

Reyka

Section II: Reflexive Essay

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1. Background

The MA in Creative Writing programme was introduced to me while I was completing a writing contract on a local soap opera, *Scandal*. I did not apply with a portfolio of writing material that needed supervision or focus. I didn't have a concept or even a character to work from. As a prospective student, I had very little, except for a need to redefine my relationship with the television (TV) audience.

This audience (in December 2007, *Scandal's* audience ratings (ARs) were about 10.0 which accounts for around a million viewers) had made me stop thinking about writing. They were not to blame, of course, but as a result of our 'relationship', I had become a functionary in a system which delivered product to consumers, and through politically orientated mandates, to citizens of our country. I was not a storyteller in the traditional sense.

Three years earlier I had been appointed to the position of head writer on E-TV's ailing flagship show. The job required the supervision of a writing team whose primary output was the delivery to production of twenty four scripts a month. When I started I had no experience or knowledge of the demands of the position. In addition, I inherited a writing team who were demoralised and listless as the ARs had plummeted to a disastrous low (in September 2005 the ARs were about 2.0 which accounts for around two hundred thousand viewers).

I set about learning the craft of TV writing. It became apparent that my primary responsibility was to service the expectations of the advertiser. If we went to the break on a car advert, then it was due to the success of the IVF sperm-swapping storyline. If we went to the break on a washing powder it was because the audience weren't responding to the romantic lead having an affair with his son's girlfriend.

Our job, as story-liners and scriptwriters, was to create story arcs and construct scenes that built toward suspenseful cliff-hangers and detonated the highest stakes: putting characters into peril and distress on the one hand, and ensuring that the audience cares and understands what is actually at stake on the other. This should be a significant bond in a young TV writer's life. Imagine the power.

Picture the whole world dotted with hundreds of millions of homes glowing with the blue light of TV sets. Inside each home – your own home, for example – visitors tell stories about their dreams and problems, loves and rages, their thrills and their losses.

You care about them, probably more than you admit; you even talk about them when they're not around – after all, they come every week. Sometimes they're broiling over issues in the news. Or sick and scared about that, or lying, or brave. At one time they were attacked and fought back and barely survived. But no matter what, they'll be back next week, your same friends, there with you in your most vulnerable place, at home when you're tired after work. Intimate. (Douglas 2005: 7)

The rules of TV writing demand that the process be collaborative. The needs of the broadcaster must be accommodated within the limitations of the production, and the head writer operates in the hazy space between these needs and these realities. This is a fertile environment where writing staffers assemble to brainstorm character journeys and story arcs. They anticipate how the audience will react to a particular plot point and set about refining it into a finely crafted scene that will account for a minute of screen time.

In that brainstorm, at that moment, the TV writer knows that they have contributed something meaningful to the process and the commercial functions can now run their course. This need TV writers have to preserve the origin of the idea, to fight for its survival at all costs, to justify its importance to the production as a whole, is essential to the process but it's not productive and the ideas certainly won't be executed as conceived. The constraints imposed by casting, wardrobe, make up, performance, direction, location, continuity and editing convert that pure moment of inspiration into a commercial by-product. It's the way it is. It's the only way it can be. In short, the duty of the TV writer is to capture and maintain audience share.

This leaves the TV writer with a dilemma: how does one balance creative autonomy with commercial demand? I registered for the MA programme to redefine my relationship with the audience. Until that point, the audience I wrote for felt, at least to me, like a bloated hotel guest spoilt for choice at a buffet. How was I to attract his attention? The only strategy available to me was to portray the human condition at its most exaggerated and heightened, ramp the story toward the ad break and hope they came back for more.

I needed the opportunity to engage in a conscious process within an academic environment in order to think about writing differently. I did have initial reservations about the process. Even though it neutralises the creative spirit, TV writing is also an immediate and stimulating experience where ideas are polished and pushed with urgency through a system. Sometimes

these stories engage, sometimes they don't, but they hit the screen a few weeks after conception, communicating their message and then either remain in common memory, or are quickly forgotten, but by then one is on to the next project.

