

## **Beyond the Biopic**

# **An Exploration into the Nature of Biography through the Medium of Film**

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English  
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## **DECLARATION:**

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Graduate Programme in English Studies, School of Arts, College of Humanities, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg campus, South Africa.

I, Janet van Eeden Harrison, declare that

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## **ABSTRACT**

This research deals with the process of writing a biographical screenplay which sheds light and insight into the life of Mary Wollstonecraft, the eighteenth-century writer of ground-breaking works such as *A Vindication on the Rights of Woman* (1792). Although the facts around Wollstonecraft's life are relatively well-known, especially in Britain, I wanted to write the screenplay to explore how her struggle to be taken seriously as a woman is still relevant today. For this reason I chose to create the modern, parallel narrative of Khetiwe's story to illustrate the struggle for emancipation, which still continues in some parts of the world.

Primarily, I aimed to create a structure which illustrates the defining characteristics of the protagonists, and ensures that the form of the screenplay enhances the hermeneutics of the narrative. This practice-based research begins with an examination of the most popular writing techniques which could be employed as obvious structural solutions. I begin with an exploration of the biographical genre itself, to discover how genre usually dictates structure. I then examine traditional storytelling structures, namely the hero's journey. Next, I explore ways of making these traditional structures move beyond the privileged masculine point of view. I subsequently explore the hero's journey's apparent opposite, the heroine's journey. Then, I document how I stumble across the use of the *mise en abyme* through writing and producing one of my short films. This leads to an examination of the exact nature of this particular literary device. I examine two biographical feature films, *La Vie en Rose* and *Saving Mr Banks*, to show how they make use of the *mise en abyme*, and show how successful these applications are. Finally, I track the process of writing *A Hyena in Petticoats*, making note of the structures I have employed. In conclusion, I collate a template to illustrate my structural choices with the use of the *mise en abyme* as a hyper-structure, on top of a baseline structure. I suggest that the template proffers a new way of approaching biographical feature-film writing, and offers opportunities for biographical feature scripts, as well as possibilities for narrative-feature scripts.

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## Introduction

This thesis examines whether a biographical feature-film (biopic) script can be written in such a way that it does not follow the standard hero's journey structure of traditional biopics, but is written in such a way that the structure reflects the essential characteristics of the subject of the film itself. To this end, the focus of the thesis is on the process of writing the biographical screenplay in particular.

Chapter One examines genre in general, and the genre of biopics in particular, exploring the origins of this form of script writing. It takes note of how the screenwriting craft has moved from hagiography, to a more honest portrayal of the lives of remarkable people. Screenplay structure is explored in Chapter Two, with a special focus on the origins of the hero's journey, from the discovery of the psychological construct of archetypes, as coined by psychoanalyst, Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961), to the identification and use of these archetypes in story-structure, as uncovered by Joseph Campbell in his seminal work, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949). This chapter also examines the corollary of the hero's journey with an examination of Maureen Murdock's *The Heroine's Journey* (1990). Chapter Three explores finding a motif which dictates structure and an investigation into the literary term, *mise en abyme*. The chapter goes on to explore the use of the literary device in two biopics about women, *La Vie en Rose* (2007) and *Saving Mr Banks* (2013). Chapter Four explores the writing of the script itself and how different aspects of the theories above have been put into practice, focusing especially on the use of the *mise en abyme*, and the reasons behind my choices when writing the script of *A Hyena in Petticoats*. It also posits a template for the inclusion of the *mise en abyme* as a hyper-structure in biopics, and possibly other narrative feature films. The Conclusion sums up how I have found a new structure for the writing of biopics or any other type of screenplay, by using the *mise en abyme* as a hermeneutical device to add to the depth of understanding of the nature of the character portrayed.

The methodology I have applied in this thesis is practice-based research. I chose this methodology as it suits the creative and investigative aspect of my project which delves into the structure of writing screenplays, specifically biopics, through the medium of a creative work. In the introduction to their book, *Practice-led Research, Research-led Practice in the Creative Arts*, the editors Hazel Smith and Roger T. Dean explain the parameters of creative research in the following way:

In the humanities, theory, criticism and historical investigation have been heavily prioritised over arts practice. Traditional courses in English departments, for example,



were concerned with the study of literature. They rarely, if ever, included creative writing or discussion of the creative process, and if academics wrote novels this was regarded largely as a hobby. However, in the last two to three decades, the idea that arts practice might be a form of research has been developing ascendancy. Terms such as practice-led research have been developed by creative practitioners, partly for political purposes within higher education, research and other environments, to explain, justify and promote their activities, and to argue – as forcefully as possible in an often unreceptive environment – that they are as important to the generation of knowledge as more theoretically, critically or empirically based research methods. (2009, p 2)

Smith and Dean go on to say that “[R]esearch, therefore, needs to be treated, not monolithically, but as an activity which can appear in a variety of guises across the spectrum of practice and research. It can be basic research carried out independent of creative work (though it may be subsequently applied to it); research conducted in the process of shaping an artwork; or research which is the documentation, theorisation and contextualisation of an artwork – and the process of making it – by its creator” (p 3). It is clear that my project is most closely aligned to the second definition which refers to “research conducted in the process of shaping an artwork”. Furthermore, the editors argue the value of this type of creative research in the following way:

Firstly, creative work in itself is a form of research and generates detectable research outputs; secondly, ... creative practice – the training and specialised knowledge that creative practitioners have and the processes they engage in when they are making art – can lead to specialised research insights which can then be generalised and written up as research. The first argument emphasises creative practice in itself, while the second highlights the insights, conceptualisation and theorisation which can arise when artists reflect on and document their own creative practice. (p 5)

To this end, the work on the screenplay is taken in the spirit of creative endeavour in order to add to the body of theoretical research in the field of screenwriting. As the thesis culminates in the screenplay, the research is practice-based research rather than practice-led, which does not necessarily have to include a creative component. Through an investigation into the structure of biopics in particular, with the aim of finding an alternative structure which is more organically suited to the subject of the biographical screenplay through the writing of my own biopic script, *A Hyena in Petticoats*, this project fulfils the above-mentioned criteria. The creative practice of

writing the screenplay has lead to specialised research insights which have subsequently been written up in the thesis as research, thereby adding to the body of knowledge about screenwriting theories. Practice-based research is, therefore, the best methodology for *Beyond the Biopic*.

In this biopic, the subject is Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1792), who was remarkable for her independence of thought and actions in eighteenth-century Britain, as well as her writings on the issues of how women should be educated and allowed equal rights to men. Her ideas were years ahead of her time. The screenplay for *A Hyena in Petticoats* demonstrates the foresight of Mary Wollstonecraft and how her precepts are still relevant today. My research question sets out to explore an alternative form of film writing structure to the classical hero's journey, as described by Joseph Campbell, and also to the heroine's journey, as explored by Maureen Murdock, in the hope of broadening the scope of the structure of biopics. After exploring existing structures in the screenwriting field of research, I have posited a theory of a hyper-structure, to be imposed upon a basic storytelling structure, to add layers of depth to the process of screenwriting. This was developed through the creative process of the research project.

The research project, or thesis, therefore focuses in particular on the process of the writing of the biographical feature film, *A Hyena in Petticoats*, after the initial first two chapters deal with story structure in general. The challenge I set myself in writing the creative project, the script itself, was largely to create a story about a well known historical character without falling into a documentary style of writing or reportage, in an endeavour to make the story as emotionally engaging as a fictional one. Therefore the research project sets out to examine how to make a historical character come alive, almost three hundred years after she lived, without resorting to a pedestrian retelling of the chronological events of her life. The aim of the research was to find an innovative structure which would enhance the narrative of a remarkable real life character in particular, and to broaden the perspectives of biographical film writing structure in general, by adding a fictional modern protagonist to echo the narrative thread.

The biopic, *A Hyena in Petticoats*, aims to capture the vulnerability of an anachronistic woman who believes she can live as freely as a man in repressive eighteenth-century England. The screenplay concentrates on Mary Wollstonecraft, the woman, and postulates ideas regarding how she came to have such subversive ideas for the time about emancipation. The biopic isolates her disappointment with her alcoholic father and her indulged brothers as one of the major causes of her dissatisfaction, and explores her milieu during a time when traditional values were being questioned and the status quo was violently overthrown in neighbouring France.

The Wollstonecraft strand of the narrative takes place in a time when the middle-class was broadening, partly as a result of wealth that was coming in from the colonies, some of which was based on slave labour, which Wollstonecraft and her friends energetically opposed. The Industrial Revolution also played a role in Wollstonecraft's life, and she was influenced by the work of the writers she read such as François-Marie Arouet Voltaire, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. The screenplay examines how she breaks through the boundaries imposed on her by her sex and station in life at that time, and how she succeeds in becoming a new genus of woman, as she herself predicted. Even though the final outcome of her life is tragic her literary achievements, as well as her personal breakthrough in being one of the first women to shape her own life with a conscious effort, are at the forefront of the screenplay.

Wollstonecraft's deliberate choices in her life broke the traditionally acceptable mould for women of her age. This is one of the reasons why I wish to tell her story in an alternative way. Not only does the biopic deal with the remarkable personal details of Wollstonecraft's unusual life, but I retell Wollstonecraft's story in a format which breaks away from the standard linear structure of traditional biopics in order to enhance the themes behind the narrative and to highlight certain aspects of Wollstonecraft's character.

The research project also explains the genre of biopics in general and makes a comparison between *A Hyena in Petticoats* and other biopics, especially *La Vie en Rose* (Dahan, 2007), the film about Edith Piaf. This biopic is an exceptional example of non-linear storytelling and recreates the workings of human consciousness in an episodic format. The script for this film is written by a woman, Isabelle Sobelman, which makes it even more appropriate material for exploration with regard to structure. The second biopic I examine is *Saving Mr Banks* (Hancock, 2013), which focuses on a time in the life of P.L. Travers when she meets the film mogul Walt Disney. By using specific trigger-moments in the present story-line, the script flashes back to pivotal moments in Travers's childhood. The screenwriters use this technique to explain her aggressive, independent choices as an adult. Once again, this script, which presents a non-linear narrative, is written by two women scriptwriters, Kelly Marcel and Sue Smith. The similarities between these two biopics – both are about fiercely independent, creative women, both are non-linear, and both were written by women – make for interesting material for comparisons with androcentric biopics.

Another salient point I examine is which facts of the subject of the biopic's life should feature most strongly and come under the scrutiny of the screenwriter. The question uppermost in my mind was how a biographical scriptwriter decides which events of a life to focus on and what the reasons are

behind these particular selections. I also explore the question of receptivity and cultural correlatives in the examination of these biopics, particularly focussing on the way women have been depicted previously in comparison to their male counterparts, in terms of visibility and exposure.

One of my primary concerns is exploring whether the different structure I choose to employ when writing my biopic would limit this film to an elite, art-house audience or whether it will still be possible to have a broad appeal, as the hero's journeys usually have. Achieving this difficult task forms a major part of writing the screenplay as does the process of creating a new structure for the biopic. In the light of this aim, I explore the work of some of the twentieth-century feminist scholars, such as Maureen Murdock (1990), who have written about the hero's journey, and ascertain the viability of applying this journey to *A Hyena in Petticoats*.

As the biopic is a recreation of the life of one of the first feminists, Mary Wollstonecraft, much research was required to ensure I depicted the events in her life accurately. I had already done a great deal of research into Mary Wollstonecraft's life for my Master's degree. The creative aspect of my Master's constituted the play which I wrote and produced called *The Savage Sisters* (Van Eeden, 2006), about an imagined meeting between Mary Wollstonecraft, Jane Austen and Fanny Burney. The dissertation accompanying the stage play was a reflection on the writing of the play and the research into the life and times of Wollstonecraft, Burney and Austen. My current thesis, which explores the writing of *A Hyena in Petticoats*, takes into its orbit the research I did for the Master's as well as a great deal of new research into Mary Wollstonecraft's life, as new writing on her life has subsequently emerged. For example, the biography, *Mary Wollstonecraft: A New Genus*, by Lyndall Gordon (2005), and *Romantic Outlaws: The Extraordinary Lives of Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley* by Charlotte Gordon (2015), shed new light on the life of Wollstonecraft. Therefore, this current thesis builds upon previous research undertaken in the course of my studies.

As stated above, the major focus of both the thesis and the biopic screenplay is the examination of alternative writing structures. This is based on a critical exploration of the genre of the biopic, concentrating on those films that experiment with the best ways to tell a biographical story. I drew on my previous work with regard to literary biography, as I had written the *Savage Trilogy* of plays. This trilogy deals with the lives of four literary figures, namely Katherine Mansfield, Jane Austen, Mary Wollstonecraft and Fanny Burney, as well as the life of the artist, Paul Gauguin. In the first and third plays, particularly, I set out to find an alternative way to re-create some of the factual

aspects of a literary life, while adding a creative element which confronts the nature of biography itself. In *A Savage from the Colonies* (Van Eeden, 2001), for example, I place The (fictional) Writer (of the play) on stage with Katherine Mansfield as Katherine tries to sort out a wooden chest, crammed full of her own writing, on the night she dies. During the course of the play, Katherine attempts to destroy incriminating diary entries and letters, but The Writer intervenes and insists that Katherine face up to the less-than-perfect elements and influences of her life. The structural choice of the writer being able to interfere with the life of her creation in the biographical play commented on the very nature of biography itself. A biographer is responsible for which events are chosen to be privileged in the work, whether it is a biographical novel, a play or a screenplay. The writer chooses to showcase events which reflect her particular interpretation of the life-events of the subject.

In *The Savage Sisters*, three young actors prepare to rehearse a play about literary figures: Jane Austen, Fanny Burney and Mary Wollstonecraft. I used the conceit that one of the young actors has not read the play before the rehearsal. Therefore, the facts behind each author's life have to be spelled out to her by one actor who knows everything, before they can begin their rehearsals. In this way, the audience is introduced to characters such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Fanny Burney, about whom they probably know little. In the play, another conceit is that the director is unavailable to help them rehearse because she has to deal with a sick child. This introduces the theme of women trying to fulfil the needs of a career at the same time as they have to care for their children. While the actresses begin to read extracts from the writers' work in Act Two, they transmute seamlessly into the literary figures themselves. In the play, the transition from young women rehearsing for a play, into becoming the actual characters they portray, was a device I chose to amplify the theme of the narrative. Essentially the main theme commented on the way women's lives are inextricably intertwined. Each woman writer's life is affected by those who have gone before her. The seamless, transitional structure of the play echoed the theme of the interconnectedness of writing women.

Therefore, with the aim of finding a specific form which echoes the character of the subject of the biopic, the following issues are addressed in the thesis and the screenplay. The character of Wollstonecraft, and especially her vocation as a writer, is the first consideration when writing the screenplay. The challenge is to examine whether an intense focus on the structure of writing a biopic, rather than the mere historical details of a character's life, will enhance the content of the story, as well as act as a commentary on Wollstonecraft's character in an effective way. This question is a concern for me as a writer, but will not be the main focus for the intended audience of the film. The audience should be moved by the story of Mary's life, rather than by an awareness of

the structure of the film. However, the hope is that an astute audience would appreciate the structure of the film for the sake of the commentary it makes on the protagonist's character too.

So, to this end, as stated previously, I explore the craft of screenwriting itself, in the desire to investigate the essential nature of a writer through the medium of writing a screenplay. I examine the nature of scriptwriting, as I understand it from my own experience of twenty years of writing screenplays, as well as explore the writing of others, from those mentioned above to the latest publications in screenwriting theory. I wanted to find useful structural elements to amplify my narrative. In this way, I needed to create an unusual form which mimics the nature of writing itself, as well as the art of creation. More specifically, I wished to create a form which echoes the lived experience of a creative woman writer such as Mary Wollstonecraft. However, I had to ensure that structural invention was not used for the sake of artifice alone. Only elements which enhanced the understanding of the essential character of Mary Wollstonecraft, in particular, and writers in general, were to be used.

In *Beyond the Biopic*, I examine the nature of writing a screenplay, particularly *A Hyena in Petticoats*. However, in both the execution of the screenplay and the thesis, I explore the question of whether the medium of expression is quintessential to the subject matter in screen- and play-writing in general and in *A Hyena in Petticoats* in particular. The question I asked myself is whether it is always necessary to tell a story which is factually-based in a chronological, linear format, or if a writer is justified in using the format of the screenplay itself as yet another agent through which to illustrate an aspect of the essential character of the protagonist. I believe the latter to be true, for reasons that will be argued in the thesis.

In the final analysis, writing this biopic was an experiment with both form and content, which I hope turns into a marketable screenplay that can be produced as a feature film. As Robert McKee says, "With content in one hand, and a mastery of form in the other, a writer sculpts story. As you rework a story's substance, the telling reshapes itself. As you play with a story's shape, its intellectual and emotional spirit evolves" (McKee, 1999, p 87). Wollstonecraft's life story is my content, and the structure in which I chose to tell her story forms a vital part of the originality of this screenplay. The final product has to meet the exacting standards of not only the academically-rigorous evaluators of this project, but also those of an erudite production company. Finally, I hope this film will also satisfy the requirements of a receptive audience.

Ultimately, I sought to find a match between the essentially non-linear options for women which are ascribed to them according to their sex, and the structure of the biopic for *A Hyena in Petticoats*. Instead of the traditional masculine-orientated hero's journey favoured by biopics and most Hollywood films, I set out to create an inherent hero's journey in writing this script.

## **Literature Review**

The initial departure point for both my thesis and the screenplay was the formula of the hero's journey as formulated by Christopher Vogler in his *Writer's Journey, Mythic Structure for Storytellers and Screenwriters* (Vogler, 1992), based on Joseph Campbell's *The Hero With A Thousand Faces* (1949). The theories of other writing theorists, from the earliest postulations of Aristotle's *Poetics* (Butcher, 1895) and Lajos Egri's *The Art of Dramatic Writing* (1942), to more contemporary writers such as Syd Field, specifically in his book, *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting* (2005), and Robert McKee's scriptwriting theories in his manual *Story: Substance, Structure, Style and the Principles of Screenwriting* (1999), were explored. The more recent works on screenwriting such as Linda Aronson's *The 21st Century Screenplay* (2010), and *Alternative Scriptwriting* written by Ken Dancyger and Jeff Rush (2007), also formed an integral part of my background reading. During the latter stages of my research, Maureen Murdock's *The Heroine's Journey* (1990), as well as the writings of Elizabeth Abel *et al.* in their analysis of women in literature in their seminal work, *The Voyage In: Fictions of Development* (1983), informed much of my thinking.

In this way, using aspects of these story structures or writing theories, which serve many of the more formulaic Hollywood films, as my starting point, I examined the writing of biopics in general. The theorists and their work formed the foundation from which I approached my cross-textual research into the selected biopics to see how much these diverged from the prescribed Hollywood structural theories. All the material I encountered fed into my exploration of the "unique shaping of the telling" as McKee defines choices of structure (McKee, 1999, p 87).

While I used the particular theoretical model of the hero's journey in screenwriting from which to launch my own exploration into effective structure, I also chose to explore twentieth- and twenty-first century literary theories from a feminist perspective which dealt specifically with the work of novels, as mentioned above. In the work I encountered, most notably *The Voyage In* (Abel *et al.*, 1983), the feminine alternative to the hero's journey is explored. In literary theory, the hero's

journey is equated with the German term, *Bildungsroman*. The two terms share similar criteria in that they both deal with a journey skewed favourably towards the masculine rite-of-passage narrative. Hence, reading the feminist analysis of the hero's journey alongside the more traditional masculine hero's journey, I compared and contrasted the two, to see which route was most suitable to exploring the story of Mary Wollstonecraft in the biopic.

Research into the facts of Wollstonecraft's life required reading of the best known biographies which have been written about her. I did, however, favour the biographies by Lyndall Gordon (2005), and also Charlotte Gordon (2015), as these are the most recent. The other biographies I read were by Janet Todd (1993), and Clare Tomalin (1992). The works of Wollstonecraft, herself, were essential reading in deciding how to create the structure of the biopic. Hence, the following works by Wollstonecraft formed the basis of my recreation of Wollstonecraft's character: *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman with Strictures on Moral and Political Subjects* (1792); *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters: With Reflections on Conduct, in the More Important Duties of Life* (1787); *Mary: A Fiction* (1788); *A Vindication of the Rights of Men, in a Letter to the Right Honourable Edmund Burke* (1790); *An Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution, and the Effect it has Produced in Europe* (1794), and *The Wrongs of Woman, or Maria. Posthumous Works of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1798). William Godwin, Wollstonecraft's husband, wrote a poignant memoir of her life, *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), and this was a great source of inspiration. His own philosophical writings, too, formed an integral part of the research for the screenplay.

The decision to parallel the life of a fictional character, alongside that of the biopic's historical subject, was a pivotal choice which affected the structural outcome of the biopic. It is a bold decision to attempt to recreate a young woman's life whose culture differs from my own, but in this respect, I wanted the character of Khetiwe to reflect the oppression many women face in patriarchal societies on the African continent. Many sources were researched to ensure that I was accurate in my depictions of the culture. The following were my primary sources into the study of Zulu culture: a Master's dissertation, "Izinganekwam: An Anthology of Zulu Folktales" by N. Canonici, from the University of Natal (1986); an article entitled "The Magicality of the Hyena" in *Asian Folklore Studies*, Volume 57 by Jurgen Fremgen (1998); works by Z.L.M. Khumalo of the University of Zululand, including "The Portrayal of Themes in Blose's *Uqomisa Mina Nje Uqomisa Iliba (It Makes me Just Crazy)*," a Master's dissertation (1995); Nelson Makhubane Tshabalala's recent publication *Chronicles of Tshabalala Clan in Mhlongamuula and Its Exodus* (2016), and Margaret



Marggraff's Master's dissertation, entitled "The Moral Theme in Zulu Literature: a Progression (1930-1955)", for the University of Pretoria (1998). These works revealed the deep symbolism embedded in all aspects of Zulu folklore. Animals which feature in Zulu literature are especially invested with semiotic resonances. Therefore, using an animal to depict a particular characteristic of human behaviour cannot be undertaken lightly. I took this awareness into creating the figurine of the hyena which plays a pivotal role in *A Hyena in Petticoats*, to ensure that I utilised specific semiotics which would enhance the narrative of Khetiwe's story without betraying her culture. I also conducted interviews (Sem, 2015; Phoswa, 2016) and watched home videos about *Umhlonyane* and other traditional practices (Dlamini, 2012; Phoswa, 2016) to attempt to understand authentic Zulu culture.

I realise that simply undertaking thorough research into the culture I depict in the screenplay will not obviate me from the charge of cultural appropriation. In an article in the journal, "*Off Our Backs*", Vol. 21, No. 9 (October 1991), Joanne Stato writes about a white woman who was about to play a didjeridoo at a musical festival in Michigan. An Aboriginal woman appealed to her not to play the instrument as it was sacred to her religion. The white musician agreed, and did not play the instrument, even though she had built her own didjeridoo, and had written original music for the piece. Stato refers to the disenfranchisement of the Aboriginal people of Australia, and explains that it is understandable that the instrument has taken on political overtones as a result. She states:

The key to understanding the problem in the didjeridoo incident lies in the fact that indigenous peoples have had their territory (land) stolen, their society displaced, their culture suppressed; all with little avenue of redress. So it is not at all surprising that an aboriginal would consider it entirely inappropriate for a non-aboriginal to take even that which has a negligible money value (compared to mineral rich land, for instance), namely, a sacred ritual instrument. (p 20)

Stato goes on to say that "examining one's racism is a lifelong process", but she insists that she has a need to incorporate influences from other cultures into her work. Her following comment resonates when she argues that:

Without that freedom, the climate is too limiting for an artist to continue to grow. I see the real issue to be one of acknowledging injustice, working to change it, and continuing

to examine one's own work to assure it springs from a healthy and just consciousness.

(p 21)

While the above argument makes sense on the surface, it needs to be interrogated more thoroughly. Susan Scifidi, in her book *Who Owns Culture?: Appropriation and Authenticity in American Law* (2005), states that the concept of culture itself is challenging if it is seen to be “an object of ownership, or a locus of authenticity”. She explains that culture has been defined as one of the most complex words in the English language (p x).

In another legal article by Rosemary J. Coombe, “The Properties of Culture and the Politics of Possessing Identity: Native Claims in the Cultural Appropriation Controversy” in the *Canadian Journal of Law and Jurisprudence* (1993), Coombe states that the term “cultural appropriation” was defined to mean “the depiction of minorities or cultures other than one's own, either in fiction or non-fiction” (p 250). It often happens that the claim of cultural appropriation comes about when a less-powerful culture is appropriated by a dominant one. This inevitably leads to a charge of oppression or exploitation from the appropriated culture. Having their identity defined by the more powerful culture results in the less-powerful culture feeling disenfranchised. Identity, itself, is a fragile conceit and cultural critic, bell hooks, asserts that there is a need for a pragmatic approach. She is quoted by Coombe as saying: “Cultural critics must confront the power and control over representations in the public sphere, because social identity is a process of identifying and constructing oneself as a social being through the mediation of images” (268). Coombe continues exploring hooks's hypothesis in the following way.

hooks asserts that an identity politics, however necessary in the stage of the liberation of subordinated peoples, must ‘eschew essentialist notions of identity and fashion selves that emerge from the meeting of diverse epistemologies, habits of being, concrete class locations, and radical political commitments.’ A return to ‘identity’ and ‘culture’ is necessary, in hooks' perspective, more as a means of locating oneself in a political practice, than in the embrace of the positivism projected by cultural nationalism. (267)

Coombe and hooks infer that it is more important to locate oneself in a political practice rather than focusing on the “essentialism” which is inherent in cultural nationalism. Hence, they suggest that disenfranchised people need to link their identity “to a history and a politics, rather than an essence” (267).

Perhaps anti-essentialism is one way to approach the issue of culture, yet it does not solve the problem of cultural appropriation. In an article in the journal of *Communication Theory*, Richard A. Rogers's article, "From Cultural Exchange to Transculturation: A Review and Reconceptualization of Cultural Appropriation", explains how this phenomenon is always intertwined with cultural politics (2006). He goes on to explicate four types of appropriation in literature: exchange, dominance, exploitation, and transculturation. He posits that transculturation questions the validity of the first three: "— not only in an era of postmodernity or globalization, but also in historical contexts". He continues by saying that transculturation points to "culture as a relational phenomenon that itself is constituted by acts of appropriation, not an entity or essence that merely participates in appropriation" (p 475).

The above statement rings true, especially in a multi-cultural society such as South Africa. There has been much appropriation by every culture of the other through the proximity of our interactions. However, I still felt the need to be cautious in placing the story of Khetiwe in the script. As a writer, I believe Khetiwe's story is essential to rooting the script in my home country. I could not have written the parallel storyline about a white girl in South Africa, as the issue of white privilege would dominate critiques. No matter how many obstacles I faced in my life, no one would credit that any white person in this country faced as many disadvantages as a person of colour.

Filmmakers such as Darryl Roodt (1962 –) have no qualms in writing and directing a film about the other, such as an impoverished black woman in *Yesterday* (2004), appropriating Zulu culture as well as the female idiom. In spite of possible charges of cultural appropriation, the film was a success and was nominated for an Oscar Academy Award in 2005 for Best Foreign Language Film. Novelist, Elsa Joubert, wrote unapologetically about the other in *Die Swerffjare van Poppie Nongena* in 1978 and won numerous awards. Shula Marks's *Not Either an Experimental Doll* (1987) documents the lives of three black African women and earned her recognition in the academic world

An argument which bolsters my choice to create the parallel character of Khetiwe in the script comes from the fact that women of all races have been marginalised as the other through the centuries, due to the dominance of hegemonic masculinity. Melissa Steyn argues in her book *Whiteness Just Isn't What it Used to Be: White Identity in a Changing South Africa* (2001) that the privileges for white women came about only from their association with white men, who needed

them for the propagation of the dominant white race. She states that, “Whiteness needed to create docile bodies, both of its women, and of those it marked as excluded” (p 20). She continues:

Treacherous white women were (and are) considered a threat to the continuation of the superior race. For this reason, control over their women’s sexuality was an important component of the white narrative (Nederveen Pieterse, 1992). ... One of the consequences of this ambivalent position has been that some white women were in time able to recognize the correspondences between their position and that of subordinated races, a phenomenon that fed into the early abolitionist and feminist movements, as well as more recent resistances against abuses of civil rights (Ware, 1992; Segrest, 1994). (p 20)

If I extrapolate from the idea that, historically, all women have been subjugated and oppressed as well as being “othered” in terms of the patriarchy, I could equate the idea that Khetiwe and Mary are linked intrinsically through their womanhood. As such, I am qualified to write about this through my own experience of being dominated by the patriarchy. In the screenplay, I choose to compare the two protagonists’ experiences of being subordinated by the dominant androcentric culture in which they find themselves, and to draw parallels between their narrative journeys, rather than to make specific comparisons between their cultures. So, with humility and respect, I undertook writing their parallel narratives. When the film goes into production, I will employ a black director to direct Khetiwe’s story. In this way, I hope to limit the charge of cultural appropriation and hope to show evidence of transculturation instead in this artistic work.

Therefore, the screenplay was undertaken in a spirit of critical and creative endeavour, not only to explore the nature of structure itself, but also to explore whether a story with a feminine protagonist should in fact be told in a form more closely shaped to the orientation of the lives of women, rather than a traditional hero’s journey structure which, by its very nature, favours a masculine journey. This endeavour also aimed to explore whether the challenges faced by Wollstonecraft in the eighteenth century were similar to those faced by a young girl living in a patriarchal society in the twenty first century.

The thesis traces the development of the screenplay along the lines discussed above, bearing witness to the creative process as well as documenting the research problems and solutions, which result in specific choices of structure and content in the screenplay.

## **Creative Considerations**

A key creative consideration is that the screenplay had to be written in such a way that the context of Mary Wollstonecraft's struggle can be clarified for a modern audience so that they can appreciate the strength it took to voice such unpopular and largely unexpressed ideas, especially with regard to the gender politics of the eighteenth century.

Bearing in mind that Mary Wollstonecraft's unusual intellect was never employed at the expense of her sometimes volatile sensibilities, it is vital to ensure that a modern audience responds to her life story on an emotional, as well as an intellectual, level. This is where I endeavoured to employ my skills as a writer to recreate a believable portrait of a sensitive, yet strong-willed, woman, while doing justice to her ground-breaking intellectual theories as well as experimenting with the structure in which I placed her life story.

I approached writing the script about Wollstonecraft in two ways. Initially I extrapolated the most important events of her life which I believed conspired towards making her the exceptional woman she was. Deciding which events need to be featured in a biopic is a difficult exercise. My choices were made by ensuring that each event highlighted a specific aspect of Wollstonecraft's character and fed into the overall theme of the biopic, which is about a woman's desire to be an independent human being, free from the strictures of a patriarchal society.

Then, after much time spent trying to find the most engaging way to tell the story for a modern audience, I decided to write the parallel fictional strand featuring a twenty-first century young African girl, Khetiwe, whose life bears similarities to Wollstonecraft's eighteenth-century restrictive circumstances. Linda Aronson refers to the creation of a parallel character structure as a tandem narrative.

Successful tandem narrative films consist of equally important stories (each with its own protagonist and each on the same socio-political theme) unfolding simultaneously and chronologically in the same time frame. Theme and moral are hugely important in these films, and the writing motto here is: 'same theme, different adventures', which reminds us that all the various stories have to illustrate the film's theme in different ways. (2010, p 182-183)

Creating the character of Khetiwe allowed me to explore the patriarchal views still prevalent in some parts of South African society. While trying not to be paternalistic, I chose to write Khetiwe's story as a tandem-narrative to show that the struggle Wollstonecraft endured in the hope of being treated as an independent human being in the eighteenth century is not over. Hopefully, Khetiwe's character would make the story accessible to a modern audience who could identify with her desire to pursue a life in which she attempts to live as independently as a man, even though the patriarchal society in which she finds herself still exists in some parts of twenty-first century Africa. In this way, the tandem narrative would have the matching themes required. Once again, Khetiwe's story had to be told through a structure which breaks free from a traditional masculine hero's journey and embraces the less-rigid feminine pattern. Therefore, the second step of writing the screenplay involved a simple exposition of the sequence of events which I would feature in Khetiwe's fictional life story. These events were chosen to enhance the narrative of Khetiwe's story through their similarity to Mary's struggle.

Once the basic expositional events of the story had been set down in writing, then the crafting of the screenplay began. Referring back to one of my favourite techniques which I used in the play *The Savage from the Colonies* (Van Eeden, 2001), where a character representing the writer of the work itself commented on the action of the main protagonist, I tried to find the right form of interplay between dramatic reality and reality itself. After much thought, and after attending a Script Surgery with script editor, Ellin Stein, from Euroscript in London, all manner of extreme ideas were considered and rejected, from Mary's incarnation to Khetiwe in a vision after Khetiwe's performance of a ritual to her ancestors, through to Mary's ghost appearing to Khetiwe in dreams. Finally, however, after much meditation on their relationship, I had an image of the shape of their story: it was to be a spiral of sorts, a double helix, to be exact, which reflected back on itself. The story had to incorporate all I had read so far, and yet to add a totally unique edge to the structure.

