

The Hounds of Heaven

Andrew Judd

Screenplay Thesis and Accompanying
Exegesis submitted to Auckland University of
Technology in Fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Masters of Creative Writing

2013

Faculty of Culture and Society

Acknowledgements

The author would like to gratefully acknowledge support of the following individuals: Mike Johnson, Joan Rosier_Jones and Mitchell Judd. I have also appreciated the support and feedback of my fellow students in the MCW course.

Intellectual Property

The intellectual property residing in the screenplay *The Hounds of Heaven* remains with the author, Andrew James Eric Judd.

Exegesis by Andrew Judd

Synopsis. This is a film of approximately 105 minutes with the working title “The Hounds of Heaven”.

Jess is a twenty-five year old schizophrenic living on Auckland’s North Shore. Although she is on the invalid’s benefit and relatively isolated, she maintains an optimistic outlook, believing that she is ‘recovering’. She goes on a ‘date’ with a charmer called Rick who, at the end of the night, attempts to force himself on her. This upsets her equilibrium, leading her, a few days later, to experience a psychotic episode. In the course of the episode, the February earthquake in Christchurch occurs; Jess decides that she is responsible for it. Jess is hospitalised. When she recovers sufficiently to be discharged, her father, believing it better if she stays with him, takes her with him to Christchurch where he is working to co-ordinate the civil response. The film ends by depicting the relationship between Jess and her father and with her father trying to ensure that she does not feel responsible for his divorce from her mother.

Introduction

This exegesis is divided into five parts. The first part of the exegesis discusses theories of schizophrenia; these inform what McKee (1997) calls ‘the controlling idea’. If I have succeeded the film will have successfully communicated a particular view of schizophrenia to the audience.

The second part of the exegesis is concerned with the film's context using other films that have dealt with the topic of mental illness. In the third part, I discuss theories of narrative as proposed by Todorov (1970), Campbell (1959), McKee (1997) and Egri (1946) and relate them to my film. In the fourth part I discuss some general features of the script I have written, and in the last part I consider the relationship between theory of writing and its practice.

Theories of Schizophrenia

The dominant paradigm used when explaining mental illness, the view that is embraced by most psychiatrists, is that mental illness is the result of faulty brain functioning. According to the 'dopamine hypothesis', (Kendler, Shcaffner, 2011) the brains of psychotics produce too much dopamine, a hypothesis supported by the success of anti-psychotic medications, which act as dopamine antagonists, in alleviating symptoms. An example of a neurological argument for a psychotic symptom, based on the dopamine hypothesis, is one given by Friston (1998) who proposes that voice-hearing is the result of decreased left-hemisphere dominance (in turn a result of excess dopamine production) that results in signals from the Broca's area (associated with language) propagating to the tertiary auditory cortex; because of this, the sufferer does not recognize that the signal is internal and instead interprets it as an external voice. The psychiatric perspective stops at the brain or, if it goes further than this, blames bad genetics.

Many psychologists, however, seek causes for schizophrenia outside the brain,

looking for environmental factors that might contribute to the development of psychosis. For example, an older theory, now unfashionable but not wholly discredited, is to identify the origins of schizophrenia in the way the sufferer's mother interacts with him in childhood (Lidz, 1949). More recently, Read (2009) has argued that the illness is largely the result of childhood sexual abuse. These theories strongly conflict with the established medical model but the idea that environment does matter has good evidential support. Tellingly, for example, Bentall (2004) cites studies that show that remitted psychotics are more likely to relapse if they go home to live with their parents than if they live alone or in shared accommodation.

The aetiology of schizophrenia is thus very contentious. Personally, I find both sides of the debate unsatisfactory. Although neurological arguments seem authoritative, they are in reality quite speculative and seem to me to lack a human dimension. I am more sympathetic to the psychologists' view, but find many (such as Bentall) to be too conservative.¹ Both camps spend a lot of time talking *about* schizophrenics but too little time talking *to* them.

This is a large part of what motivated me to write *The Hounds of Heaven*. Psychiatric and psychological discourse treats psychotics as objects, as others; I wanted to present a character who is a Subject, who is intelligent and articulate enough to describe her own experience in her own words. I believe that the question of what causes schizophrenia is an important one to raise and that the fact that most 'experts' have no good answer to this question is something of which the public should be aware.

