in *Bottle Money*

The emotional truth in *Bottle Money* is threefold. Firstly, *Bottle Money* aims to highlight the vulnerability of children and our need to protect them, exemplified by the past tragedy of Amy's disappearance and the present dysfunctional environment. This truth is further demonstrated by the knowledge that Emily and Rose's childhood lives following the tragedy of their sister's vanishing, lacked support and thereby shaped their futures, prompting Rose to become an alcoholic, who

eventually kills herself, and causing Emily to abandon her family to live a life of isolation, unable to form relationships, supporting the idea that ‘narrative events uncover painful truths that we may have devoted our lives to denying.’ (Carney & Quart, 2000, p.38).

A second emotional truth in *Bottle Money* is the damage that can be caused by a person’s inability to move on from a tragedy. This is reflected in *Bottle Money* by Katherine’s unhealthy inability to pack away Amy’s belongings and her obsessive need for revenge, which ultimately leads to her inability to function as a mother and causes her to end up in prison on a conspiracy to murder charge. The inability to move on is also illustrated by Emily’s repression of the tragedy and her need to isolate herself from her family. Rose’s alcoholism that impacts on her daughter Katy’s life also exemplify the inability to move on from a tragedy.

A third truth in *Bottle Money* is the idea that it is impossible for a person to be unaffected by constant accusations of a crime that was not committed, and this will potentially result in the person taking on aggressive characteristics that were not present before the abuse. This is exemplified by Ben’s behaviour following years of physical and emotional abuse at the hands of Katherine and her supporters. The repeated naming of *Bottle Money*’s suspects Ben and Billy as “monsters” supports Helena Bassil-Morozow’s (2010) belief that “monsters are not born – they are created” (Bassil-Morozow, 2010, p. 51). Ben’s “monstrosity” is exemplified in *Bottle Money* by his exaggerated gestures of aggression towards Emily’s and her family, who suspect him of abducting Amy, illustrated when Ben, “stares at them and makes the shape of a gun with his fingers, pretending to shoot.” He has, in part,

become what these people believe he is. Ben's action also supports Helena Bassil-Morozow's (2010) belief that: "the monsters' overreaction to external events can be perceived by others as aggression, or even a sign of derangement, but however terrible the fiends are on the outside, deep down they are unhappy and hurt creatures" (Bassil-Morozow's, 2010, p. 51-52).

3.2 Relationship Between the Audience and the Protagonist

Jule Selbo (2014) believes that although, "the audience may not have gone through the exact experience of the one presented in the narrative... they may be able to relate to the emotional journey to personal passages through life" (Selbo, 2014, p. 76). I intend to prompt *Bottle Money's* audience relation to Emily's emotional journey by my use of the drama genre's key signifiers of emotion and realistic characters. Initially, I intend for the audience to feel Emily's discomfort of returning to her family home and the historical event of her sister's disappearance. I also anticipate that the audience feels frustrated by her initial desire to return to her life in the city. I aim for the audience to sense Emily's unease at forming relationships, having been living an isolated life for some time. But as time goes by, Emily begins to bond with Katy and I intend for the audience to see a transformation begin and intend for them to respond warmly to her eventual desire to put Katy's welfare before her own selfish needs. In doing so, Emily's life at the end of the film will show her taking responsibility for Katy, which will prompt the audience to feel admiration and satisfaction regarding her change. These examples of family interaction within *Bottle Money* aim to create a sense of authenticity, because "the protagonist must be relatable to the audience" (Selbo, 2014, p. 52). I aim to portray Emily's character to the audience by *Bottle Money's* final scene that shows her

living happily with Katy in the city, because this is a sharp contrast to the viewers' first image of her living alone and isolated. This arc "shows the public relationships of the protagonist... [Consisting]... of moments plotted into the script that shows step by step the internal changes' (Aronson, 2010, p. 118).

3.3 Relationship Between the Protagonist and the Antagonist

Linda Aronson (2010) states that, 'often a protagonist and relationship line antagonist start out enemies and end up friends' (Aronson, 2010, p. 87). This is exemplified in *Bottle Money* through Emily and Katy's interaction within the relationship line. Initially Emily and Katy are forced together due to the circumstances of Rose's unsuccessful suicide attempt and both resist each other. However, over time Emily and Katy begin to bond and this is in part prompted by the plot that forces them together for much of the story, giving Emily the opportunity to form a relationship, something she has avoided in the past and providing Katy with the chance to be 'mothered' properly. Aronson (2010) also states, that within the action line the antagonist typically changes, 'little and in extreme forms...are so focused on one aim that they are physically unstoppable' (Aronson, 2010, p. 89). This is exemplified by Rose's almost-unstoppable self-destruction, illustrated by her alcoholism and repeated attempts to kill herself. Emily's repeated attempts to 'fix' her sister are halted by Rose's inner turmoil that leads to her eventual suicide in the third-act.

3.4 *Bottle Money* within the Marketplace

In presenting my finished screenplay to potential investors I will emphasise *Bottle Money's* placement within the genre of mystery drama because, 'genre movies are

those commercial feature films which, through repetition and variation, tell familiar stories with familiar characters in familiar situations' (Grant, 1995, p. 15) and this is what investors primarily rely on during their marketing campaigns. More importantly, this *familiarity* is what audiences relate to. I will also stress *Bottle Money's* emotional truths, because not only do they support the mystery drama's key signifiers, and thereby the audience's expectations of the genre, they also aim to promote the audience's engagement, because these 'truths' prompt the audience to ask, "if I were this character under these new circumstances, what would I do?" (McKee, 1997, p. 178).

3.5 Conclusion:

In conclusion, I feel *Bottle Money* meets the contemporary audience's expectation of the mystery drama genre through its use of key signifiers and narrative structure. *Bottle Money's* key signifiers and structure also assist in my exploration of the themes of family, grief, guilt and revenge. Ultimately, my research demonstrates that although "any genre film is the original creation of an individual (Schatz, 1981, p. 13) its originality is "determined by the conventions involved in the filmmaking process" (Schatz, 181, p. 13).

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