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**“A Little Bitchy Faith”**

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Master of Creative Writing

## **Abstract**

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

Have been awarded Sydney Fashion Blog of the year, and engaged to her hot Maori fiancé, Nui, flamboyant Brazilian blogger Manuela is at the top of her game, with no time kids or inconveniences. But when Nui's father suddenly passes away, Manuela's plans must be put on hold to attend the Tangi in New Zealand.

If the cultural shock wasn't enough, Nui's mother Ngahuia demands him to stay and look after the struggling family Honey business. Trying to make the best of the situation, Manuela bond with Nui's sister's AROHA and HINEMAIA. Under the pressures of work and Ngahuia's demands Manuela and Nui's start to drift apart.

Wanting to prove her worth, Manuela sets up cameras around the farm to promote the business through her blog, unintentionally filming WILLIE, Nui's brother, stealing the family's beehives, which he traded for dope. Soon after, Manuela discovers a secret involving Hinemaia's biological parents, that if exposed would jeopardize the whanau's reputation.

Having a secret of her won exposed, Manuela and Nui reach breaking point and she decides to return to Sydney. But discovering that Hinemaia's welfare is at stake, Manuela returns, determined to do whatever it takes to expose the truth, thus gaining Ngahuia's respect and reconciling with Nui.

The Thesis is framed by an Exegesis which is a 6060 words essay on the subject of:

- (a) The genre of the Thesis
- (b) The development process from synopsis to second draft

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### **Attestation of Authorship**

**“I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), 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.”**

Tatiana Hotere

# **I. GENRE ANALYSIS EXEGESIS**

## **1. DEFINITION OF THE TERM GENRE AS USED BY THE FILM INDUSTRY IN COMPARISON WITH ACADEMICS/THEORISTS.**

The word *Genre* is a broad term translated from the French which means kind, genus, or type. It refers to a group of film, literary work or academic text that share certain specific characteristics.<sup>1</sup> However, the employment of the term Genre differs between the film industry and the academic community.

In academic terms, the definition of the term *Genre* relates to the categories of texts that have recognisable structures, use certain techniques, display patterns and syntax, or any other forms of textual elements used as a vehicle of intellectual communication which serve a particular purpose for a particular audience, in this case, the academic community.

In the film industry, however, *Genre* is determined based on audience's understanding and recognition of it, because a media text *Genre* is more than it's content and the way it's constructed. As in academic terms, a film *Genre* can also be defined as a set of patterns, of forms, styles, and structures which inform the kind of story a particular script or film tells. But, the *Genre* of a movie specifies to the audience certain frames of recognition, which a script must adhere to in order to be coherent and to deliver a film - from the written pages to the production, marketing and distribu-

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<sup>1</sup> The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines *Genre* as a *noun* meaning: a particular type or category of literature or art. Therefore, *Genre* determines in which group a particular work belongs to. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/genre>

tion, aiming to appeal to a particular demographic, thus generating interest, consumption and profit.

Therefore, for the cinematographic community, it's the audience's perspective, and expectation of what media work contains must be specific and exist in other media texts of the same Genre.<sup>2</sup> For example, a Fantasy movie, such as Harry Potter, and a Rom-Com film like Hitch, both have simple narratives and a positive outcome. But Harry Potter fits in a Fantasy Genre as it's aimed at a younger audience, who expect the film to contain a character undertaking a quest in a make-believe place, themes of magic, good fighting evil, and significant CGI effects. Hitch, on the other hand, appeals mostly to a female demographic expecting to see a love story set in the real world where after a series of comedic events, the resolution usually culminates in the main character's happy union.

Types of *Genre* differ according to purpose, structure, information it conveys, or in the case of films and books, from story plot to feelings it may elicit in an audience, thus fulfilling the expectations of its target audiences. Discerning the *Genre* of a film will establish a basis to develop the script well, giving it a framework and a strong foundation for the structure of the plot, the tone, and the direction of the story. Producers and distributors of media texts rely heavily on *Genre* to determine the making of the media text and the clear channels of marketing and distribution in order to attract viewers and make profitable films.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.mediaknowall.com/gcse/keyconceptsgcse/keycon.php?pageID=genre>

<sup>3</sup> A comprehensive list of the importance of defining genre for the film Industry, is outlined on <http://www.mediaknowall.com/gcse/keyconceptsgcse/keycon.php?pageID=genre>

Some popular film *Genres* are Action, Crime, Comedy, Drama, Horror, Fantasy, Love, Science Fiction, and Thriller. In literature as well as in cinematography the main *Genres* can, and often are, mixed to create interesting and enriched *sub-genres* (*Cowboys and Aliens* is an example of Western/Sci-Fi; *Ghostbusters* an example of Action/Supernatural/Comedy).