To this end, I conceived the conceit that Mary creates the character of Khetiwe herself, in the shape of a clay figurine, when longing for freedom from her restrictive life. Immediately this brought to mind the arguments about cultural appropriation and colonialism where the white Western character creates the African character in her own image. So I decided to confront this directly and engage with the idea of cultural appropriation in the structure of the story. While I allowed Mary to create Khetiwe in the beginning of the narrative, I ensured that Khetiwe became aware of this manipulation. When she becomes aware that she is a creation of Mary's imagination, she demands to have control over Mary's sensibilities too. In this way, Mary influences Khetiwe, but Khetiwe

has an equally strong influence on Mary's growth as a woman of liberal views. Doing this allowed me to satisfy the question of why Mary changed her fairly conservative and deeply Christian views as a young woman into those which were far more liberal and progressive as she grew older. In the structure of the screenplay, Khetiwe is the one who pushes Mary to expand her limited world view. While this may not be based on fact, it is a creative idea which attempts to illustrate that Mary's mind was malleable, and years ahead of her time, and she was also highly susceptible to influences from countries outside her native England.

*A Hyena in Petticoats* strives to be non-derivative of other biopics which have gone before, or of any of my own work. Instead, it hopes to offer a new structure for biographical film scripts and will make a valuable contribution to the body of theoretical work which already exists about the writing of screenplays as a whole. The thesis documents the process of finding a structure which aims to go beyond the standard heroic structures of biopics, into a storytelling structure, which uses primary events in the life story of the subject as the baseline narrative, but expands this into a hermeneutically profound interpretation of the subject's personality through the insertion of a hyper-narrative.

## **Chapter One**

### **A Theoretical Investigation into the Genre of Biopics**

Genre is a promise to the audience, and you must fulfil that promise in a real but unusual way. [A writer must] make sure that [she] knows enough about the demands, clichés and nuances of any chosen genre to recreate it in a powerfully original way that will fulfil, and hopefully exceed, the audience's expectations . (Aronson, 2010, p 21)

In this chapter, the meaning of genre itself is explored in general, and then the genre of biopics in particular, especially with regard to the way biopics and biographies themselves have usually been slanted towards the masculine hero's journey over the past century. The bias found in the genre of biopics is compared to that found in literary novels of the past two centuries, with their penchant for the genre of masculine-biased *Bildungsromane*. The comparison of the traditional *Bildungsroman* with biopics goes further to explore and contrast nineteenth- and twentieth-century novels featuring, or written by, women to identify whether there is a specific structure for the hero's journey. Once these elements have been explored, conclusions are drawn regarding the viability of a hero's journey, as opposed to a masculine hero's journey, which can be expanded into a structural framework for a biopic about two women, one historical and one fictional.

As Linda Aronson says above, genre sets up expectations in an audience. The task of screenwriters is to fulfil and exceed those expectations. Ken Dancyger and Jeff Rush observe in their book, *Alternative Scriptwriting* (2007), that audiences enjoy genre films for a particular reason. They note that there is a "complex relationship between the fears and aspirations of audiences and the genres that speak to these feelings" (p 76). These authors extrapolate this idea by stating that "Genre is more than formula. More often it is a type of story that has a visceral appeal to its audience. The scriptwriter who ignores the strength of that appeal does so at considerable cost" (p 76).

For this reason, approaching the biographical feature film (biopic) as a genre in itself has to be done with care. World cinema has a long history of biopics which have been made over the decades and continue to be enjoyed by audiences into the twenty-first century. Hollywood continues to produce feature films based on the lives of real people, and some of the most successful films of recent years have been biopics. As the Internet Movie Data Base (IMDB) shows, the top films of 2013 and 2014 were biopics, among them *Dallas Buyers Club* (Valee, 2013), *The Butler* (Daniels, 2013), *The Wolf*



of *Wall Street* (Scorsese, 2013), *12 Years a Slave* (McQueen, 2013), *Saving Mr Banks* (Hancock, 2013), *Selma* (DuVernay, 2014), and *Mr Turner* (Leigh, 2014). Slightly older films of the same genre have achieved much success in the past. Films such as *Amadeus* (Forman, 1984), *Schindler's List* (Spielberg, 1993), *A Beautiful Mind* (Howard, 2001), *Catch Me If You Can* (Spielberg, 2002), *The Pianist* (Polanski, 2002), *Monster* (Jenkins, 2003), *The Life and Death of Peter Sellers* (Hopkins, 2004), *Walk the Line* (Mangold, 2005), *The Aviator* (Scorsese, 2005), *La Vie En Rose* (Dahan, 2007), *Into the Wild* (Penn, 2007), *The King's Speech* (Hooper, 2010), *The Social Network* (Fincher, 2010), have all received critical acclaim and Academy nominations. Most of these biopics received awards. In 2016, the popularity of biopics continued with a number of well known literary figures' lives being documented, amongst others. These include *A Quiet Passion* (Davies, 2016), which documents the life of reclusive poet, Emily Dickinson; *A Storm in the Stars* (Al-Monsour, 2016), which explores the relationship between Percy Bysshe Shelley and Mary Godwin; and *Florence Foster Jenkins* (Frears, 2016), which follows the path of the titular indulged heiress who was determined to sing opera even though she did not have the ability to do so.

Biopics have long appealed to mainstream audiences, as have biographies, possibly for the same reasons. I believe audiences and readers enjoy reading or watching stories about people who, while seemingly ordinary, have made an extraordinary mark on the world. Biographies give audiences inspiration for their own lives. Production companies, therefore, target a wide market of people who want to see aspirational films for this very reason. I would argue further that the biopic depicting the life of an outwardly ordinary person, who overcomes enormous obstacles to become extraordinary, almost always follows the path of what was referred to as a classic hero's journey in the work by scholar Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), and Disney story executive Christopher Vogler's *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers* (1992). Therefore, it makes sense that this genre appeals to a wide audience for the same reasons that heroes' journeys form the basis of the most popular stories, myths and legends across culture and time. I discuss the hero's journey in more detail in Chapter Two.

### **The Hero's Journey in Biopics**

The notion that most biopics take the form of a hero's journey is borne out by a quotation from Jill Ker Conway in her book, *When Memory Speaks: Exploring the Art of Autobiography*. She states, "If we study the history of autobiography in Western Europe and the white settler societies that are

its offshoots, it soon becomes apparent that there are life scripts for men and for women which show remarkable persistence over time” (1999, p 7). Conway continues:

For men, the overarching pattern for life comes from adaptations of the story of the epic hero in classical antiquity. Life is an odyssey, a journey through many trials and tests, which the hero must surmount alone through courage, endurance, cunning and moral strength. His achievement comes about through his own agency and his successful rite of passage leaves him master of his own fortunes, though of course, still subject to the whims of the gods or the turning wheel of destiny. (p 7)

Samuel Johnson commented on the need to highlight heroic aspects of the subject’s life in a biography. “He that recounts the life of another, commonly dwells upon conspicuous events, lessens the familiarity of his tale to increase its dignity, shews his favourite at a distance decorated and magnified like the ancient actors in their tragick dress, and endeavours to hide the man that he may produce a hero” (quoted in Dankert, 1992, p 86).

It is therefore obvious that the classic hero’s journey structure fits well with the traditional biopic which shows an ordinary hero or heroine overcoming enormous odds to succeed in extraordinary endeavours. The aspirational dimension of the genre must be acknowledged and is as much a part of the success of the biopic as is the educational aspect of the audience’s desire to find out more about successful and interesting people.

Ken Dancyger and Jeff Rush, in their seminal work on genre *Alternative Screenwriting* (2007), refer to the following points as important elements of the genre of biographical film. It is worth quoting them in full:

The central character has a particular talent and a nonconformist personality.

The central character’s talent develops in conflict with the conventions of society.

The drive for actualization is singular.

The antagonist is not physical; rather it can be time (*The Life of Louis Pasteur*), ignorance (*The Life of Emile Zola*), or conventional thinking (*Patton*).

The seminal event is acted out in a public manner.

The psychological makeup of the central character allows her to overcome the tragedy of life and succeed. Although Van Gogh dies at the end of *Lust for Life*, his success is evident in his life's work.

There is a sense of mission that is religious in its overtone. Patton is as zealous, in his way, as Gandhi.

Personal relationships often fail, but this only adds to the spiritual side of the central character.

The critical moment, whether it is a discovery or a religious or political conversion, is the most important point in the story, far more important than the public acknowledgement of the character's achievement.

The tragic aspect of the character's life is also important in this genre. Whether it is Patton's dishonor, Gandhi's assassination, or Zola's death, the reminder of mortality acts as ballast to the mythical subtext of these stories. (p 94)

These characteristics itemised by Dancyger and Rush relate without exception to the classic hero's journey, from the earliest days of the ancient tales of Homer's Odysseus in *The Illiad and the Odyssey* (Homer, 800), to modern biopics such as *Erin Brockovich* (Soderburgh, 2000). Vogler explains the role of the hero in his screenwriting book *The Writer's Journey, Mythic Structure for Writers* (1992), as the following:

The dramatic purpose of the Hero is to give the audience a window into the story. Each person hearing a tale or watching a play or movie is invited, in the early stages of the story, to **identify** with the Hero, to merge with him and see the world of the story through his eyes. Storytellers do this by giving their Heroes a combination of qualities, a mix of universal and unique characteristics. Heroes have qualities that we all can identify with and recognize in ourselves. They are propelled by universal drives that we can all understand: the desire to be loved and understood, to succeed, survive, be free, get revenge, right wrongs, or seek self-expression. Stories invite us to invest part of our personal identity in the Hero for the duration of the experience. In a sense, we become the Hero for a while. We project ourselves into the Hero's psyche, and see the world through her eyes. Heroes need some admirable qualities, so that we want to be like

them. We want to experience the self-confidence of Katharine Hepburn, the elegance of Fred Astaire, the wit of Cary Grant, the sexiness of Marilyn Monroe. Heroes should have universal qualities, emotions, and motivations that everyone has experienced at one time or another: revenge, anger, lust, competition, territoriality, patriotism, idealism, cynicism, or despair. (p 30)

The primary function of a hero, it seems, is to create audience identification, according to Vogler. It is the ordinariness of the hero which appeals to us, but he or she must have qualities we aspire to as well. Vogler goes on to state the following:

But Heroes must also be unique human beings, rather than stereotypical creatures or tin gods without flaws or unpredictability. Like any effective work of art they need both universality and originality. Nobody wants to see a movie or read a story about abstract qualities in human form. We want stories about real people. A real character, like a real person, is not just a single trait but a unique combination of many qualities and drives, some of them conflicting. And the more conflicting, the better. A character torn by warring allegiances to love and duty is inherently interesting to an audience. A character who has a unique combination of contradictory impulses, such as trust and suspicion or hope and despair, seems more realistic and human than one who displays only one character trait. (p 30)

In other words, audiences need to identify with heroes who show the vulnerabilities of being human, and who also have conflicting character traits. Audiences love to see a story about an underdog who overcomes obstacles in an unusual way, in fictional stories. When they see a film or read a book about an actual human-being who is flawed, yet who overcomes obstacles in an unusual way, audiences identify even more with the character. They can relate to the real-life hero as the events and obstacles the protagonist overcomes are often familiar, and sometimes correspond to events in their everyday life. Vogler goes on to identify the aspirational elements of heroes in good, fictional storytelling which echo the value of inspirational biopics and biographies:

Heroes are symbols of the soul in transformation, and of the journey each person takes through life. The stages of that progression, the natural stages of life and growth, make up the Hero's Journey. The Hero archetype is a rich field for exploration by writers and spiritual seekers. (p 37)

E. Katz, J.G. Blumler, and M. Gurevitch in “Uses and Gratifications Research” (1973), postulate a theory about why certain groups of people engage in specific types of media, and they also examine reasons behind which genres of their chosen media they prefer. According to their categorisations, there are a number of reasons why audiences enjoy biopics in particular. These fall under the categories of “Personal Identity”, “Integration” and “Social Interaction” (Katz *et al.*, 1973). One can extrapolate from these categories that audiences enjoy watching biopics because these films allow them to identify their own life stories with those being explored in a biopic or biography. They experience gratification in a number of areas of human development. These areas are, namely, to discover and explore new models of human behaviour, to gain insights into their own lives and into the circumstances of others, to grow in social empathy through these insights, and finally to identify with others, which will lead to them gaining a sense of personal belonging.

The above reasons delineated by Katz, Blumer and Gurevitch clarify the vital aspect of audience identification in biopics. They also explain the didactic element of this genre of films in their ability to impart life lessons drawn from the experiences of the subjects of the film. This explains why biopics have been popular as a genre since filmmaking began. Dennis Bingham, in his book *Whose Lives Are They Anyway? The Biopic as Contemporary Film Genre* (2010), explains that biopics were made by the film studios from the earliest days of Hollywood. Their popularity waned, however, due to the reverential treatment given to the subjects of the biopics which portrayed them as iconic heroes from the beginning of their depiction to the end. The biopics of that time succeeded in estranging their subjects, whom they sought to revere, from the general public. The element of audience identification was missing in the deification of the biographical subject in these early films. As a result, the popularity of these biopics declined so much that in the latter half of the twentieth-century, referring to a film as a biopic became a pejorative term. The biopics produced by the Hollywood studio system were regarded by critics as being turgid. Richard Schickel of *Time* magazine stated in 1994 about Lawrance Kasdan’s film *Wyatt Earp* (Kasdan, 1994), that the generic conventions of biopics meant that the films would “grind relentlessly, without selectivity or point of view, through a rootless and episodic life, from adolescence to old age” (Bingham, 2010, p 12). It took the critical success of three powerful biopics such as *Erin Brockovich* (Soderburgh, 2000), *A Beautiful Mind* (Howard, 2001), and *Catch Me If You Can* (Spielberg, 2002), from the turn of the millennium onwards, to inspire audiences to enjoy biopics again. Bingham notes that “like any genre that dates back to nearly the beginning of narrative cinema, the biopic has gone through developmental stages, emerging from

each of its historical cycles with certain modes which continue to be available to filmmakers working in the form” (p 17). Bingham goes on to identify the following models which have been used in biopics from their earliest days:

- the classical, celebratory form (melodrama)
  - warts-and-all (melodrama, realism)
  - the transition of a producer’s drama to an auteurist director genre (Martin Scorsese, Spike Lee, Oliver Stone, Mary Harron, Julian Schnabel, etc.)
  - critical investigation and atomisation of the subject (or the *Citizen Kane* mode)
  - parody (in terms of choice of biographical subject; what Alexander and Karaszewski call the “anti-biopic, a movie about someone who doesn’t deserve one” mocking the very notions of heroes and fame in a culture based on consumerism and celebrity rather than high culture values)
  - minority appropriation (as in queer or feminist, African American or third world, whereby Janet Frame or Harvey Milk and Malcolm X or Patrick Lumumba own the conventional mythologising form that once would have been used to marginalise or stigmatise them)
  - since 2000, the neoclassical biopic, which integrates elements of all or most of these.
- (p 17)

Bingham cites Bloomsbury circle writer, Lytton Strachey, and Hollywood writer, director and actor, Orson Welles, as two of the writers who had the most influence on biography as a genre. When Strachey published *Eminent Victorians* (Strachey, 1918), he did for biography “what the works of his Bloomsbury friends were doing for the novel, bringing a literary genre into the new century, helping to define modernism” (Bingham, 2010, p 31). Until then, Victorian biographies were a description of the inspiring public deeds of the subjects and did not delve into their private lives or motivations behind the actions of the famous people they depicted. The early biographies border on hagiography. Strachey’s approach to biographical writing changed this, as Bingham observes:

*Eminent Victorians* did all of these [points in Bingham’s definitive list on biopics noted above], and in a fast-paced style that appropriated more than a few techniques from fiction. That fictional style, ironically, owed more to Trollope than to Woolf and Joyce. Strachey’s point of view combined omniscience with an approach to personal

motivation and emotional reaction that goes as far as biography can when the writer has only letters and the works of others to go on. ... Strachey's largest influence on literary biography, on journalism, and eventually, on the biopic stems from the author-narrator's point of view, which is implicitly critical, dismissive, often scornful, and in a term from a later time, counter-cultural because Strachey, again like a good novelist, discovers his characters as he writes. Furthermore, while his accounts are narratives, they are also commentaries on their subjects. ... Strachey's influence on film biography is far-reaching. The hagiographic, formulaic biopics of the studio may seem analogous to the stodgy, impersonal form that Strachey's "New Biography," in Woolf's triumphant term, displaced. (p 32)

Until Strachey's unorthodox approach, Hollywood studios would produce biopics which glorified "scientists, inventors, writers, and statesmen" and "a common theme was that these greats created the progressive, capitalist, liberal-humanist modern world that the spectator was having the good fortune to inhabit". In contrast, Strachey set out to "de-mythologise and scrutinise [the] subjects", whereas Hollywood set out to make myths (p 32).

Strachey's approach opened the doors for writers to explore biographical subjects while using the creative resources at their disposal, to flesh out the sub-text and motivations behind the public personae. Even in the case of the biopics based on the lives of famous people but made to look like fictional characters, such as the roman à clef, *Citizen Kane* (Welles, 1941), for example, the structure takes the form of a quest. Orson Welles's famous take on the life of William Randolph Hearst involves a quest, as this film's hero's journey is encapsulated in the unravelling of a mystery, as well as the retelling of an origin story about an apparently fictional hero. The hero achieves his material goals but does not find happiness at the end of his life, making it a cautionary tale about the dangers of greed and ambition. It is also a quest narrative for the reporters wanting to find out the truth about the fictional Citizen Kane. So it would seem that even fictional biopics such as *The Godfather* (Coppola, 1972), to give one example of another much admired faux-biopic, favour the classical structure of the hero's journey. Bingham explains how *Citizen Kane* changed the face of biopics:

*Citizen Kane*, as has been well documented, is the studio era's outstanding anomaly, the work that subverts the system in almost every way, while taking full advantage of the

resources of the studio, the first American mainstream art film. There has been much research into the film's basis in the life of the publishing magnate William Randolph Hearst (1863-1951), around which controversy began to rage almost as soon as the film was finished. ... As the film that almost all agree is the greatest ever made *Citizen Kane* stands at a crossroads with one road leading back toward films and culture that went before it and to which it is reacting. The other road, as we know from retrospect, reaches toward much that comes after it both in terms of cinema and of how cinema looks out at the world. ... Kane's influence on biopics did not even begin to be seen until two decades after its release and was really not felt en masse until forty or fifty years later. (p 50-51)

So *Citizen Kane* shaped the future of the biopic and there is no doubt that the film had a significant influence on the reception of the more recent biopics which have grown in popularity over the past decade and a half. By taking his cue from the life of William Randolph Hearst, Welles created a dramatic story which used elements of good storytelling as its guide rather than a loyal recitation of the facts of the subject's life. Bingham continues by stating that the reason for the popularity of the biopic is that it aims to help audiences understand humanity better. He says that biopics aim "to plumb that mystery of humanness, that inability completely to know another person, and the absolute importance of knowing them and ourselves" (p 18-19).

Trying to "plumb that mystery of humanness" is an enormous goal for anyone attempting to write a biopic. Knowing that the genre conventions of biopics favour the hero's journey format, it would seem that the obvious way to write such a script would be to follow the well trodden path of the hero on his or her odyssey. However, the main purpose of my thesis is to explore an alternative form of story structure which moves away from the masculine-skewed hero's journey. After twenty years of writing film scripts and plays, I decided to write a screenplay that moves away from the so-called Hollywood model, set out in Vogler's *Mythic Structure and Storytelling, The Writer's Journey* (1992), based on the book by Campbell, *The Hero With A Thousand Faces* (1949). As this framework is very successful in Hollywood because the universality of its structure ensures its broad appeal to audiences, and, therefore, big box office returns, this is, unsurprisingly, still the formula of choice for almost all mainstream films.

The hero's journey structural approach served me well and is the basis of my online scriptwriting



course which has been running successfully for the past seven years. It is also forms the basis of my scriptwriting manual, *Cut to the Chase: Scriptwriting for Beginners* (Van Eeden, 2011). The introductory modules are based on Vogler's hero's journey. The students I have taught in South Africa, as well as those from around the world, have found the formula very useful as it enabled them to structure the stories they wanted to tell, using the hero's journey as a template. Many of them felt the same way as Christopher Vogler did when he discovered Joseph Campbell's work on the hero's journey. Vogler said that Campbell had "unlocked the secret code of storytelling" (p 32). For some of my students, this was the breakthrough they needed to understand how stories can be structured.

I began to use this formula in my playwriting after my first play, *A Savage from the Colonies*, which was experimental in nature, was not popular with audiences. Four of the six plays I wrote afterwards followed the hero's journey formula. Although all the plays were produced and performed at the Grahamstown Arts Festival, the four that followed the hero's journey did well with audiences in contrast to my more experimental work. In addition, using the hero's journey in my pitch document to film producers helped me secure the scriptwriter position on a multi-million rand film, *White Lion* (Swan, 2010). This was the first screenplay which I sold, after writing many screenplays for nine years without success. *White Lion* was the first screenplay which was produced and which reached the big screen. It was released internationally in 2010 and still enjoys success as a family film.

So while the formula of the hero's journey proved very successful for me in the past, I wanted to break away from it as much as I could while writing the biopic about Mary Wollstonecraft. Because I wanted to explore Wollstonecraft's life in an unconventional way, to suit her unconventional life, I aimed to explore new territory in film writing structure. I wanted to move away from the hero's journey which privileges a masculine protagonist, to create a journey which is more accurately matched to a woman's journey, especially that of a woman who desires to leave her mark on the world in a way other than the usual roles assigned to women as wife or mother.

Whether it would be possible to write a biopic by breaking one of the prime conventions of the genre, the hero's journey framework, remained to be seen. I discovered a number of possibilities while doing research into the nature of biography, both literary and filmic. Bingham states that the

biopic does not necessarily have to deal with facts. Contrary to expectations, he says that, “It is more about being true to reality” (p 7). He goes on to say that “the biopic is by no means a simple recounting of the facts of someone’s life. It is an attempt to discover biographical truth” (p 7).

This echoes another famous author’s words which gave me insight into how I could possibly reinvent the biopic without slavishly following the published facts of the subject’s life as was the case in the 1950s. George Orwell stated that “For a creative writer, possession of the ‘truth’ is less important than emotional sincerity” (1939). This statement gives poetic licence to the biographer to invent or re-imagine moments which will better describe the “emotional sincerity” of the subject through the writer’s interpretation of the evidence found in previously published works. It also frees the biographer from adhering to the exact explication of the chronological facts of the subject’s life whenever they deem it unnecessary. Orwell’s statement allows the biographer the space to speculate about the motives of the subject under scrutiny. Furthermore, this statement reflects the approach to the ground-breaking biography by Strachey, *Eminent Victorians*, and the seminal pseudo-biopic by Welles, *Citizen Kane*. It almost certainly helps the biographer avoid hagiography, especially if the subject has become much admired and revered in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, as Wollstonecraft has.

A twenty-first century’s biographer, Lyndall Gordon, examines the nature of biography in her memoir, *Divided Lives: Dreams of a Mother and Daughter* (2014). She asks:

Might there be an underlying pattern to each life, more visible of course in the lives of the great but discernible, if a biographer has the wit to see it, in the lives of the obscure, those whose lives to whom Virginia Woolf directs us with her feelers for what lies in the shadow? The practice of biography compels a biographer to consider her own life.  
(p 260)

### **Bildungsroman and the Hero’s Journeys**

My search for an alternative formula to a hero’s journey required my becoming reacquainted with my roots in English literature, drawing me to explore the hero’s journey along the lines of the structure of the *Bildungsroman*, the coming-of-age novel. The hero’s journey is closely aligned to the literary *Bildungsroman*’s structure. Essentially, both deal with protagonists who have a flaw or

short-coming of some kind, and who have to go on a journey of discovery to find themselves.

Susan Hader, in her article on “The *Bildungsroman* Genre: *Great Expectations*, *Aurora Leigh*, and *Waterland*” (1996), states that the term *Bildungsroman* is used for a novel which has as its main focus the self-development of the protagonist. According to Tobias Boes, the term was first used in 1870.

The term “*Bildungsroman*” was introduced to the critical vocabulary by the German philosopher and sociologist Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1941), who first employed it in an 1870 biography of Friedrich Schleiermacher and then popularized it with the success of his 1906 study *Poetry and Experience*. For more than fifty years following the publication of *Poetry and Experience*, German scholars occupied themselves with differentiating between ever finer gradations of *Bildung* and with honing the thesis that the novel of formation possesses an inherent national particularity. (2006, p 222)

The literary work which epitomises this term is Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s novel published in 1795, *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship*. His novel defined the journey of self-actualisation of the eponymous young man. This novel is now regarded as one of the first coming-of-age novels. As Hader states: “*Great Expectations* is widely considered to be a direct descendant of Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister* the prototypical *Bildungsroman*” (1996, p 168).

Hader simplifies the genre into a distillation of qualities first defined by Marianne Hirsch in her work *From Great Expectations to Lost Illusions: The Novel of Formation as a Genre* (1979), into the following list:

1. A *Bildungsroman* is, most generally, the story of a single individual’s growth and development within the context of a defined social order. The growth process, at its roots a quest story, has been described as both “an apprenticeship to life” and a “search for meaningful existence within society”.
2. To spur the hero or heroine on to their journey, some form of loss or discontent must jar them at an early stage away from the home or family setting.
3. The process of maturity is long, arduous, and gradual, consisting of repeated clashes

between the protagonist's needs and desires and the views and judgments enforced by an unbending social order. (1996, p 168)

The similarities to the hero's journey are obvious. Like the hero's journey, the *Bildungsroman* deals with a protagonist who is forced to leave his ordinary world through a call to adventure in some guise. The protagonist grows from innocence to experience, from childhood to adulthood, from unknowing to wisdom. Like the hero's journey, the *Bildungsroman* is equally strongly skewed towards masculine aspirations and opportunities. It, too, implies that the protagonist will go through a journey of self-actualisation in some form. It, too, explores the growth of the protagonist from an ingénue to a mature human being. The protagonist in both hero's journeys and *Bildungsromane* must embark on a journey of self-discovery and overcome potentially insurmountable obstacles along the way. Finally, both these forms of narrative intrinsically favour the masculine journey. As the editors state in their introduction to *The Voyage In* (Abel *et al.*, 1983), referring especially to nineteenth-century fiction:

Even the broadest definitions of a *Bildungsroman* presupposes a range of social options available only to men. When a critic identifies the 'principal characteristics' of a 'typical *Bildungsroman* plot', he inevitably describes 'human' development in exclusively male terms. [In contrast] fiction shows women developing later in life, after conventional expectations of marriage and motherhood have been fulfilled and found insufficient. (p 7)

The contrasts between the male and journeys are enormous, especially when one considers how difficult it has been for women to find fulfilment and self-actualisation in their personal quests in any influential way. The demands especially on nineteenth and twentieth-century women were for them to be primarily home-makers and caregivers. Women, especially in nineteenth-century fiction, mirrored the world around them. They rarely benefitted from formal schooling. This is also true of those women who were governesses and in charge of teaching children, as they seldom ventured out of the domestic domain in which their journeys of discovery perforce took place:

Even those who are directly involved in formal education, such as Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe, do not significantly expand their options, but learn instead to consolidate their nurturing roles rather than to take a more active part in the shaping of society. When

[women] do [leave their home] they are not free to explore; more frequently, they merely exchange one domestic sphere for another. Where the young hero roams through the city, the young heroine strolls down the country lane. Her object is not to learn how to take care of herself, but to find a place where she can be protected, often in return for taking care of others. Nor do women sever family ties as easily as men. (p 7-8)

The expectations for the feminine journey, especially in the last two centuries, differ vastly from those for the masculine journey. For example, in the *Bildungsroman*, it is expected that the hero will encounter two affairs of the heart, one which is sexual and debasing, and the other which is spiritual and exalting. These are seen as necessary for the hero's emotional and spiritual growth. A woman, however, is afforded no such luxury. If she ventures into the world of sexuality outside of marriage, she is either vilified by society or killed in some punitive way (p 8). The latter is evidenced in many works of literature such as *Anna Karenina* (Tolstoy, 1888), and *Madame Bovary* (Flaubert, 1850). This trope has carried through into literature, drama and even musical theatre well into the twentieth century. For example, in the musical *Into the Woods* (Sondheim, 1986), the wife who discovers the secret to feeling fulfilled outside of her marriage, which just happens to include a love affair, falls off a cliff minutes after she voices her joyful discovery. The broad scope of worldly experiences afforded to male heroes is in stark contrast to those allowed for the hero. As Abel *et al.* state:

The “two love affairs or sexual encounters, one debasing, one exalting” that Buckley sees as the minimum necessary for the male hero's emotional and moral growth are clearly forbidden to his sisters. Even one such affair, no matter how exalting, would assure a woman's expulsion from society. Although adulterous relationships may offer nineteenth century heroines brief escapes from the constraints of marriage and family obligations, this option also guarantees punishment. (p 8)

Regarding the re-creation of Wollstonecraft's life-journey into a biopic, these considerations of nineteenth-century literature are even more applicable, especially as her behaviour in the eighteenth-century was as outrageous as any character created by Gustave Flaubert or Leo Tolstoy. Not only was her sexual behaviour more promiscuous than Anna Karenina's or Madame Bovary's, but her quest to fulfil herself as a writer and a respected reviewer was outside the usual milieu for women of her time. As we can see from the examination of the journeys of the literary characters of the nineteenth-century, there were very few options open to women at that time:

While male protagonists struggle to find a hospitable context in which to realise their aspirations, protagonists must frequently struggle to voice any aspirations whatsoever. For a woman, social options are often so narrow that they preclude explorations of her milieu. Even the [male] rebel's defiance and the [male] artist's withdrawal are conventional arrangements with society. Novels of development, by contrast, typically substitute inner concentration for active accommodation, rebellion or withdrawal. Confinement to inner life, no matter how enriching, threatens a loss to public activity; it enforces an isolation that may culminate in death. (p 7-8)

In *Jane Eyre* (1847), Charlotte Brontë's protagonist states that "women need exercise for their faculties and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do" (p 7). Half a century before Charlotte Brontë wrote these words, Mary Wollstonecraft was attempting to redefine the field of efforts for women through the example of her own life. However, the reality for women in the nineteenth-century as reflected in the literature of the time, as well as in Wollstonecraft's repressive eighteenth-century England, was that society did not allow women the same "field for their efforts". As Abel *et al.* state:

fiction of development reflect the strong tensions between the assumption of a genre that embodies male norms and the values of its protagonists. The heroine's developmental course is more conflicted, less direct: separation tugs against the longing for fusion and the heroine encounters the conviction that identity resides in intimate relationships, especially those of early childhood. The deaths in which these fictions so often culminate represent less developmental failures than refusals to accept an adulthood that denies profound conviction and desires. (1983, p 10-11)

In their search for individuation, the women of nineteenth-century fiction often chose to subsume themselves in death, which is sometimes described as a spiritual fulfilment. The *Bildungsroman*, as with the hero's journey, favours an individualist approach towards self-development from the protagonist in order to fulfil his destiny. Women are denied the same opportunities as Abel *et al.*, mentioned above, not only because of society's refusal to allow them the same freedoms as men, but also because they often form the backbone of a family and do not throw off their familial demands as easily as men do. It is no surprise that women often begin their journey of self-

discovery after meeting the demands of dutifully providing a family for a husband. These quests often grow out of the disillusionment that comes from discovering that their role as care-giver to husband and children is no longer satisfying, especially when their children grow up and leave home. For those characters to whom the guarantee for happiness through marriage and children proves false, the heroine's journey begins in earnest once the burden of child-rearing eases off. Abel *et al.* expand on this idea:

First, the protagonists grow significantly only after fulfilling the fairy-tale expectation that they will live “‘happily-ever-after’”. Because it frequently portrays a break not from parental but from marital authority, the [] novel of awakening is often a novel of adultery. Second, development may be compressed into brief epiphanic moments. Since the significant changes are internal, flashes of recognition often replace the continuous unfolding of action. The tensions that shape development may lead to a disjunction between a surface plot, which affirms social conventions, and a submerged plot, which encodes rebellion; between a plot governed by age-old story patterns, such as myths and fairy-tales, and a plot that reconceives these limiting possibilities; between a plot that charts development and a plot that unravels it. The developmental tale may itself be concealed in coded memories such as *Mrs Dalloway* or deflected through recurrent dreams such as *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Fictions of development may revise the conception of the protagonist as well. Women characters, more psychologically embedded in relationships, sometimes share the formative voyage with friends, sisters or mothers, who assume equal status as protagonists. (p 12)

As mentioned before, in their search for individuation, the women of nineteenth-century fiction often choose to give themselves over to death, which is sometimes described as a spiritual fulfilment.