¹ By conservative, I mean wary of formulating bold theories. Psychology, these days, seems to me to lack a general theory of the mind. Freud, for all his faults, at least offered a general picture of consciousness but this picture has fallen out of favour because it is deemed unscientific. It is the felt need to give theory a strong scientific basis that makes much modern psychological literature seem overly conservative.

The fact that many professionals operate from a position of ignorance can be shown with respect to 'voice-hearing'. Friston, mentioned above, completely misinterprets the nature of this phenomenon: voice-hearing is really more the misattribution of thoughts to others; the voices a psychotic 'hears' are not really *heard*, but thought/. Bentall approaches this question in an entirely different way, spending an entire chapter arguing that people engage in self-talk - as though this fact were not completely obvious to anyone who has seriously considered the nature of their own consciousness. Or has read *Ulysses* (Joyce, 1922).

Naturally, I could not write this script if I did not have my own theory of schizophrenia. I am not a psychiatrist. The theory comes, rather, from reflection on my own personal experience, acquired from living with psychosis for a number of years, and on my observations of friends and acquaintances with psychosis. I have assumed that my experiences – which included severe paranoid delusions and 'auditory hallucinations' - are typical of most sufferers. I may not be a psychiatrist but I can understand myself. Rather than present this theory here, however, I have decided to let the film speak for itself.

Filmic Context

Many films have alluded to or directly tackled the subject of mental illness. Such films include *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (Forman, 1975), *Shine* (Hicks, 1996), *A Beautiful Mind* (Howard, 2001) *Fight Club*, (Fincher, 1996), *Donnie Darko* (Kelly, 2001), *Benny and Joon* (Chechick, 1993), *Twelve Monkeys* (Gilliam, 1995)

Melancholia (von Trier, 2011) and (very recently) the Australian film *Mental* (Hogan, 2012). Films like *Fight Club* and *Twelve Monkeys* are fantasies and use the idea of madness as a metaphor, almost as a way of highlighting just how fantastical the stories they tell are. The others approach the question of mental illness in a different way: they are concerned with raising awareness of mental illness as a genuine problem in society, of drawing people's attention to it. It is in this second class of film that my film falls.

Benny and Joon deserves special mention. Generically, this film is a romantic comedy, depicting the blossoming love between Sam, an eccentric clown-like figure who models himself on Buster Keaton (played by Johnny Depp), and Joon, a young woman with schizophrenia. The protagonist of the film, though, is in fact Benny, Joon's brother and caregiver, who must relinquish his role as protector to allow Joon to pursue her relationship with Sam. The screwball quality of the romance comes from the fact that both Sam and Joon are eccentric. As the film goes on though, we realize that Sam's eccentricity is assumed but that the girl is genuinely crazy and suffers for it.

Benny and Joon is an important film because it presents its schizophrenic as an ordinary person and does not shy away from the fact that psychosis can be a terrible experience. However, it does not present Joon's experience from the inside, focussing instead on the people around her. *The Hounds of Heaven* is in some ways a reply to *Benny and Joon* in that it corrects this mistake. In the first scene, Jess is represented in a bowler hat and pencil tie: she is a synthesis of Joon (the mad girl) and Sam (the clown). Later, her 'flipping out' out on the bus directly alludes to the moment in

Benny and Joon when Joon breaks down on a bus – but, unlike *Benny and Joon*, Jess claims ownership of the moment by saying (in voice-over) “This is me flipping out.” She is both the mad-girl and the comedian.

Donny Darko does indeed present schizophrenia from the inside. We know Donny is psychotic because he takes anti-psychotics and hallucinates that he is seeing a giant evil Bunnyman. *Donny Darko*, however, is not a realistic film: in its opening scene a jet engine falls into Donny’s bedroom and the film ends with Donny time-travelling back to this moment to change history. In some ways the film can be more fairly classed as a fantasy (like *Fight Club*). Unlike *Fight Club*, it has some serious points to make about the nature of madness. It communicates some psychotic ‘insights’ - such as the idea that Fate exists and that people are faced by a choice between love and fear, of embracing or rejecting Fate, as ways of orientating oneself towards the world. “Donny Darko” is really more a poetic rumination on these themes, rather than an authentic description of psychosis, and I think perhaps the fact that Donny is schizophrenic goes over the head of the audience.