## 2. THE GENRE OF MY SCREENPLAY

In the same way that "Dramedy" is a portmanteau<sup>4</sup>, so my Family Dramedy screenplay is a combination of a dramatic story containing elements of comedy explored in a family situation. Examples of this Genre are *Little Miss Sunshine*<sup>5</sup>, *The Descendants*<sup>6</sup>, and *Juno*<sup>7</sup>.

## 3. FAMILY DRAMEDY: A recognisable Genre by the Industry.

Movies are crafted to produce a visceral, rather than an intellectual response<sup>8</sup>, but as audiences have grown more discerning and sophisticated, so has the demand for movies that evoke emotional engagement, a degree intellectual discernment, and enjoyable entertainment, leading to the development of hybrid genres.

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<sup>4</sup> "a word or morpheme whose form and meaning are derived from a blending of two or more distinct forms (as *smog* from *smoke* and *fog*)." <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/portmanteau>

<sup>5</sup> *Little Miss Sunshine* [Motion picture]. Jonathan Dayton & Valery Farris, (Directors). USA: Fox Searchlight Pictures. 2006.

<sup>6</sup> *The Descendants* [Motion picture]. (2011) Alexander Payne (Director), Alexander Payne, Jim Rash, Nat Faxon (Writers) USA: Fox Searchlight Pictures, 20th Century Fox, Warner Bros. 2011

<sup>7</sup> *Juno* [Motion Picture]. Jason Reitman, (Director). Diablo Cody (Writer). USA: Fox Searchlight Pictures. 2007.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.bbc.com/culture/story/20130620-is-china-hollywoods-future>



A *Family Dramedy* is a hybrid between a Family Drama and a Family Comedy. “Like the “rom-com” phenomenon, the comedy-drama (“dramedy”) genre has begun to establish itself as a permanent fixture in the entertainment realm. Developing over the past decade, dramedy as a distinct genre has recently entered a proverbial golden age with dozens of popular shows now adopting the “dramedy” label.”<sup>9</sup> Family Dramedy films appeal to a wider demographic, interested in movies that deal with serious contemporary issues in a family context, employing the use of a relatable style of comedy, where the protagonist experiences change, and is the catalyst for transformation in others, which brings hope for the future to the whole family.

There is a growing trend in using comedy to address important and uncomfortable issues, this has made the genre an important part of modern film culture. Topics considered taboo or offensive have been explored in films through the humanity of characters and truthful situations that most people can relate to. Below are recent examples of successful Family Dramedy movies, recognised as such by both critics and fans:

- ***Little Miss Sunshine*** - A review by Jack Smart states: “Little Miss Sunshine” that gem of a *dramedy* about a family trekking across the country for a child’s beauty pageant, turns 10 years old today.<sup>10</sup> A year prior, Jonathan Dayton wrote: “The ambient theme of family in the name of all things rings proud and quite loud in the hi-

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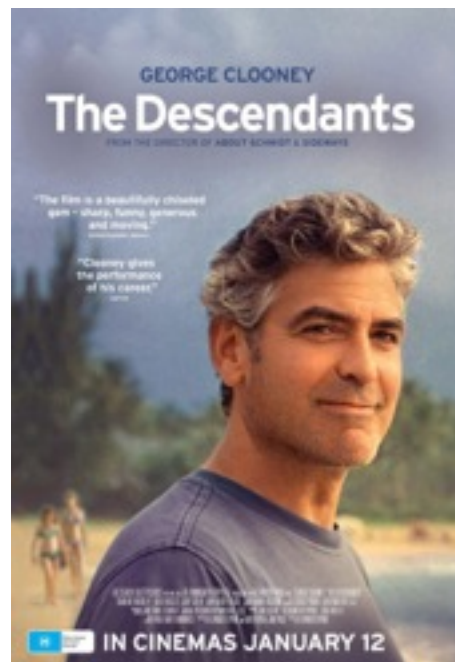
<sup>9</sup> <http://emorywheel.com/the-rising-popularity-of-the-dramedy/>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.backstage.com/news/why-we-love-little-miss-sunshine-10-years-later/>



larious and sad *Little Miss Sunshine*. The *dramedy* is carried by a number of misfits making up a family unit.”<sup>11</sup>

- ***The Descendants*** - Kevin Jagernauth’s review’s states “The Descendants’ Trailer Promises Another Finely Tuned *dramedy* from Alexander Payne”.<sup>12</sup> In a similar fashion, Maureen O’Connell wrote: “The Descendants, a *dramedy* filmed on Oahu and Kauai, and packed with a cast of compelling Hawaii characters, today picked up five Academy Awards nominations.”<sup>13</sup>