It is not unusual for women such as Wollstonecraft to aspire to succeed in a masculine domain and to be afforded the same respect as a man, especially in our supposedly enlightened twenty-first century. As it was, her situation in the eighteenth century was far more complex, most especially as she was a woman voicing her opinions in a society which did not believe women had opinions worth listening to. However, complications arose even more when she became an unmarried mother. While Wollstonecraft was born into a society in which the ideas of the Enlightenment

proliferated, where reason superseded religion, her views only became acceptable when she moved into a more literate society in London. The friends of her publisher, Joseph Johnson, were an enlightened and philosophical group, and Wollstonecraft was tolerated, if not welcomed, by most. Having a child outside the bonds of marriage would have relegated her to the very outskirts of the so-called polite society of England, even though she had the cachet of being an author. So Wollstonecraft solved the problem by calling herself Mrs. Imlay. Most people gave her the benefit of the doubt, and she was accepted into general society. However, after her death, when William Godwin published his memoirs about his beloved wife and proudly described every detail of his unconventional wife's behaviour, polite society could no longer turn a blind eye. After her death, Wollstonecraft was vilified for her bold behaviour in choosing to have a child outside of wedlock, and it became unseemly to mention her work in polite society. Everything she had written and staked her reputation on was ignored. Once again, society defined the parameters in which she could succeed, and, by breaking a cardinal rule of the time, by ignoring the sanctity of marriage, her journey became far more difficult than that of any man with similar aspirations. Once again Abel *et al.* delineate the contradictions between the path towards fulfilment for a woman as opposed to a man:

Describing how women come of age in fiction naturally has thematic ramifications. Women's developmental tasks and goals, which must be realised in a culture pervaded by male norms, generate distinctive narrative tensions, between autonomy and relationships, separation and community, loyalty to women and attraction to men. The social constraints on maturation produce other conflicts, not unique to characters, but more relentless in women's stories. Repeatedly, the protagonist or *Bildungsheld* must chart a treacherous course between the penalties of expressing sexuality and suppressing it, between the cost of inner concentration and of direct confrontation with society, between the price of succumbing to madness and of grasping a repressive "normality". Marriage and community mean sacrificing integrity and work; sexuality focuses the frightening relations between men and women and spells the loss of a nurturing bond. Yet withdrawal to the inner life leads to fever, hallucination and death. (p 13)

The editors refer especially to Rachel Vinrace's "truncated life" in *The Voyage Out* (Woolf, 1915). Rachel's journey to find a way to endure the effects of trying to make peace with "repressive reality" leaves her few options, hence her truncated life. The choices for women, especially in the



early twentieth century, seem to be marriage and/or working for the community, or following one's integrity and sacrificing marriage and family bonds as a result. As far as the inner life of emotions, of love and fulfilment are concerned, these would be confined to either marriage bonds or nurturing relationships. The last resort has been withdrawal into an inner life which potentially leads to fever, hallucinations or death, as has been shown in much of nineteenth and twentieth-century literature in the United Kingdom. Wollstonecraft herself almost succumbed twice to the temptation of suicide, especially when trying to follow her ground-breaking journey, as a new genus of woman was just too daunting a prospect. Fortunately she was rescued both times and lived to find some measure of happiness in her chosen path before her early death.

Another example of the difficulties of fulfilment for women is examined in Susan J. Rosowski's chapter in the Abel *et al.* anthology. Entitled "Novel of Awakening", she compares the demise of the protagonist of Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* to that of Kate Chopin's Edna Pontellier in *The Awakening*. Both protagonists end their quests for a life other than the one prescribed to them by society by dying. They can see no other way forward which would allow them to live their lives with integrity:

Imagery describing Edna Pontellier's death is similar to that describing Emma Bovary's death [the protagonists in the aforementioned novels]. Both characters experiencing the expanding consciousness basic to the growth of a child into an adult, came to the age-old realisation of the conflict between the soul's yearning for the infinite pitted against the body's imprisonment in the finite. But for the protagonist this realisation is traditionally male: he must learn to concentrate his energies in work that, by having broad social and ethical implications, will transcend his own mortality. Flaubert and Chopin, using women as their protagonists, add to thematic tension by including sexist roles that restrict the women from the expansion necessary to deal with her realisation. Alternatives are severely limited to feminine options: the woman must choose between her inner life of romance and the outer world of reality. Either alternative leaves her passive: when she is true to her romantic dreams, she is the passive pawn to her own moods; when she attempts to follow the outer world, she is the passionate pawn of men, of a husband or a lover. More important, the dreams in which she attempts to lose herself are limited: she regresses to childhood dreams of limitlessness or she loses herself in romantic dreams of passion. They [the protagonists] have staked everything

on one hand, and they lose. They have driven the blood until it will drive no further, they have played their nerves up to the point where any relaxation short of absolute annihilation is impossible. And in the end, the nerves get even. Then the ‘awakening’ comes. (p 54-55)

Rosowski refers to the protagonists’ deaths as their “awakening” when the women finally make peace with themselves in defeat. This conclusion is depressing in its baldness. There is no apparent alternative open to women who break the bonds of society other than death and admission of defeat. As mentioned earlier, even the apparently dauntless Wollstonecraft reached the same conclusion twice in her life. Rosowski concludes with this observation:

Each [novel] presents an awakening to limitations. Each presents a resolution only at great cost to the protagonist: she must deny one element of herself, whether by the extreme of Emma’s and Edna’s suicides. And finally, each presents the dilemma of an individual who attempts to find value in a society that relegates to her only roles and values of the woman, ignoring her needs as a human being. (p 680)

In Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s book, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* (1979), the authors refer to the fact that many nineteenth-century novels have two plots. These authors state that they are interested particularly in “the submerged plot: the one plot that seems to be concealed in most of the nineteenth century literature by women [which] is in some sense a story of the woman writer’s quest for her own story; it is the story, in other words, of the woman’s quest for self-definition” (p 76). The authors continue in this vein by stating the following:

Indeed, much of the poetry and fiction written by women conjures up this mad creature so that authors can come to terms with their own uniquely feelings of fragmentation, their own keen sense of the discrepancies between what they are and what they are supposed to be. (p 78)

In fact, Gilbert and Gubar state that a “literary woman must shatter the mirror that has so long reflected what every woman was supposed to be” (p 76). One such author who attempted to shatter the mirror of what every woman was supposed to be was Virginia Woolf. In her work Woolf was

acutely aware of the preponderance of masculine journeys of discovery and the male author's authoritative expression of the same in literature. However, in her novels, her narrative structures gave voice and life to women and their journeys, which was an unusual choice for writers at that time. Her desire to find the woman's story behind the masculine domination of literature of her era is best illustrated by her description in *A Room of One's Own* (1929), of the experience of reading a classic *Bildungsroman* which privileges the male perspective. She explains how the woman's point of view, whether as a character or as a reader, is obliterated by the dominance of the male point of view. She writes:

Indeed, it was delightful to read a man's writing again. It was so direct, so straightforward after the writing of women. It indicated such freedom of mind, such liberty of person, such confidence in himself. One had a sense of physical well-being in the presence of this well-nourished, well-educated, free mind, which had never been thwarted or opposed, but had had full liberty from birth to stretch itself in whatever way it liked. ... But after reading a chapter or two a shadow seemed to lie across the page. It was a straight dark bar, a shadow shaped something like the letter 'I'. One began dodging this way and that to catch a glimpse of the landscape behind it. Whether that was indeed a tree or a woman walking I was not quite sure. But, here I turned a page or two, looking for something or other, the worst of it is that in the shadow of the letter 'I' all is shapeless as mist. Is that a tree? No, it is a woman. (p 115-116)

Woolf creates an awareness of the obliteration of the feminine perspective in the above extract. With her stream-of-consciousness prose, she was able to re-create the free-flowing thoughts of a woman in contrast to the single-minded, goal-orientated masculine narratives of the time. In Elizabeth Abel's chapter in *The Voyage In*, entitled "Narrative Structure(s) and Development: The Case of Mrs Dalloway", she explores Woolf's perspective on literature of her time:

Woolf explicitly parallels the dominance of male over values in literature and in life, while implying a different hierarchy that further complicates the woman novelist's task. By contrasting the 'values of women' with those which 'have been made by the other sex', Woolf suggests the primacy of values as products of nature rather than culture and of the named sex rather than the 'other one'. No longer the conventionally 'second' sex, women here appear the source of intrinsic and primary values. In the realm of culture, however, masculine values prevail and deflect the vision of the woman novelist,

inserting a duality into the narrative, turned Janus-like toward the responses of both self and other. This schizoid perspective can fracture the text. The space between emphasis and undertone, a space that is apparent in Woolf's own text, may also be manifested in the gap between plot that is shaped to conform to expectations and a subplot at odds with this accommodation. (p 163)

The “underlying pattern” referred to by Lyndall Gordon in *Divided Lives*, the “emotional sincerity” referred to by Orwell and “what lies in the shadows” of a masculine plotline, and “the space between emphasis and undertone” referred to by Virginia Woolf, the “gaps slyly inserted in the narrative” referred to by Elizabeth Abel, these elusive characteristics became my quest while writing the biopic *A Hyena in Petticoats*. In order to write a biopic which does not follow the masculine hero's journey nor the similar male parameters defined by the *Bildungsroman*, I have searched for a pattern or a blueprint to trace a woman's life. However, even though my focus is on the life of a woman, I want the biopic of *A Hyena in Petticoats* to fulfil the primary aim of the genre as defined by Dennis Bingham: “to plumb that mystery of humanness, that inability completely to know another person, and the absolute importance of knowing them and ourselves” (2010, p 18). My aim is to find this elusive pattern in the lives of women, especially in the life of an extraordinary woman like Wollstonecraft, and to ensure it is engaging to an audience.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Film Structure: From the Hero's Journey to the Heroine's Journey**

He that recounts the life of another, commonly dwells upon conspicuous events, lessens the familiarity of his tale to increase its dignity, shews his favourite at a distance decorated and magnified like the ancient actors in their tragick dress, and endeavours to hide the man that he may produce a hero. (Samuel Johnson, referenced in Chapter One. Dankert, 1992, p 86)

As Samuel Johnson explained above, many writers construct the telling of the life of another in such a way as to portray their subject as a hero, by highlighting heroic deeds and showing the protagonist overcoming enormous obstacles, in the hopes of making the character more admirable and engaging to a reader. The choices made by a writer to create the structure of a narrative will, perforce, create a particular slant to a story and impose a specific meaning to the described events. As Robert McKee states in his guide to writing screenplays *Story: Substance, Structure, Style and the Principles of Screenwriting* (1992), "Structure is a selection of events from the characters' life stories that is composed into a strategic sequence to arouse specific emotions and to express a specific view of life" (p 33).

### **The Hero's Journey and Origins**

The choice of key events to create a particular structure for a narrative, in order to create intentional meaning, is a device good story tellers have always understood. In particular, good story tellers have known instinctively that audiences love to hear a story about a hero with a flaw, an underdog who has to overcome huge obstacles against the odds. Every good story ensures that the brow-beaten underdog is made of such indomitable spirit that he will overcome the odds. In spite of all opposition, the underdog succeeds in the end. Oral story tellers relied on this formula to enthrall their listeners, enacting tales around a fire of a brave hunter pitted against mighty beasts. Even ancient mythologies used this pattern to describe the heroic nature of the gods pitted against the vicissitudes of fate. The unassailable conclusion is that most stories, which keep an audience emotionally invested until the final moment, have a hero with whom an audience can empathise. Audiences love the trope of the underdog because of, not in spite of, his flaws.

In the early twentieth century, Carl Jung devised his own belief system based largely on the idea that humanity shared a common set of symbols which are universally recognised. After studying dreams, mythologies, religions and different cultures he concluded that humankind shared a common set of stock characters. He believed that there were standard, recognisable characters which reappeared in stories and myths throughout the world, and which played universally recognisable symbolic roles. He called these characters “archetypes” (Jung, 1969). One example of an archetype is the Wise Old Man, a recurring figure in many fairy tales and fables. Examples such as Merlin, Gandalf the Grey, Dumbledore the Wizard, tribal elders and wise sangomas abound in literature. There are also the Wise Old Women such as the witches with supernatural insight in *Macbeth* (Shakespeare, 1623), for example. Both the Wise Old Man and the Wise Old Woman archetypes act as mentors, according to Jung, to help young heroes find their way on their personal journeys. Another archetype identified by Jung is the young ingénue, the Innocent Virgin, or the Anima, as Jung called her. Ingénues are recognisable as characters in classic fairytales such as Cinderella, Little Red Riding Hood and Snow White, for example. The masculine equivalent of the ingénue is the Animus, in Jung’s terminology. There are many archetypes described by Jung such as the Threshold Guardian, the Shape Shifter, and the Shadow. However, for the purposes of studying story structure in its most traditional form, the most important archetype is the hero.

In classic storytelling structures, the hero is one of the most powerful archetypes because his role is crucial in creating a narrative which allows for audience identification. If a hero is flawed, the audience finds him more relatable to as they, too, can identify with his flaws. Once they recognise an aspect of their own personalities in the hero, they are prepared to invest in the narrative. Thus they become engaged with the story.

Following on from Jung’s findings, the American writer and academic Joseph Campbell began to analyse the similarities among myths, legends and archetypes in the 1950s. Campbell spent much of his life devoted to comparing common themes in world mythologies and great stories. Eventually he wrote a book which changed the way people viewed storytelling. It was called *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Campbell, 1949). In this work, he shows that there is a classic structure behind most, if not all, of the best stories in the world. He clarified certain common steps in the structure, which he referred to as a monomyth, and wrote a blueprint of story-structure which could be applied to most narratives. He identified it as follows:

The standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage of separation; initiation; return; which might be named the nuclear unit of the monomyth. A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man. (p 581)

The monomyth of the hero separating from the familiar and undergoing an initiation in order to return with new wisdom appears to resonate deeply with audiences and readers throughout the ages. Human beings recognise this pattern, which they find satisfying, when the hero triumphs over disaster. This phenomenon could be explained by the archetypal recognition through the collective unconscious Jung defined, especially when the myths are told through the guise of a hero. Campbell believed it was more than mere audience identification. In her introduction to the 1968 edition of *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Clarissa Pinkola Estés ascribed Campbell's fascination with ancient myths in part due to the fact that they created psychic resonance in those who encountered them. She expands on Campbell's understanding of psychic resonance in this way:

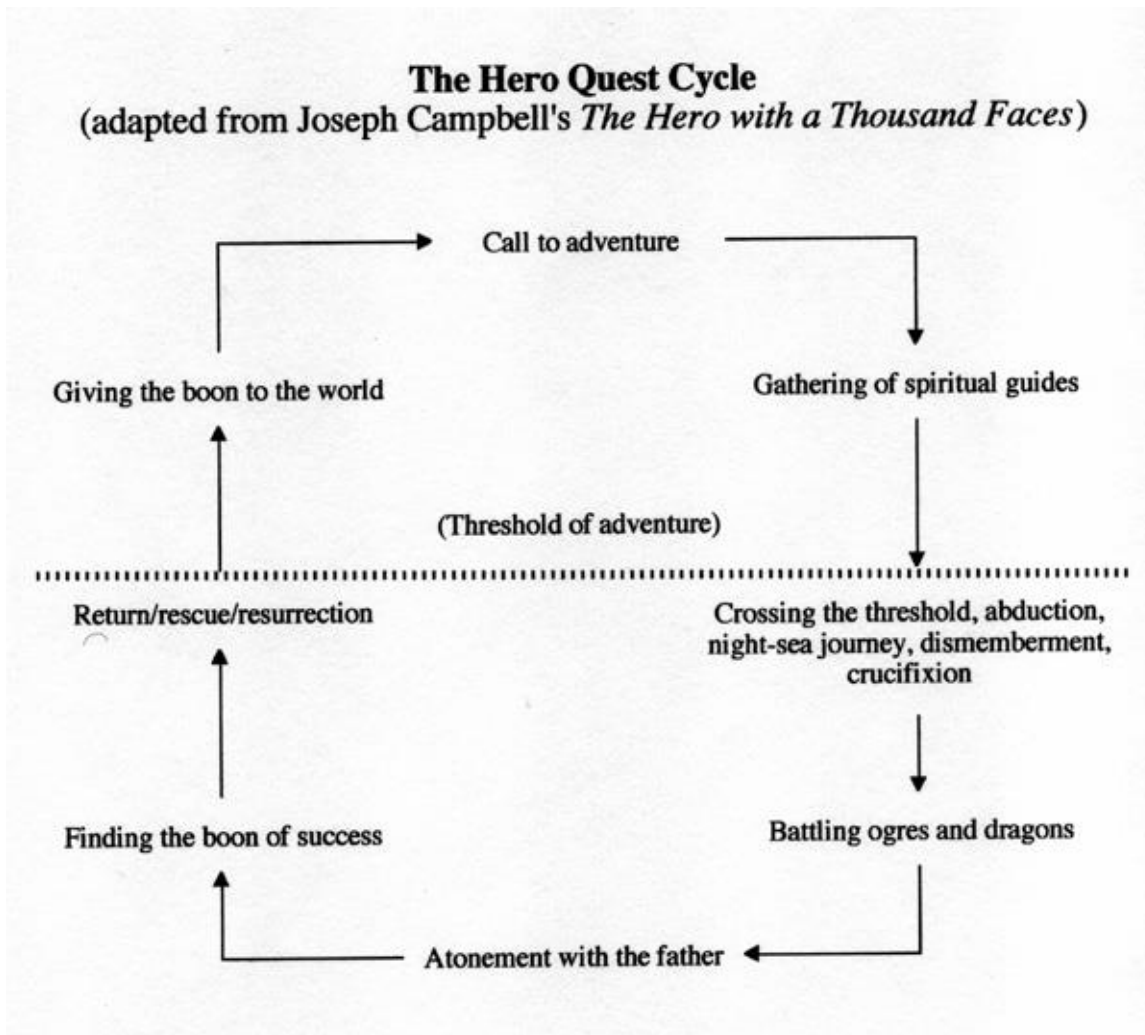
[In] ancient populations, the storytellers and poets, who pecked with styluses on stone or etched with pigment on hand-wrought paper or cloth, beautifully detailed a particular idea about psychic resonance, one that modern psychoanalysts, mythologists, theologians, and artists also continue to take up with interest. This very old idea about mythic reverberation was understood as one which takes place in a triad between Creator, individual human being, and the larger culture. Each mysteriously and deeply affects and inspires the others. Thus, in a number of ancient Babylonian and Assyrian tales, the psychological, moral, and spiritual states of the heroic character, of the king or queen, were directly reflected in the health of the people, the land, the creatures, and the weather. When the ruler was ethical and whole, the culture was also. When the king or queen was ill from having broken taboos, or had become sick with power, greed, hatred, sloth, envy, and other ailments, then the land fell into a famine. Insects and reptiles rained down from the skies. People weakened and died. Everyone turned on one another, and nothing new could be born. Campbell brings this ancient idea, that the mysterious energy for inspirations, revelations, and actions in heroic stories worldwide, is also universally found in human beings. People who find resonant heroic themes of challenges and questing in their own lives, in their goals, creative outpourings, in their

day- and night-dream, are being led to a single psychic fact. That is, that the creative and spiritual lives of individuals influence the outer world as much as the mythic world influences the individual. By restating this primordial understanding, Campbell offers hope that the consciousness of the individual can prompt, prick, and prod the whole of humankind into more evolution. (xv)

As Pinkola Estés states above, “the creative and spiritual lives of individuals influence the outer world as much as the mythic world influences the individual”. This explains why stories which have particularly strong spiritual messages have a profound effect on populations. The account of a struggling, first-time screenwriter in 1970s America is particularly relevant here. The aspiring writer/director came across Campbell’s work, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, and found a solution to his story-problems. He had been stuck in development hell for years, unable to find clarity in his story set in a fictional, futuristic world where a young man named Luke had to find his vocation. Desperate for help, the writer/director applied Campbell’s structure outline to his unwieldy story and found his way into a classic storytelling structure. In this way, his protagonist, Luke Skywalker, had a definite story-arc and was set, inevitably on a hero’s journey. The young writer/director’s name was George Lucas, and his script was *Star Wars* (1977). It may be argued that the spiritual tests of endurance undergone by Luke in his path towards becoming a Jedi knight and becoming one with the force, equal the quests of ancient Master’s such as Guatama Buddha. The effect of the film was profound. Generations after the release of the first episode of *Star Wars*, fans streamed back into cinemas to watch the latest release of the ongoing saga. When George Lucas wrote about The Force, a supernatural power which could be utilised by the Jedi knights when they had reached an elevated state of being, he did not envisage the devotees who would embrace The Force as a legitimate religion. The power of psychic resonance awakened by The Force in the *Star War* films echoes the psychic resonance embraced by ancient cultures who found meaning in their myths. Undoubtedly, Campbell had uncovered a universal chord through his monomyth and George Lucas and the franchise reaped the rewards.



Campbell's Hero's Journey has been simplified online into a diagram by Linda Griggs (2012), as illustrated below:



(2.1. The Hero's Quest Cycle, Griggs, 2012)

As Vogler states:

Joseph Campbell's great accomplishment was to articulate clearly something that had been there all along: the life principles embedded in the structure of stories. He wrote down the unwritten rules of storytelling, and that seems now to be stimulating authors to challenge, test, and embellish the Hero's Journey. (1992, xv)

Once he had discovered Campbell's work, Vogler wrote a seven-page memo as a practical guide to assessing whether scripts which were submitted to their studio met the basic requirements of good storytelling. This memo became required reading for all Disney development executives. The success of this memo led Vogler to expand his theory into writing the work which became *The*

*Writer's Journey, Mythic Structure for Storytellers and Screenwriters* (1992). Vogler went on to expand his description of the hero's journey saying:

At heart, despite its infinite variety, the hero's story is always a journey. A hero leaves her comfortable, ordinary surroundings to venture into a challenging, unfamiliar world. It may be an outward journey to an actual place: a labyrinth, forest or cave, a strange city or country, a new locale that becomes the arena for her conflict with antagonistic, challenging forces. But there are as many stories that take the hero on an inward journey, one of the mind, the heart, the spirit. In any good story the hero grows and changes, making a journey from one way of being to the next: from despair to hope, weakness to strength, folly to wisdom, love to hate, and back again. It's these emotional journeys that hook an audience and make a story worth watching. (p 7)

One of the most important aspects of the journey is the process of overcoming the many challenges facing the protagonist. The hero must go through a transformation, attaining things that he or she set out to achieve, that were lacking in the beginning. As Vogler says above, we can identify outer missions which are tangible goals that need to be accomplished, like destroying the death star in *Star Wars*. We can also identify inner missions which are more personal and introspective for the hero like Luke needing to become an adventuring Jedi Knight and trusting his ability to utilise The Force as his power. These inner journeys are spiritual in nature, and they make the protagonists expand in consciousness and understanding. More than overcoming outer, physical oppositions and barriers, it is the inner obstacles which are overcome that make the protagonists worthy of the title of hero.

To explicate the steps of Christopher Vogler's hero's journey, I created a blueprint that shows the steps along the journey. In the following table, I have equated all standard terms of playwriting/scriptwriting from Aristotle in green, Robert McKee in blue, Joseph Campbell in violet and Syd Field in red to equate with Vogler in pink. Any other general screenwriting terms in common usage are in orange. All the terms which are in general usage, and have been for some time, remain in black.

## THE HERO'S JOURNEY

### ACT 1

#### Beginning - Aristotle

Ordinary World	Establishment/Proposition	Set up - McKee
Call to adventure	Inciting Incident - McKee	Point of Attack
Refusal of the call	First reversal/Opposition	
Meeting the mentor	Wise Old Man/Wise Old Woman - Campbell	
Crossing the (first) threshold	1st Act Turning Point 20 - 30 pgs - Syd Field	

### ACT 2

#### Confrontation – McKee Middle – Aristotle Development

Tests, Allies, enemies	Escalation	
Approach to innermost cave	Darkest Moment - Campbell	
	Midpoint - McKee and Field	
Ordeal	Crisis - Aristotle	Darkest Moment- Campbell
	Complication	
Reward (Seizing the Sword)	2nd Act Turning Point 50, 60 pgs - Field	Catharsis - Aristotle

### ACT 3

The Road back	Resolution- McKee	
Resurrection	Climax - Aristotle	Denouement - McKee
	Revelation	
Return with the elixir	About 80, 90 pgs - Field	End - Aristotle

(Van Eeden, 2011, p 27-28)

There are many more screenwriting terms than those cited above. However, the ones chosen in the table mirror the hero's journey best. In summation, the hero's journey, as it is used in screenwriting terms, ensures that a protagonist goes on a journey of transformation as an unenlightened character, and emerges at the end as a different person with new insights. This journey of enlightenment is known as the character's arc. The hero may still find him- or herself in the same situation as they were before they embarked on the journey, but h/she should be enriched with insights and wisdom from the adventure they have undertaken. In a tragedy, the hero does not usually survive, but he or she should still die with enlightenment, or have passed the wisdom from their life on to another person.

A classic hero's journey has very recognisable turning points, a phrase used by McKee, amongst others, to mark pivotal stages on the hero's journey. These are the moments shaped by a story teller to create heightened awareness and convey a message. As McKee says: "From an instant to eternity, from the intracranial to the intergalactic, the life story of each and every character offers encyclopaedic possibilities. The mark of a master is to select only a few moments but give us a lifetime" (McKee, 1999, p 21).

As analysed in Chapter One, biopics have traditionally favoured the classic hero's journey structure for the very reasons mentioned above. The accessibility of the well-worn story pattern allows audiences to feel comfortable about embarking on the adventure of a feature film, whether it is fiction or biographical. However, as discussed in Chapter One, I wanted to explore other possibilities for *A Hyena in Petticoats*, for two reasons. First, as the pattern of the hero's journey has become standard fare, especially in Hollywood films; it has led to predictability. There are the rare occasions when a brave screenwriter experiments with familiar structural forms and these experiments succeed. Once there is a rare success, there is a rash of copycat films trying to emulate the clever structure. A prime example of such a successful experiment is *Pulp Fiction* (Tarantino, 1994) which seemed to break the traditional structure in such a way that the form mimicked the fractured lives of the protagonists. However, when each one of the multiple plotlines of the narrative of *Pulp Fiction* is unravelled, the strand of each individual hero's journeys becomes obvious. The film was successful largely due to the original and intriguing story-line, the stylish direction and the exceptional performances of the actors which created iconic moments in twentieth-century neo-noir cinema. *Memento* (Nolan, 2000) is another case of a successfully experimental narrative. *Memento* also played on the idea of a fractured narrative. In this case, to the credit of the filmmakers, the medium of execution amplified the themes of the narrative. Once

again, however, if the plot-line is unravelled, the story becomes a classic hero's journey. Both these films are clever re-workings of the hero's journey but, essentially, neither re-defines the classic structure in any profound way.

The second reason I wanted to explore an option other than the hero's journey, even if most biopics prioritise this masculine-favoured quest-narrative, is that the comparison in Chapter One of the coming-of-age narrative adventure for women in a *Bildungsroman* with the hero's journey, shows that both offer very limited options for women in comparison to those available to men. With the similarities between *Bildungsromane* and the hero's journey delineated previously, I needed to find a structure which favoured the hero's journey, especially as I believe it is intrinsically different from the male's hero's journey.

In my search to find a fulfilling narrative for *A Hyena in Petticoats*, however, I had to be careful not to throw out the engaging aspects of the hero's journey merely for the sake of wanting to be different. The structure which I searched for had to be different from the hero's journey. It had to prove equally engaging and emotionally enriching and yet it had to be specifically suited to a woman's life. I decided, therefore, to explore the apparent polar opposite of the hero's journey which, logically, meant I should examine *The Heroine's Journey* (Murdock, 1990), in some depth.

### **The Heroine's Journey and Origins**

However, before embarking on Maureen Murdock's work, I had to take cognisance of the work of Carol Pearson and Katherine Pope. Their work, *The Hero in American and British Literature* (1981), was seminal in that they draw attention to essential and unavoidable obstacles faced by women on their own hero's journey. Their premise was that the hero's journey was not essentially different from the male's hero's journey in its archetypal roots. However, they illustrated the differences between the battles which needed to be fought on the journey. Susan R. Gannon, in her article "Women as Heroes" (1983), reviews the findings of their work. She cites Pearson and Pope's most important theoretical starting point: "because negative myths about women are internalized through the socialization process, the first task of the hero is to slay the dragons within" (p 30). Their work identified the unconscious bias towards the patriarchy in literature and in journeys of discovery. Their conclusion, that the hero's main obstacles are related to overcoming the patriarchy within themselves, and in the outer world beyond them, was a landmark conclusion for the scholars

who came after them . In her thesis, “The Quest of the Hero in the Works of Patricia A. McKillip” (2001), Christine Main summarises Pope and Pearson’s conclusions:

Carol Pearson and Katherine Pope, rather than simply using Campbell’s monomyth with a few gender inversions, have developed a separate structural model of the hero’s quest that is nevertheless very similar to Campbell’s monomyth in their comprehensive study of the hero in western literature. Their names for the stages of the hero’s quest differ tellingly from Campbell’s, but the underlying structural patterns can still be discerned. (p 9)

Main concludes that the monomyth of Campbell’s theory dominated Pearson and Pope’s theory and, although their conclusions might be skewed towards the hero, they are not essentially different from Campbell’s work. Coline Covington’s article, “In Search of the Heroine” (1989), broke new ground in comparison to Pearson and Pope. She takes the exploration of the hero’s journey into new territory. In her work, Covington identifies the role of the heroine, at that time, as taking the following forms: there is the embodiment of a male hero, embarking on a quest in the same way and performing heroic feats on her journey, with her gender being a mere incidental aspect of her classic hero’s journey; then there is the heroine who is characterised by sacrifice such as Medea and Antigone. She also identifies that there is the heroine who is the patient partner to a heroic man, such as Penelope, who stoically supported Odysseus for decades, and Sleeping Beauty, whose only virtue is that she waited peacefully for her prince’s arrival. In fact, Covington asks the following question:

In my attempt to identify the heroine, I would like first of all to return to her counterpart, the hero, and ask a basic question, why is the hero represented as male? An answer would give us the most important clue as to who the heroine is. The hero’s story is one of individuation, a striving towards self-determination, and the struggle to know the world, to become conscious. This is the treasure to be gained. (1989, p 244)

However, Covington identifies the need for both hero and heroine to separate from the mother, and continues:

...the danger in failing to recognise the concept of hero/heroine as metaphorical is that of making the symbolic actual, or identifying with the archetype, resulting in both an

inflation and a deflation. The anatomical differences of hero/heroine are only too often taken to apply literally; the qualities associated with the heroine of passivity, receptivity, and renewal have been regarded as intrinsically 'feminine' and therefore innate in women, while the active, penetrating qualities of the hero have been seen as intrinsically 'masculine' and therefore innate in men. Apart from the false dichotomy this creates between men and women, it encourages within us the tendency to emphasise one aspect at the expense of the other. Hero and heroine counterbalance one another and form a typically reactive psychological process. Because we see the impetus to separate from mother as the beginning of individuation, it does not mean that hero is more primary than heroine or that one is more essential than the other. Within a developmental framework, the interchange between hero and heroine constitutes a way of imagining the dynamics of de-integration and reintegration in the process of individuation. In this respect, the hero is symbolic of the process of de-integration and the heroine of the process of reintegration. The two necessarily go hand in hand. While the hero represents the first separation as effected through independence, the cutting of the umbilical cord, the heroine represents a subsequent dependency, in which a new attachment is discovered which can then enable further separation to occur. Autonomy for the heroine is achieved not through doing, or making things happen, or going out into the world. It is during her period in the forest, when nothing appears to happen, that things change and her plight is resolved. It is for this reason that we sometimes fail to recognise her. (1989, p 253)

Covington's article is useful in that she differentiates between the hero and heroine in a definitive way and points out that their journeys may be similar but they are never the same. She does not expand on the heroine's journey beyond her explanation that the heroine, after the necessary separation from the maternal figure, has to withdraw to find her true path. In a way, she pre-empts Murdock's final stage of her heroine's journey which leads to a place of spiritual enlightenment and enrichment.

Murdock approached her investigation into the heroine's journey in a more holistic way. Immersing herself in the theories on narrative storytelling that had gone before, embracing her clients' experiences in her therapeutic practice, and even accessing her inner creativity through meditation to make sense of this path, she came up with a blueprint of her own. Murdock had been a student of Campbell's and is generally credited with being the first person to propose an alternative blueprint

to the masculine hero's journey. Murdock begins her explication of her search for a pattern of narrative in women's lives by describing her discussion with Campbell when she presented him with an alternative for a heroic path for women. His answer to her is quoted in the extract below:

I knew that the stages of the heroine's journey incorporated aspects of the journey of the hero, but I felt the focus of spiritual development was to heal the eternal split between woman and her feminine nature. I was surprised when [Campbell] responded that women don't need to make the journey. "In the whole mythological tradition, the woman is *there*. All she has to do is to realize that she's the place that people are trying to get to. When a woman realizes what her wonderful character is, she's not going to get messed up with the notion of being pseudo-male". (1990, p 2)

Unsurprisingly, Murdock finds Campbell's answer as unsatisfying. Campbell seemed unable to consider that women are not fulfilled by simply waiting to be discovered by a man who has finally realised that he needs to embrace his feminine side. It is not enough for a woman to know that she is the place "people are trying to get to". Campbell was apparently blind to the thought that women might have their own desires and volitions, their own quests and vocations to follow. After many years of working with women in various stages of their lives in her practice as a therapist for women, and taking her own experiences and studies into account, Murdock concluded:

Women do have a quest at this time in our culture. It is the quest to fully embrace their feminine nature, learning how to value themselves as women and to heal the deep wound of the feminine. It is a very important journey towards being a fully integrated, balanced and whole human being. Like most journeys, the path of the heroine is not easy; it has no well-defined guideposts nor recognizable tour guides. There is no map, no navigational chart, no chronological age when the journey begins. It follows no straight lines. It is a journey that seldom receives validation from the outside world; in fact the outside world often sabotages and interferes with it. (1990, p 3)

Murdock reflects on Campbell's statement that "the task of a true hero is to shatter the established order and create a new community. In so doing the hero/heroine slays the monster of the status quo, the dragon of the old order" (p 14). She agrees, in part, with this statement and adds to it, modifying it for women, by stating that the task of a true heroine is to shatter the established order of:



...deeply entrenched patriarchal values, those of dominance and control by the stronger, more vocal, and more powerful male population. But on the personal level, the old order is embodied by the mother, and the heroine's first task towards individuation is to separate from her. (p 14)

In relation to the heroine's need to separate from the mother, Murdock agrees with Covington. However, while Murdock could easily define what the heroine's task is, it took an injury to her back to help her uncover the shape of the journey to the path she envisaged. She believes she put her back out because she was figuratively "bending over backwards" to accommodate the needs of her family. While she was recovering, she had a vision of a circular path which moved clockwise (p 4). She saw this circular pattern which:

...begins with our heroine's search for identity. This "call" is heard at no specific age but occurs when "old self" no longer fits. This may be when the young woman leaves home for college, work, travel, or relationship. Or it may be when a woman in mid-life divorces, returns to work or school, changes career, or is faced with an empty nest. Or it may simply occur when a woman realizes she has no sense of self that she can call her own. (p 5-6)

Murdock defines this feminine call to adventure as the moment when a woman rejects the stereotype of the "passive, manipulative, or non-productive" woman (p 6). She entitles this step Separation from the Feminine, and it is the first stage of her heroine's journey (p 4). In essence, this stage is the heroine's desire to separate from the maternal figure. This step leads into, and coincides with, the masculine hero's journey's stage called Crossing the Threshold, after the hero's initial call to adventure. The heroine now finds herself on a path with a quest, driven and determined, much like her male counterpart. Murdock refers to this next stage as the Identification with the Masculine and Gathering of the Allies. The journey again resembles the masculine hero's journey quite strongly in the next few steps. Stage three of Murdock's journey refers to the Road of Trials, Meeting Ogres and Dragons (p 5), which has close similarities with Campbell's Battling the Ogres and Vogler's stage in Act Two, Test, Allies and Enemies. The next step in the heroine's journey is called Finding the Illusory Boon of Success, which equates with the Campbell's Boon of Success and Vogler's Reward stage of the hero's journey.