Donny Darko is not so much concerned with showing schizophrenia as it objectively is, but as it subjectively feels like. In this respect, it can be compared to *Melancholia*. This film takes the dominant feeling of clinical depression – that nothing matters– and embodies this feeling in a dramatic situation. The planet is about to be destroyed and there is nothing anyone can do to stop this. Only the Melancholic, played by Kirsten Dunst, can face this fact stoically. Like *Donny Darko*, *Melancholia* is concerned with representing a subjective feeling or idea and embodying it in a concrete situation.

Shine and *A Beautiful Mind* take a different approach to schizophrenia. Both films are biographical and based on exceptional people; both film exploit people's admiration for geniuses as a way of creating sympathy for seemingly unsympathetic characters; both films are realistic, setting out to 'explain' Schizophrenia to an audience that is interested in but ignorant of the subject. Of the two *A Beautiful Mind* deserves special consideration. This film, which won Oscars for Best Picture and Best Actor, is a seminal work and a reference point for all other films on the topic. In this film, Russel Crowe plays John Nash, a mathematician and economist. The early part of the film represents his matriculation at Princeton and early success, while also introducing a roommate who becomes his best friend; later he takes up a job at MIT. The middle part of the film describes his burgeoning romance with his future wife (played by Jennifer Connelly). During this period, he is given a special mission by the CIA: he is to decode secret messages planted by a Communist conspiracy in periodicals. This mission eventually goes wrong: he becomes intensely paranoid and is institutionalised; at the point the film reveals that his secret mission is a paranoid delusion and that a number of characters in the film, including the roommate, are imaginary. Nash retreats to a house in the countryside with his wife. Unable to wholly accept that his beliefs are delusional, he goes off his medication and relapses, but, eventually, realizing that his delusions are internally inconsistent, accepts that he is mad. The last part of the film charts his gradual re-entrance into academia and the film ends with him as an old man, accepting the Nobel Prize in economics, still troubled by his imaginary friends but steadfastly ignoring them.

Formally, *A Beautiful Mind* follows a very clichéd narrative arc. Nash is gifted but flawed: his flaw is not that he is mad but that he is hubristic. In the course of the film

learns humility. In the last part of the film, he, arduously but successfully, recovers his former prestige, humbled but undefeated. A large part of the commercial and critical success of this film can be attributed to its yoking of a known, even hackneyed, dramatic structure (the overcoming of the flaw of hubris) to a difficult subject. In this way, it makes schizophrenia seem intelligible.

Insofar as *A Beautiful Mind* gives an account of what schizophrenia is, it does make a few good points: it captures, for instance, the fact that many schizophrenics communicate with imaginary companions; it hints at the grandiosity of schizophrenic delusions; it tries to show how schizophrenics seek to decipher the world, looking for hidden signs, conspiracies, messages. However, I think that in many ways *A Beautiful Mind* fails. It does not get to the heart of its protagonist. Watching it, I felt that the screenwriter had read a short psychiatric monograph on the subject and then struggled to dramatize the essay point by point. It does not ring true.

Finally, I would like to mention *Mental*, a very recent Australian film by P.J. Hogan. *Mental* begins by introducing a family of young girls who all would like to have psychiatric labels because they believe that this will make them more interesting (particularly to their father) and explain why they feel like outsiders. Toni Collette's character, Shaz, appears to nanny these girls; she firmly believes that she is the only sane person in a world of lunatics and proceeds to teach the girls to view the world in the same way. So far, the film promises to deconstruct the dichotomy between 'normal' and 'mental'. Unfortunately, in the last part, Shaz is revealed to be unambiguously mental herself, schizophrenic, and the film falls apart. *Mental* fails because it does not have a clear idea what it is trying to say; in the end, all the crazies

are presented as unikeable grotesques and, because everyone is crazy, the film feels misanthropic. I find *Mental* salutary because it shows one of the traps a film on this topic can fall into – the trap of not treating its subjects sympathetically.

Considering the number of films made about madness, one can wonder if it is possible to say anything new about it. My film differs from these others in a number of ways. First, *The Hounds of Heaven* is set in the world of a typical Mental Health ‘client’ today. Jess’s life consists of her family, her occupational therapist, her shrink and her support groups. In that sense, it describes the real situation of hundreds of people in New Zealand. Second, although Jess’s situation is typical, she herself is atypical. She is smart and funny, quite capable of explaining herself. She is sympathetic. Of course, the fact that she is young, pretty and always nattily dressed helps make her sympathetic (audiences tend to identify with smart, pretty people more than dumb, ugly people). Third, and most importantly, I think this film contributes to the discourse about mental health because it presents a new but credible theory of what schizophrenia is: that the illness is rooted in the personality of the sufferer.