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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.ecufilmfestival.com/en/little-miss-sunshine-jonathan-dayton/>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.indiewire.com/2011/05/watch-the-descendants-trailer-promises-another-finely-tuned-dramedy-from-alexander-payne-118403/>

<sup>13</sup> [http://www.hawaiimagazine.com/blogs/hawaii\\_today/2012/1/24/Hawaii\\_Oahu\\_Kauai\\_Descendants\\_film](http://www.hawaiimagazine.com/blogs/hawaii_today/2012/1/24/Hawaii_Oahu_Kauai_Descendants_film)



•**Juno** - A fan expressed that Juno is “an Award Winning Dramedy... the genre closest to normal life itself.”<sup>14</sup> Also, in her **Juno Film Review**, Serita Stevens, describes the movie as “A Teen *Dramedy* for All Ages”<sup>15</sup>.

Family Dramedy posters reveal contemporary family issues and yet the choice of colours, text fonts, and light-hearted photos add a touch of humour, signalling the tone of the story, and making the film genre recognisable.

#### 4. SUMMARY OF THE HISTORY OF THE GENRE

In the POETICS, Aristotle affirms that “*Tragedy portrays humans better than they are while comedy portrays humans worse than they are*”.<sup>16</sup> One can then conclude that tragedy (or drama) and comedy are at opposite sides of the storytelling spectrum. One evokes empathy, the other incites us to revel.

The term Comedy in its broadest sense can be defined by humorous art forms, be it literary, visual or theatrical. Comedic works have been an ancient art form, at least as old as the Greek civilization records. However, according to historical evidence, it was right before the Classical Age that *dramatic comedy* first emerged, skill-

<sup>14</sup> [http://ajisabaki.com/movies/\\_comedy/Juno/](http://ajisabaki.com/movies/_comedy/Juno/)

<sup>15</sup> [http://www.lasplash.com/publish/Film\\_106/Juno\\_Film\\_Review.php](http://www.lasplash.com/publish/Film_106/Juno_Film_Review.php)

<sup>16</sup> Halliwell, S., & Aristotle, . (1998). Aristotle's Poetics. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

fully blending the hard and painful stuff of life with the humorous hilarity of it, no longer absolute opposites but rather different sides of the same coin.

In terms of tragedy, history points to Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides as the earliest dramaturges in history, since little is known about Greek tragedy before their works. However according to 'A Guide to Writing in History and Classics' it was "*during the Classical Age, satyr plays followed the presentation of tragic trilogies, making them the oldest form of comic drama extant.*"<sup>17</sup> Examples of that can be found in Aeschylus' tragedy *Prometheus Bound*, in which the playwright approached the same myth both tragically and comically, and in the theatrical works of Menander, the last great Athenian dramatist of antiquity, to whom comedy had the goal to '*teach as much as to delight*'.<sup>18</sup>

Moliere<sup>19</sup> states, "*the function of comedy is "to correct men's vices by amusing them"*"<sup>20</sup>. Thus, in a *Family Dramedy* both functions of tragedy and comedy balance each other in the addressing of important issues in a family context, while also providing a comedic relief for the audience. If a theatrical, literary or screen work is a comedy with a sense of drama, or if it is a drama with a sense of humour, either can be

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<sup>17</sup> A Guide to Writing in History and Classics. SECTION 3: ANCIENT GREEK COMEDY. Chapter 8: Early Greek Comedy and Satyr Plays. Creative Commons Attribution-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License. <https://www.usu.edu/markdamen/Class-Dram/chapters/081earlygkcom.htm>

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Molière, original name Jean-Baptiste Poquelin (baptised January 15, 1622 - died February 17, 1673, Paris) French actor and playwright, the greatest of all writers of French comedy. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Moliere-French-dramatist>

<sup>20</sup> <http://www3.dbu.edu/mitchell/molierrep.htm>

categorised as a hybrid or sub-genre, that is recognised in the industry as *Dramedy* (drama+ comedy).

Although the term *Dramedy* was first known to be used in 1978 to define: ‘a comedy (as a film or television show) having dramatic moments’<sup>21</sup>, it can also be used in relation to a drama containing comedic moments with its historical roots as ancient as humanity itself, or at least as the ancient Greeks, for its a part of human nature to find humour amidst hardship.