This is where the similarities between the two journeys end. At this point in the heroine's journey, Murdock talks about a sense of aridity and emptiness which possesses the heroine after the illusory boon of success. She calls this step Awakening to Feelings of Spiritual Aridity and Death (p 5).

This stage comes about when the heroine realises that her achievements, whether in the home or the workplace, no longer satisfy her. In this discovery, she realises how competent she has become, she may even be acclaimed, but her dreams, health and intuition have been sacrificed as a result of her outward success. Effectively, Murdock defines this latter stage as a woman's understanding that she has lost her deep relationship to her feminine nature (p 7).

The heroine then descends into a period of self-reflection and sadness. This is called the Initiation and Descent to the Goddess (p 61). Murdock describes this as the stage where:

...the dragons that jealously guard the myth of dependency, the myth of inferiority, and the myth of romantic love, are fearsome opponents. This is not a journey for cowards; it takes enormous courage to plumb one's depths. (p 48)

This is the moment where the heroine discovers that her needs are not being considered, and may initially feel that "something is wrong with *her*. She may actually feel shame that she has needs too" (p 49). Murdock states that it is imperative that, "To destroy the myth of inferiority, a woman needs to carry her own sword of truth, sharpening her blade on the stone of discernment" (p 56).

The next phase is called the Urgent Yearning to Reconnect with the Feminine. As Murdock explains, "there is a desire to develop those parts of herself that have gone underground while on the heroic quest: her body, her emotions, her spirit, her creative wisdom" (p 111). The following phase of the journey is called Healing the Mother/Daughter Split. This stage is profound, Murdock explains, as it comes about when a woman realises she needs validation for her own femininity. Many women have grown up to believe that their roles in life are not as valid as a man's. While this view may seem out of date, as the book was written in 1990, and Murdock's work is part of the last stages of the second wave of feminism, there is still a desperate need for women to give themselves permission to be women who do not strive to be "father-daughters" as Murdock calls them. This is a name she has given to women who feel they have to behave in a masculine way. These women aim to do everything in their power not to be like their mothers, sometimes at the risk of losing their feminine qualities. It is true that Murdock refers to women whose mothers were probably the last of the subjugated women of the post-Second-World-War era, when the patriarchy was largely

unquestioned. Murdock's heroine would have to emulate the father-figure in order to go on a quest which involved more than children and husbands. Unfortunately, Murdock's ideas are still relevant even now, during the time of third wave feminists, as women are often undervalued in the home and at the workplace, especially in Africa. If one examines the actions of organisations such as Boko Haram in Nigeria, for example, it is obvious that there is much work to do for emancipation. Murdock asked this question of women in 1990, and it is still an issue we face today:

What is a woman's place at this stage of our cultural development? I feel strongly that it is to heal the split that tells us that our knowings, wishes, and desires are not as important nor as valid as those of the dominant male culture. Our task is to heal the eternal split that tells us to override the feelings, intuition, and dream images that inform us of the truth of life. We must have the courage to live with paradox, the strength to hold the tension of not knowing the answers, and the willingness to listen to our inner wisdom and the wisdom of the planet which begs for change. The heroine must become a spiritual warrior. This demands that she learns the delicate art of balance and have the patience for the slow, subtle integration of the feminine and masculine aspects of herself. She first hungers to lose her feminine self and to merge with the masculine, and once she has done this, she begins to realize that this is neither the answer nor the end. She must not discard nor give up what she has learned throughout her heroic quest, but learn to view her hard-earned skills and successes not so much as the goal but as one part of the journey. She will then begin to use these skills to work towards the larger quest of bringing people together, rather than for her own individual gain. This is the sacred marriage of the feminine and the masculine, when a woman can truly serve not only the needs of others but can value and be responsive to her own needs as well. (p 11)

Murdock's heroine's journey's first two steps ring true with my own life, as well as in the life of my protagonists, Mary and Khetiwe, in *A Hyena in Petticoats*. Both Mary and Khetiwe reach a point in the first act of the script where they feel dissatisfied by the role society has imposed upon them. Their call to change is that they see their mothers as victims, powerless against drunken and abusive husbands. This powerlessness, Murdock states, humiliates the young girls who vow to be nothing like their mother. Mary and Khetiwe set out to strive for some form of power in the world at large, but like Murdock's heroine, it may be at the expense of their own needs. "Until she makes this unconscious reaction conscious," Murdock warns, "the daughter will continue to function in

reaction to her mother” (p 19). Mary and Khetiwe, like the women Murdock refers to, have to become aware that they have to make peace with their own femininity before they can progress on to the next stage of the heroine’s journey.

Murdock refers to the next stage of the heroine’s journey as Healing the Wounded Masculine. Instead of rejecting the masculine forever, the heroine has to have a relationship with the positive inner masculine, what Murdock refers to as the Man with Heart (p 121).

The masculine is an archetypal force, it is not a gender. Like the feminine, it is a creative force that lives within all women and men. When it becomes unbalanced and unrelated to life, it becomes combative, critical and destructive. (p 156)

According to Murdock, after the heroine has made peace with her own femininity, she is able to release the masculine energy she embodied before as machisma, an unbalanced extreme of masculinity. This is where she reaches the last stage of the journey which is the Integration of Masculine and Feminine. At this stage the heroine has to embrace the positive elements of her feminine nature as well as the positive elements of her masculine nature. “The return trip home to the feminine is where we release machisma” (p 159). It is essential that the healthy masculine energy is embraced for her to become a healed heroine:

There is no doubt that she needs the masculine. ... But she needs a relationship with the positive inner masculine, the Man with Heart. He will support her with compassion and strength to heal her tired ego and reclaim her deep feminine wisdom. For this positive man with heart to emerge she needs to honor her feminine nature. ... The heroine comes to understand the dynamics of her feminine and her masculine nature and accepts them both together. (p 160)

Murdock regards the final stage as a Sacred Marriage between the Ego and Self, the Feminine and the Masculine and a union of spirit (Psyche) and Love (Amor). Once these opposites are conjoined, they give birth to “ecstatic wholeness” (p 160-161). The ultimate task of the heroine is to:

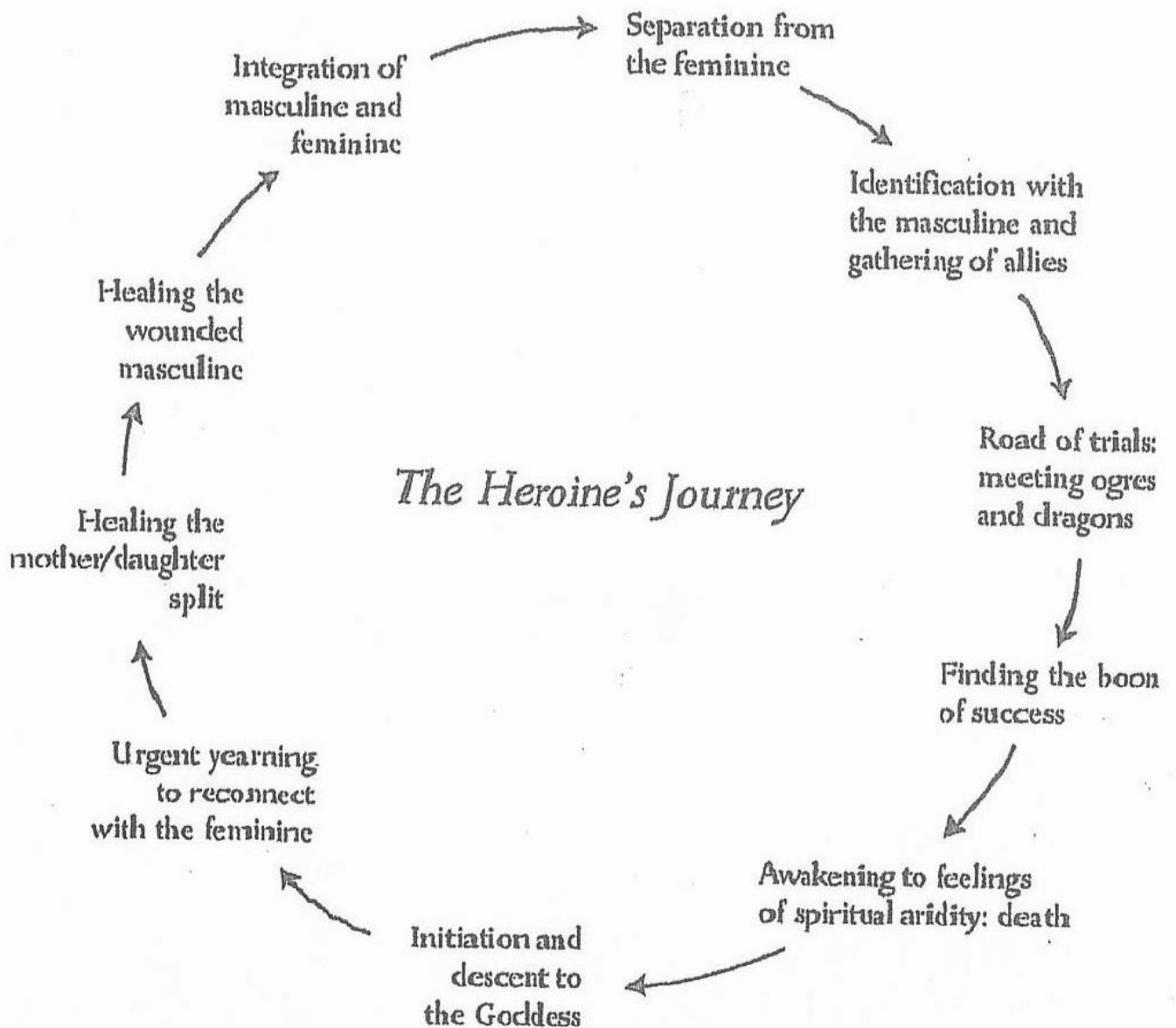
... heal as she breathes, as she recognises her true nature, breathing knowledge into all of us. The heroine becomes the Mistress of Both Worlds; she can navigate the waters of daily life and listen to the teachings of the depths. She has gained wisdom from her

experiences: she no longer needs to blame the other; she is the other. She brings that wisdom back to share with the world. And the women, men, and children of the world are transformed by her journey. (p 168)

Murdock's heroine constitutes a being who embraces the world and its inhabitants as much as she embraces the opposite elements of her own nature within herself. Unlike the masculine hero of Campbell's description, who pursues a solitary mission and whose goal is individualistic, Murdock's heroine seeks to unite all she encompasses, in a global manner. Her ambitions are not for self, but for the universe, to bring enlightenment and fulfilment to those who come after her. Her quest is largely spiritual in nature, in contrast to the hero whose spiritual quest is usually secondary to his outer mission. She explains:

The task of today's heroine is to mine the silver and gold within her *self*. She must develop a positive relationship with her inner Man with Heart and find the voice of her Woman of Wisdom to heal her estrangement from the Sacred Feminine. As she honors her body and soul as well as her mind, she heals the split within herself and the culture. Women today are acquiring the courage to express their vision, the strength to set limits, and the willingness to take responsibility for themselves and others in a new way. They are reminding people of their origins, the necessity to live mindfully and their obligation to preserve life on earth. (p 185)

Murdock's heroine's journey has been drawn up into a figure in this way:



(2.2. Murdock's Heroine's Journey, Ballard *et al.*, 2014)

There have been subsequent feminist texts which explore the hero's journey from a feminine point of view since Murdock's work. One popular online blog has a series of articles on the heroine's journey. The site is administrated by author Tricia Barr and expresses much current thought on the hero. Issues facing women in the twenty-first century, such as choosing whether to have children or

not, or how to balance work, family and career, inform the posts. In a blog post first published in 2012, Barr wrote:

In the Heroine's Journey, the model should be designed to readily include many elements that reflect iconic choices faced by young women and the different values that often animate women's lives compared to men. Choices about when to have children, or whether to have children, can be at the very heart of self-identity for many characters in a way that often is not the case for their male counterparts. Choices about how to balance work and home, career and family, are defining challenges for many women's lives, in way that is not the case for many men. Similarly, portraying a heroine as valuing her family, friends, lovers, and other relationships is often critically important to writing her in a credible and relatable way. Heroines also frequently undertake their journeys as part of a team, in contrast to the iconic lone male hero. A heroine's objectives often are different, as well, such as protective or nurturing motivations or placing the safety of others above her own survival or glory.

It is surprising that there are no new strands to the heroine's journey emanating from the Internet. Barr accepts the monomyth as standard, only highlighting individual choices such as whether to have a child or not, to mark the difference between women's lives and the lives of men.

While Murdock's blueprint for the heroine's journey would seem to be the obvious one to follow when writing a biopic about a strong woman like Mary Wollstonecraft, Murdock's feminist lens, through which she views the heroine's journey, has received considerable critical attention. However, I discovered that there are elements of her blueprint which relate specifically to the protagonists of *A Hyena in Petticoats*. Separating from the Feminine, for example, is the first step of her journey which heroines need to embrace in order to have an experience of self-actualisation. Yet, I still wanted to search for a deeper, meaningful resonance that goes beyond surface structure, one which related specifically to Wollstonecraft's character as a writer and as a woman. In search of this goal, I found that Murdock's theories appealed to me especially as she works within a Jungian paradigm, to which I relate. Murdock's exploration into the unconscious world of the symbolism of dreams and visions resonates with me deeply. Most importantly for my purposes, however, her focus on spirituality allowed me the opportunity to explore and illustrate the metaphysical bond between the two subjects of the script. I believed that I would be able to find a link between Mary and Khetiwe in a way that is spiritual within Murdock's paradigm.

As I stated in Chapter One, even though my focus in writing this script is on the life of a historical woman, I want the biopic of *A Hyena in Petticoats* to fulfil the primary aim of the genre as defined by Dennis Bingham. My aim, in this biopic, is “to plumb that mystery of humanness, that inability completely to know another person, and the absolute importance of knowing them and ourselves” (Bingham, 2010, p 18). I still believe there are greater depths to explore when writing the script, so that I can attempt to “plumb the mystery of humanness”. Without discarding the elements which apply to an engaging narrative, whether they come from Campbell’s hero’s journey or Murdock’s heroine’s journey, I was searching for a deeper, intrinsically feminine aspect of womanhood to utilise as a motif for the biopic, *A Hyena in Petticoats*.



## **Chapter Three**

### **Finding a Motif which Dictates Structure: From Fractals to *Mise-en-Abyeme*.**

With the hero's journey and the heroine's journey competing for privilege in my approach to story-structure while I struggled to find a fresh structure for the script of *A Hyena in Petticoats*, I remembered a seminal experience which had informed my writing process in 2013. Flying over the Eastern Cape in a small airplane in July of that year, after a conference entitled "The Legacies of the Apartheid Border War", at Rhodes University, I stared down through the airplane window at the winter-dry earth beneath me. In between the harsh scrubland, a town would appear intermittently amongst the hills. Observing a town from the sky has always intrigued me, ever since I flew in a helicopter during a student-internship at the goldmines in the then Orange Free State. At that time, we flew over mine dumps and compounds where the mine-workers lived. From the helicopter seat, I looked down on the people below, going about their lives, without any way to protect themselves from my privileged gaze. It engendered in me a short-lived sense of being godlike, albeit an embarrassed god, aware of the unwelcome intrusion into private lives. However, it did give me the sense of having the power of an omniscient observer. Being able to see the microcosm of people's daily routines from a great height enabled me to have a supernatural point of view of humanity, albeit for just a brief moment.

That feeling stayed with me over the years but receded into the background of memories until the flight on the way home from the conference at Rhodes. What struck me forcibly, as I flew a mile above the ground in 2013, was the apparent orderliness of the lay-out of the towns below me. Everything appeared neat and organised. Roads squared off, hugging houses into safe geometric forms. Areas for growing vegetables exploded in patchworks of pregnant green; industrial buildings clung together, wheezing smoke into one another's lungs. The appearance of the towns from above was of a perfectly designed organism, planned to be the best it could be, to give the inhabitants a meaningful experience of life on this planet. My lateral-thinking brain usually links disconnected items together, and the view of the towns seen from above triggered a memory of the motherboard I had recovered from my expired laptop just a few days before. When the technician opened up the casing of the laptop, I observed how the circuitry of the motherboard was laid out in neat, colourful rows feeding into a central processor unit. From my aerial point of view, the towns followed a similar pattern of apparent order and design. Parallel streets contained rows of houses. Every house

contained a family. Every family contained its own personal history. Each family history had a back-story of previous histories of lives lived, traversing back into time until memory expired.

It seemed to me that each dwelling observed from the sky was as profound with meaning and information as one byte of information stored in a motherboard. Perhaps this realisation struck me so forcibly because of the conference I had just attended. People from around South Africa had come together to speak about their experiences of the Apartheid Border Wars. I had been invited to screen the short film which I had written and produced about my brother's death on the border when he was barely twenty-one years old. Others had come to speak of the trauma they had endured during the nightmare years of the apartheid war. One man spoke of his experiences as a young soldier on the border, bearing witness to man at his most inhumane in the heat of senseless battle. A group of aging activists, the Amabutho, were still prepared to fight for their rights, thirty years after they had first demanded them, as they felt their voices had not yet been heard. Accounts were given by spies who had worked for the government; by young black academics who found the experience of white conscripts excellent food for research; by hardened freedom fighters who had built their own bombs and lit tyres around the necks of so-called sell-outs, all in an effort to make the country ungovernable.

Each byte of human energy I had encountered at the conference was packed with profound memories. My view from the airplane, looking down on the apparent symmetry of life below, led me to wonder if humanity was not perhaps part of an intricately designed motherboard, fulfilling functions programmed into us, on a predestined path, part of the design of an omniscient observer. As a scriptwriter who views life mainly as an exercise in learning how to write better, this experience of the town from above made me think of how I approached writing the script for my short film *A Shot at the Big Time* (Van Eeden, 2012), about the death of my brother on the border which had just been shown at "The Legacies of Apartheid War" conference. I had struggled for months to find a way to extract a twelve page script from one-hundred-and-ten pages of feature script based on the life of someone I had loved deeply. How would I find the heart of the story without going through each detail of his life?

Writing the short film script for *A Shot at the Big Time* became an all-consuming exercise during 2012. In order to condense the events and depth of the narrative of the feature film, I wrote twelve versions of the script until I finally discovered the only way to proceed with this difficult task successfully. I decided that each moment of the script should reflect the controlling idea (McKee,

1999), or main theme, at the heart of the feature film. After much contemplation, I had concluded that the controlling idea of the short film was that my brother's inability to cope with the unjust circumstances and trauma he had endured as an army conscript drove him into a schizophrenic breakdown. I decided that the fact that a schizophrenic episode results in the sufferer's perception of reality being expressed in a fractured form, should dictate the structure of the short film. Therefore, I made the creative choice that the narrative structure of my short film was to depict each story beat as a part of my brother's breakdown, whether as a pleasant memory from the past which had been betrayed by brutal experience, or as a trauma which had been inflicted upon him. The tragedy of the schizophrenic attack in my script was evoked through depicting a fractured consciousness which jumped between chronological events and memory. There was only one proviso when I began to write the script: every expression of the protagonist's reality portrayed in the film had to reflect the single controlling idea: the hero had been betrayed by an unjust system.

On the flight in 2013 as I flew over the town, I realised I had stumbled upon an alternative way of viewing story-structure in writing and producing the short film. Without realising it at the time, I had moved away from my favoured traditional formula of the hero's journey and stumbled into a story based on a self-iterating controlling idea or motif.

At this realisation, my mind raced from accepting traditional story structure as the ultimate aim in writing, to considering writing a story shaped primarily around motif, to the comparison with bytes of information stored in microchips which contain self-iterative information. These thoughts brought me to the point of considering the mathematical phenomenon of fractals, as fractals are sets of information which form a pattern which is repetitive. As M.F. Barnsley and H. Rising explain, "A fractal is an object or quantity that displays self-similarity, in a somewhat technical sense, on all scales" (1993, p 16). This pattern was first noticed by Benoit Mandelbrot, a Polish mathematician, one of the first to define geometric fractals as "a rough or fragmented geometric shape that can be split into parts, each of which is (at least approximately) a reduced-size copy of the whole" (1983). This train of thought, piecing together images of towns seen from above, to motherboards, to microchips, to fractals, inspired me to approach writing the feature-length biographical feature film, *A Hyena in Petticoats*, using the idea of fractals to create a cohesive narrative.

The term "fractals", however, refers to mathematical operations with geometric sets. I came to realise that the literary term *mise en abyme* refers to a very similar self-iterative pattern as a fractal set. To fit into an English Studies thesis, therefore, I have equated my initial idea of using the image

of fractals as a building block for structure, with the literary term, *mise en abyme*, which still equals the controlling idea in scriptwriting terms. With this aim in mind, I chose to find the *mise en abyme* at the heart of the life of Mary Wollstonecraft, the subject of my biographical feature script, and to ensure that the structure of the narrative is shaped around this single idea.

*Mise en abyme* is a term coined by French novelist, Andre Gide (1869-1951), and was developed by Lucien Dallenbach in his work, *Le récit spéculaire. Essai sur la mise en abyme* (1977). Initially, the term was used in heraldry, where the centre of the shield contained another shield, with yet another shield in the centre of that one, and so on. The term refers to an image being cast into an abyss of infinite repetitions of itself. *Mise en abyme* can refer to an image reflected ad infinitum by a multitude of mirrors, for example, and this conceit was sometimes used by old master painters to add a commentary on the nature of the subject of their portraits. It can also refer to a play-within-a-play such as used by William Shakespeare in *Hamlet* (1599), or a play-within-a-film such as in *The Producers* (Stroman, 2005), or a dream-within-a-dream such as in the film, *Inception* (Nolan, 2010).

Patricia M. Lawlor defines *mise en abyme* in her essay on the subject in “The French Review” (1985), in the following terms:

In literature, *mise en abyme* has come to include duplication by analogy as well as recurrence of similar images or events.... *Mise en abyme* not only reflects the past but anticipates the future, and sometimes both, simultaneously. The retro-prospective nature of the liminal *mise en abyme* establishes a perspective on what is to follow. (p 829-830)

Lawlor goes on to quote Neil Hertz: “There is no term in English for what French critics term *mise en abyme* – a casting into the abyss – but the effect itself is familiar enough: an illusion of infinite regress can be created by a writer or painter by incorporating within his own work a work that duplicates in miniature the larger structure, setting up an apparently unending metonymic series” (p 829).

One example of a film which uses structure effectively to echo the main themes of the film and its subject, and to set up an “apparently unending metonymic series”, is *American Splendor* (Springer Berman, Pulcini, 2003). This biopic focuses on only one protagonist, but changes its medium from an apparent comic book format, to live action, to a stage play, to documentary and back to live action, in order to illustrate the misanthropic and fractured inner life of cartoonist, Harvey Pekar.

Throughout most of the film, actors portray the subjects of the biopic, Pekar, and also his wife, Joyce Brabner, while in some scenes, the real-life Pekar and Brabner observe and comment on the action portrayed by the actors as if in a behind-the-scenes documentary. In another scene, the actors playing Harvey and Joyce watch a stage play which has been written about their characters. The stage actors portray Harvey and Joyce on stage while in the audience, the actors, Paul Giamatti and Hope Davis, portray Harvey and Joyce watching themselves on stage. This scene cuts away to the real Harvey and Joyce commenting on what it was like to watch a play about their lives. In this way, the film explores the multi-faceted layers of personae of Harvey and Joyce in their various incarnations through the structural choices made. The biopic narrowly avoids self-consciousness, which can detract from an immersive narrative.

The danger that the audience might be bored by a repetitive pattern in any art form is real, but hopefully, a skilful use of this construct would create a structure with a self-iterating motif which adds depth and meaning to the subtext, rather than distracts from it. Juliana de Nooy, in her essay “The Double Scission: Dällenbach, Doležel, and Derrida on Doubles” (1991), cites the three theorists quoted in her title who voice doubts about the effectiveness of *mise en abyme*. They warn about the “dangerous and discouraging plurality from which the term *mise en abyme* has to be rescued: ‘We started from the discouraging plurality of the term *mise en abyme* and attempted to drag it away from its indeterminate state’” (p 22). The theorists suggest that *mise en abyme* can be overused until its original meaning is diluted into a generalisation without much impact. One example of the extreme overuse of *mise en abyme* is evident in a film called *Synecdoche, New York* (Kaufman, 2008). Charlie Kaufman, who mastered the art of self-reflection in his films *Being John Malkovich* (Jonze, 1999), *Adaptation* (Jonze, 2002), and *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (Gondry, 2004), takes it to the extreme in *Synecdoche, New York*. The narrative, which explores its protagonist’s life within layers-upon-layers-upon-layers of his reality, is stretched to such an extreme level that the viewer feels claustrophobic. In this film the protagonist, a loosely-disguised Kaufman-replica, recreates aspects of his dysfunctional life with a cast of hired actors, building an enormous house with many rooms to contain each problem-area in his life. Each room is a *mise en abyme* of one aspect of the protagonist’s problems. The house grows in relation to the protagonist’s neuroses and personal problems until it is unwieldy and incomprehensible. Although it is Kaufman’s intention to convey the sense of discomfort caused by his protagonist’s obsessive-compulsive disorder, the story suffers as a result. In essence, the claustrophobic style of the film, created by the materialisation of the obsessive-compulsive’s mind into actual buildings in which each thought becomes a re-enactment depicted in his on-set world, is a sensory overload. By

contrast, in *American Splendor* the multi-layered approach to the depiction of a real-life character accurately depicts that there are many versions of the truth. I was looking for a similar awareness and self-reflexivity in my screenplay. However, there is a danger of overuse, as is illustrated above. The most important thing was not to exploit the device at the expense of an immersive narrative.

Certain literary theorists sound a warning about the use of *mise en abyme* as a device in a text, in both this century and the last. A modern critic of the device of *mise en abyme* is Marcus Snow, who, in his doctoral thesis, “Into the Abyss: a study of the *Mise en abyme*” (2016), states that the term:

... ‘mise en abyme’ is a stand-in term: it is a term which means other things. Very often, it refers to forgotten rhetorical effects, effects which are quite easily identified and explained. Sometimes, the term is attributed to texts with extreme, abysmal, themes. In such cases, the *mise en abyme* resonates with a profound mood which is symptomatic of modern times. ... The *mise en abyme* became something associated with ideas far beyond what Gide could have imagined. It became a term believed to indicate endless deferral of meaning, even though no clear examples were ever put forward which could tenably support the formal possibility of any such regressive conception. Criticism had become sophisticated but compromised especially since the *mise en abyme* carried various meanings that relied on little more than fortifying theories. (p 11-12)

Snow and De Nooy draw our attention to the potential dangers and vagaries of unclear and excessive examples of *mise en abyme*, as I illustrate in my account of the film, *Synecdoche, New York*. However, De Nooy and Derrida rescue this term from being thrown into the abyss itself and show where its use is most valuable. If *mise en abyme* is used skilfully, they say, it can add depth to, and enhance, a narrative. De Nooy’s article concludes with Derrida’s comments:

As Derrida explains, the *mise en abyme* can always play an ‘appeasing role’ such that the abyss no longer threatens us: ‘The *mise en abyme* can always fill the abyss’. The tamed *mise en abyme* provokes a tantalizing shiver of vertigo, allows us to gaze into the gulf from behind the behind the *garde-fou*. (p 26)

So, faced as I was with writing a potentially pedestrian retelling of the sequence of actual events in a real person’s life, when I approached writing the biopic based on the life of Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Hyena in Petticoats*, I decided to focus, initially on the underlying theme of a controlling idea of

the story, before I could begin to find a *mise en abyme*. As always, the controlling idea had to be recreated in every beat of the script.

In the case of Mary Wollstonecraft, the controlling idea I wished to convey in this script was that she referred to herself as “a new genus of woman” (Gordon, 2005, p 128), one who insisted on living an independent life. By saying this of herself, she intimated that she would create herself in her own image, as it were. The heuristic value of using her wilful independence as a controlling idea to find the *mise en abyme* gave me a focus for further exploration into a way to shape the story. I had to show how Mary chose to shape herself as a “new genus”. The idea of Mary, the character, shaping herself into the person she wished to become, appealed to me greatly and gave me ideas about implementing a creative enactment of the *mise en abyme*.

Before I delved into the literal recreation of Mary as a new genus through the use of *mise en abyme*, I chose to examine whether the use of this literary device had played a part in two of my favourite biopics about remarkable women, and whether this enhanced the films. For added interest, I chose two screenplays that were both written by women, although the male director took co-writing credit for the Edith Piaf biopic, along with the original woman screenwriter. The two screenplays in question were *Saving Mr Banks* (Marcel, Smith, 2013), and *La Vie en Rose* (Sobelman, Dahan, 2007).

### **Saving Mister Banks and Mise en Abyme**

My search for the elusive *mise en abyme* drew me towards these particular well structured, and well received, biopics about real women, Edith Piaf (1915-1963) and Pamela Lyndon Travers (OBE, 1899-1996) as the execution of both films was unusual. Perhaps the inspiration for the writers was that both women led extraordinary lives, breaking the expectations for women during their lifetimes and living lives of convention-defying originality. I wanted to see whether the *mise en abyme* was used in either of the films. From the opening moments of *Saving Mr Banks*, the visuals, music and voice-over narration work together to set up the *mise en abyme* which reappears throughout the film. The script gives the blueprint for the film’s opening sequence:

EXT. MARYBOROUGH PARK - AUSTRALIA - DAY (1906)

OVER BLACK:

MUSIC - string violins treat us to a familiar song opening and then a voice - male.

TRAVERS (V.O.)  
 (singing)  
*Winds in the East*  
*Mist coming in-*

FADE IN:

A whoosh of wind spins us around in a blue sky, spinning, spinning until we slow to a stop and find ourselves amongst white fluffy clouds. A shadow (oddly shaped like an umbrella) dances amongst the nimbus.

TRAVERS (V.O.)  
*Like something is brewing,*  
*about to begin -*

The shadow's direction becomes purposeful - taking us down through the clouds, whipping us on the wind towards a small town in the distance.

TRAVERS (V.O.)  
*Can't put me finger on*  
*what lies in store -*

Downwards and downwards until it skittishly circles a large, bustling park and then swoops us into the lavish gardens. There, a ten-year-old girl plays in the lush grass; she puts the finishing touches to a miniature version of the large park she sits in - benches made from twigs, trees from flowers, picnic cups from acorns - and gives a satisfied nod. She wraps her arms tightly around her chest, lifts her face to the sky, a half-smile threatening to break across her concentrated face. This is the young P.L. TRAVERS (whom we will also know as GINTY.)

TRAVERS (V.O.)  
*But I feel what's to happen,*  
*all happened before -*

Her little brow is furrowed with imagination and then, all of a sudden, the smile breaks free as something in her mind becomes real.

INT. SHAWFIELD ST - PAMELA'S OFFICE - LONDON - MORNING  
 (1961)

P.L. TRAVERS sits in her rocking chair (in the same position as above) arms clasped tightly around her body, face to the sky. Older, beautiful; striking blue eyes aid her air of stiff and steely determination.