In TV, the material is evolving so quickly that the head writer's job is mostly reactive, putting out fires without the time to reflect on the development of material over a period. Without immovable deadlines determined by broadcast dates would the writing process remain vital? My major concern about the MA programme was that meditating on a writing project for too long would dilute its original impulse; that it would become boring, and ultimately I would fall out of love with the material.

The initial idea for the project that became *Reyka* was the story of an undercover police unit that investigated crimes rooted in African mythology, custom and the supernatural. As stated in the proposal, "I will examine the social fabric of multi-cultural African societies, focusing on belief systems, superstition and religious practices with the purpose of reinventing the supernatural TV genre in an intrinsically South African way. I will present a unique world where witchcraft, magic and ritual violence are investigated within the framework of a procedural police TV drama series."

I participated in workshops run by David Simon, (Creator/Executive Producer: *Homicide: Life on the Street*, *The Wire* and *Treme*) on writing TV drama and his unique discourse, with strong masculine ideas treated somewhat ironically, prompted my attempts to reverse these choices and tread new ground. I decided that I wanted to write an investigative drama where the story concept of the hard working cop, driven by the intrinsic male need to penetrate a mystery and arrive at truth, is tested and challenged by having a female protagonist at its centre.

The tension between academic reflection and commercial accessibility remained throughout the writing process. It is important to signal and recognise this consideration because slowly I started to take my cue from the writing workshop and developed the confidence to write against the grain of standards of entertainment. Ultimately, my strategy was to upend the conventions of genre, character, structure, language and theme in order to create work that is worthy of the standards set by the MA in Creative Writing programme and then also compelling entertainment for a television audience in 2011.

2. Research

Screenwriting authority Syd Field asserts that it is essential to know one's subject before one can isolate it into a dramatic premise:

Action is what happens; character, who it happens to. Every screenplay dramatizes action and character. You must know who your movie is about and what happens to him or her. It is a primary concept in writing. (Field 2003: 25)

In my TV writing experience, what the project is about comes from research. To prepare for my work as story-liner and scriptwriter on SABC 1's *Yizo Yizo*, I researched the underbelly of the Johannesburg inner city for six months before I put pen to paper. I spent time in abandoned buildings; with those who hijack them, with the tenants they hold hostage and with the team of men who are sent in to evict them. I interviewed drug lords, shadowed drug dealers, drug addicts, sex workers, their clients, and the police who find it impossible to resist the dark side. It was an emotionally challenging process that shaped me as a writer, forced me to think about story in a different way, but mostly, taught me to do the groundwork and be prepared.

I started this new research process by trying to source experts in a crossover 'field' of criminology and the spirit world. This is a field that, since the advent of the new South Africa, doesn't seem to formally exist. The problem facing the criminal justice system is that witchcraft-related crimes are both under-reported, and in most instances, not identified as a specific crime by the police. The legality of some of the crimes is defensible and the policing of laws pertaining to them are impossible to establish precedent and regulate accordingly:

Between 1985 and 1995 the courts prosecuted only 109 (52 per cent) of the 209 people accused of participating in witch-killings. Twelve were given wholly suspended sentences; four, strokes with a light cane and 84 were imprisoned (for periods varying from 18 months to life). Judges often treated the belief in witchcraft as an extenuating circumstance. In the case of *State v Mathabi*, Justice van der Walt considered sentencing to death four accused who had pleaded guilty, to murder. But he accepted their claim that they had thought the deceased was a witch and reduced the penalty to five years' imprisonment, of which two years were suspended.