Television is where this genre first emerged and where it has been heavily developed. It is said that *Moonlight* was the 1980’s television show that invented dramedy. “Arguably one of the clearest examples of the dramedy genre emerged in 1985-86 when the Directors Guild of America nominated the hour-long television series *Moonlighting* for both Best Drama and Best Comedy, an unprecedented event in the organization's previous 50 years (Horowitz, 1986).”<sup>22</sup> According to Emory Whell, “[t]he late 80s witnessed the first use of the portmanteau “dramedy” in regards to a wave of shows that merged the characteristics of the two genres, including “*Hooperman*” and “*Frank’s Place*,” one of the shortest-airing shows to be nominated for the Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Comedy.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/dramedy>

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.museum.tv/eotv/dramedy.htm>

<sup>23</sup> <http://emorywheel.com/the-rising-popularity-of-the-dramedy/>

Centred around a New Orleans family restaurant “Frank’s Place” was a successful Family Dramedy on television. It explored heavy topics, such as class and racial discrimination, and it did so in a relatable and witty way, laying the foundation for future Drama+Comedy shows and films. Emory Whell also states that “[o]f the most popular shows airing regularly in the modern era, more and more shows are being distinguished as dramedies... Chances are, the majority of the shows you’re currently addicted to are labeled as “dramedies” - a pretty astounding change from 35 years ago when the genre and term were practically nonexistent.”<sup>24</sup>

## 5. KEY SIGNIFIERS OF THIS GENRE IN STORY AND SCREENPLAY

According to Mel Brooks *‘Tragedy is when I cut my finger. Comedy is when you fall into an open sewer and die.’* That is because drama leads us to empathise with the character, while comedy evokes enjoyment on the misfortune or pain of someone else.

Family Dramedy key signifiers are a blend of drama and comedy codes and conventions and the story must both resonate with the audience by exploring compelling and powerful themes and making those themes palatable by intelligently using a truthful and relatable kind of humour.

Some key signifiers in a Family Dramedy are:

- *A likeable protagonist with fallacies and the potential to change.*
- *The main antagonist is usually a family member*

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<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*

- *Cultural/Gender/Generational clash*
- *Truthful humour - we laugh because it's true and hits close to home.*
- *Happy resolutions with a brighter future for the whole family in the end.*

All the key signifiers above are present in Family Dramedy movies, are present in the movies examples used previously.

## **6. CONTEMPORARY AUDIENCES' EXPECTATIONS.**

A contemporary audience of the *Family Dramedy* genre expects movies about what family life is really like. Contemporary themes that have been considered taboo or offensive, such as hyper-sexualization of young girls, mental illness, life support, teenage pregnancy and porn addiction, are all issues that audience nowadays are very familiar with and in many cases have experienced themselves.

Well constructed *Family Dramedies* may lay bare the hard stuff of life while avoiding being preachy or judgmental. They provide an opportunity, an invitation, for an audience to the *see into ourselves* as we engage, through the safety distance provided by the movie screen, with the humanity of characters and situations that most people are able to relate to, to some degree or another, but are afraid or uncomfortable to face in real lives.

The contemporary audience of *Family Dramedy* doesn't necessarily expect that the comedy will be a hysterical laugh-out-loud type of humour, but rather to be truthful even though it may be subtle. The use of comedic points in a *Family Drame-*

dy gives the audience the relief it needs while addressing important, and sometimes very uncomfortable, issues. Such expectations from audiences have made this genre an important part of modern film culture.

“Not too serious nor too frivolous, the dramedy strikes the perfect chord with masses of audiences, regardless of background, who seek some significance and personal relatability from the shows [and films] they watch, while still being able to laugh.”<sup>25</sup>

## 7. HOW MY SCREENPLAY FULFILS THOSE EXPECTATIONS

My screenplay fulfils the expectations of a contemporary audience of *Family Dramedy* by implementing the following key genre signifiers:

- *A likeable protagonist with fallacies and the potential to change.*

My protagonist, Manuela, is charming, flamboyant and has a good heart but she is also self-absorbed, vain and prone to accidents. She has the potential for transformation of herself and to bring healing to her future Maori family.

- *The main antagonist is usually a family member*

The staunch future mother-in-law Ngahuia is a strong main antagonist. Determined that Manuela is not good enough for her son, Ngahuia's creates a barrier between Manuela and Nui.

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<sup>25</sup> <http://emorywheel.com/the-rising-popularity-of-the-dramedy/>



- *Cultural/Gender/Generational clash*

Manuela's outspoken 'Brazilianness' was attractive to her fiancé until contrasted with his traditional Maori family. Manuela aggravates the generational clash between the teenager Hinemaia and the matriarch Ngahuia.

- *Truthful humour - we laugh because its true and hits close to home.*

Manuela's unawareness of her improper English with its miscommunications and her accident prone personality bring humour to awkward situations.