(Marcel, Smith, 2013, p 2-3)

The whimsical introduction quoted above sets the tone for the controlling idea or the *mise en abyme* of the screenplay *Saving Mr Banks*. P.L. Travers's filmic father Travers Goff, portrayed by Colin Farrell, sings a song in a voice-over from the film *Mary Poppins* (Stevenson, 1964). In real-time reality as well as in the reality of the film, *Saving Mr Banks*, Travers Goff was dead long before P.L. Travers had written the first Mary Poppins' book, never mind discussing selling the rights of the book so that it could be made into a film by Walt Disney. In the opening moments of the film, we are introduced to a number of posits: the first refers to the idea that time has a fluid nature; the second is that any fiction is born of a reality experienced by the author, as well as the fact that the author is a product of her lived reality and her fantasy life; and finally, the most important posit for the film is that P.L. Travers's creation, Mary Poppins, is born out of her experiences with her father. The lines above, "I feel what's to happen all happened before," alert the audience to the *mise en abyme*, which will illustrate that time is not linear, and that P.L. Travers's art is born out of her own personal suffering. As Lawlor states in her article quoted above:

... *mise en abyme* has come to include duplication by analogy as well as recurrence of similar images or events.... *Mise en abyme* not only reflects the past but anticipates the future, and sometimes both, simultaneously. The retro-prospective nature of the liminal *mise en abyme* establishes a perspective on what is to follow. (p 829-830)

The "retro-prospective nature of the liminal *mise en abyme*" of the words of the song creates the awareness that the story of Mary Poppins is as much the story of P.L. Travers, and her father is deeply embedded in the birth and outcome of the story. The retro-prospective nature of time is outlined in the words of the song, "I feel what's to happen, all happened before". From the opening moments of the film, we are introduced into not only the magical elements contained in the Disney film about Mary Poppins, but also the element of whimsy and the fantasy world which live in the core of P.L. Travers's personality, in spite of her protestations to the contrary. In the second scene of the film P.L. Travers, played by Emma Thomson, tells her agent Diarmuid Russell, played by Ronan Vibert, that "You don't know what she means to me" (p 6). He thinks she is talking about her maid but she is talking about Mary Poppins, her creation. In the first few pages of the script, the significance of her creation is stated by the protagonist of the film. We have no doubt that the book *Mary Poppins* (Travers, 1934) is more than just a work of fiction. The story and its characters are viscerally connected to P.L. Travers.

The link between the creation of Mary Poppins as she exists in the book, and the character of P.L. Travers in the screenplay *Saving Mr Banks* is further clarified through flashbacks to her childhood with her father. When he pretends to have lost Ginty, his pet name for his daughter, she tells her father, “You can’t lose me!” Travers Goff promises, “Never. I promise. I will never lose you” (p 6). The narrative continues to flashback to moments from P.L. Travers’s past to underline the choices she makes in the present. In spite of her trying not to allow the whimsy which her father brought into her life to be a part of her current personality, she betrays herself occasionally. She refers to the cherry blossoms outside her window in England as “pink clouds on a stick” (p 3). She reacts violently to the gifts in her room left for her by the Disney team in Los Angeles. Not only does she remove the obviously over-the-top gifts of Disney stuffed animals, including a giant-sized Mickey Mouse, but she reacts to a bowl of fruit placed in her room as a courtesy. She picks out three pears from the bowl and mutters to herself, “This won’t do”. She walks to the balcony window and a flashback takes us into a scene from her childhood in Australia. In this scene, her father extols the virtues of their arid wreck of a farm, telling Ginty that the farm is, in fact, a palace and they have a noble steed instead of an ancient wreck of a horse. The flashback ends and the scene in the hotel continues from the point of view of guests at the pool below P.L. Travers’s room. The guests observe three flying missiles splashing into the pool from above. They are the three pears which P.L. Travers has thrown out of the window. Above the heads of the surprised guests, P.L. Travers shuts her window firmly on the offending fruit (p 14-15).

This action is a rejection of her father and all he stood for, most especially the world of fantasy and whimsy, which Walt Disney seems intent on forcing upon her once again. It is only at the end of the film that the flashback to Travers Goff’s dying moments reveal the significance of the pears. Travers is dying on the bed and Ginty offers to buy him something special with a tuppence her aunt gave her. Travers mouths the word “pears” (p 95). She runs off to buy them. When she returns with the pears a short while later, her father has died. In her shock, she drops the pears and they fall to the floor. Ginty had wanted to save her father, even to the extent of sneaking a bottle of alcohol into his bed earlier at his behest, much to the horror of her mother, but she was unable to do so. She also berates her aunt who had come in to help them, and who resembles Mary Poppins in certain respects, that she had promised to save her father, but she failed. Ginty blames her aunt for allowing her father to die.

The seminal experiences of her father’s failures ensure that P.L. Travers determines to be much stronger in her life than her father. As an Irish immigrant into Australia, he prided himself on being

always subject to romantic whimsy. There is one scene where he returns home from work in the middle of the day and runs through lines of washing with the children, chasing an old chicken who he refers to as Aunt Ellie, his wife's "horrendiferous sister" (p 60). He tramps the clean sheets into the mud and dismisses his wife's concerns, all for the sake of fun. P.L. Travers's father wanted life to be an adventure, rather than repetitive drudgery. He could not bear spending his days working in the bank from nine-to-five because the routine dulled his spirit. He drank, not only because he had a tendency towards alcoholism, but also to escape the responsibilities of the world, which included a wife and three children. He did not succeed in overcoming these responsibilities, no matter how much he employed his imagination. His only way of escape was to die young.

The steely and pragmatic aspects of P.L. Travers's character are in direct contrast to the world her father inhabited, one of dreams and imagination. However, at her very core, as illustrated above in the opening scenes of the film *Saving Mr Banks*, is the whimsy she inherited from her father. Even though her father assured her that he and she shared a Celtic soul, and that she could dream and become anything she wanted to become, P.L. Travers has discovered through harsh experience that the world of her father was made of insubstantial stuff. As a child, she tells her father she wants to be just like him. After watching him die, a failure and penniless, she decides to reject her father's way of life. However, in her heart, she does not reject her father and his whimsical nature. She simply tries to find a way to rescue him from ignominy. In the following sequence, she berates the writers and Disney for thinking that Mary Poppins came to save the children. This is just after she accuses the writing team and Disney of creating nothing more than "flim-flam" in the script. She tries to convince the writing team and Walt Disney, and almost convinces herself, that she is as pragmatic as she presents herself. She cannot allow the writers to damn Mr Banks, however. After the team has sung "A Spoonful of Sugar," she launches into an ardent attack on their light-hearted approach to the world:

WALT

I won't be able to stop  
singing that for weeks!

PAMELA

It seems enormously  
patronising to me. The very  
sort of annoying tune you  
would have playing in your  
themed park I daresay. All  
giddy and carefree,

encouraging children to  
face the world unarmed. All  
they need is a spoon and  
some sugar and a brain full  
of fluff and they're  
equipped with life's tools.  
Wonderful!

Dick is completely deflated.

WALT

What's your point Pam?

PAMELA

MRS Travers! My point is  
that, unlike yourself, Mary  
Poppins is the very enemy  
of sentiment and whimsy.  
She is truthful, she  
doesn't sugar coat the  
darkness in the world that  
these children will  
eventually come to know.  
She prepares them for it,  
she deals in honesty. One  
must clean one's room;  
it won't magically do it  
itself!

She waves the script in the air.

PAMELA (CONT'D)

This whole script is flim-  
flam! Where is its reality?  
Where is its heart, where  
is the gravitas?

She opens a window and flings the script out.

PAMELA (CONT'D)

No weight, Mister Disney!  
See?

Dick, Don and Bob look out of the window as the pages  
flutter downwards and spread themselves over the Disney  
lot.

WALT

No whimsy or sentiment says  
the woman who sends a  
flying nanny with a talking

umbrella to save the  
children.

PAMELA  
You think Mary Poppins is  
saving the children, Mr  
Disney?

Pamela sighs, shakes her head.

PAMELA (CONT'D)  
Oh dear.

(p 58-59)

P.L. Travers reveals her motives in the above sequence in the script. Perhaps she reveals them to herself as well, for the first time. Finally, after many power struggles which involve every aspect of the film-making process, not only the writing, P.L. Travers begins to relinquish her stranglehold on the story. In the present timeline of the story, towards the end of the second act, P.L. Travers is close to surrendering her rights to Walt Disney as she has been seduced steadily by Disney and his team. Then she realises that Disney plans to use animation to create a dance for animated penguins in one sequence of the film adaptation. From her point of view, this is a direct betrayal. She had stated from the beginning that the film had to be live-action, without any animation at all, and Walt Disney had agreed. This discovery changes P.L. Travers's mind about everything to do with the film adaptation. She is incensed. She storms into Disney's office and accuses him of being a trickster and a fraud. She throws the copyright papers onto his desk, which still do not have her signature on them, and leaves the building. Disney follows her out of the building and confronts her at her car which is waiting to take her home.

WALT  
Please Mrs Travers - You  
must listen.

PAMELA  
You shouldn't make promises  
you can't keep, especially  
to children, they hold on  
to them you see? And those  
promises they just sit  
there inside of them, like  
little doses of poison, all  
those broken promises,  
eating away forever.

WALT

Pamela? I don't understand  
why this is so hard for you.  
Please, make me understand-

PAMELA

The books weren't written for  
the children. They were written  
for the promise breakers.

WALT

The promise breakers? Mrs  
Travers I -

-

But she's gone, face to the sky, eyes closed, breathing.

WALT (CONT'D)

Mrs Travers?

Ralph pulls up and gets out of the car.

RALPH

Woah! Mister Disney!

WALT

Hi.

RALPH

Hi! I'm such a huge fan.  
It's such an honour to-

He suddenly sees that Pamela is more deeply entrenched in  
herself than usual and his priority becomes her.

RALPH (CONT'D)

(to Walt)

Excuse me.

Ralph moves past Walt and gently taps Pamela on the  
shoulder, she opens her eyes, relieved to see him.

RALPH (CONT'D)

You ready to go Mrs?

PAMELA

Yes. Thank you.

WALT

Pamela-

PAMELA  
 (tearing up)  
 I'm so sorry Mister Disney.  
 To have put everyone to so  
 much trouble.

WALT  
 You must reconsider. You  
 must.

PAMELA  
 I simply can't give her up.  
 Not yet. Perhaps not ever.  
 I don't know why.

DISNEY  
 You do know why!

PAMELA  
 I can't, he's -

DISNEY  
 He's?

PAMELA  
 I just -  
 Goodbye Mr Disney.

(p 100-101)

The moment when P.L. Travers states that she cannot relinquish her control over her book, is the moment when she reveals to Walt Disney that she cannot deny the power the apparently fictional Mary Poppins has over her. She needs to own Mary Poppins, to be in control of her, because without her magical, whimsical help, P.L. Travers is unable to rescue her father from an undignified life. Her hint at the end of the above sequence shows that her father is her main concern, not Mary Poppins. "He's..." shows she is thinking of her father.

The second act climax arises when the two inter-linking story-strands collide across time. In the present timeline, the writing and musical team are working on the song which Mr Banks is supposed to sing in the bank in the final version of the film, *Mary Poppins*. In the past storyline, Travers Goff is due to present prizes at a country fair prize-giving on behalf of his bank. Unfortunately, he cannot resist drinking and he becomes too drunk to do the presentation without embarrassing his family. In the present timeline, the team sings a song in which Mr Banks tries to extort the tuppence out of his son. The boy does not want to deposit his money into the bank but

would rather buy a bag of food for the birds. The two timelines intersect and Travers Goff sings the words of Mr Banks's song (while the team sings along in a voice-over). The song is brutal and abusive towards Mr Banks's son, demanding the tuppence from the boy so that he can enhance the bank's earning power. In the past timeline, Travers sings the words of the song while he is on stage, as if it were his speech. He then calls Ginty up to help him walk off the stage to relieve himself. He falls into the dust at the foot of the stage as he is too drunk to walk by himself, and breaks a limb. This mortifying memory, triggered by the song sung by Disney's team, causes P.L. Travers to break down the barrier between the two worlds of Mary Poppins, the book, and her own life. She cries out: "Why did you have to make him so cruel? He was not a monster!" (p 74) She continues, asking the men if they have children, and whether they would tear up the presents their children gave to them, in the way that Mr Banks had just done:

DON  
Who are we talking about?  
I'm confused.

PAMELA  
You all have children yes?

DON  
Yes.

DICK  
Yep.

BOB  
Yes.

PAMELA  
And do those children write  
you letters, make drawings  
for you?

DON  
Of course.

DICK  
Mine like to make folded  
paper -

PAMELA  
(cutting him off)  
And would you tear up those  
gifts? In front of them?!



Silence. They know where this is going.

PAMELA (CONT'D)

It's a dreadful thing to  
do! I don't understand! Why  
must father tear up the  
advertisement his children  
have written and throw it  
in the fireplace!? Why  
won't he mend their kite?  
Why have you made him so  
unspeakably awful?

(beat)

For all the world to see,  
in glorious technicolor?  
You claim to make them live  
- if that happens, can't  
he? Can't they at least  
live well?

Pamela chokes back a sudden rush of distress.

PAMELA (CONT'D)

I can't bear it.

(softly)

Please don't -

The boys are shocked at the level of upset.

PAMELA (CONT'D)

Please don't - I'll feel  
like I let him down again -

She leaves the room, head hung.

(p 74-75)

This revelation is the second-act climax, where P.L. Travers finally reveals what it is about Mary Poppins, her apparent work of fiction, that she cannot release. She has imbued it with the regrets she had about being unable to save her father from a feckless life which bore little fruit, other than the lives of his children. P.L. Travers sees it as her duty to save him, by becoming Mary Poppins herself, the one who puts everything in order, the one who redeems those who have let themselves and others down.

The self-referential nature of the film, *Saving Mr Banks*, is enhanced by a scene shortly after the one just described. P.L. Travers rushes out of the rehearsal room where she had just revealed too much of herself and her concerns about her father. She walks to a grassy area outside the office building and sits down on the grass. Not only does she perform the uncharacteristic act of sitting on the grass, but she plays with twigs and leaves and builds a pretend band-stand out of them, just as she does as a girl in the opening scene of the film (p 77). She is joined by her daily chauffeur, Ralph, to whom she has been distant and dismissive ever since they met.

EXT. GRASS AREA - DISNEY STUDIOS - BURBANK - DAY

Pamela flops down onto the ground, digging her fingers into the dirt and lawn.

Pamela picks a daisy, finds a stray twig and arranges them in the grass.

RALPH

Mrs?

Pamela looks up, her eyes are red rimmed but she's not crying.

RALPH (CONT'D)

I, uh, brought you a tea.

He hands her the tea in a takeaway cup.

PAMELA

It's blasphemy to drink tea  
from a paper cup.

Ralph, shifts nervously from foot to foot. He's not quite sure what to say to her or why he brought the tea.

Pamela puts the tea down and continues to fiddle with bits and pieces of twig and bloom that she's plucking from the area around her.

RALPH

Everything okay Ma'am?  
Would you like me to drive  
you home?

PAMELA

All the way to England?  
Yes, please.

Ralph lowers himself onto his haunches.

RALPH  
You got family back there  
Mrs?

PAMELA  
You're an impertinent man  
you know? You ask an awful  
lot of questions that have  
no relevance to you being  
able to carry out your  
duties.

RALPH  
(laughing)  
I know! I do, do that. Yes!

PAMELA  
And you have no barometer.

Ralph is confused.

PAMELA (CONT'D)  
Let us say that I haven't family  
who'd notice whether I was halfway  
across the world or sitting in my  
living room.

She pulls a thread from the hem of her skirt, ties two  
twigs together.

RALPH  
Ma'am; I-

Ralph sees that she has a little collection of things, he  
looks around for some more.

Pamela takes a stick and digs a small line through the  
grass then hands it to him.

PAMELA  
Make a little furrow,  
there.

Ralph dutifully does as he's told, looking over his  
shoulder for fear of being caught digging holes in Disney  
soil. Ralph pokes the ground, thinking.

RALPH  
I gotta kid.

PAMELA  
Well, most people do.

RALPH  
Jane - she's got all kinds  
of troubles.

Pamela raises an eyebrow.

RALPH (CONT'D)  
Handicapped you know?  
Myelitis-transverse.  
(beat)  
She's in a wheelchair see?  
That's why I concern myself  
with the weather - sunny  
day she can sit out in the  
garden. Rainy day I have to  
leave her cooped up inside.  
(beat)  
Worry 'bout the future, but  
then I stop cuz you can't  
do that. Only today.

Pamela takes the plastic lid off the paper cup and pokes  
holes in it.

PAMELA  
Now look.

She takes the lid, twigs now sticking out of the poked  
holes and places it in the centre of what we now see is one  
of Pamela's tiny parks. She gently rest a leaf on the twig  
struts forming a roof.

PAMELA (CONT'D)  
It's a band stand.

She takes the cup of tea and gently pours the steaming  
liquid into Ralph's trench, which runs all the way around  
the park.

RALPH  
A river!

PAMELA  
(correcting him)  
Lake.

RALPH

Lake.

(beat)

Hey! I wish I could take  
her there!

He points at the miniature park.

PAMELA

Wouldn't that be nice?

(p 77-79)

The scene above is a replica of the opening sequence with ten-year-old Ginty building a miniature park (p 2) in a garden in Australia. The *mise en abyme* is enhanced, therefore, not only by the young Ginty and the older P.L. Travers echoing their actions of building a miniature park, but it is enhanced by glimpses of the scenes from the original film *Mary Poppins* where Bert and Mary spend time in a park with a band-stand, loosely resembling Ginty's and P.L. Travers's makeshift versions.

The final redemption of P.L. Travers is not yet complete at the above stage, even though her flaw as a protagonist has been revealed. Ironically, the screenwriters, Kelly Marcel and Sue Smith, allow the character of Walt Disney the honour of redeeming P.L. Travers in the final act of *Saving Mr Banks*, although this episode is most certainly an invention. When P.L. Travers flies home to London after deciding not to sign the copyright over to Disney, she opens her door late at night to find Walt Disney on her doorstep. She invites him in, reluctantly, and he tells her his own story (which is based on fact), about his father who forced him and his brother to do two paper routes a day, in dreadful weather conditions, morning and evening, in spite of gruelling demands at school. He tells P.L. Travers that his father, Elias Disney, is his personal Mr Banks. Disney assures her that he understands that Mary Poppins has come to save Mr Banks in the story. He acknowledges that he knows Mr Banks is also a recreation of P.L. Travers's father, Travers Goff. He continues that he has discovered that the story of Mary Poppins is about forgiveness. P.L. Travers answers, quickly, that she has no need to forgive her father because he was a wonderful man.

WALT

Mrs. Travers. It's all  
about him isn't it? All of  
this. Everything.

Pamela looks at her hands, they're shaking.

WALT (CONT'D)

Forgiveness. It's what I  
learned from your books.

PAMELA

I don't need to forgive my  
father. He was a wonderful  
man.

WALT

No, you need to forgive  
Helen Goff. Life is a harsh  
sentence to lay down for  
yourself.

Pamela looks down at the table top.

WALT (CONT'D)

Give her to me, Mrs  
Travers. Trust me with your  
precious Mary Poppins. I  
won't disappoint you. I  
swear that every time a  
person goes into a movie  
house - from Leicester to  
St Louis, they will see  
George Banks being saved.  
They will love him and his  
kids, they will weep for  
his cares, and wring their  
hands when he loses his  
job. And when he flies that  
kite, oh! They will  
rejoice, they will sing. In  
every movie house, all over  
the world, in the eyes and  
the hearts of my kids, and  
other kids and their  
mothers and fathers for  
generations to come, George  
Banks will be honoured.  
George Banks will be  
redeemed. George Banks and  
all he stands for will be  
saved. Maybe not in life,  
but in imagination. Because  
that's what we storytellers  
do. We restore order with  
imagination. We instil hope  
again and again and again.

Trust me, Mrs Travers. Let  
me prove it to you. I give  
you my word.

(p 111)

The *mise en abyme* is no longer a secret. It is revealed, even if the screenwriters gave the honour of the revelation to Walt Disney himself, unlikely as this may have been in P.L. Travers' real life story. Whatever the manner of its revelation, there is no doubt that Mary Poppins, the character within the book, is the motif of the *mise en abyme*, creating the narrative-within-the-narrative, revealing the depth of the protagonist's desire to recreate the world as she would like it to be, not as it is. P.L. Travers needed to save not only Mr Banks, but also herself in the execution of the screenplay of Mary Poppins. The screenwriters' skilful interplay between the layers of the story-strands adds depth to each of the two timelines in the screenplay, namely Ginty's past and P.L. Travers's present. This allows each timeline to add commentary to the other, making them resonate in tune to create an overarching narrative in the final execution of the filmmakers' work in the film *Saving Mr Banks*.

The use of *mise en abyme*, in this instance, exemplifies Derrida's comments in De Nooy's article: "'The *mise en abyme* can always fill the abyss.' The tamed *mise en abyme* provokes a tantalizing shiver of vertigo, allows us to gaze into the gulf from behind the behind the *garde-fou*" (p 26). In *Saving Mr Banks*, the shiver of vertigo, the filling of the abyss, occur when the examples of *mise en abyme* line up throughout the timelines. To use the term literally, the abyss is time, where events from the past have just as much impact in the present. The abyss occurs when the audience realises that time is not linear. As Lawlor (quoted earlier) says, "*Mise en abyme* not only reflects the past but anticipates the future, and sometimes both, simultaneously" (1985, p 829-830). The opening lines of *Saving Mr Banks* point towards this same reflection of the past and its anticipation of the future. Travers sings: "Can't put my finger on what lies in store, but I feel what's to happen all happened before," (Sobelman, Dahon, 2013, p 2). In these lines we establish the "retro-prospective nature of the liminal *mise en abyme* [which gives us] a perspective on what is to follow" (Lawlor, 1985, p 829-830).

The device, therefore, enhances the resonances behind selected moments of P.L. Travers's life, giving deeper insight into the complex influences on her character. We understand her apparent aversion to whimsy and yet her wilful desire not to let money hold sway over her decisions. These

insights allow us to make sense of the contradictions in her prickly and fussy character which can still be seduced by make-believe play on the grass outside a studio lot. The use of *mise en abyme* in this screenplay is used as an effective device in finding a way to learn the deeper motivation behind the life of an extraordinary woman, even though the screenplay focuses on a single, short episode in her long and unusual life. Through the glimpses of the *mise en abyme* in the screenplay, P.L. Travers is revealed as the untamed girl, who grew up in harsh scrublands of Australia, and who tries, unsuccessfully, to save her father from himself. We learn that through her writing, she attempted to give him some form of redemption by the intervention of her fictional character, Mary Poppins. It barely matters that, in the biopic, the screenwriters have made Walt Disney the agent who grants P.L. Travers permission to forgive herself allowing her redemption. It does not matter either that Walt Disney gave the same redemption to P.L. Travers's father, by creating Mr Banks as a sympathetic and essentially lovable character in the film version of *Mary Poppins*. Disney's studios turned Mr Banks into a kind, if initially misguided, man, who wants the best for his family. In this way, the studio created Mr Banks as the sympathetic and whimsical father P.L. Travers remembered him to be. What does matter, in the final analysis, is that the *mise en abyme* of the story of Mary Poppins, allows everything to be put in order, to make sense of the narrative in all the timelines of the screenplay.

### **La Vie en Rose and Mise en Abyme**

In search of the *mise en abyme* in a biographical feature film, I watched *La Vie en Rose* (Dahon, 2007), the film, for the third or fourth time. As I was unable to gain access to a screenplay of this biopic, I have resorted to citing from the DVD, using the time-code as the point of reference. The biopic had made an enormous impact on me when I first watched it. After my initial viewing, I regarded *La Vie en Rose* as a powerful film which attempted to recreate the workings of the mind itself, emulating the way memory works in a non-linear way through its structure, flashing backwards and forwards across Edith Piaf's life story to reveal formative moments in her development as an artist and a human being. Surprisingly, as I watched it again as a close study, examining the structure of the work rather than simply for entertainment, looking for examples of the use of *mise en abyme*, I was disappointed not to find the use of the device in a deliberate way. On my initial viewing, I was moved deeply by the tragic events in Edith Piaf's life story, and especially by the big revelation at the end which I will discuss later.



As Piaf (1915-1963) is the subject of the biopic, the film revolves solely around the portrayal of events in her life. She endured an exceptionally harsh early childhood and adolescence. Even her early adult years were beset with difficulties. Born just before the First World War, baby Edith was left with her maternal grandmother while her own mother, Annetta Maillard, took to the streets to earn money by singing and, almost certainly, by prostitution too. When Edith's father, Louis Gassion, discovered that his child had been left with her maternal grandmother, who drank as heavily as her daughter, he returned home from the war just long enough to take Edith to his own mother's house. Unfortunately, his mother's house was nothing less than a fully-functional brothel, and his mother was the madam. Edith's father returned to the war and Edith spent a number of years being looked after by the prostitutes.

She lost her sight for four years, but the prostitutes pooled their money to take Edith to the shrine to Saint Therese of Lisieux. She regained her sight after this religious pilgrimage and the biopic makes much of this event, creating a motif for Saint Therese which appears a number of times throughout the film. When she was seventeen, Edith gave birth to a daughter, after a brief affair with a young man, Louis Dupont. She would leave the child alone at home while she went out singing in clubs. Eventually, Dupont took the child away from Edith but the child was weakened from neglect, and sickly. She died at the age of two of meningitis. However, this fact is not revealed in the biopic until Piaf's dying moments, as she takes her last breaths in her deathbed in 1963. This event is the focus of the biopic's big revelation which is what makes the film powerful. The screenwriters chose to show that Edith neglected her own daughter in the same way as she had been neglected by her mother. Another big revelation in the final moments of the film is that the child was named Marcelle. This fact creates a link to, and explains, her obsession with the famous middleweight boxer, Marcel Cerdan. His name reminded Edith of her daughter, and she idolised him, even though he was married and had three children. Through the narrative, it is implied that Edith wanted to gain redemption through Marcel. If he would love her, then she would be absolved from the neglect of her daughter. Unfortunately, he died in an airplane crash in 1949, on his way to see Piaf in New York, at her insistence. Piaf never recovered from the loss of a man she referred to as the love of her life (Burke, 2011).

In spite of the cleverly interwoven threads of the plotline, in the non-linear structure of *La Vie en Rose*, I found the strong use of motifs but no example of *mise en abyme* in the true sense of the term. The motif of Saint Therese is begun when Edith, the five-year-old child, loses her sight while living in the brothel (16:16). The prostitutes collect money to take Edith to Lisieux in Normandy, to

the shrine of Saint Therese. Young Edith is prompted to ask Saint Therese to heal her as she does not want to be blind (17:48). Later, at 27:05 minutes into the film, ten-year-old Edith observes a fire-breather practising his craft in the dark, when she is living with her father again and is part of the circus. The fire sprayed by the fire-breather's spumes of paraffin, creates particles of light in the dark night, which float in the sky, creating an illusion of magic. A nickelodeon plays tinkling, bell-like music over the visuals as she watches the spectacle of magical lights. A voice-over speaks to Edith. It is a woman's voice, and she tells her it is Saint Therese. She reminds Edith how she saved her eyesight when she was a small girl. Saint Therese tells her that she is watching over her.

The motif of Saint Therese is recreated throughout the film, and whenever she is in a moment of crisis, Edith speaks to Saint Therese. A nickelodeon plays the signature tune for Saint Therese, "If You Love Me" over the visuals of most of the scenes where Edith prays to Saint Therese. Finally, when she performs her last concert at the Olympia, she will not continue the performance until her cross is found (1:55:55 minutes). The cross is a symbol of her faith, and a reinforcement of her reliance on Saint Therese to carry her through difficult times. In her dying moments she prays again to Saint Therese, telling her nurse that she wants to pray on her knees (1:59:57). It is at this moment that the screenwriters choose to reveal Edith's darkest secret, that she abandoned her only daughter and that the daughter subsequently died. There were subtle hints that Edith had a daughter earlier on in the narrative, when her mother tells her that her daughter will not help earn Edith any money either (37:24), but it is only with hindsight that the audience realises that this is a prophetic statement.

In a sense the motif of Saint Therese creates the illusion that Edith is protected and guided by divine forces. Perhaps this is the reason Edith, the human being, was as reckless as she was: she had a sense of being blessed by Saint Therese, and being destined for greatness because of the miracle of the restoration of her eyesight. It is a clever device for the screenwriters to use to create Edith's sense of superiority and being above the claims of responsible behaviour and even maternal duty. However, it is not a *mise en abyme* as such. I was disappointed to realise that it is merely a motif which threads its way throughout the narrative, ensuring that Edith's sense of having been chosen for greatness is enhanced. Motifs are useful in themselves, but the hermeneutic depth provided by a well chosen *mise en abyme* is greater than can be achieved through the use of a motif.

The most important aspect of the narrative of *La Vie en Rose*, though, is the revelation in the final moments of the film. The screenwriters hint very obliquely at the existence of a daughter in a scene

in a cafe where Edith's drunken and haggard mother begs her daughter for money. Edith is approximately eighteen years old in the scene. She gives her mother a few coins, then tells her to "get lost". Her mother berates her and says: "Don't count on your daughter feeding you" (37:24). Edith's reaction to her mother's words is to storm out of the cafe in fury. It is only on her death bed that we learn more about the cause of her violent reaction to her mother's words. Edith refers to "Marcelle, my little ghost" (2:00:28) as she is dying in bed. She mutters to her nurse that only her best friend Momone knows about Marcelle, but she wants to tell the nurse about her. She calls out for her daughter once again, and the film flashes back to Edith's daughter, aged two. Louis Dupont, the girl's father, arrives to fetch her from Edith, berating Edith for having the child on the streets again (2:01:16). He leaves, taking Marcelle with him. The film then cuts to a scene in a club where a drunken Edith is singing to a rough crowd. Dupont fights his way through the crowd to call Edith to come to the hospital with him as Marcelle is ill (2:01:32). They arrive at the hospital just in time to see the doctor at their daughter's bedside. The doctor tells them that Marcelle had meningitis and there was nothing he could do to save her (2:01:59). The camera comes in close to Edith's face as she hears the news. Her face is full of horror and regret as she stares up into the air, as if praying for Saint Therese to explain how this could happen (2:02:10).

The film cuts back to Edith on her deathbed, her eyes staring up into space in a similar pose to the previous scene, her mouth agape (2:02:12). Edith cries, moved by the feelings evoked by memories of her daughter's death. The film then cuts to Edith staring into the mirror in her dressing room before her last concert at the Paris Olympia in 1962, waiting for her cross to be brought to her before she agrees to perform (2:02:36). Her helper opens the door, with the retrieved cross in hand (2:02:49). The next flashback is to Edith on the beach, knitting peacefully. A young journalist comes up to her and interviews her, asking her what she would do if she could not sing. She answers that she would not want to live if she could not sing. Her words to the journalist, in answer to the journalist's questions, play out as a voice-over while Edith walks towards the stage to perform for the last time. This scene jumps forward to a scene of Edith on her deathbed (2:05:30). Then the film takes us back to the Olympia. Finally, from the point of view of someone backstage, the red, velvet curtains open to reveal a spotlight on the empty stage (2:05:32). A full-house applauds the arthritically-bowed woman who walks out slowly into the spotlight (2:06:03).

Just as she is about to sing, the voice-over from the interviewer on the beach is heard over the scene on stage. The journalist asks Edith what her advice would be to a woman, a young girl, and a child, respectively. To each of these questions, Edith answers: "Love" (2:06:07). There is a brief flashback

to the journalist on the beach who asks Edith for whom she is knitting. Edith answers, “Whoever will wear my sweater” (2:06:23). There is a cross-fade from the beach, to the sea, to the sky, and finally to Edith about to sing her last concert (2:07:08). She begins to sing at last, and it is the song most associated with Edith Piaf, the singer, “Je ne regrette rien”, or “No Regrets”. The film jumps forward to Edith on her deathbed once again (2:07:40), as she lies with her eyes staring into space, as if she is listening to herself singing her iconic song. A faint smile plays across her face, as the song continues over the next scenes as a voice-over. There is a flashback to Edith, aged about five, playing in a field, stroking a frog (2:08:05). The five-year-old Edith smiles into the camera. The film cuts back to Edith singing on stage (2:08:26). She sings through the whole song, and the audience’s reactions are shown. Edith is magnificent as she sings the final words, “It begins again with you” (2:09:14). The film cuts to black and it is over.

The last nine minutes of the film could be described as a montage of scenes, which build up to the final revelation of the film which is that Edith’s neglect of her own daughter led to her daughter’s death. The screenwriters chose to show this as the memory which haunts her on her deathbed. It is a powerful revelation, and underscores with poignancy the narrative which has gone before. It creates the resonance between the name of the love of Edith’s life, Marcel Cerdan, and her daughter, Marcelle, and enhances Edith’s desire for spiritual acceptance and redemption. The montage effect, with the interplay between flashbacks and flash-forward, in the final nine minutes add to the hermeneutical depth of the subject in this particular biopic.

In fact, this biopic is a perfect example of the words of Ann Jefferson, who wrote in an article, entitled “*Mise en abyme* and the Prophetic in Narrative”, that “Narrative is more than a mere collection of motifs, devices or functions, more than a simple sequence of actions; it is an end-dominated collection or sequence, and this domination of the end will affect the reading of all that precedes” (Jefferson, 1983, p 196). Jefferson’s quote is especially appropriate in the case of this screenplay. In this instance, the impact of the narrative in *La Vie En Rose* is created specifically by the revelation at the end of the film, rather than by the use of a *mise en abyme*.