Narrative Unity

What is a story? The minimal theory of narrative devised by Todorov (1970) is that a story begins with a fictional world in equilibrium, that this equilibrium is disturbed, that the characters must act to restore it and that the story concludes with the establishing of a new equilibrium. It is useful to compare Todorov’s theory to Campbell’s notion of the Hero’s Journey (1949). Campbell argues that the hero begins the story in the familiar world, that he receives ‘the call to adventure’, engages

in some sort of quest through a fabulous world, overcoming obstacles but eventually reaching his goal, and then returns to the normal world with the 'boon' that he has won. Campbell's theory sharply contrasts with Todorov's. In Todorov's theory, a single world that is in equilibrium is disturbed and then returns to equilibrium while Campbell's theory involves two worlds: a familiar one and a fantastic one, the narrative involving a passage by the Hero from one to the other and back. In Todorov's theory the state of the world causes the action; in Campbell it is a summons from the other world.

In *Story: Substance, Structure, Style, and the Principles of Screenwriting* (1997), the influential screenwriting teacher Robert McKee proposes a theory that seems to combine aspects of Todorov's and Campbell's. McKee argues that the unifying ingredient of a story is Desire:

For better or worse, an event [the inciting incident] throws a character's life out of balance, arousing in him the conscious and/or unconscious desire for that which he feels will restore balance, launching him on a Quest for his Object of Desire against forces of antagonism (inner, personal, extra-personal). He may or may not achieve it. This is story in a nutshell. (p.196-197)

McKee's notion that the story begins with a disturbance of equilibrium that motivates the protagonist(s) to 'restore balance', is reminiscent of Todorov. By describing this as a 'Quest', it is more similar to Campbell.

These theories are similar because they emphasize the idea that a story is held together by the goal-directed agency of its protagonists. McKee's theory seems particularly plausible. However, I believe that it is incorrect. We can see it is wrong by considering how many stories do not fit the formula. In *Othello*, for instance, the protagonist has no clear desire until towards the end (when he decides to kill Desdemona); it is Iago who possesses active desire, the desire to destroy Othello, and it is Iago who drives the story forward. In *King Lear*, Lear sets the story in motion by giving his kingdom away to two of his daughters but, for the rest of the play, he is simply responding to the actions of others. In *Moby Dick*, the story is driven by Ahab's monomaniacal obsession but it is Ishmael who is the protagonist. In *Benny and Joon* the romance between Sam and Joon drives the story forward but it is Benny's reactions to this romance that is the focus. In all these examples, the protagonist is reactive rather than active.

What drives a story forward is not the desire of the protagonist but the way he reacts to the situations in which he finds himself. The protagonist is not 'the desiring agent' but a surrogate for the audience; the question a story always asks its audience is, "What might I do if I was this character in the same situation?" If the protagonist of a story decides, for no reason, to rob a bank, we do not identify with him. If he is put in a situation where *he has no choice* except to rob a bank (because he is up to his eyeballs in debt, perhaps), *then* we identify with him. Even *Star Wars* (Lucas, 1977), the modern paradigm for a well-structured narrative, presents a protagonist who is reactive rather than active. Luke's first desire is to find Obiwan Kenobi; later it is to rescue the princess; in the last act it is to help destroy the Death Star. Each time he changes his desire it is as a reaction to his circumstances. The intention of the film, to

be sure, is to show that Good triumphs over Evil, but Luke does not begin the story with a burning desire to destroy the Death Star, nor formulate this desire as a response to the princess's plea for help. He ends up the hero without ever seeking to become it. Luke's desire changes and, I believe, this is what many of the best stories show. They dramatize how a character's desires *change* as a reaction to different situations.

Generally speaking, then, the protagonist does not drive the plot forward but is rather caught up in it. Other examples that show this include *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (Craven, 1984) and *Friday the 13th* (Cunningham, 1980). In horror films, the protagonist's 'desire' (if we can call it that) is simply to stay alive; in no way, though, can this be compared to a Quest. It is not necessary for a protagonist to have a constant desire. This is important to my film because its protagonist Jess has no well-defined desire; I worried about this when I was writing it. I now believe, however, that the convention that the story should begin with a character determining to achieve a goal and ending with him attaining it is more the exception than the rule.