- *Happy resolutions with a brighter future for the whole family in the end.* Manuela discovers a toxic secret in the family, becoming the catalyst for the truth to be exposed, first escalating the conflict but eventually bringing out reconciliation for the whole family.

## **8. MY FAMILY DRAMEDY: A fresh perspective for an audience**

Blended families are a reality for a contemporary audience. My screenplay relates to the realism of moderns family interactions by mixing cultures and generational gaps in a family dealing with the loss of a loved one and facing financial challenges.

My *Family Dramedy* places a strong urban and independent female protagonist from Brazil in her fiancé's rural and traditional and matriarchal Maori family. It's a culture she finds herself unable to navigate, the language, customs, and world-views are very different from her own. There is no doubt that the main characters love each

other, but when they have to uproot their lives from a neutral setting, where both of them accept and cherish each other's differences, to immerse themselves in a culture that is familiar to him but completely foreign to her the conflicts arise.

She faces the challenges trying to maintain her relationship alive while striving to find her place in a setting where she struggles to understand the ways of a new culture and to gain the approval of her future mother-in-law.

Although portrayed through Manuela's experience as a foreigner, being judged (by ethnicity, looks, opinions or personality), are universal human experiences which people can relate to, making the tension and humour of my script relevant to a vast audience.

## **II. MY SCRIPT DEVELOPMENT PROCESS**

### **A) EMOTIONAL TRUTH**

I intend the audience to recognise that: ***It's true that we judge those who are different from us and we hurt the people we love the most.***

"For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do, this I keep on doing."<sup>26</sup> This is true in my life and in the lives of people I know well, especially within a family environment, where we are bound by deep loyalties but also where we inflict pain on those they love most. On the other hand, humans also have the astonishing capacity to forgive and to reconcile if they choose to.

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<sup>26</sup> Holy Bible. New International Version. Book of Romans, Chapter 7, verse 19.

Often differences are seen as something to protect against or get rid of, instead of opportunities to enrich ourselves by embracing others and learning from them. As my characters get insight into their own prejudices toward one another, I hope to evoke in my audience a sense that as human being we have the tendency to be closed to, or to judge what/who is foreign. However it is possible to connect truthfully if we are willing to let go of our judgements and agendas in order to connect and accept each other.

My personal motivation for dramatising this emotional truth is my desire to write a fictional story where strong characters clash due to prejudice and judgement in a family environment. As a foreigner married to a Maori, living in New Zealand, I am familiar with discrimination, both inflicted on me by others and from my own point of view on the world and people around me. So I chose to create strong characters from different cultural backgrounds who make choices motivated by love but end up hurting the people whom they love most. I also wanted my story to reflect reconciliation and restoration as this is an important aspect of my personal ethos.

## **B) DEVELOPMENT FROM INITIAL CONCEPT TO 1st DRAFT**

### **(i) SYNOPSIS**

#### **• PLOT**

When MANUELA, a hard working Brazilian living in Sydney, meets NUI, a Maori musician, she comes up with an idea to save MISS HONEY's business. But she didn't expect to fall in love and get married so quickly. When Nui's father passes away the newlyweds to NZ for the Tangi. Meeting her in-laws for the first time

Manuela has a huge cultural shock while also facing the harsh disapproval of Nui's mother Ngahuia. Mariana struggles with the news that Nui, must stay in New Zealand to look after the family business.

As Manuela discovers that Willie, Nui's cousin is using the business for illegal deals, she becomes a threat to the family's reputation. Coupled with Manuela's growing influence on HINEMAIA, Nui's teenage sister, tensions between Manuela and Ngahuia escalate causing strife with Nui to the point of Manuela considering an abortion when she discovers of her pregnancy.

Wanting to silence her, Willie forces himself on Manuela. Nui finds out of his father's involvement in Willie's illegal deals. Manuela challenges Nui to turn Willie to the cops against Ngahuia's wishes. Once Nui breaks away from his mother's toxic control, Manuela reveals she has an idea to save the business, thus gaining Ngahuia's respect and saving her marriage.

- ***THEME***

Cultural differences and the place of women in a Maori social setting are at the heart of my story. The different backgrounds of the characters pose hard challenges for their relationships, highlighting the all too common human behaviour of self-protection, of mistrusting and judging outsiders whose world-views may conflict with ours.

Manuela is perceived as a threat to the status quo. Her views and behaviour clash with Ngahuia's expectations, empowers Hinemaia and forces Nui to make hard decisions. But she also has much to learn and gain from opening up to a culture she doesn't comprehend or accepts.