### **The Value of *Mise en Abyme***

The skilful use of *mise en abyme* in *Saving Mr Banks* has enhanced the narrative to create depth and nuances of meaning across three timelines, intertwining them to create a more resonant and rich commentary on the life of P.L. Travers. The use of this device as a controlling idea has added to the

hermeneutic value of the narrative. *La Vie en Rose*, on the other hand, would run the risk of losing dramatic impact if the storyline included a *mise en abyme* which hinted at Edith's neglect of her daughter from the outset, for the following reasons stated by Jefferson. She argues that *mise en abyme* cannot be used as the sole motif to encapsulate the whole narrative as it would detract from the element of surprise, which should be used to enhance the dramatic power of endings in a narrative work:

Only as a condensed image of the overall design and the theme of a narrative can it have a positive function, for as a hermeneutic device it is contributing to critical analysis and not to the unfolding of the narrative. As an element of the chronology in the narrative... *mise en abyme* has a largely negative function; it pre-empts the ending and spoils its effects by revealing the story in toto. It apparently undermines the hermeneutic code by providing premature revelations that render the remaining narrative and its ending redundant. As Lucien Dallenbach puts it in his book on the subject, *mise en abyme* acts as a *mise en cause* of narrative chronology: "incapable of saying the same thing at the same time as the fiction, the analogon of the fiction, in saying it elsewhere, says it at the wrong time and sabotages thereby the sequential process of the narrative". (p. 82)

It is, therefore, advisable to use a *mise en abyme* as a hermeneutic element as an encapsulation of the theme or of the controlling idea, to add depth to the interpretation of the narrative, rather than using it solely as a narrative device to tell the whole story in a symbolic way. The reason that the *mise en abyme* works well in *Saving Mr Banks* is that it is used to add to the understanding of P.L. Travers's character, rather than being used simply to move the plot forward. It does not form part of the actual events of the narrative, but it connects the events in the way in which it is part of the exegesis of the narrative, rather than an explication of the beats of the story. It is, therefore, a hermeneutic device rather than a structural one. When the device is used to tell the story, as Charlie Kaufman uses it in *Synechdoche, New York* (2008), it removes the element of surprise and repeats the chronology of the narrative until it becomes repetitive ad nauseum.

It was with this awareness in mind that I approached using *mise en abyme* in *A Hyena in Petticoats*. If used correctly, the device could form part of the hyper-structure I referred to earlier, adding resonance to the narrative through its ability to add hermeneutic depth. However, it is not advisable to use the device as the foundation for the intrinsic structure of the screenplay itself, because of the

danger of it sabotaging the sequential process of the narrative and removing the element of surprise by pre-empting the revelation at the end, as Dallenbach states above. In the final analysis, Jefferson states that the use of *mise en abyme* has much in common with the use of the prophetic in narratives, or dramatic irony, or Gérard Genette's term in his work, *Narrative Discourse* (1980), as 'proleptic'. Jefferson explains her conclusion about *mise en abyme* as the following: "As an element in narrative Chronology it is to all intents and purposes identical to other forms of prolepsis; it differs only in having an additional, non-chronological function as an illuminator of overall theme and design" (p 260).

My approach to the use of *mise en abyme* was, therefore, to be cautious with its implementation, and to use it, not just for effect at the expense of the element of surprise, but for enhancement of the hermeneutic value of the controlling theme of the narrative. Once again, I have to conclude that the *mise en abyme* device should not, and could not, constitute or equate to the fundamental structure of the screenplay itself, but it had to enhance the depth and resonance of the authorial intent behind the narrative. It therefore has to be used sparingly and intelligently, to be tamed, as Derrida is quoted as saying in Julianna de Nooy's article, to "provoke (s) a tantalizing shiver of vertigo... to gaze into the gulf from behind the *garde-fou*" (De Nooy, 1991. p 26). After much research into its effectiveness, I was once again determined to use the device in the hope of provoking a "tantalising shiver of vertigo" when creating the hyper-structure of *A Hyena in Petticoats*.

## Chapter Four

### Writing the Screenplay, Finding the Structure.

As I stated in Chapter One, even though my focus in writing this script is on the life of a historical woman, I want the biopic of *A Hyena in Petticoats* to fulfil the primary aim of the genre as defined by Dennis Bingham. Therefore, my aim in this biopic is to find the essential characteristic which pertains to the subject of the biopic and to enhance the depth of interpretation of her actions. The aim was to find a profundity of understanding about Wollstonecraft which had to look beyond the mere retelling of chronological events. Without discarding the elements which apply to an engaging narrative, whether they come from Campbell's hero's journey or Murdock's heroine's journey, I was searching, as a writer, for a deeper, quintessential aspect of a woman to utilise as a controlling idea or theme to extrapolate into a *mise en abyme* for the script. Even though, as stated before, the genre of biopics generally gravitates towards a heroic, hagiographical lauding of the subject of the biographies, I wanted to highlight more than the fact that Mary was a heroic figure who overcame obstacles most women would not even consider attempting. I wanted to find the most essential quality that defined her and set her apart from other women of her age.

After reading many biographies on Wollstonecraft I was able to excavate the essential events in Wollstonecraft's life which I needed to highlight when approaching the task of writing the script. The most revealing events which displayed her idiosyncratic approach to life were the following: as a young girl, she put herself between her drunken father and her mother in an attempt to protect her from her father's violent advances; she expected the same education as her brother Ned, who was not nearly as bright as she was; she railed against the feeble education girls received at girls' schools and gravitated towards elders who made books and learning possible for her; she thought nothing of the fact that she broke the law to steal her sister away from her abusive husband; after a brief stint as a governess, she decided that this position was no better than a servant, so she decided to run her own school with her best friend and her sisters; she wrote a treatise which proposed that young girls should be educated to be intelligent partners to their husbands; she tried to become part of the French Revolution and travelled on her own to France; she lived with Gilbert Imlay as a married woman, while not being married, just so she could be with the man she loved; she despaired when the world seemed to reject her after she had a child out of wedlock and Imlay rejected her; she reached the depths of depression and tried to kill herself; and she finally broke her own precepts that a woman should not marry when she met the man she fell in love with.

Initially, to counteract the pressure of trying to create an interesting and unusual biopic, I gave myself permission to write a very basic story, ironically using the hero's journey as my first template to create a skeleton for the first draft script. In my experience of writing literary biographical stage plays, I had found that the only way to manage the overwhelming amount of information one accumulates when reading about a subject's life, is to set the biographies aside once the creative writing process starts, and use only the essential events and the emotional sincerity of the subject's life to guide the path of the narrative.

This was my *modus operandi* when I wrote the *Savage Trilogy* of plays from 2001 to 2006. Writing a creative work like a stage play or screenplay is the opposite from writing an academic thesis. Instead of quoting direct passages from the biographies which have been read for research, one has to discard the source material, as such, when writing a dramatic piece of work, and allow informed creativity to be the guide. This is where artistic skill comes in, as the writer has to be a psychic detective of sorts, assessing the documented facts about a subject's life and making assumptions about the subject's motivations for their actions. Every creative choice is informed by facts gleaned from literary biographies, but sometimes the writer has to include conjecture, to create composite characters for the sake of dramatic impact, and to read between the visible lines of the published biographies. Sometimes, the subjects of the biographies hide themselves from the readers in their published work, but it is in letters and diaries where they are most unguarded. These, too, have to be read and added to the bank of mental information which is taken into the creative process. It is, therefore, impossible to reference a creative work academically by annotating each event portrayed in the screenplay to a reference source. It is my experience that the source material must be absorbed and then internalised by the writer so that the subject of the biopic or play is allowed the metaphorical freedom to breathe their own spirit into the narrative, through the creative workings of the writer.

In addition, the writer has to place him or herself into the narrative by assuming a particular point of view, by deciding which aspects of the subject's life need to be excavated. The writer's own personal worldview dictates the slant given to the hermeneutics of the narrative of the subject's life story as depicted in a creative work. In *Saving Mr Banks*, it is obvious that the writers chose to foreground P.L. Travers's need for redemption for her feckless father, as well as for herself. This may not be the way that P.L. Travers chose to see herself in her own life, but it is certainly the way the writers portrayed her. The same can be said of *La Vie En Rose*. Perhaps Edith Piaf did not have deep regrets about neglecting her daughter, although this is unlikely, given that her final words refer



to how one has to pay for every action in life (Sobelman, Dahon, 2013). These words become ironic as her most famous song, “Je Ne Regrette Rien”, is about having no regrets at all, and starting life afresh with every new lover. However, the writers choose the revelation of the tragic death of Piaf’s daughter, and Piaf’s subsequent regret and sadness about neglecting her own child, as a defining event which contrast with her apparent carelessness and reckless lifestyle. It is a well informed position to take in reviewing Piaf’s life and behaviour, and it makes the narrative much more poignant than if there were no such revelation. Therefore, the writer has to privilege one position, at least, on the interpretation of the life of the subject of a biography, to create a text which illuminates the writer’s point of view.

There are biopics which privilege a number of positions on the same subject, such as the one about singer, Bob Dylan, *I’m Not There* (Haynes, 2007). Here, the writer makes a deliberate choice to feature six different versions of the subject of the biopic, with six different actors playing the various personae Dylan presented to the world. In *A Hyena in Petticoats* I chose to present my own worldview of the significance of the experiences of Wollstonecraft, the historical figure, as well as of Khetiwe, the fictional creation.

Initially, the first draft screenplay was simply a retelling of the main story beats, or events, which I believed had to be covered in a biopic of Mary Wollstonecraft. These events have been documented by every biographer who undertook to write about Wollstonecraft, as they showed the unusual way she chose to live her life as a woman in the eighteenth century. Therefore, the first draft gave little regard to structure in terms of my aims to re-invent the hero’s journey in order to make it more in keeping with a screenplay about a woman, or to add a *mise en abyme* to illuminate the controlling themes. As such, it was a purely utilitarian screenplay which went from one defining event to another documented in Wollstonecraft’s life. The events recounted in Mary’s plotline alternated with a rather pedestrian telling of a matching tandem-narrative (Aronson, 2010) with Khetiwe’s story. As the fictional character I had chosen to use as a device to echo Mary’s story, her plotline had to amplify the eighteenth-century narrative by reflecting the same themes in a modern, South African setting. To choose the events for Mary’s journey in the script, and to echo this journey with Khetiwe’s journey, I had to have an idea of what the controlling idea, theme or perhaps even the *mise en abyme* was, however. Every event which would form part of the screenplay had to underline and reflect the controlling idea. This was one of the first and most important rules of screenwriting I had embraced wholeheartedly when I read McKee’s screenwriting manual in the early 2000s. I had learnt that every good screenplay should have a connective tissue of resonant

meaning underpinning the plotline. Just as my brother's schizophrenic breakdown had dictated the structure of the *A Shot at the Big Time, the Short* (Van Eeden, 2012), so I had to find the most striking aspect about Wollstonecraft's life which would underpin the structure of the screenplay.

When I thought about events in Wollstonecraft's life and her response to them, the one characteristic which defined how she dealt with almost every situation she found herself in was her anachronistic independence. Her actions, even as a young girl, seemed out of keeping with the subservient role which most women assumed in the eighteenth century. The defining event which stood out for me, and which was mentioned in every one of her biographies, was the way she chose to defend her mother from her drunken father's abuses, most notably by lying across her mother's bedroom door so that her father could not enter when he was drunk. Her strength of spirit shone through this event as the actions of someone who would not accept abuse against anyone she loved, especially if that person were weaker than the abuser. Wollstonecraft's sense of moral outrage, and her need to act against injustice wherever she saw it, resonated strongly with me.

As a writer, this realisation helped me to connect deeply with her character. I recognised in Wollstonecraft her spirit of independence and her desire to right wrongs, and I identified with these characteristics strongly. It was reassuring to me to discover in history another woman who had the odds stacked against her, but who would not accept her fate, or that of others around her, passively. Not only was it admirable to read about a young girl so self-assured that she would confront a man twice her size and strength, to stop him from hurting an innocent, weaker person, as Mary did with her father, but it reaffirmed my innate belief that some things are worth fighting for. In fact, Wollstonecraft's indomitable spirit was my primary inspiration for wanting to write about her in 2006, and it was this spirit which was the driving force behind the stage play, *The Savage Sisters* (Van Eeden, 2006). I decided to begin the screenplay with the scene where Mary protects her mother from her drunken father's unwelcome attentions, late at night (Van Eeden, 2016, p 2-3). Wollstonecraft's independence of spirit would definitely be my controlling idea and I would have to examine whether it worked as a *mise en abyme* too.

Therefore, the first draft contained only events which privileged the understanding of Mary as an unusually independent spirit. My tandem-narrative protagonist, Khetiwe, had to echo this same independence in the plotline which featured her. It was a relief to set down ninety pages of the screenplay at last, although I knew there was much work still to be done. The script was far from polished and, as I said earlier, it was a pedestrian retelling of two story-lines, and it was predictable

as a result of that. At least the first draft gave me the necessary skeleton I needed before I could craft a more elegant structure for the biopic. I also realised that using the idea of Mary's independence as my controlling idea was a useful one, but it was not quite the resonant *mise en abyme* I was hoping for. It was a motif, at best, but it did not lend itself to the deep "shiver of vertigo" of hermeneutic interpretation which an effective *mise en abyme* should evoke. The perfect *mise en abyme* was yet to be found.

The actual process of crafting the form and structure of the screenplay began with the second draft. At the time I began writing this draft, an international debate around cultural appropriation in Art was raging. I realised that my creation of Khetiwe as a parallel protagonist could easily be accused of cultural appropriation. As a white South African, I was walking straight into the trap of being called an appropriator of culture, by representing a Zulu woman as one of my characters. One small way to obviate the labelling, I decided, would be to do more research into Zulu culture and Whiteness studies. I wanted to do my utmost to ensure that I showed respect to Zulu culture when I wrote about it in the screenplay. Fortunately, I found a number of scholars who have done work in Zulu culture and folklore. Some of these scholars are white South Africans, and their work could also be accused of appropriating culture. However, there is a paucity of sources available, so I explored these texts with the aim of basing my narrative choices on research, rather than assumption. Using the resources I could find, I began to craft the plotline in Khetiwe's journey.

M. Marggraff's article, "The Moral Theme in Zulu Literature: a Progression" (1998), was most illuminating, as was N. Canonici's book on Zulu folklore, *Izinganekwam - An Anthology of Zulu Folktales* (1988). Both these works added to my depth of understanding about the culture in that I realised the semiotic resonances carried by imagery and iconography in folklore. Every choice made in Khetiwe's narrative had to show an awareness of the metaphors contained within each object and each action. Another book which I found useful in learning about the evolution of Zulu culture was N. Tshabalala's *Chronicles of Tshabalala Clan in Mhlongamuula and Its Exodus* (2016). It was there that I read of the rituals of initiation for both girls and boys, which were the inspiration for Khetiwe's initiation or *umhlonyane* ceremony in the script. There is much online detailing a girl's *umhlonyane* rite of passage, including video footage, as well as transcriptions of the lyrics of the songs. I read and watched the videos of the ceremony, as well as being fortunate enough to watch home videos made by my friend (Phoswa, 2015) of her own children's coming-of-age rituals. I felt it was important to include this ritual into the screenplay, as Khetiwe is reluctantly initiated into womanhood just before her arranged marriage is to take place (p 37-40).

Jumping ahead to the third draft, once I had decided on the use of the hyena clay figure in Khetiwe's timeline, I turned to J. Fremgen's article, "The Magicality of the Hyena" (1998). This scholar, amongst others, helped fortify my interpretation of Zulu culture in the screenplay. I also undertook personal interviews with Zulu speakers (Sem, 2015; Phoswa, 2016), engaged in reading many current articles about Zulu culture and explored the dangers of cultural appropriation, especially with Zulu colleagues. As a white South African I hoped, in this way, to ensure that my depiction of Khetiwe was not patronising or paternalistic. I also had an idea that Khetiwe must not be a passive follower of Mary's teachings, but that she must exercise her own will too. In this way, she would take her life into her own hands, as it were, and not merely follow the Western example of Wollstonecraft. I had already been criticised by readers from the KwaZulu-Natal Film Commission, who were responding to the first draft, for having produced a story that had the "stench of the West saving Africa" once again. So it was with great care and cultural awareness that I endeavoured to write the second draft.

While pondering how to approach the sculpting of story, as Robert McKee calls it (McKee, 1997), I decided to work on the second draft using my idea of Wollstonecraft's independence as a heuristic *mise en abyme* until I could find something better. My biggest challenge was to counteract the repetitive structure which had made the first draft monotonous, with each of Mary's life events being matched by an equal event in Khetiwe's fictional life. Before I wrote the second draft, I went to the London Screenwriters' Festival in September 2016. Fortunately, the first draft of *A Hyena in Petticoats* had been chosen for a Euro-Script Surgery. It was an honour to have an hour one-on-one with an international script expert. I chose to have Ellin Stein as my script surgeon. She runs the Master's in Screenwriting at Goldsmith University and, after reading her Curriculum Vitae, I thought it would be better to discuss Mary's story with a feminist screenwriter and scholar. During our session, I asked her advice about the structure of the first draft. I explained how the pedestrian way I had written it had been purely functional, a means to explicate the most important events in Wollstonecraft's life which needed to be included in the biopic for the sake of historical accuracy as well as for thematic purposes. However, the draft was no longer appealing to me, as the narrative swung from Wollstonecraft's eighteenth-century world to modern-day KwaZulu-Natal with predictable rhythm. We discussed a number of scenarios, all of which pointed to a psychic connection between the two women across two centuries. Somehow, this connection had to be demonstrated in the recreation of events of some sort to make the two characters connect in a

profound, albeit supernatural, way. A spiritual connection would be far more satisfying than simply having their stories told in parallel plotlines.

After the script surgery with Stein, I came back to South Africa and continued to think about how to connect the two women across the centuries in a metaphysical way. One of the options was that one of the ancestors of the character, Khetiwe, could be summoned up through her initiation ritual during her coming-of-age ceremony. The ancestor could possibly act as a facilitator to link Mary and Khetiwe. It was not inconceivable for the link to be forged between them in this way, through using the Zulu belief in ancestors. In Zulu culture, ancestors are believed to have the ability to travel through different realities unbound to specific places or time-frames. Using one of Khetiwe's ancestors as a device seemed plausible as a way to connect with both women. Another possibility discussed was that Khetiwe's initiation ritual could put her in touch with the ancestral spirit of Mary Wollstonecraft through an accident of some supernatural kind.

These were intriguing ideas and yet they felt as if they lent themselves more to comedy than to a serious engagement on the subject of traditional beliefs as practised in Zulu culture, as well as a re-examination of women's rights. In fact, I had used the device of the ancestors interfering with a Zulu character in my play *In-Gene-Uity* (Van Eeden, 2009), by having them appear in the plotline and change events to suit their needs for the character. It worked very well in that instance, but the play was a comedy. Every time I thought of the idea of Mary appearing to Khetiwe as an ancestor, I felt it was definitely comic material rather than drama. Somehow, I wanted their connection to be organic, to be born out of the plot itself, rather than a *deus ex machina* device which would strain credulity and invite ridicule. I was also wary of creating a British historical figure to appropriate the role of one of Khetiwe's ancestors, as the function of the ancestors is a role which is much revered and rooted in traditional culture. I felt deeply uncomfortable about even the thought of such misappropriation of a respected spiritual aspect of Zulu culture.

### **Finding the *Mise en Abyme***

At some point during this time, I thought deeply about the actual shape of the screenplay. My dissatisfaction with the first draft was to do with its linear, and somehow predictable, structure. After an intense meditation on the subject, I had an intuition that I would have to use the more circular approach to storytelling which Murdock refers to in *The Heroine's Journey* (1990). This sense of a circular framework for the screenplay nagged at me but I could not quite define how the

shape would work. In fact, in Chapter Two, the diagram for Campbell's Hero's Journey depicts a circular path too, so the circular structure was nothing new. Finally, I followed through with an image which had sprung to my mind while in discussion with my supervisors. When I was considering the possibilities of supernatural interference through the ancestors' interventions, I had an image in my mind's eye of Mary Wollstonecraft, as a young girl, creating an actual figurine out of clay. I imagined her fashioning the clay figure with the whimsical hope of making her into a real girl who would have possibilities in her life which could take her beyond the restrictions of Mary's own realms. It was this image which struck me most forcibly after our many discussions, even though it felt slightly ridiculous to voice it when the idea first came to me. Subsequent meditations on the idea confirmed that the structure of the screenplay may be more like a spiral, turning back onto itself, as the two women react and interact with each other through their time-lines. I saw the structure as a double-helix, connecting the women across the centuries through an appropriate use of *mise en abyme*. To give Khetiwe volition and remove the charge of cultural appropriation which had already been levelled at me, I decided that Khetiwe would have to make her own clay figure in turn. This figure would link her directly to Mary across the centuries, as the women create the characters they wish to become through the clay figures.

I turned back to the screenplay to begin the second draft with this image in mind. I had already written a scene where eleven-year-old Mary is practising writing in the mud outside the barn with a chicken-feather quill (p 9-10), after being told to stop distracting her brother and to leave him to study on his own, as girls are not expected to study. So it was not an unexpected stretch of the imagination to have her choose to fashion a figure out of the same clay. I inserted the scenes where Mary begins to fashion the clay figurine after she has been deeply disappointed by the school which she had been sent to. It is documented (Gordon, 2015, 20) that Mary's hopes of a good education were dashed when she attended the school for girls at Epping when she was eleven years old. She was dismayed to discover that young girls were taught only simple addition and needlework in the school. These basic subjects were deemed to be the sum total of a girl's educational needs in eighteenth-century England. In the screenplay Mary is furious at the paucity of her education, as she had read her older brother Ned's Science book in a previous scene, (p 4-5), and showed greater promise at understanding the subject than her dull brother. The motivation is clear in the scene where Mary decides to make her own figure out of mud, to birth a fantastical girl into a world in which she is able to study science, literature and philosophy:

MARY

I wish I could create my own school where I would teach young girls about everything!

ELIZA

That is the most fanciful wish I have ever heard, sister. No woman would ever be allowed to have her own school, never mind be allowed to teach whatever she wants.

MARY

You think not, Eliza?

ELIZA

It is a mad dream, dearest.

MARY

Perhaps.

(pauses)

Perhaps then I could be truly mad. If I were truly mad, I'd dream a life for a girl who would be free to spend day after day in studying literature, science, mathematics; to follow her own intelligence; to become everything that she is meant to be as an intelligent human being, without society's strictures.

ELIZA

But that is impossible. None of us is able to create a life for another person. Now you are just being silly.

MARY

Silly or no, I shall imagine a life for her. And I shall fashion this life for her. I shall give her

free will and I shall allow  
her to do all the things I  
am not able to do.

ELIZA  
You have been in the sun  
too long, Mary.

Mary kneels down on the ground and digs her hand into a  
muddy pool.

MARY  
If I could make a girl...

ELIZA  
(laughs)  
But you cannot make a girl!  
Not from clay... Do you  
think you are our Lord? Do  
you believe you have the  
same powers as the creator?  
(she gets no response)  
Mary, come along. Let us go  
indoors before the rain  
starts.

Mary ignores her completely. She sinks both hand into the  
ooze at her feet and extracts a lump of clayey mud.  
Careless of her clothes, she plumps herself down on the  
ground and begins to mould the clay into a shape. It starts  
to resemble a human form.

MARY  
(Completely absorbed)  
If I could make a girl, a  
young girl, who lives  
freely.

ELIZA  
There IS NO SUCH GIRL!

Mary continues without listening to her. She talks to  
herself as she falls under her own spell, moulding the clay  
all the while into the shape of a young girl.

MARY  
She must live free of  
restrictions. She must be  
able to walk and skip



and run without the  
restriction of these long  
skirts and heavy boots.

She fashions the clay feet free from shoes.

ELIZA

Well then, she would have  
to live in darkest Africa  
because they say it is so  
hot there she would not  
need shoes. In fact, she  
would run naked like a  
savage.

MARY

(in her own world)

Yes she must live in a warm  
country so she can run with  
feet that are bare on the  
dry earth.

CUT TO:

EXT. DIRT TRACK THROUGH RURAL KWAZULU-NATAL - MORNING

A young black GIRL is running along a dusty track worn  
through the luxurious green cane fields towering on either  
side. She wears a short shift-dress of loose cotton and her  
feet are bare.

CUT TO:

EXT. YARD OUTSIDE THE BARN - DAY

Mary continues her work on the clay model which is taking  
shape.

MARY

But she cannot merely run  
through the fields all day.  
She must go to school. She  
must be allowed to study  
the very things boys are  
studying. She must learn  
everything: Science,  
Arithmetic, Art, the study  
of literature -

CUT TO:

EXT. RURAL TRACK - DAY

The young girl is now dressed in a white cotton shirt, a black gym-slip tied with a girdle, short white socks and black school shoes.

(p 10-13)

This scene was pivotal in the future genesis of the second draft. It gave me the *mise en abyme* I was looking for, and it echoed the controlling idea of Mary's independence and wilfulness, as well as connecting perfectly with Wollstonecraft's own words about how she planned to live her life. In a letter to her sister, Everina, on the 7th November 1787, she wrote that she was determined to be the "first of a new genus" of women. This phrase is quoted as one of the most defining statements of Wollstonecraft's character by Lyndall Gordon in her Wollstonecraft biography, cited earlier, and also in a book called *Revolutions in Taste, 1773-1818: Women Writers and the Aesthetics of Romanticism* by Fiona Price (2009, p 8-9). The power behind Wollstonecraft's words was immense. She, a mere woman in the eighteenth century, made a conscious decision to break away from her poverty-stricken background, to move beyond her weak parents, and to venture out into the world without role models to guide her, to live as a new incarnation of woman, one never seen before, in her opinion.

Such determination and vision is remarkable, especially as her background did everything to trap her into a life with no options other than marriage, or spinsterhood in service to her father. These iconic words take Wollstonecraft out of the sphere of everyday women of her time, and show the broad scope of her unusual and lofty ambition. Yes, this independence of spirit is indeed the controlling idea of the screenplay, but her desire to recreate herself as she desired to do, essentially gave birth to the *mise en abyme* in the script. How better to show that Wollstonecraft wanted to create herself in a new mould than to have her create her own version of a woman, even if it is only in clay? The *mise en abyme* is also fitting for a writer, someone who creates or gives birth to characters through the written word. It also echoes the feminine ability to give birth, literally, to children, as well as the writer's ability to give birth to new creations through literature. The *mise en abyme* of the clay figurine could be regarded as an intuition born out of reading and research, but stumbled upon as if it were a happy accident. Its resonance, however, was surprisingly far-reaching as I soon discovered.

It was after writing this scene that I read a passage in Murdock's *The Heroine's Journey*, (1990), which echoed almost exactly what I had written in the second draft, when Mary creates her clay

figurine. Murdock writes extensively about her therapeutic work with women who have been lost along their own paths of development, and who try to find their own personal heroine's journeys as they individuate through her therapy. She writes, in one chapter, about the dream of one of her clients who is engaging with her feminine nature and healing her mother/daughter split. As Murdock explains, this split occurs in many women who have come to her for therapy who have identified as "daughters of the fathers" (p 127).

According to Murdock, the "daughters of the fathers" do all in their power to be the exact opposite of their mothers, whom they regard as weak. These women strive for heroic quests most often in the world of business or industry. Essentially, they have operated in a masculine fashion, usually in a male-dominated career. What these women who come to Murdock for therapy have in common is that they have reached the point of feeling unfulfilled, in spite of realising their career goals. It is then that they realise that their so-called heroic quests are pointless. They are then forced to re-examine their psyches and are encouraged by Murdock to embrace their feminine sides which they had rejected so forcefully. As Murdock explains:

Daughters of the father, like myself, have a difficult time *allowing* things to happen; we like to control events and their timing. Waiting for an outcome and the uncertainty of the result create enormous anxiety. There is a quality of the feminine that allows things to happen in the natural cycle of things. ... Trusting the mysteries of manifestation is one of the deep teachings of the feminine journey. (p 127-8)

Many of these women undergoing therapy with Murdock dreamt of the "dark, dream women," and they also dreamed of the dark itself. Many of them encountered a "large, powerful, dark-skinned woman who nurtures them and creates them anew" in their dreams too (p 146). One of these women, in particular, experienced a dream which resonated with the scene I had just written where Mary creates the figurine out of mud. Her dream was as follows:

A dark woman, an African or Indian woman, stirs the dust with her fingers to make a pasty mud. She begins to remake me. She starts with my vagina. My human body starts to cry. She's making me a woman first. (p 146)

The dream encourages Murdock's client to make herself anew, to cherish her femaleness, and to relinquish being the "daughter of the father". Reading this passage was an affirmation for me that I

was tapping into an archetypal image of a woman being formed out of clay, by another woman. Unlike the dreams of the women in Murdock's therapy sessions, however, I did not have the creator as a dark woman, but rather had Mary, the young white girl, act as the creator of a dark woman. The similarity with Murdock's client's dream and the event in *A Hyena in Petticoats* affirmed that I was on the right track. Mary wanted to create herself as a new genus, but ultimately, she never gave up her femininity. She fell deeply in love with a number of men in her life, most notably, Gilbert Imlay, William Godwin, and even the married painter, Henry Fuseli, when she was younger. In all but her relationship with Godwin, she became a vulnerable lover, letting her guard down to her detriment, especially in Imlay's case. Godwin, however, honoured her as a woman, and never let her feel insecure. She was assured of his love and was able to continue being the strong woman she wanted to be, with his supportive presence behind her.

The image of the woman being formed out of mud by a woman is a powerful statement about women's creativity, not only in their ability to bear children, but also in their ability to nurture others. Wollstonecraft wanted to take this creativity further. As a woman, she was just as determined to give birth to words which would live on after her. This desire to be remembered for more than the expected roles required of women at that time, as mother and as nurturer to a husband, definitely set her goals beyond most of the general population of her time.

It seemed fitting, therefore, that at the traditional first act turning point of the hero's journey, I created an echoing *mise en abyme* for Khetiwe, who was called Thandi in the first two drafts, as a placeholder name until I could find a more suitable name. At this turning point in the second draft script, Thandi returns to the mythic elements of the "dark woman" cited by Murdock, and reclaims her volition by creating her own clay figure to challenge Mary's dominance over her. It was then that I discovered that the trope of the "dark woman" seems to evoke the West African goddess of love, art and sensuality, referred to by Murdock as the one who "teaches us about beauty and creativity" (p 126). Oshun, as a goddess, springs from a deep archetype in the human psyche, as her role endured through the vicissitudes of the slave trade. As a result, she is also a highly revered goddess in the Caribbean. As Nathaniel Murrell states in his book, *Afro-Caribbean Religions*, this goddess is known to be the manifestation of "the wisdom of rivers, goddess of water, sensuality and affection". Murrell goes on to say that in Yoruba culture, Oshun "is the deity of fertility and medicine who makes her barren devotees conceive; pregnancy and a bountiful harvest are signs that she is actively at work in her children (devotees). Oshun's avatars claim that she succeeds where doctors fail and heals where modern medicine is ineffectual" (2010, p 35).

It, therefore, seemed essential to have Mary, who wanted to create herself as a new woman, shape a figure out of clay which then comes to life as her future alter-ego in the shape of Thandi/Khetiwe. The re-creation of women by “dark, dream women”, as referred to by Murdock, taps into a subterranean archetype of the image of primal woman as creator. It was the perfect *mise en abyme* for my purposes. Patricia Monaghan expands on the powers of the Yoruba goddess of the river, Oshun. This particular Orisha, or goddess, holds sway over:

... not only the human concerns of her family, health and fecundity but also the land's fertility and the demands of the spirit world. She animates all other orishas; without her, they have no power. As controller of destiny, Oshun rules divination. (2014, p 15)

Oshun's powers extend to control over all orishas, or goddesses, and she controls destiny itself. I could not have hoped to find a more powerful archetype for Mary's desire to create her own future, and to shape her life as a conscious act of choice.

I felt it was equally essential for Khetiwe to echo Mary's creation of a clay figurine so that the *mise en abyme* of two women taking charge of the creation of their own destiny could be underlined. In this way, the *mise en abyme* coalesces their symbiotic ideation into a physical form, and the function of the device of the *mise en abyme* is activated, creating a self-replicating mirror of one character's history in the other's future.

In the screenplay, I planned to have Khetiwe question the actions of Mary, her “creator” as it were, at the end of what would be the first act of a traditionally-structured hero's journey (p 43). In this way I hoped to address the very real issues of Western cultural appropriation of African culture and to give Khetiwe a voice and volition in her own life too. In the above scenes, Khetiwe has been inspired by the books given to her by Mr Majosi, the librarian at the school she is forced to leave. Because of Wollstonecraft's words, Khetiwe has dared to aspire to a life in which she is able to earn her own living and be independent of men. Wollstonecraft's books, especially *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) have allowed her to believe in herself as an equal to men, in intellect as well as ability. She has come to believe that she, unlike the women in her village and in her school, does not have to marry a man in order to survive and be cared for. Her circumstances, however, have betrayed her through her feckless father's gambling debts. Her father has promised his daughter in marriage as a settlement to his debtor, bonding her to a drunken, old man who is already

married, and Khetiwe is given no choice in the matter. She endures her *umhlonyane* ceremony, but decides to embody her deep sense of frustration by making a clay doll, using clay leftover from her coming-of-age ceremony. She tries to take her destiny into her own hands, literally, by fashioning a figure which represents Wollstonecraft in her mind. In the second draft, Thandi makes a similar figurine to Mary's, essentially a woman's figure.