An altogether different theory of narrative is that offered by Egri in *The Art of Dramatic Writing* (1946). Egri argues that a story can be distilled down to a simple statement that he calls a 'premise'. (McKee's term for this is 'the controlling idea'.) Thus, for instance, in *Romeo and Juliet*, the premise is "Great love defies even death". This statement implies a beginning: a falling in love. It says something about character: the lovers must be capable of great love and thus not shallow. It implies something about conflict: to show that it is a great love, they must overcome obstacles. And, naturally, it says something about the end of the story: they must choose love over life. In Egri's view a story is an *argument* in favour of its premise

and proceeds dialectically, opposing thesis to antithesis until a final synthesis is reached.

Of these various theories, Egri's seems to me the most credible: a story is a piece of rhetoric designed to persuade the audience of a particular idea. Often this idea is something the audience already *wants* to believe - like "Good always conquers evil" (Star Wars) or "Everyone is destined to meet his or her true love" (Sleepless in Seattle, Ephron 1993) – but feels unsure about. To reassure the audience that this comforting belief is absolutely true, a good story generally presents the opposing view (what McKee calls the counter-idea) as strongly as possible: in the case of *Star Wars* this is achieved by making the Empire vastly more powerful than Luke and the Resistance; in *Sleepless in Seattle* this is achieved by putting the lovers on the opposite side of America. By making the counter-idea as persuasive as possible it makes the audience anxious, so that, at the conclusion of the story, the audience feels relieved that the propositions they want to believe have been confirmed.

A premise does not have to be comforting. In *Stone* (Curran, 2010), a film based around a parole officer, the counter-idea is "A person can change for the better, choosing good over evil" but the film is committed to the premise "People do not change". The rhetorical efficacy of the film comes from the fact that its protagonist is professionally committed to the counter-idea and the film charts his disillusionment. It is the tension between the premise and the counter-idea that creates conflict.

Sometimes it is not even necessary to present the counter-idea explicitly: in *Priscilla. Queen of the Desert* (Elliott. 1994), everything in the film is intended to prove that there is nothing shameful about being gay. There is no need, in this film, to represent

the opposing idea – that there might be something shameful about homosexuality – because the audience supply this idea themselves. The humour of the film comes from the way it plays with the audience’s guilty conscience.

What holds a story together is that it is a sustained argument in favour of its particular theme. In *The Hounds of Heaven*, I am trying to persuade the audience that it is possible to understand schizophrenia – but that no one at present does. This raises two difficulties: the first is how to secure the audience’s interest in an issue like this and the second how to avoid being didactic. I have attempted to solve the first difficulty by making Jess as likeable as possible: she seems like a real person so we identify with her concerns. The second problem I have approached in a number of ways: for instance, I have rephrased the question, “Is it possible to understand Schizophrenia?” as “Is it possible to understand Jess?” This type of rephrasing is a common feature of stories: it introduces a space between the world of the text and the universal propositions it proposes. Another way I have avoided being didactic is by making Jess herself a believer in the established medical viewpoint – she is not (or not always, anyway) merely a mouthpiece for my views.

Another strategy that was important to me was to use subtext. For example, the scene in the film when Jess is talking to her Occupation Therapist, Polly, is intended to show her reaction to what has occurred with Rick. It would be easy in this scene for Jess to say exactly how she is feeling and in the way directly express the themes of the film. But this would be too obvious and also untrue to her character. My solution was to have Jess decide that she might be autistic and have this be the subject of the conversation. She is *unable* to make sense of what has happened and what she says

shows this.

Finally, I would like to turn to McKee's idea that a protagonist should always have a character arc. Should Jess have a character arc? I wrestled with this question during the writing of this script but eventually decided that it would be better if she did not. In the real world people do not (usually) recover from Schizophrenia - so it would be untrue if she did. However, although she does not change meaningfully, the story does have a kind of character arc in that *the audience's* view of her evolves.

Possibly I am wrong about that she does not have a character arc. An alternative way of formulating the premise might be "The world is a dangerous place if you do not know yourself." Perhaps at the end of the film, Jess attains self-knowledge and sees the world less fearfully. This is something I leave open.