## **(ii) DEVELOPMENT**

### ***1) From synopsis to 'beat-sheet'***

My intent was to write a female protagonist in a 'fish out of water' sub-genre. However, in the synopsis Nui had the strongest action line and the major character arc. Manuela became a supporting character. The main change from my synopsis to the first beat sheet was to make the story Manuela's. So I structured the beat sheet as to focus on Manuela's action line and her character arc.

In the synopsis her arc as the protagonist had good potential but it didn't translate in the first beat sheet. I focussed on clarifying her journey and choices but she became a weak protagonist in the sense that she was mostly reacting to what everyone else did without taking the major actions herself. I raise the stakes for her by adding a business investment instead of a job, and by making her a self-consumed character at the start to contrast with a change in the attitude and commitment to others at the end.

I realised that in my synopsis the secondary relationship lines were weak and I was missing the opportunity to use triangulations between the characters. I attempted to strengthen that in the beat sheet by adding complexity in three main triangulations to escalate the tension and raise the stakes in the main relationship line.

### ***2) From first 'beat-sheet' to a revised 'beat-sheet'***

I had to clarify for myself what the genre of this story. Initially, I envisioned

the story as drama. The more I explore the social issues involving gender and status within a Maori setting, the more convinced I became that to portray such differences in a respectful and non-judgmental way, I could use more humour. Thus the second beat sheet became a dramedy.

I also I tried to give Manuela stronger character traits, such as loyalty to friends, entrepreneurial and creative attributes. I hoped that these together with more obstacles for her to overcome would give her a more likeable and sassy personality that audiences could relate to and cheer for, while also providing more opportunities for relationship conflict. I also saw the need to give her a stronger action line. That came through adding the challenge of saving Nui's family business and having her discover Willie's dirty deals, which put her in danger escalating her need for stronger choices. I believe this was an important change in ACT 3.

### **3) *From revised 'beat-sheet' to a 1st Draft***

As the actual script took shape, I found a few problems to overcome that I was unaware of from the beat sheet. The main one was that ACT 3 was anti-climactic and the conclusion had the hallmark of *Deus ex Machina*. Manuela ended up removed from the main action, when she needed to be either the person with the most dramatic action or as one who incites the most dramatic choice in others.

I also realised I had not answered the dramatic question posed at the set up. By expanding on each beat, the script became a plethora of ideas, pulling the protagonist in so many different directions that the main focus of what the story was becoming blurry to me. Having said that, the process of fleshing out the scenes were enjoyable as I found the freedom to use a build up a fiercer antagonist than what I previously had imagined in the beat sheet. Ngahuia added risk and conflict to Manuela and Nui's relationship, she also provided the opportunity for humour in Manuela's line, which propelled the plot forward.

However, because Ngahuia is such a strong antagonist Manuela in contrast became too sweet and somewhat victimised, leaving her arc plateaued. I strived to create a connection between Manuela and Ngahuia at the end, but Ngahuia didn't have any redeemable characteristics for that relationship line to achieve a truthful reconciliation.

Clarifying the dramatic question and the major turning points became my main focus. In order to do so, I strayed away from the beat sheet at times, but I also found that pursuing clarity on those areas helped me develop the turning points that had major effects in my protagonist's character arc, which in turn helped me develop further the action line into more dramatic twists and turns for the relationship lines.

## C) DEVELOPMENT FROM 1st DRAFT TO 2nd DRAFT

### (i) Synopsis

#### • *PLOT*

After losing her job, career oriented and fashion conscious MANUELA, travels to Sydney for an extended vacation. There she meets NUI, an attractive Maori musician and all her plans go into disarray. Eighteen months later, living in Sydney, with a kick ass job and happily married, life is as great until the sudden death of Nui's father.

After the culturally challenging Tangi, to Manuela's dismay, Nui must stay in New Zealand to save the family business out of bankruptcy. But unlike Nui, who fits into his familiar Maori culture, Manuela is a 'fish out of water'.

NGAHUIA's, Nui's mother, constant disapproval, causes conflicts between Nui and Manuela. Meanwhile, Manuela's influence on HINEMAIA, Nui's teenage sister, and her help within the business escalates Ngahuia's antagonism. Then a tempting offer to return to her job in Sydney arrives.

Manuela discovers that WILLIE's, Nui's best mate, is smuggling drugs through the business. She reveals the truth to Nui but his incredulity pulls them apart. Willie's scare tactics leads Manuela to leave Nui for a new start in Sydney. Spotting a truck carrying a family container on her way to the airport, Manuela follows it, finding Willie's drug deal taking place. She films everything in her phone and sends the evidence to Nui, whom after confronting his mother's controlling ways comes with the police just in time to rescue Manuela, giving them a chance to reconcile and bringing the opportunity for Ngahuia and Manuela to do the same.