At this stage, I had decided that Thandi was going to put her point of view across to Mary, across the centuries, by addressing the clay figure which connects them. The decision to have Thandi fight back, as it were, against her role model from the past, was twofold. First, I wanted Thandi to have agency in the story, to show that she is not merely a puppet to echo Mary's storyline, and also to address the issue of cultural appropriation. Thandi should not be a pliable recipient of Mary's thoughts but should have input into the story-line too.

The second reason to introduce the change was that I wanted to examine what it was that made Wollstonecraft develop her ideas in her early writings from an essentially Christian point of view which was conservative, in spite of her desire for women to be well educated, to the radical views expressed in her later work and behaviour. Initially, her philosophy in *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787) complied with the precepts of the church: that a woman should obey her husband and make herself amenable to his desires, even if she is well-educated. Somehow, this philosophy altered enormously over the next few years when Wollstonecraft wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). In 1792, she decided to go to France so that she could be part of the radical revolution which she thought would embrace her philosophies. There, Wollstonecraft met Gilbert Imlay and lived with him openly without being married to him. She bore his child, Fanny, and continued to live as if she were his wife. The Wollstonecraft of the 1790s is very different from the earlier, conservative woman of the late 1780s. The revolution in Wollstonecraft's thinking over the course of a few years was the impetus for me to imagine that a young woman from two centuries in the future and from a different continent, is the catalyst for Mary to break free from her conservative beliefs. As stated previously, in the first and second draft, the tandem-character's name was Thandi, simply as a placeholder name. As this name has been overused, I researched Zulu girls' names and finally decided on the name "Khetiwe", as this means "the chosen one", which seemed perfect for Khetiwe's character.

Remembering that Dennis Bingham wrote that the biopic does not necessarily have to deal with facts, I decided to rearrange the chronological events in Wollstonecraft's life so as to

enhance the heroine's journey in the story-line of the script. While still dealing with actual events that happened in Wollstonecraft's life, I believed it was important to reorder the events to show that Thandi/Khetiwe influences Mary, as much as Wollstonecraft's writings initially influence Thandi/Khetiwe. As Bingham says, "the biopic is by no means a simple recounting of the facts of someone's life. It is an attempt to discover biographical truth" (2010, p 7). The fact that Wollstonecraft wrote the treatise *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* two years after she rescued Eliza from an abusive marriage creates the impression that she still believed women should be respectful to the Church and their husbands even after her illegal actions. It is difficult to make sense of her apparently conservative ideas after she had kidnapped her sister from her husband. Therefore, I decided to switch these events around in the screenplay. To enhance the dramatic stakes of the narrative, I had Thandi/Khetiwe read from the work Wollstonecraft had written before Eliza's rescue, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*. She reads these words at a moment of crisis in her life, after her coming-of-age ceremony and before her arranged marriage. She berates Mary for her conservative views and instructs her to follow her heart rather than the precepts of the church. Thus, the narrative is constructed to show that Thandi/Khetiwe can effect change in Mary's life by encouraging her to take the drastic step of rescuing Eliza.

In this way, Thandi/Khetiwe can become an intrinsic part of the narrative, as a character whose actions impact on Mary's character arc in the same way as Mary's life and work impacted on hers. In the second draft, Thandi creates a clay doll, in the same way that Mary does in an earlier scene. In the following scene from the second draft, she is still called Thandi. After her coming-of-age ceremony, she addresses her frustrations to Mary through the *mise en abyme* motif of the clay doll, talking about her fate to become Bra Sithole's wife, quoting passages from Wollstonecraft's *Thoughts On the Education of Daughters* which she has recently discovered. We cut between Thandi in her rondawel, and Mary writing the words Thandi is reading. Wollstonecraft's words distress Thandi deeply in this scene, as Wollstonecraft urges women to educate themselves essentially in order to be better wives to their husbands. She urges them to be resigned to their fate of being subordinate to the church, but assures the reader that this resignation and improvement will make them more respectable to the church, as well as to God above:

INT. ROOM IN RONDAWEL - NIGHT

Again there is snoring coming from one corner of the rondawel. Bheki has succumbed to the effects of the day's celebrations.

Thandi lies on her mat, blanket covering most of her face. There is a trace of white clay still attached to her eyebrows.

Moving as quietly as she can, she edges towards the bowl of white clay which is still on the floor where it was earlier. It has been covered with a cloth. Thandi pulls the cloth away and grabs two handfuls of the substance and then shuffles back to her blanket.

Once there, she begins to fashion a figure, a semblance of a shape. The clay sets quickly and Thandi soon has a replica of a DOLL. She whispers urgently to the figure.

THANDI

What was it you wrote,  
Mary? Wasn't it you who  
wrote that I must not  
marry? And now, where are  
you to help me? Mr Majosi  
was right. You were not a  
success. A woman cannot  
break free from the way the  
world is. You could not.  
Now I cannot.

She cries. The tears express her utter frustration. She cradles her white clay doll in her arms as she cries.

CUT TO:

INT. MARY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Older Mary is writing at her desk with a quill. She mouths the words as she writes. On her desk is a clay figurine, a more sophisticated reworking of her farm-yard doll.

MARY

He who is training us up  
for immortal bliss, knows  
best what trials will  
contribute to make us  
virtuous...

She touches her clay model gently. She whispers to it.



MARY (CONT'D)

...and our resignation and improvement will render us respectable to ourselves, and to that Being, whose approbation is of more value than life itself.

CUT TO:

INT. ROOM IN RONDAWEL - NIGHT

The scene is a continuation from the rondawel scene before. Thandi still cradles the figurine. Mary's voice bleeds over into this scene from the previous one.

MARY (V.O.)

...and our resignation and improvement will render us respectable to ourselves, and to that Being, whose approbation is of more value than life itself.

THANDI

You tell me to resign myself to my situation? Do you mean I must accept that it is my fate to be married to that beast Sithole? Just because "that Being", your God, will value my virtue? Mary, how can you tell me that? Your words are forsaking me, white girl.

MARY (V.O.)

It is what the church tells us.

THANDI

(addressing the figure)  
Perhaps it is your church which says so, but my heart tells me it is wrong. You, of all people, cannot condemn a woman to a life of abuse and slavery to such a monstrous man?

INT. MARY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mary examines her clay figure closely.

THANDI (V.O.)

Mary, you cannot keep thinking  
this way. You must change your  
thoughts!

MARY

(in awe)  
I hear you. I hear your  
voice...

She addresses her figurine.

MARY (CONT'D)

I hear you but I do not  
understand you - how is it  
possible to go against the  
precepts of the church?  
These precepts I learnt  
from my earliest years?

THANDI (V.O.)

Rather go against the  
precepts of the church than  
the precepts of the heart.

CUT TO:

INT. ROOM IN RONDAWEL - NIGHT

Thandi speaks to her figure.

THANDI

I will not resign myself to  
this marriage. And you must  
learn from me, Mary. You  
must not allow yourself or  
those you love to be  
trapped because of  
patriarchal tradition, even  
if it is taught by your  
church.

CUT TO:

INT. MARY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

She peers at the clay figure intently.

THANDI (V.O.)

Now you, you will learn from  
me. I will show you how to  
break free from a man.

Mary puts her ear close to the figure. She listens, but  
hears no more.

EXT. VILLAGE - NIGHT

The village sleeps deeply as the embers of fire send  
tendrils of smoke into the frosty early morning air.

One of the rondawel doors creaks open. It is Thandi at the  
threshold of her hut. She is covered with a dark blanket  
which makes her invisible to all but the most observant of  
onlookers.

She walks out of her father's hut, closes the door silently  
behind her and steals through the sleeping village, afraid  
even to breathe. She does not look back.

From under her blanket-cloak, a cloth bag peeps out. The  
shape of her clay doll can just be discerned.

(p 40-42)

### **Finding the Hyena in Petticoats**

There was to be a further tweak to the *mise en abyme*, however, after I realised I had not made any mention of a hyena in the second draft script at all. It is important to anchor the title of a screenplay in the text itself. It seemed that there was definite room for some reference to a hyena, to solidify the relationship between the two protagonists. At the end of the second draft, the then Thandi makes a rather innocuous speech when she reaches an important milestone in her life. In the script, Mary's life story is played out according to the facts known about her. She dies in childbirth in 1797 with her devoted William Godwin by her side. In contrast, I decided to depict Thandi as a strong, young woman who has overcome the many obstacles which faced her throughout the narrative. It was important to me that the modern story should highlight the fictional protagonist's victory over endless opposition so that the screenplay could end on a hopeful note.

In the first draft, the ending was a mere placeholder until I could find a better way to end the narrative. I wrote a graduation scene in which Thandi graduates with a degree after teaching herself through correspondence schools. In the second draft, I kept the graduation scene but moved on to

another ending where Thandi has written a book about her harsh journey to financial and emotional independence. The script ends with her launching the book at the very same bookshop she had worked at previously, just after she had run away from her home. In the final scene, Thandi stands up proudly in front of the man who raped her when she was younger and more naive. However, her confident speech and her dismissal of him when he approaches her are proof enough that she has overcome the previously traumatic event. The second draft ending was slightly better than the ending in the first draft, as Thandi showed more volition, overcoming her circumstances by her own actions, and making a success of her life when she could so easily have become yet another victim of poverty and abuse. Her final speech, however, was very short and did not reflect the depth of the journey she had endured:

INT. BOOKSHOP IN MALL - EVENING

Thandi is launching her book, *Thoughts on the Education of an almost Shebeen Bride*, at the bookshop she once worked at. She is the picture of elegance and poise, standing at the microphone on a podium addressing a large crowd.

THANDI

We are nothing without  
those who have gone before  
us. And they are nothing  
without us who follow them  
and take their examples to  
greater heights.

The audience claps.

Mike, her former nemesis, tries to approach her to congratulate her. He steps up to the podium, full of effusive words and smiles.

MIKE

I always knew you would  
succeed... You always stood  
out...

THANDI

(to Mike)

You're in my way.

In full view of everyone, she snubs him, turns her back to him, and walks away. Embarrassed, he stares after her, his face burning.

She sees someone at the back of the crowd. She waves. It is Cebo with young Londi at his side. She rushes up to them. Cebo smiles at her but his face is anxious.

CEBO

You must come quickly. It is Gogo.

Without hesitation, Thandi turns to the crowd of admirers and addresses them briefly.

THANDI

Forgive me, I must leave.  
My family needs me.

She takes Cebo's hand in hers and walks out of the door with him and young Londi.

Copies of her publication form a sea around her. In the PHOTOGRAPH on the cover of her book, Thandi's face beams in front of a fully-laden oak bookcase. On the bookcase's shelf, just behind her head, is a rather battered old clay figurine.

(p 102-103)

I included a reference to Ma Khubone, the “Gogo” Cebo refers to here, as I wanted to illustrate how the obstacles in our paths never cease. After one victory, there is usually another crisis to deal with, or perhaps that is just my experience of life. Nevertheless, the ending was not satisfying and Thandi’s speech was too simple to do justice to the harshness she had endured. I realised that Thandi’s speech needed more depth and perhaps some sort of tribute to Wollstonecraft, her inspiration to break away from her oppressive background. One idea to link the journey between the two protagonists so that Khetiwe could incorporate a tribute to her role model was to make a hyena out of clay, rather than for Khetiwe to make a clay doll like Mary’s.

I investigated the symbolism of the hyena in traditional Zulu culture to ensure the artistic choice was rooted in Khetiwe’s character and culture, rather than it being a convenient device added on to include a reference to Mary. It was the right choice. I hoped to find a meaningful symbol of the hyena in Zulu culture, given that Wollstonecraft had been referred to as a “hyena in petticoats”, for her outspoken points of view, in a letter by British Member of Parliament, Horace Walpole, at the time of the publication of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. This was the primary reason I had

used the phrase as the title of the screenplay, after all. I began to read as much as I could about how the hyena was represented in Zulu mythology.

I was rather dismayed to discover that the hyena evokes a mixed response in African folktales and folklore. Very often, it is regarded as foolish or stupid. In Margaret Marggraff's work, "The Moral Theme in Zulu Literature: a progression" (1998), she refers to N. Canonici's collection, *Izinganekwam - An Anthology of Zulu Folktales* (1986). She states that he emphasises that the moral theme is always present in Zulu folktales, and that the moral polarities of good and evil, right and wrong, are often embodied in animal form. Canonici goes on to say that these stories offer "the opportunity for a criticism of society and for social satire; for moral education" (1990, p 18). For example, in a story entitled "Impisi Nethambo" ("The hyena and the bone"), by C.T. Msimang, the hyena is painted in a poor light:

In this story, a hyena finds an old bone of a buck after a hard day's futile hunting, and picks it up with its mouth. When it crosses a river, it sees the reflection of the moon in the water, and confuses the moon with a lump of meat. It drops the bone in the river and tries to grab the reflection of the moon, but all to no avail. When the other animals hear this story, they laugh and say that only the hyena could be so stupid to throw away a buck which it had in its possession. (1991, p 75)

"In fables or animal stories," Canonici continues, "animals are chosen to represent specific human qualities, and the hyena represents gluttony and foolishness" as is shown in the above story (1990, p 18). These were not exactly the qualities I wished to embody in the device of the hyena in the screenplay. The hyena seems to be one of those creatures which evokes extreme feelings, from loathing to reverence. In his article "The Magicality of the Hyena", Jurgen Framgen states that, "The hyena is depicted in African folklore as an abnormal and ambivalent animal: considered to be sly, brutish, necrophagous, dangerous, and the vilest of beasts, it further embodies physical power, excessivity, ugliness, stupidity, as well as sacredness" (p 333). The hyena seemed to represent everything from the profane to the sublime. I searched for more examples of the mythical significance of hyenas and was reassured to read that certain cultures looked upon these creatures more kindly than others. Reading about the symbolism of the hyena in Allen Roberts' work, I discovered that there were many more meanings associated with the hyena in South Africa and the rest of Africa than those mentioned above. For example, Zulu people refer to the animal as:

... impisi, while some tribes in Zimbabwe call it sisi. These words literally mean 'the purifier', 'the cleaner', 'the one who makes things orderly.' This name is indicative of the hyena's tendency to tidy up the carcasses on which it feeds. In Sestwana the hyena is called sephiri or phiri. This means the 'animal of the secret' because the hyena moves in secret usually in darkness and silently. The Shangaan people associate the hyena with evil and witchcraft. 'Ku va mhisi', in Tsonga means to be a hyena, i.e. a hard and fearless worker. 'Ku va ni matimaba ya mhisi', i.e. 'to have the strength of a hyena', that is to be strong and evil. (1995, p 333)

Another reason for the dichotomy of responses to the hyena is possibly to do with the hyena's sexuality. Not only is the hyena clan led by a powerful matriarch, but her sexual organs compete with the males' sexual organs for primacy. As Allen Roberts explains:

The female of the spotted hyena has an elongated clitoris that in relaxed as well as erect condition is similar in shape to the male penis. In addition, it has a pseudo-scrotum that looks similar to the male scrotum. As a result, it is difficult (even for a zoologist) to differentiate between the sexes. As a result of this apparent lack of sexual dimorphism, people think that one and the same spotted hyena can alternately father as a male and give birth as a . (p 75-76)

Roberts goes on to explain that the sexual ambiguity of the hyena has led to the use of the spotted hyena mask in the Kore cult of the Bamana in Mali. He explains,

The alternating androgyne consequently appears as an ideal in-between in the ritual domain. During initiation the role of the (spotted) hyena mask is often to transform the neophyte into a complete moral being, integrating his male principles with femaleness. (p 75-76)

I believe it is the androgyny of the hyena which leads to the ambiguity of responses to the animal. At first glance, the hyena presents as a male, and even experts have trouble differentiating between the sexes. The apparent lack of sexually defined roles for the males, with the powerful matriarchal dominance in the hyena clan, confuses the human patriarchal systems which are privileged in many parts of the world. To the distress of the patriarchy, I imagine, the male hyenas are the lowest ranking animals in the clan, and a male has to be exceptional to be allowed to mate with the

matriarch. The powerful qualities of the hyena which subvert male dominance, and thereby seem to pervert the generally accepted societal order of humanity, explain why the hyena is often perceived as such a threat to the natural order of things. It makes sense of Walpole's epitaph, too, as a woman who speaks her mind and acts independently, who presents herself as if she were a man, allowing herself the same freedoms of speech and behaviour as would be accorded to a man, would threaten the patriarchal view of society, especially that of an established Member of Parliament in the eighteenth century.

Therefore, the hyena, representing powerful womanhood, would be one of the most evocative components of the *mise en abyme* I could employ to add depth of meaning in the character of the newly-named Khetiwe in the third draft. Khetiwe challenges the societal order by her independence of spirit and is, therefore, destined to forge her own way in the world. She defies the traditional Zulu culture, into which she is born, the culture where the preferred "everyday life [was] of a society in which each member of the family had clearly-defined duties to perform" (Canonici, 1990, p 28). Khetiwe overthrows the expectations cast upon her by virtue of her having been born . She dares to choose a path which none of her family, or even the inhabitants of her village, have walked. It is even more unusual for her to make this choice, as she is a young girl in a society which does not allow young girls the freedom to choose their own futures. I, therefore, rewrote the scene in which Khetiwe takes the pivotal decision to leave her home and familiar surroundings. In the traditional hero's journey, this moment can be identified as Campbell's Separation from the Familiar, (1949) or Vogler's Crossing the Threshold (1992), or Murdock's Separation from the Feminine (1990). Khetiwe has to leave the home of her parents, to break away from the path followed by her mother, in order to discover her own will, independence and thoughts. I changed the scene in the third draft to reflect the *mise en abyme* of the hyena in the following way:

INT. ROOM IN RONDAWEL - NIGHT

Again there is loud snoring coming from one side of the room, where Bheki has succumbed to the effects of the Zulu beer.

Khetiwe lies on her mat, blanket covering most of her face. There is a trace of white clay still attached to her eyebrows.

Moving as quietly as she can, she edges towards the bowl of white clay which is still on the floor where it was earlier. It has been covered with a cloth. Khetiwe pulls



the cloth away and grabs two handfuls of the substance and then shuffles back to her blanket.

Once there, she begins to fashion a figure, a semblance of a shape. The clay sets quickly and Khetiwe soon has a replica of a doll. She whispers urgently to the figure.

KHETIWE

What was it you wrote,  
Mary? Wasn't it you who  
wrote that I must not  
marry? And now, where are  
you to help me? Mr Majosi  
was right. You were not a  
success. A woman cannot  
break free from the way the  
world is. You could not.  
Now I cannot.

She cries. The tears express her utter frustration. She cradles her white clay doll in her arms as she cries.

CUT TO:

INT. MARY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Older Mary is writing at her desk with a quill. She mouths the words as she writes. On her desk is a clay figurine, a more sophisticated reworking of her farm-yard doll.

MARY

He who is training us up for  
immortal bliss, knows best what  
trials will contribute to make us  
virtuous.

She touches her clay model gently. She whispers to it.

MARY (CONT'D)

...and our resignation and  
improvement will render us  
respectable to ourselves, and to  
that Being, whose approbation is of  
more value than life itself.

CUT TO:

INT. ROOM IN RONDAWEL - NIGHT

The scene is a continuation from the rondawel scene before. Khetiwe still cradles the figurine. Mary's voice bleeds over into this scene from the previous one.

MARY (V.O.)

...and our resignation and improvement will render us respectable to ourselves, and to that Being, whose approbation is of more value than life itself.

KHETIWE

You tell me to resign myself to my situation? Do you mean I must accept that it is my fate to be married to the beast Sithole? Just because "that Being", your God, will value my virtue? Mary, how can you tell me that? Your words are forsaking me, white girl.

MARY (V.O.)

It is what the church tells us.

KHETIWE

(Addressing the figure)  
Perhaps it is your church which says so, but my heart tells me it is wrong. You, of all people, cannot condemn a woman to a life of abuse and slavery to a monstrous man?

INT. MARY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mary examines her clay figure closely.

KHETIWE (V.O.)

Mary, you cannot keep thinking this way. You must change your thoughts!

MARY  
 (in awe)  
 I hear you. I hear your  
 voice...

She addresses her figurine.

MARY (CONT'D)  
 But I do not understand you  
 - how is it possible to go  
 against the precepts of the  
 church? These precepts I  
 learnt from my earliest  
 years?

KHETIWE (V.O.)  
 Rather go against the  
 precepts of the church than  
 the precepts of the heart.

CUT TO:

INT. ROOM IN RONDAWEL - NIGHT

Khetiwe whispers to her figure as she begins to mould its shape. Its pliable form changes within minutes into that of an animal figure. Its forelegs are long. Its hind-legs are shorter. It has a large head. With her nail, Khetiwe carves out a smile.

KHETIWE  
 How can you obey the words  
 of the church, how can you  
 make your behaviour suit  
 these words, words which  
 are written by men to keep  
 women in their place? I  
 will not resign myself to  
 this marriage. And  
 you must learn from me,  
 Mary, from my country. I  
 will no longer be a doll, a  
 puppet. Nor must you. We  
 will take the form of the  
 most powerful animal in  
 Africa.

CUT TO:

INT. MARY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

She peers at the clay figure intently.

KHETIWE (V.O.)

And you, you will learn  
from me, to become the  
matriarch. Like the  
hyena, she is the most  
powerful in the clan. So  
powerful that legend  
has it, she can become her  
own mate too. The impisi.

MARY

I am listening.

She puts her ear close to the figure. She listens, but  
hears no more.

EXT. VILLAGE - NIGHT

The village sleeps deeply as the embers of fire send  
tendrils of smoke into the frosty early morning air.

One of the rondawel doors creaks open. It is Khetiwe at the  
threshold of her hut. She is covered with a dark blanket  
which makes her invisible to all but the most observant of  
onlookers.

She walks out of her father's hut, closes the door silently  
behind her and steals through the sleeping village, afraid  
even to breathe. She does not look back.

From under her blanket-cloak, a cloth bag peeps out. The  
shape of her clay hyena can just be discerned.

(p 40-43)

When Khetiwe takes the decision to mould her clay doll into a hyena rather than a replica of Mary's doll, her self-determination grows enormously. This act is counter to Mary's. She is no longer the student learning from the master, or mistress. Here she decides that her connection with Mary should be reciprocal. Khetiwe takes charge of her own fate, teaching Mary that there are some rules which need to be broken, if a woman is to follow her heart. Khetiwe's character has volition. She follows her own will, and her actions have consequences, in the screenplay, reaching across the decades to change Mary's conservative and Christian views. The resonances of the mythic qualities and symbolic associations of the hyena seemed appropriate in this scene. The animal's androgyny and sexual ambiguity are in keeping with Khetiwe's actions, as she relinquishes her role as the daughter who fulfils her parent's misguided expectations.

Khetiwe acts with the independence of a man and takes enormous risks by leaving her parental home with nothing more than a bit of money to keep her going for a few weeks. She boards a train, and leaves for a city she has never even visited. She meets the old woman who forms an archetypal bond with her, by whom she is shown the ways of the city. Yet, she still makes her own decisions. Even though the old woman, Ma Khubone, becomes her mentor, Khetiwe outgrows her need for the mentor when she assumes responsibility for her own education. She rejects the old woman's forged matric certificate and insists on earning her qualifications through her own actions once more. She is determined to be the sole person in charge of her future. When Khetiwe finally succeeds, it is a success on her own terms. She has carved out her future on her own by not accepting anything less than what she believed was right for her. In the final scene of the screenplay, I wanted Khetiwe to make a speech which summed up her endurance and courage in undertaking the traumatic path of independence as a woman in a patriarchal society. I took the suggestions from my supervisors and included a reference to her role-model, Wollstonecraft, and, finally, brought in the reference to the hyena, her chosen totem animal, which symbolises, in a powerful, matriarchal way, all that Khetiwe and Mary have achieved:

INT. BOOKSHOP IN MALL - EVENING

Khetiwe is launching her book, *Thoughts on the Education of a Hyena*, at the bookshop she once worked at. She is the picture of elegance and poise, standing at the microphone addressing a large crowd.

KHETIWE

We are nothing without  
those who came before us.  
And they are nothing  
without us who follow them  
and take their examples to  
greater heights. Many years  
ago, over two hundred years  
ago, Mary Wollstonecraft  
was a woman who made  
her own rules. She was  
vilified and called a hyena  
in petticoats for speaking  
her mind.

The audience laugh politely.

KHETIWE (CONT'D)

All because she wanted to be educated, to live as an independent woman, and to be taken seriously for her work. If women like Mary and women like me are compared to hyenas, then we are proudly so. Hyena matriarchs are the strongest of the clan. They care for their families and fight for their young. Unlike the legends, they are not hermaphrodites. They do need their males by their side to make their clans work, but their strongest trait is that they are independent. They decide which path they, and their clan, will walk. Like Mary, I may be a hyena in petticoats, but I am proud to be so.

The audience claps enthusiastically.

Mike, her former nemesis, tries to approach her to congratulate her. He steps up to the podium, full of effusive words and smiles.

MIKE

I always knew you would succeed... You always stood out...

KHETIWE

(to Mike)

You're in my way.

In full view of everyone, she snubs him, turns her back to him and walks away. Embarrassed, he stares after her, silenced.

She waves to someone at the back of the crowd. A young man steps forward, walking hand-in-hand with a girl of eight. It is Cebo with young Londi at his side. Khetiwe motions them to stand next to her.

Together, the three of them turn towards the photographers

and smile as they pose for the press.

Copies of her publication form a sea around her. In the PHOTOGRAPH on the cover of her book, Khetiwe's face beams in front of a fully-laden oak bookcase. On the bookcase's shelf, just behind her head, is a rather battered clay hyena figurine.

(p 104-105)

It seemed fitting that the hyena, as a symbol, is featured at the final stage of Khetiwe's moment of accomplishment in the script. Khetiwe has become all that is positive in the symbol of the hyena. She has been strong and fearless, and taken care of those who love her. Mary would have been proud of her.

### **From Traditional Structure to Hyper-structure**

I set out on this endeavour to find a structure for biopics which would move away from the traditional hero's journey of biopics. As I argued in Chapter One, even the Coming of Age novels of the nineteenth and twentieth-centuries tended to favour the masculine hero's quest structure of storytelling. The resultant lack of choices for the heroines in the latter-mentioned genre of literature, especially, showed the essential shortcomings of a structure which privileges the masculine journey. As most of heroines in these *Bildungsromane* die or end up in lunatic asylums, the paucity of choices for women on a quest were limiting, to say the least. Murdock, in *The Heroine's Journey* (1990), which is set up to be the polar opposite of the hero's journey, offers an interesting alternative. Her initial step of the journey, Separation from the Feminine, is of the same magnitude as Campbell's and Vogler's Crossing the Threshold stage. Murdock notes that for women to embark on a quest of their own, it is essential that they have to become their own women, as it were, and separate their identities from those of their mothers, in order to individuate as self-actualising human beings. This step was particularly helpful in defining the initial impetus of both Mary and Khetiwe in the screenplay. Although the moment when they leave their homes to embark on a new life could quite easily have been called Crossing the Threshold, both women are taking a conscious step away from their mothers, both of whom are downtrodden victims of overbearing and brutish men. When the two young women evaluate the lives of compromise and virtual slavery that their mothers endure, Mary and Khetiwe make a decision not to become like their mothers. They take a stand against the men who have oppressed women in their families and in their cultures.

Murdock's phrase "separating from the feminine", is especially apt when discussing the structure of *A Hyena in Petticoats*. In fact, my earlier statement, in Chapter Three, that Mary's spirit of independence evolved because she could not rely on her father, could be expanded upon. Perhaps her primary motivation, to be as independent as possible, stemmed mainly from her desire not to be like her mother. In this way, she is more like the women in Murdock's therapy sessions, the "daughters of the father" who identify with the masculine rather than the feminine, as the opportunities for an extraordinary life are more plentiful and varied for men.

Following the pattern of Murdock's heroine's journey, each stage is worded differently, yet it can be equated with the similar stage of character development in the script as the hero's journey. Murdock tweaks the names of each step to show how women react differently from men at each of these stages. The heroines on their journey act in a particularly feminine way but, in essence, the steps match pivotal storytelling moments in the character's dramatic journey, much like the hero's journey. It was no surprise to me to realise that I had, in fact, crafted a reasonably traditional heroine's journey in the skeletal structure of both women's journeys.

Mary's initial desire to separate from the feminine originates when she decides that she wants to study. She makes the decision to teach herself and her sisters to read and write, even if it means scratching in the mud with a chicken feather. She pushes her desire to be different a step further when she discovers how inadequate her education will be, after realising that her education at school will consist of being taught sewing and basic arithmetic. When Mary desires to create herself as a new woman in the shape of the clay doll, she announces through this action that she is, indeed, creating herself as a new genus of woman.

ELIZA

I am sorry Mary.

MARY

Do not feel sympathy for me  
Eliza. It shall be your  
fate shortly too.

(pauses)

I wish...

ELIZA

What do you wish, Mary?

MARY

I wish I could create my  
own school where I would



teach young girls about everything!

ELIZA

That is the most fanciful wish I have ever heard, sister. No woman would ever be allowed to have her own school, never mind be allowed to teach whatever she wants.

MARY

You think not, Eliza?

ELIZA

It is a mad dream, dearest.

MARY

Perhaps.

(pauses)

Perhaps then I could be truly mad. If I were truly mad, I'd dream a life for a girl who would be free to spend day after day in studying literature, science, mathematics; to follow her own intelligence; to become everything that she is meant to be as an intelligent human being, without society's strictures.

ELIZA

But that is impossible. None of us is able to create a life for another person. Now you are just being silly.

MARY

Silly or no, I will imagine a life for her.

Eliza laughs.

MARY (CONT'D)

And I will fashion this  
life for her. I will give  
her free will and I will  
allow her to do all the  
things I am not able to do.

(p 10)

The above moment defines Mary's journey in the script. As Murdock says, the task of a true heroine is to shatter the established order of:

...deeply entrenched patriarchal values, those of dominance and control by the stronger, more vocal, and more powerful male population. But on the personal level, the old order is embodied by the mother, and the heroine's first task towards individuation is to separate from her. (p 14)

Mary's initial desire to be different is pushed into new territory by Khetiwe, in the final script of *A Hyena in Petticoats*. The device of the *mise en abyme*, the clay figure which connects Mary to Khetiwe, is employed during the pivotal scene on page 43, when Khetiwe urges Mary to change her way of thinking. As the vital *mise en abyme* symbolises creation of the new, it is able to adumbrate the direction of the plot throughout the script:

INT. ROOM IN RONDAWEL - NIGHT

Khetiwe whispers to her figure as she begins to mould its shape. Its pliable form changes within minutes into that of an animal figure. Its forelegs are long. Its hind-legs are shorter. It has a large head. With her nail, Khetiwe carves out a smile.

KHETIWE

How can you obey the words  
of the church, how can you  
make your behaviour suit  
these words, words which  
are written by men to keep  
women in their place? I  
will not resign myself to  
this marriage.

KHETIWE (CONT'D)

And you must learn from me,  
Mary, from my country. I  
will no longer be a doll, a  
puppet. Nor must you. We  
will take the form of the  
most powerful animal in  
Africa.

CUT TO:

INT. MARY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

She peers at the clay figure intently.

KHETIWE (V.O.)

And you, you will learn  
from me, to become the  
matriarch. Like the  
hyena, she is the most  
powerful in the clan. So  
powerful that legend  
has it, she can become her  
own mate too. The impisi.

MARY

I am listening.

She puts her ear close to the figure. She listens, but  
hears no more.

(p 43)

In the script, Khetiwe is the first one to take the pivotal step of separating from the “deeply entrenched patriarchal values”, as well as to separate from her mother in order to individuate. She does this shortly after creating her clay figure and urging Mary to follow her example. Khetiwe demands that Mary must change her thinking, in the scene quoted below, and emulate her when she leaves home and embarks on a physical and emotional journey into the unknown, in the hope of attaining her independence.

EXT. VILLAGE - NIGHT

The village sleeps deeply as the embers of fire send  
tendrils of smoke into the frosty, early morning air.  
One of the rondawel doors creaks open. It is Khetiwe at the  
threshold of her hut. She is covered with a dark blanket  
which makes her invisible to all but the most observant of

onlookers.

She walks out of her father's hut, closes the door silently behind her and steals through the sleeping village, afraid even to breathe. She does not look back.

From under her blanket-cloak, a cloth bag peeps out. The shape of her clay hyena can just be discerned.

(p 43)

The impetus for Khetiwe's actual process of separation develops slowly during the first act, as does Mary's. Khetiwe's initial words and actions demonstrate her desire to be different from the women around her. Her intelligence pushes her to seek out answers. Her intellect does not allow her to accept the status quo complacently. Her unequivocal Crossing the Threshold moment culminates in physical separation, as well as an emotional separation, as indicated above.