General Features.

I would now like to discuss some general features of the film. The most distinctive feature of the script is its pervasive use of voice-over. Some screen-writing teachers, such as McKee, say that voice-over should be avoided as much as possible.

Personally, I think that voice-over can be used well, as in *Fight Club* and *Trainspotting* (Boyle, 1996) or badly, as in *Two Little Boys* (2012, Sarkies). Generally speaking, effective voice-over complements the visuals by providing additional information. An example of good voice-over is the opening sequence of *Trainspotting*. In this scene, Renton sarcastically enjoins us to "choose life", i.e.

sensible adult values, and ends with him saying that he does not choose life but “something else”. The visuals meanwhile show him running from a crime scene: that is, the visuals show the ‘something else’ that he has chosen. The scene is economical and rich in subtext. By contrast, during the opening sequence of *Two Little Boys* the voice-over simply consists of the protagonist explaining what is happening on screen; because it tells us little that we cannot work out ourselves, it is virtually redundant. The rule of “Show, don’t tell” applies to voice-over as well as dialogue.

I intended voice-over to be an integral part of *The Hounds of Heaven* from its conception. It is not simply used for exposition but has an integral function. Jess is *explaining* herself to the audience; the voice-over is her attempt to be understood. Furthermore, the voice-over illustrates her personality– she is acutely self-conscious and constantly tries to imagine how she appears in the eyes of others. By narrating her life, Jess is trying to control how others see her.

One challenge I faced is that because the script is so focussed on what Jess says, it was sometimes difficult to find visuals to complement the voice-over. An example is the sequence in which Jess expounds on Gnosticism; the second part of this sequence works well because it shows Jess going to the supermarket, a visual narrative that ironically complements the voice-over by contrasting the sacred and the mundane. The first part of the sequence works less well. I originally intended the visuals to show her going about her ordinary life while she occupies herself mentally with religious musing but this does not really work. My mentor suggested that the visuals should reflect her obsession with Gnosticism by showing Gnostic images; my own feeling is that the visuals should present a contrasting narrative, showing the

dissolution of her everyday habits of self-maintenance, that she is pre-psychotic. I am unsure how to achieve this.

A second feature of the script is its abstruse vocabulary and references. Jess uses words like “sciolist” and “lucubration” and name-drops people like John Berryman and Wallace Stevens; at one point she quotes John Ashbery and Ezra Pound. Once again this serves a function in the script; the fact that other people cannot understand her is a metaphor for the incommunicability of experience. A second function is that I am deliberately narrowing the audience of people who truly ‘get it’; in this way the film is trying to confront the audience and force it to re-evaluate its preconceptions.

The film is not perfect – it is still a work in progress. It has some issues that may or may not be problems. One example is that, early on in the film, I introduced myself as a character. When I wrote this scene I was still unsure where the film was going. I cannot decide if it is a meta-textual device that contributes to the film’s argument or simply self-indulgent; I have left it in because I do not know with what to replace it.

Another possible problem is that, towards the end of the second act, the film includes two dramatic climaxes in quick succession – the scene with Jon Stewart and the lecture by the visiting psychologist. According to McKee (and I agree with him here), one should avoid putting emotional climaxes back to back because of what he calls “the Law of Diminishing Returns” (p. 244). That is, the emotional impact of these scenes is weakened by making them contiguous. Unfortunately, this is an insoluble problem; I cannot separate out these two scenes, nor can I delete one because both are vital to the story.

Finally, one last potential problem is to do with Jess's father. Although he is introduced in the first act, Jess's father does not become a major character until the last. I always imagined him as a major character – the shadow of Jess's parents hangs over her the whole way through - but it has been pointed out to me that it is odd to properly introduce a major character so late. I considered having Jess say in voice-over about Rick, when she is with him at the club, "He makes me think of my father for some reason." The advantage of this would be that it would help tie the film together; the disadvantage is that it makes Rick more into a known quantity rather than an unknown stranger. I am unsure, also, if it is realistic for Jess to think this at this time. Here, I have to compromise between the effectiveness of the sequence and of the whole film. Because I have not made up my mind, I have included the line in square brackets.

Theory and Practice

I would now like to make some observations about the relationship between theories of writing and practice.