- ***THEME***

Challenges of cultural differences, especially around the place of women, keeping appearances and the expectations from family members within a traditional Maori social setting are the central theme of this draft.

Manuela's outspoken and care-free personality clashes with the structures of Nui's family environment, where placing the importance of having a blameless reputation above everything and everyone else, becomes toxic to the family members, whose secrets and inability to express themselves in a healthy way become their downfall.

- (ii) **DEVELOPMENT**

The first change I made on my second draft was to set up my protagonist as an independent, self-sufficient woman because I wanted her sense of empowerment to be threatened creating a flaw in her character development. I explored humour through miscommunications due to her broken accent, which she is mostly unaware of. This change gave me the opportunity to escalate the dramatic tension in her main relationships lines as it provided an opportunity to hinder her ability to understand Nui's commitment to his Whanau and to be able to relate to Ngahuia. Once I placed her in a new and uncomfortable context, i.e.: the Maori culture, she feels disempowered and her choices pushed the story forward more actively as she then pursues to regain empowerment. This was one of my particular aims, as I have struggled in the previous draft to make her an active protagonist.

I also decided to establish Manuela and Nui's relationship as a married couple from the middle of the First Act. The reason for that choice was that as a married woman she would be more pressured and thus have to fight harder for her autonomy, for her marriage, for her place in the family, while also having more to lose. As a married woman, the stakes are higher and her choices and consequences of those choices are more dramatic as she is pressed by the antagonists and finds secrets in the family.

I chose to highlight the cultural differences through expanding on Manuela's experience at the Tangi. In that setting, I aimed to and established her disconnection and discomfort with what is familiar to Nui. She sees a side of him she didn't know and an unexpected side of herself as well. I used simple things, that an audience familiar with Maori customs can relate to and find it humorous, but through the eyes of a foreign stylish woman are odd or cringing.

Another area that I decided to use for the character arc was to expand Manuela's influence on teenage Hinemaia. This decision also served me in escalating the tension through the antagonism of Ngahuia, while also adding an unexpected subplot line with AROHA. The new triangulation resulting from this change, HINEMAIA/AROHA/ MANUELA, feeds another layer of drama related to Ngahuia's need to maintain the family's reputation at all costs and Manuela's frustration with her mother-in-law's control.

I chose to remove some characters and add new ones to aid Manuela's pro-activeness in the action line, especially in her discovery of Willie's secret deal. The new characters also added points of comic relief to the story. Another major change was to portray my main antagonist, Ngahuia as more human and give her truthful and relatable characteristics. That was an important decision because I want the resolution of the dramatic question to have redemptive qualities and an uplifting outcome. A truthful reconciliation wouldn't be possible if Ngahuia was irredeemable.

As for the development of the action line, one of the directions I took was to embed that in the character arc. So to make Manuela more active in this draft I gave her fewer points of struggle to deal with - like removing saving Miss Honey's business, removing the Brazilian best friend and the abortion, however, I made the remaining struggles more intense. My goal was to amp the tension build up towards the Third Act and to have her as the protagonist at the centre of the climatic point. Her actions, therefore, affect everyone, even if she is not physically present, and it's through her that the action line is resolved.

Underlying all those I strived to achieve my goal of using comedy sparsely to lighten the mood as I explored the issues of prejudice against foreigners and the so-called acceptable place of women in a particular staunch and conservative Maori setting. I wanted to address those areas because they have been part of my personal experience and because they are contemporary issues that a modern audience can relate to. I am conscious of portraying the Maori characters's humanity because I want to show that everyone is subject to prejudice, judgment, antagonism, irrespective of race,

gender, socio-economic or intellectual status. In the same way, we are all capable of change, of love, respect, and acceptance, even when our world-views differ.

## **D) DEVELOPMENT FROM 2nd DRAFT TO POLISHED 2nd DRAFT.**

### **(i) Synopsis**

#### **• PLOT**

Recently engaged to her Maori Fiancé, NUI, and been awarded the Sydney Fashion Blog of the Year, stylish Brazilian blogger MANUELA is at the top of her game. With an image to preserve and plans for her coming wedding, she has no time kids or inconveniences. But, when Nui's father suddenly passes away, Manuela's plans must be put on hold to attend the Tangi in New Zealand. Meeting her future in-laws for the first time she is warmly welcomed by Nui's sister's AROHA and HINE-MAIA, but the cold disapprove of matriarch NGAHUIA towards her is clear.