In a similar way, Mary's intellect urges her to seek out her own answers, especially when she is disappointed by the education she receives. Her initial act of creating the clay doll demonstrates her desire to carve out a new path. However, in the script, she makes the literal crossing of the threshold and separation from the feminine only after she and Khetiwe connect across time and space. Only once Khetiwe has urged her to break away from the conventional beliefs of the church and to embrace independent thought, does Mary separate completely from the feminine, both physically and emotionally. Unlike Murdock's step, which is the very first one on the path of the heroine's journey, both Mary's and Khetiwe's moment of separation is a culmination of a series of events building up to what could be called the first act climax. I took the decision to make Mary's defining moment when she rescues Eliza from her abusive marriage, even though this was anachronistic. Her action goes against the church's precepts which proclaim that a woman is the property of her husband, which she proclaims in the above scene from a treatise which was written after Wollstonecraft rescued her sister. The reason for this decision is explained above, but it was important at this stage to have Mary steal Eliza away from her husband for dramatic effect. It is her unequivocal first step onto the heroine's journey. This is her defining Crossing the Threshold or Separation from the Feminine moment. In the script, it occurs immediately after Thandi/Khetiwe has told Mary that she has to think her own thoughts and break away from the precepts of the church.

Here, Mary decides to act with the agency and decisiveness usually associated with a man, especially in eighteenth-century England.

INT. BEDROOM IN LARGE HOUSE - NIGHT

A large four poster bed dominates the modest bedroom. Inside it is an older ELIZA, 20 or so years old. She's in her nightclothes, hair dishevelled and eyes wild and red from constant crying. She grasps the hand of the young woman next to her. This is Mary, older too, but still the strong-willed soul of her youth.

MARY

You must break free from  
him Eliza!

ELIZA

You know I cannot, sister.  
The law is on his side. And  
I shall be condemned by the  
church as a sinner for ever  
more.

MARY

The law and the church are  
designed by men to keep us  
in our place. To keep women  
in servitude.

ELIZA

How can you say that,  
sister? That's heresy!

MARY

Is it heresy to condemn a  
woman to suffering in the  
way you are clearly  
suffering?

ELIZA

I know not, Mary. But tell  
me, where did you come by  
such thoughts? Are you not  
afraid to break the laws of  
man?

MARY

My spirit told me to come  
to your rescue.

ELIZA

Thank God you came, sister.  
I fear I will lose my mind.

MARY

What did he do, Eliza? Tell me!

Eliza wills herself to speak the dreadful words.

ELIZA

The baby was not hours old,  
Mary. He forced himself...  
(she sobs soundlessly)  
The pain!

MARY

Did he not understand?

ELIZA

You are asking a monster to understand? To have compassion? He has not left me - not one night or day - these three months since the baby was delivered. I will go mad, Mary, I swear it!

MARY

I will not allow it.

Mary makes sure that there is no-one in the passage. She closes the bedroom door. Then she approaches the bedside.

MARY (CONT'D)

Will you do as I say?

ELIZA

What are you planning, Mary?

MARY

You will come with me.  
Fanny Blood and I have resolved to be independent women. We will open our own school for girls. You and Everina will join us.

Is that not a wonderful plan?

ELIZA  
Fanny? Your friend?

MARY  
I wrote you. Did you not read my letters?

ELIZA  
My life has been a torment. I have not read anything these past months.

MARY  
No matter. Fanny and I have vowed to make our own way in the world. You and Everina will teach alongside us. There will be no need for men to look after us.

ELIZA  
Meredith will never agree to that!

MARY  
We are not going to tell him.

ELIZA  
You know I cannot leave without his permission.

MARY  
Do you truly believe he is treating you as a loving husband should treat his beloved wife?

ELIZA  
No! He is not kind. He does not listen to me. I beg him for respite but he will not hear me.

MARY

Therefore we must act  
without him. He does not  
deserve consideration. And  
my conscience shall not  
allow me to leave you with  
such a brute.

ELIZA

But the baby?

MARY

We will send for her once  
you are safe.

ELIZA

He will never allow me to  
have her. The law is on his  
side there too.

Mary hesitates for a second. She knows this is true.

MARY

I cannot leave you here  
with this man, Eliza. He  
will be the death of you.

ELIZA

(sobs)

He will... but to leave my  
baby girl!

Mary stands, grabs a hold-all, puts a few items of clothing  
inside it, and moves towards the door. She opens it and  
peers outside. She comes back over to the bed.

MARY

We will fetch her in due  
course, Eliza, but for your  
sake we must leave now.  
While he sleeps.

She throws a coat over Eliza's nightdress, shoves her feet  
into a pair of shoes and guides her bewildered sister  
towards the door.

ELIZA

Are you sure of this Mary?



MARY  
I am sure that this is your  
only hope of sanity,  
sister.

The women leave the room. Eliza tries to compose herself as she walks through the door.

Mary helps Eliza down the staircase as quietly as possible.

(p 43-47)

The above scene shows Mary taking a literal step across the threshold, and once she has crossed it, there is no possible return to her former, conventional life. She has broken the statutes of society by taking Eliza away from her husband without his consent. She has defied the law, as well as broken the conventions of marriage. Mary has also shown that women deserve to be treated with kindness and compassion.

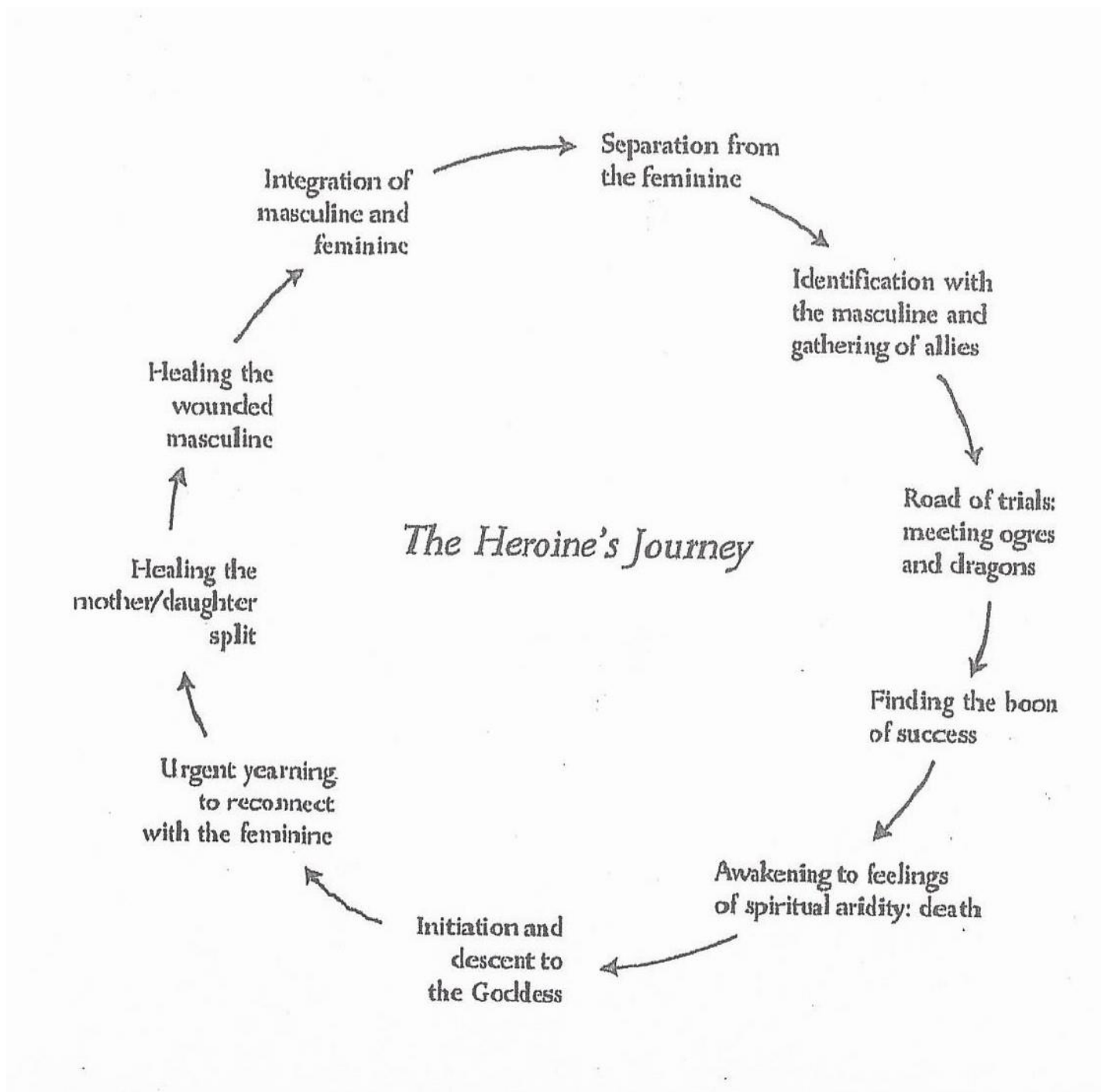
The decision to rely on the traditional hero/heroine's quest structure was made mostly because I needed to tell an engaging story. One of the best ways to do this is to create a dramatic turn of events in a script, where the heroine is moved out of her ordinary circumstances and propelled along a journey which takes her into extraordinary situations. In screenwriting terms, this stage is referred to as an event which asks a dramatic question. In *A Hyena in Petticoats*, the question asked of each of the protagonists is, "What will happen to them now that they have left their home and ventured into new territory?" The engagement of the audience is assured by asking a good dramatic question which hooks them into the narrative. If the question is compelling enough, the audience will be drawn into the story until the dramatic question is answered. Using this age-old formula assures the writer that the narrative is engaging and that the audience is able to relate to the characters in the script. Therefore, it seemed to be unavoidable that the first step of Campbell's hero's journey and Murdock's heroine's journey had to be taken in a narrative which hopes to engage an audience.

The second stage of Murdock's journey is Identifying with the Masculine and the gathering of allies. This step is evident when Mary decides to open her own school in Newington Green. While there is a long history of schooling for boys in the United Kingdom, which dates back to the eleventh century, schools for girls were not considered as an option, especially in the eighteenth-

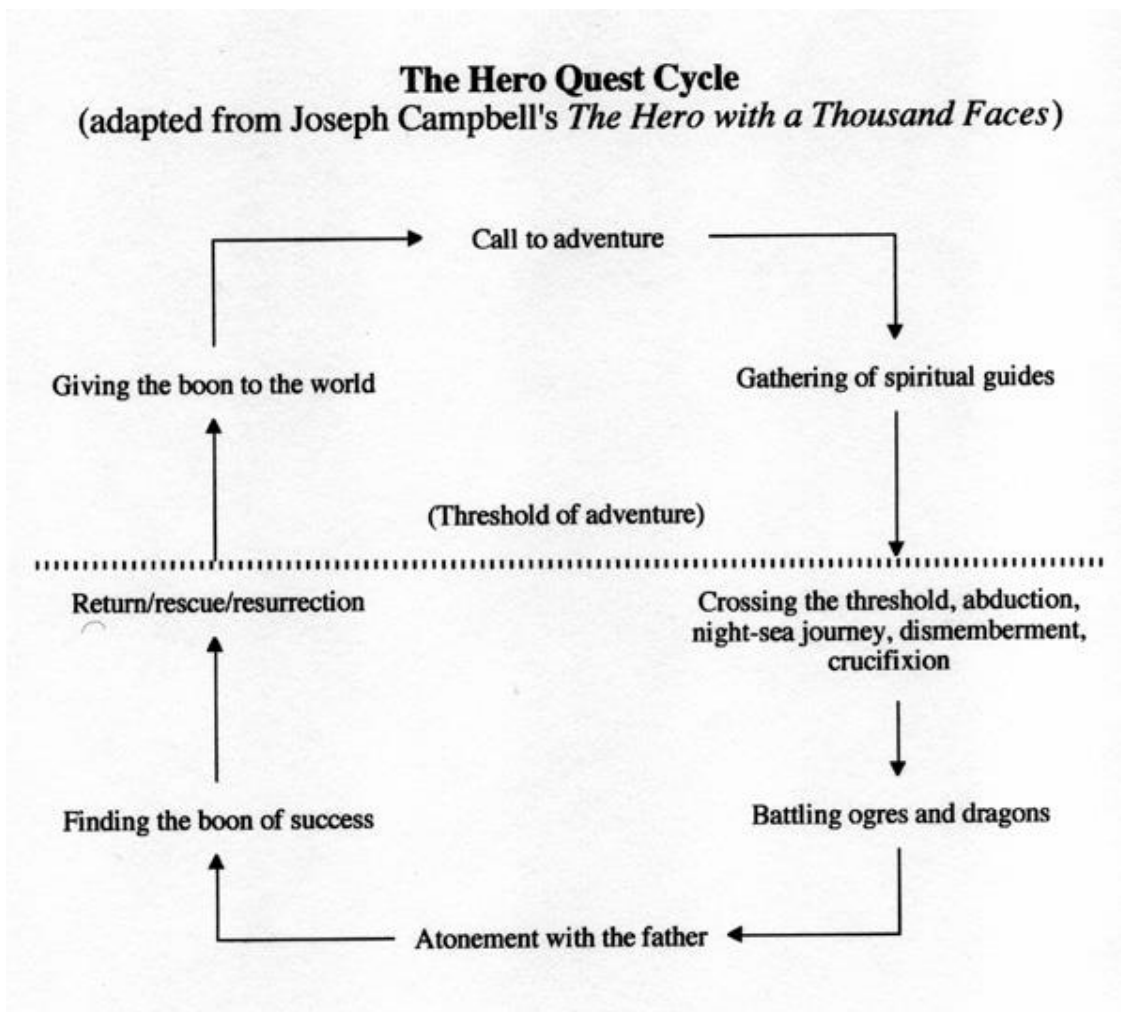
century. Wollstonecraft's decision to open a school for girls, and to run it herself, was counter to the popular conventions of her time.

She was, indeed, identifying with the masculine to venture into the male territory of running a school, even if it was for girls. In Campbell's template below, this stage is referred to as the Road of Trials or Tests. Once again, these two terms, Identifying with the Masculine, and the Road of Trials or Tests can be equated with Mary opening her school with her sisters and Fanny Blood (p 47), even though Murdock's term equates the step in terms which relate especially to the heroine's journey. Khetiwe's journey conforms with Campbell's Road of Trials or Tests, but she too, takes on a masculine role in society by the defiant step of leaving the safety of her home (p 47), and travelling as a single woman into an unknown city. Even though Khetiwe takes on menial jobs at first, which are not essentially masculine roles, she plans to earn her place in society by her own means, and effectively Identifying with the Masculine through her independent actions and through her agency.

If we relook at the pattern of Maureen Murdock's template for the journey of the heroine, as well as Joseph Campbell's monomyth of the hero's journey, we can see similar moments in *A Hyena in Petticoats*.



(Figure 4.1: Repeat of Figure 2.2: Murdock's Heroine's Journey. Ballard *et al.* 2014)



(Figure 4.2: Repeat of Figure 2.1: The Hero's Quest Cycle. Griggs, 2012)

The subsequent steps of the protagonists' journeys in *A Hyena in Petticoats* follow the structure of the hero's journey and the heroine's journey in fairly traditional ways. It seems that engaging stories cannot avoid using the most traditional aspects of storytelling, even if only as a baseline structure. I have had to admit that there is indeed a basic hero/heroine's journey as part of the skeletal structure of *A Hyena in Petticoats*. Not all the stages of the two journeys can be equated within the script, but the pivotal three-act structure is definitely in place. I have, therefore, illustrated the breakdown of the script as follows, using red for Joseph Campbell's terms, and blue for Maureen Murdock's terms:

## Mary/Khetiwe's **Hero's/Heroine's** Journey

### Baseline Structure

#### Act One:

**Call to Adventure/Separation from the Feminine:** Mary wants an equal education to boys and men. Khetiwe wants an equal education to boys and men.

**Meeting the Mentor, Supernatural Aid:** Mary makes a clay figure which becomes Khetiwe through supernatural means. She and Khetiwe are linked across the centuries, mentors to each other.

**Identification with the Masculine:** Mary wants to teach her sisters. Khetiwe balks at marrying the man her father betrothed her to and wants to be independent.

**Crossing the Threshold:** Mary rescues Eliza. Khetiwe leaves home.

#### Act Two:

**Road of Trials, Tests/Meeting Ogres & Dragons:** Mary opens the school but her best friend dies. Khetiwe is threatened by thugs at the station but is rescued by Ma Khubone.

**Finding the Boon of Success:** Mary goes to London and Joseph Johnson publishes her work. Ma Khubone helps Khetiwe obtain a matric certificate so she can find a job in a book shop.

**Approach to the Innermost Cave/Initiation & Descent to the Goddess:** Mary travels to Paris, meets Imlay, becomes a single mother. Khetiwe loves her job but is raped by the manager of the shop.

#### Act Three:

**Ordeal, Dark Night of the Soul:** Mary tries to drown herself. Khetiwe, pregnant, hides herself in a menial job as a cleaner at a school.

**Urgent Yearning to Connect with the Feminine:** Mary meets Godwin and contemplates marriage for the first time in her life. Khetiwe gives birth to her daughter and studies for herself, to earn a degree on her own merit, to be an example to her daughter.

**Resurrection/Healing the Mother/Daughter Split/ Integration of the Masculine:** Mary marries Godwin and is more successful in her career than ever. Khetiwe allows Cebo into her life again but succeeds in her career in a very hero-like way.

See below for the formatted table.

Mary/Khetiwe's Hero/Heroine's Journey		
ACT ONE		
Call to Adventure/Separation from the Feminine		
Mary wants an equal education to boys and men		Khetiwe wants an equal education to boys and men.
Meeting the Mentor, Supernatural Aid		
Mary makes a clay figure which becomes Khetiwe through supernatural means		Mary and Khetiwe are linked across the centuries, mentors to each other
Identification with the Masculine		
Mary wants to teach her sisters		Khetiwe balks at marrying the man her father betrothed her to and wants to be independent
Crossing the Threshold		
Mary rescues Eliza		Khetiwe leaves home
ACT TWO		
Road of Trials, Tests/Meeting Ogres & Dragons		
Mary opens the school but her best friend dies		Khetiwe is threatened by thugs at the station but is rescued by Ma Khubone
Finding the Boon of Success		
Mary goes to London and Joseph Johnson publishes her work		Ma Khubone helps Khetiwe obtain a matirc certificate so she can find a job in a book shop
Approach to the Innermost Cave/Initiation & Descent to the Goddess		

Mary travels to Paris, meets Imlay, becomes a single mother		Khetiwe loves her job but is raped by the manager of the shop
<b>ACT THREE</b>		
<b>Ordeal, Dark Night of the Soul</b>		
Mary tries to drown herself		Khetiwe, pregnant, hides herself in a menial job as a cleaner at a school
<b>Urgent Yearning to Connect with the Feminine</b>		
Mary meets Godwin and contemplates marriage for the first time in her life		Khetiwe gives birth to her daughter and studies for herself, to earn a degree on her own merit, to be an example to her daughter
<b>Ressurrection/Healing the Mother/Daughter Split/Integration of the Masculine</b>		
Mary marries Godwin and is more successful in her career than ever		Khetiwe allows Cebo into her life again but succeeds in her career in a very hero-like way

(Table 4.2: Mary/Khetiwe's Hero's/Heroine's Journey: Baseline Structure: Van Eeden, 2017)

The explicated table below illustrates the actions of the *mise en abyme* as a hyper-narrative in the screenplay, overlaying the traditional structure. The *mise en abyme* is marked in **bold purple**.

## Mary/Khetiwe's Hyperstructure with *Mise en Abyme*

### Baseline Structure with Hyperstructure of *Mise en Abyme*

#### Act One:

**Call to Adventure/Separation from the Feminine:** Mary wants an equal education to boys and men. Khetiwe wants an equal education to boys and men.

**Meeting the Mentor, Supernatural Aid/ *Mise en Abyme*:** Mary makes a clay figure which becomes Khetiwe through supernatural means. She CREATES KHETIWE. She and Khetiwe are linked across the centuries, mentors to each other.

**Identification with the Masculine:** Mary wants to teach her sisters. Khetiwe balks at marrying the man her father betrothed her to and wants to be independent.

***Mise en Abyme:*** Khetiwe makes her clay figure and turns it into a hyena. It influences Mary's behaviour. KHETIWE CREATES MARY'S ACTIONS.

**Crossing the Threshold:** Mary rescues Eliza. Khetiwe leaves home.

#### Act Two:

**Road of Trials, Tests/Meeting Ogres & Dragons:** Mary opens the school but her best friend dies. Khetiwe is threatened by thugs at the station but is rescued by Ma Khubone.

**Finding the Boon of Success:** Mary goes to London and Joseph Johnson publishes her work. Ma Khubone helps Khetiwe obtain a matric certificate so she can find a job in a book shop.

**Approach to the Innermost Cave/Initiation & Descent to the Goddess:** Mary travels to Paris, meets Imlay, becomes a single mother. Khetiwe loves her job but is raped by the manager of the shop.

#### Act Three:

**Ordeal, Dark Night of the Soul/*Mise en Abyme*:** Mary tries to drown herself. Khetiwe, pregnant, hides herself in a menial job as a cleaner at a school. Both women look to their figurines to draw inspiration but there is none forthcoming.

**Urgent Yearning to Connect with the Feminine/*Mise en Abyme*:** Mary meets Godwin and contemplates marriage for the first time in her life. Khetiwe gives birth to her



daughter and studies for herself, to earn a degree on her own merit, to be an example to her daughter. The clay figurine holds pride of place in their homes.

**Resurrection/Healing the Mother/Daughter Split/ Integration of the Masculine/*Mise en Abyme*:** Mary marries Godwin and is more successful in her career than ever.

Khetiwe allows Cebo into her life again but succeeds in her career in a very heroic way. Mary passes the figurine on to her daughter, to continue where she had left off. Khetiwe uses the figurine as a mascot to inspire future generations through her life story. Both women have created new paths for their lives, and the figurine is given credit.

See below for the formatted table.

## Mary/Khetiwe's Heroine's Journey with Hyper-structure of *Mise en Abyme*

### ACT ONE

#### Call to Adventure/Separation from the Feminine

Mary wants an equal education to boys and men		Khetiwe wants an equal education to boys and men.

#### Meeting the Mentor, Supernatural Aid

Mary makes a clay figure which becomes Khetiwe through supernatural means		Mary and Khetiwe are linked across the centuries, mentors to each other.
	Mary makes the clay figure which becomes Khetiwe through supernatural means. She creates Khetiwe	

#### Identification with the Masculine

Mary wants to teach her sisters		Khetiwe balks at marrying the man her father betrothed her to and wants to be independent
	Khetiwe makes her clay figure and turns it into a hyena. It influences Mary's behaviour. Khetiwe creates Mary's actions	

#### Crossing the Threshold

Mary rescues Eliza		Khetiwe leaves home

Both rise up against  
patriarchal,  
parastatal societal  
structures

## ACT TWO

### Road of Trials, Tests/Meeting Ogres & Dragons

Mary opens the school but her best  
friend dies

Khetiwe is threatened by thugs at the station but  
is rescued by Ma Khubone

Both visited by  
moments of  
benediction and  
calamity

### Finding the Boon of Success

Mary goes to London and Joseph  
Johnson publishes  
her work

Ma Khubone helps Khetiwe obtain a matric  
certificate so she can find a job in a book shop

Out of benediction  
and calamity arise  
moments to  
seemingly advance  
their journeys

### Approach to the Innermost Cave/Initiation & Descent to the Goddess

Mary travels to Paris, meets Imlay,  
becomes a  
single mother

Khetiwe loves her job but is raped by the manager  
of the shop

Both narratives are  
intercepted  
by the Masculine

## ACT THREE

### Ordeal, Dark Night of the Soul

Mary tries to drown herself

Khetiwe, pregnant, hides herself in a menial job  
as a cleaner at a school

	Both women look to their figurines to draw inspiration but nothing is forthcoming	
Urgent Yearning to Connect with the Feminine		
Mary meets Godwin and contemplates marriage for the first time in her life		Khetiwe gives birth to her daughter and studies for herself, to earn a degree on her own merit, to be an example to her daughter
	The clay figure holds pride of place in their homes	
Ressurrection/Healing the Mother/Daughter Split/Integration of the Masculine		
Mary marries Godwin and is more successful in her career than ever		Khetiwe allows Cebo into her life again but succeeds in her career in a very hero-like way
	Mary passes the figurine onto her daughter, to continue where she had left off. Khetiwe uses the figurine as a mascot to inspire future generations by her life story. Both women have created new paths for their lives and the figurine is given credit	

(Figure 4.2: Mary/Khetiwe's Heroine's Journey with Hyper-structure of *mise en abyme*, Van Eeden, 2017)

## Conclusion

At first, it seemed that my search for innovation in the structural aspects of biopics was in vain. My initial focus in this endeavour was to move away from the heroic nature of the biographical feature film and craft a script which would be completely innovative. In the final analysis, this lofty aim seems impossible, as the subjects featured in a biopic need to be, by definition, extraordinary in some way. The biographer's need to tell the story about characters who are unusual performers leads the writer to choose subjects who perform acts which are of a heroic nature. In my introduction to this thesis, I had queried whether I would be able to write a script which ignored the tenets of traditionally structured biopics, and still be able to attract an audience. It seems I would have run the risk of writing a script which would only appeal to a niche or art-house audience if I had not used elements of the hero/ine's journey. As I stated in the introduction, I did not want to limit the potential of the target audience in any way as the chances of a niche script being produced and being successful are minimal.

When I began to recreate the narrative through writing the screenplay, *A Hyena in Petticoats*, I realised that I had to fashion the events of the script along the lines of a hero/ine's journey, if not following the hero/ine's journey directly, if I hoped to create an engaging narrative. It seems there is, indeed, a pattern of sorts that has to be followed if a writer wishes to claim the attention of an audience. In the opening moments of the screenplay, I had to ask a dramatic question, as in traditionally structured hero/ine's journeys, to set the heroine on a journey. As in all good stories, I had to answer the dramatic question by the end of the script, or risk leaving an audience unsatisfied.

From the first draft, I found myself restructuring elements from Wollstonecraft's life into a more dramatic framework, to craft the script along the lines of a three-act narrative. It soon became apparent that it was essential to make the first-act turning point one of the most dramatic events in the script for Mary, as well as for Khetiwe, to create audience-identification through raising the stakes for the protagonists. Once the stakes are raised for the audience, and they are drawn into the narrative, they become immersed in the story. It seemed essential, therefore, to ensure that this stage of the narrative process takes place. One of the most important elements for me, when I write a play or a screenplay, is to ensure that the audience is engaged by the narrative. So the stage of Murdock's Separating from the Feminine, equating with Campbell and Vogler's Crossing the Threshold, was essential. This is the first-act turning point in traditional three-act structures.

Restructuring the chronological events of Wollstonecraft's life allowed me to make the first-act turning point the moment when Mary breaks the law by rescuing her sister from her abusive marriage. In the final draft, this event required even more tampering with the chronology as Khetiwe reads from work Wollstonecraft would have written after the dramatic kidnapping of Eliza. Khetiwe's recitation of Mary's later work back to her across the centuries, in a moment which is out of synchronisation with Wollstonecraft's life, is used as a spur to make Mary, the character in the script, change her conservative point of view. It is this imagined intervention from Khetiwe across the centuries and across continents, which sparks the journey for both women in their respective time-lines. The chronological tweak also allows me to give Khetiwe agency over Mary's writing, as well as over her behaviour, across time and space. This was the metaphysical connection I had been looking for all along.

The spiritual connection between the protagonists, Mary and Khetiwe, was heightened by the elision across time. When I watched the recent film *Arrival* (Villeneuve, 2016) earlier this year, I had already written the third draft script of *Hyena*. I was struck by the way the filmmakers had created similar elisions in their film. In *Arrival*, events in the future impact on events in the past. The proposition that neither time nor space are linear are the main themes of the film. I was surprised to discover that I had written similar themes in *A Hyena in Petticoats* before watching *Arrival*. It encouraged me to see that I had chanced upon a current and universal theme.

So while I found myself using elements of the hero/ine's journey in the baseline structure of the script, I like to think that my attempts to include the *mise en abyme* in *A Hyena in Petticoats* have pushed the script beyond the realm of traditional, heroic-narrative biopics and into a more hermeneutically profound dimension by enhancing the understanding of the subject of the film.

My analysis of *Saving Mr Banks* shows that the use of *mise en abyme* is not new by any means. Not only was it used in this 2013 biopic, but the device has been used for centuries in many art forms. So, unfortunately, I cannot lay claim to its use in *A Hyena in Petticoats* as an entirely new approach to writing a biopic either. All I can lay claim to is that I have identified the use of the *mise en abyme* as a device to create a hyper-structure, or a meta-narrative, which can be placed within the traditional three-act structure. I would also assert that choosing the *mise en abyme* as an illustration of the essential personality traits of the subject of the biopic, adds to the depth of understanding and the interpretation of the human being whose life is explored in the script. Hopefully the use of the device allows the biographer to add to the understanding of the human condition.

In the final analysis, I have to admit that there is nothing new under the sun. Even though I had attempted to reinvent the genre of biopics, structurally, I was able to merely tweak traditional structure by adding layers of meaning to the narrative by using the *mise en abyme* as a heuristic device to enhance the complexity of interpretation of the characters. I had hoped that the *mise en abyme* would work in creating a spiral-shaped connectivity, of emotional development as well as of plot, between the two characters. I do believe I have been successful in this attempt.

It is fair to say that the *mise en abyme* has been used to link the lives of the two protagonists in a metaphysical manner which could not have been done without it. In this way, I have achieved the self-reflexive pattern which I had hoped for when I began this endeavour. I know this has added to my depth of understanding of the subject of the biopic, Mary Wollstonecraft. The most interesting thing about the table is that if it were placed in three dimensions, it would form a double-helix. This is the shape of the screenplay which I envisaged during a meditation on its form before writing the second draft. This fact encourages me to think that I have, in fact, succeeded in creating the desired spiral-shaped structure with the use of the *mise en abyme*.

The tautology created by the use of the *mise en abyme* and the way in which it is used in *A Hyena in Petticoats* automatically creates a self-reflexive structure, and therefore, the double-helix shape I had hoped for. Once again, I refer to Patricia M. Lawlor's definition of the *mise en abyme* in her essay on the subject in "The French Review":

In literature, *mise en abyme* has come to include duplication by analogy as well as recurrence of similar images or events.... [...] *Mise en abyme* not only reflects the past but anticipates the future, and sometimes both, simultaneously. The retro-prospective nature of the liminal *mise en abyme* establishes a perspective on what is to follow. (p 829-830)

Lawlor's comments explain what I had hoped for in the search for the structure of *A Hyena in Petticoats*. The clay figurine gave me the "retro-prospective nature of the liminal *mise en abyme*" that I wanted, to connect the protagonists across the centuries. Creating the *mise en abyme* of the clay figure epitomised Mary's desire to create herself as a new incarnation of woman. The creation of the clay figure is the signifier of Mary's desire to be a self-made woman, in semiotic terms, as well as her desire to be a creator, as a writer herself. The script uses the *mise en abyme* device to reach forward, across two centuries, to impact upon another young woman who desires to be her own version of herself. Khetiwe's creation of her own

clay figurine allows her to re-imagine herself as a woman unbound by the trappings of traditional culture, and with the freedom to choose her own path. Her choice to fashion the clay figure into a hyena allows the figure, itself, to have agency by influencing Mary's thoughts and actions, across the liminal threshold of two centuries in the past. The choice of the hyena, and its connotations of the power of the matriarch of the hyena clan both in traditional Zulu culture and in terms of natural history, held enormous semiotic significance, and strengthened the *mise en abyme* even more as a representation of the strong women in the biopic.

Through the elision of time and space, the clay figurines bind both women together into a journey of reflexive cause and effect. The self-reflexive nature of the protagonists' connection gave me the spiral, or double-helix shape I had envisaged by connecting the threads of the plot like a Mobius-strip. Once again, it is important to note that the *mise en abyme* device of the clay figurine was not used as a plot device and did not evoke the endless abyss of repetitive events as is sometimes possible in the use of a *mise en abyme* when it is used as a plot-device, such as in *Synechdoche, New York* (Kaufman, 2008). It is used in *Hyena* as a hermeneutic tool only to enhance the interpretation of the subjects of the biopic.

Essentially, as I stated earlier, the *mise en abyme* coalesces the characters' symbiotic ideation into a physical form, when the function of the device of the *mise en abyme* is activated, creating a self-replicating mirror of one character's history in the other's future. This is the "shiver of vertigo" across centuries and continents that I had hoped to create, to use Derrida's phrase. Even though centuries separate the two women, their shared journey and their shared totem connect them spiritually through the ages. This "underlying pattern" referred to by Lyndall Gordon in *Divided Lives*, the "emotional sincerity" referred to by Orwell and "what lies in the shadows", and "the space between emphasis and undertone", referred to by Virginia Woolf, the "gaps slyly inserted in the narrative", referred to by Elizabeth Abel, are the elusive characteristic traits of the subjects of the film, Mary Wollstonecraft, and her echoing tandem-protagonist, Khetiwe. Hopefully, their emotional sincerity has been elucidated by the use of the *mise en abyme* in the biopic *A Hyena in Petticoats*.

As I stated earlier, the use of the *mise en abyme* is not new in Art. It has been used for centuries and is still utilised in films such as *Saving Mr Banks* (Hancock, 2013). What this thesis lays claim to is that the table, with a *mise en abyme* structure included in a baseline structure, has not been drawn up before. It is my hope that the table of the hyper-structure of



*A Hyena in Petticoats*, using the *mise en abyme* device, will add to the body of screenwriting methodology too, as a way to enhance a more profound understanding of the protagonist depicted in either a biopic or even a fictional narrative feature. If the work which has gone into this endeavour is able to add to the body of screenwriting theory, then this journey beyond the biopic will have been worth it.

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