I wrote my first feature film script some ten years ago as part of Bachelor level paper on screen writing at the University of Auckland. My lecturer at the time gave us a formula for what constitutes a film: all films, she said, have a three act structure and are exactly divided up into a quarter first act, a half second act and a quarter third. Being young and dutiful, I accepted this as gospel. When I wrote this first film, I arrived at the second plot point at page ninety and had to invent a whole subplot

involving FBI agents and rural cops in order to bring the last act up to the required thirty minutes. This meant I had a 120-minute film with a bloated third act.

When I enrolled at AUT's Masters of Creative Writing course at the beginning of the year, having decided to have another go at writing, I had half of another film script written. I couldn't get this film to work. I now know that this was partly because I did not have a clearly defined premise, but another reason it did not work was because I still believed the last act needed to be twenty-five minutes long. When I came to write "The Hounds of Heaven" I eventually decided to just let it find its own shape. Plot point one comes around page twenty-six; plot point 2 at page ninety and the film ends around page one hundred and five.

The fact is my lecturer at the University of Auckland was wrong. McKee points out that short third acts are quite common. Even the 'rule' that every film has a three-act structure is incorrect: I believe that *A Beautiful Mind* has four and McKee argues that *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (Newell, 1994) has five.

For this reason, I am very glad to have read McKee. But he is not perfect. As I argued above, his notion that every story should be framed as a Quest misrepresents the nature of narrative and, if taken as scripture, would lead to a great reduction in both the variety and quality of stories written. It is important for writers to reflect on their craft and there are helpful 'rules' and tips that can help improve a writer's work but nothing should be taken as dogma. It is better to have no theory at all than a bad theory.

References

Bentall, R. P. (2003) *Madness Explained: Psychosis and Human Nature*
London: Penguin Books Ltd

Boyle, D. (Director) (1996) *Trainspotting* [Motion Picture]

Campbell, J. (1959). *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Pantheon Books, USA

Chechik, J. (Director) (1993) *Benny and Joon* [Motion Picture]

Craven, W. (Director) (1984) *A Nightmare on Elm Street* [Motion Picture]

Cunningham, S. (Director) (1980) *Friday the 13th* [Motion Picture]

Curran, J. (2010) *Stone* [Motion Picture]

Elliott, S. (1994) *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* [Motion Picture]

Ephron, N. (Director) (1993) *Sleepless in Seattle* [Motion Picture]

Fincher, D. (Director) (1996) *Fight Club* [Motion Picture]

Forman, M. (Director). (1975) *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* [Motion Picture]

Friston, K. (1998) *The Disconnection Hypothesis*, Schizophrenia Research, 30

Geekie, Jim; Read, John (2009). *Making Sense of Madness: Contesting the Meaning of Schizophrenia*, Taylor & Francis

Gilliam, T. (Director) (1995) *Twelve Monkeys* [Motion Picture]

Hicks, S. (Director) (1996) *Shine* [Motion Picture]

Hogan, P. (Director) (2012) *Mental* [Motion Picture]

Howard. R. (Director) (2001) *A Beautiful Mind* [Motion Picture]

Joyce, J. (1922) *Ulysses*, Sylvia Beach

Kelly, R. (Director) (2001) *Donnie Darko* [Motion Picture]

Kendler, S., Schaffner, K (2011) *The Dopamine Hypothesis of Schizophrenia: An Historical and Philosophical Analysis*, Philosophy, Psychiatry and Psychology, Volume 18

Lidz, T, Fleck, S, Cornelison. A. (1966) *Schizophrenia and the Family*, International Universities Press

Lucas, G. (1977) *Star Wars* [Motion Picture]

Melville, H. (1851) *Moby Dick*, Richard Bentley, Britain

McKee, R. *Story: Substance, Structure, Style and the Principles of Screenwriting*,
(1997) Harper Collins, USA

Newell, M. (1994) *Four Weddings and a Funeral* [Motion Picture]

Sarkies, D. (Director) *Two Little Boys* [Motion Picture]

Shakespeare, W. *Othello*, (circa 1603)

Shakespeare, W. *Romeo and Juliet* (circa 1593)

Shakespeare, W. *King Lear* (circa 1605)

Todorov, T. (1975) *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*,
Cornell Paperbacks

Trier, L. (Director) (2011) *Melancholia* [Motion Picture]