Unfamiliar with Maori Protocols and life in the country, Manuela makes one mistake after another, adding pressure to the struggling family Honey business. As her relationship with Nui starts to suffer under the pressure of Ngahuia's demands, Manuela is determined to help Nui and prove her worth.

Setting up cameras around the farm to blog about the business, she films WILLIE, Nui's brother, stealing beehives, which he traded for dope. To make matters worse, Manuela discovers that young Hinemaia is Aroha's secret daughter. Tension escalates between Manuela and Nui, and she decides to leave. But seeing Hinemaia and her biological father, ED, together in an amorous manner, Manuela becomes determined to do whatever it takes to expose the truth and prevent Hinemaia from com-

mitting incest, thus gaining the Ngahuaia's respect and restoring her relationship with Nui.

- ***THEME***

As a flamboyant and open person, Manuela struggles with the dynamics of a traditional and secretive family, and her differences are seen as unacceptable flaws. She discovers that in order to protect those whom we love, we lie or cover up the truth, but that only leads to hurting them more. The truth must come out because the welfare of the most vulnerable person in this family is at stake, but the fear that the truth may be too hard to face, keeps the characters enslaved to the toxic lies they created that is destroying the family.

**(ii) DEVELOPMENT**

Having found ways in which to make my protagonist more active in my previous draft, I wanted to pursue this aspect of my script further by strengthening and clarifying my main character's arc and make the development of the plot completely dependent on her dramatic actions. My main challenges were to find ways to show her actions and her transformation cinematographically.

To open possibilities for dramatisation, my first decision was to change her occupation. I opted to make her a prominent fashion blogger, using the trends in blogging culture and conventional video blogging formats. I aimed to set up her inner and outer world, aspirations, priorities, and personality, which later would be set in stark contrast to the conventions of the world and social structures she finds herself im-

mersed in, thus adding tension and raising the stakes within the character's arc and within the main triangulations.

Following from that, I aspired to give Manuela sincere and likeable attributes mixed with a comedic undertone that strongly emerges when she is placed in a world and in situations that would evoke a degree of incapability and highlight further her character flaws. In the previous drafts, she was a miss-know-it-all, making choices to save the dysfunctional family. This time I tried to develop her a character who sees herself in a positive and confident light but is inept to deal with life outside her familiar world. As a famous award winning fashion blogger she does have a great measure of success but, placed in the unfamiliar and traditional Maori country environment, she is inapt, ignorant and unintentionally mucks up every time she tries to help the family. I tried to show that they need help, but so does she.

But I also aimed to use Manuela's weaknesses and flaws as strengths, adding depth to her character and a degree of fluctuation between empathy and identification with her, to antipathy and disassociation towards her. For example, she talks too much, but she is able to connect and coax the truth out of other. She is scared and inapt in nature, but she is positive and thinks outside the box, using her skills to set up cameras to blog about the Honey Business and to find the runway Hinemaia. She is superficial and image conscious and internet dependent, but she bridges the generational gap with Hinemaia, connecting with the teenager in a way that her mother and sister/biological mother were are unable to. She hides the truth from Nui, but she is willing to make herself vulnerable and to ultimately bring the truth out for Hinemaia's

sake. The main reason for this change was the fact that I wanted the audience to experience the empathetic aspects of a drama while also enjoying the comedic elements of the film.

Another major change in the development of this draft was in terms of the action line. I endeavored to create a quick set up rapidly followed by the disruption of the status quo, the introduction of the antagonist and the dramatic challenges of the new situation and I made changes in the development of two strong points of change in the plot:

1. The action line regarding the business struggles, which develops into the conflict between MANUELA/WILLIE/NUI and is resolved towards the middle point of ACT 2. In this line, Manuela's efforts escalate the conflict in the main relationship line with NUI and with Ngahuia.
2. The action line involving MANUELA/AROHA/HINEMAIA where Manuela discovers the truth about Hinemaia's biological parents - foreshadowed initially in Act 1, further developed in the first part of Act 2, fully escalated after the midpoint, and finding its resolution at the climax of Act 3. Although the centre of this action is Hinemaia, it's Manuela who forces the change in the other characters, and her choices bring about her own transformation.

The reason for this changes where to add layers in escalating the tension, keeping the most dramatic challenge simmering under the plot lines until it erupts at the end of Act 2. Placing the youngest and most vulnerable character in eminent dan-

ger with no return at the begging of Act 3, forced Manuela as the main character to make the hardest dramatic choices. My biggest challenges were to maintain my protagonist the most active character, and to portrait the secret of Hinemaia's biological parenthood plus her amorous relationship with Ed, her biological father in a truthful way, without allowing it to become too dark or too soap-opera-ish, but maintaining the light Family Dramedy tone.



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