Moreover, judges have recognised witchcraft beliefs as suitable grounds for appeal. In 1985, for example, Neledzani Netshiavha woke after he heard a scratching sound on

his door. Neledzani picked up an axe, walked outside and chopped down an ‘animal’ hanging on the rafters of his roof. After it fell to the ground, he chopped it twice more. Villagers came to see the ‘animal’ and described it as a donkey or a large bat, but said that it later assumed the shape of an elderly man who was a reputed witch. Neledzani had killed this man. A judge of the Venda Supreme Court sentenced him to ten years imprisonment for culpable homicide. The Bloemfontein Appeal Court, however, reduced Neledzani’s sentence to four years. (Niehaus 2001: 186)

The Constitution guarantees freedom of religion but makes it illegal for: any person to label another person a witch or wizard; to claim or to pretend to have supernatural powers that can cause harm to others; to hire a ‘witch-finder’ to identify a ‘witch’; to profess a knowledge of witchcraft or to act on any advice from a ‘witch-finder’ which might harm another person suspected of being a ‘witch’. (The Witchcraft Suppression Act, No.3 of 1957)

The strategy I employed needed to be indirect. Consultations with former head of the Occult-related Crime Unit in the South African Police Service, Kobus Jonker, also known as God’s Detective, gave me insight into Satanism, the challenges of policing it, and why these practices are traditionally more violent in South Africa than elsewhere:

I think that our social structure is basically gone. That is the main concern. There are no norms for people to follow in South Africa. The parents don’t worry about the children anymore; you get the absent fathers that are never around. I call the children in primary schools ‘die sleutelhouers’ (key holders) because they come home from school with a key for their homes around their necks. Mom’s not there, she’s working, Dad’s working, there is no-one at home and they can do what they like. (Lustig 2010)

In the case of Katherine Kruger, in the “Pilot”, the material was inspired by the true incident of a woman who tried to escape a cult by stepping in front of a car:

A tall blonde, presumably a witch from Johannesburg, one night walked in front of a car on the highway to Grahamstown, after a ritual at St George's beach in Port Elizabeth. She died on the scene. The word Jesus was tattooed on her left foot and Christ on her right foot. The words Satan's Angels and the numbers 666 were engraved on her left arms. An elephant leather jewellery bag with knives usually used in Satanist rituals and Satanist jewellery were found in her left hand. She apparently wanted to sacrifice herself. She was buried as an unidentified body. (Cuhulain 2005)

What happens when the spirit world and everyday life collide? When magic leaks into the world? These ideas came out of my sessions with Jonker and the inception of Reyka as someone who possesses an intuitive gift came from Jonker's own life. His faith in his subject, and his ability to unlock it, make him not only a convincing character but also a misunderstood outsider who is much maligned by his peers. Despite this, his faith is absolute and he never questions the validity of who he is or what he is doing.

This question of legitimacy resonated deeply with another research consultant, investigative psychologist Micki Pistorius. She helped me construct a unique discourse, and her struggles with the job influenced some of my choices around character. Naked of soul, her sympathetic, yielding qualities made her an invigorating independent force, a reversal of the traditional male cops who, despite their often accepted swagger and bravado, are far less sure of themselves and more in need of affirmation and support.

Paradoxically, accessing her gift to identify and catch criminals makes Pistorius vulnerable to exposure, and she chooses to withdraw into a private anti-social life. She is protective of her identity and image, and is, possibly like Reyka, a modern depiction of a female tragic hero, alienated from her own spiritual and emotional core. In her autobiography, *Catch Me a Killer* Pistorius explains:

While every case I have worked on as a profiler has been unique, it is true to say that many serial killers have also led nomadic lives and have grown up in changing family circumstances. I do believe that my childhood experience made me more sensitive to this and more in tune with the world of serial killers. I understand relationships, I can interpret intricate hidden agendas and I am sensitive to vibes. (Pistorius 2000: 3)

Once I got to know the world and character better, I focused the second phase of fact finding on actual news stories. I wanted the cases Reyka investigates to come from real life. I was interested in how the media reports everyday news stories, how the narrative shifts and turns as the story breaks and swells and how the public gets caught up in the drama. The subjects of all four episodes are rooted in actual news stories (see References: Articles):

Episode Two – “Dummy”: In July 2009, a two week old baby, identified only as BZ Ncumani, was snatched from a maternity ward at Tygerberg Hospital. The baby's mother had been in a coma since the baby's birth and awoke to find out that he was missing. A country-

wide search failed to return the baby until a community member tipped the police off that her neighbour had given birth to a baby without going through pregnancy.

Episode Three – “Maghrib”: In January 2009, a KZN gardening contractor died a slow and painful death after eating a poisoned banana which had been left lying around in a garden to bait vervet monkey troops. The woman who planted the banana denied responsibility and retaliated by accusing the gardener of being a thief for stealing the banana that was meant for the monkeys.

Episode Four – “Swan Song”: Inspired by the drug induced deaths of South African singing sensations Brenda Fassie in May 2004, Tsakani "TK" Mhinga in May 2006, and Lebo Mathosa in October 2006, and from research into catharsis and healing which can arise from incidents of trauma.

Finally, Hollywood screenwriter, Ann Peacock (Writer: *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*) played an important role in providing me with guidance from the point of view of a screenwriter based in Hollywood. Her expert opinions, especially on character, have challenged my initial choices and impacted on subsequent decisions. An early question of race provides a good example of this. Initially, I was convinced that Reyka needed to be a black woman. In order for her to change the course of events that were embedded in African mythology I felt that she needed to be an insider, able to access the social codes and give meaning to them. Peacock's advice was to focus on the outsider and their power to dismantle social rhythms and codes. For creative, and commercial reasons (according to Peacock in the US raising finance for a show anchored by a black female lead is considerably more difficult than for a white lead) Reyka had to be white.

3. Genre

The TV drama series format suited the ideas I had for this project and became, through my understanding its limitations and scope, the ideal story unit from which to execute them. That meant: scripted entertainment of about fifty two minutes per episode, shot on a single camera. In addition, it struck me as being an art form that had experienced a massive upswing in popularity at the beginning of the 21st century and was now ripe for a reboot. As Daniel Petrie Jr., President of the Writers Guild of America, West, stated, “Right now is the golden age of TV drama.” (Quoted in Douglas 2005:1)

The terms of TV drama are dominated by genre convention, providing opportunities to engage and challenge them in distinct ways. Building a robust yet flexible show design that is eclectic in genre, motivated by character and innovative in structure, was the governing principle of my original proposal.

Much of the appeal of TV drama series in the last twenty years can be attributed to Home Box Office (HBO), not only because of their services but because they are seen by most as the leading innovator of new technologies, marketing strategies and programming concepts. With successful product like *The Sopranos*, *The Wire*, *Deadwood*, *Oz*, and recently *Boardwalk Empire*, TV drama has certainly reclaimed its credibility. This makes it a fruitful field to enter and because of its sustainability it is vigorous enough to endure a test to the norms.

In exploring the mechanisms and strategies that are specific to the genre, so different from, say, a novel, I needed to work within the limitations and possibilities of dialogue and visual elements, dependent for their ‘actualisation’ on being filmed and seen.

Genre conventions reflect changing audiences and I was insistent that this world needed to be relevant and resonate in 2011. Interrogating a multi-cultural, hybridized society where race, culture and spiritual beliefs crash against each other became the investigative pulse of this show.

World building was where I could establish the rules and impose limitations. Initially I was inspired by the popularity of the supernatural or fantasy genre, as depicted in programming like *Angel*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Heroes*, and *Supernatural*. The genre has been

inundated by American culture and discourse and I was excited by the possibility of placing this recognisable template inside a foreign setting: modern day Johannesburg.

I found that the term “genre” encompasses a central but loose grouping, and that it is not an especially useful tool for marketing a product. For example, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is part vampire story, part teen comedy, part coming of age story. *Supernatural* is domestic drama meets the supernatural. They all partake of different things in order to make themselves unique. This eclectic use of genre became an important strategy in pursuit of identity and reinvention in *Reyka*.

My earliest world building conception revolved around an antagonist who has a prophecy that warns of “magic leaking back into the world” as a result of the looming apocalypse. The villain forecasts that agents of evil are rising to bring on Armageddon, and he’s preparing his followers to hail this phenomenon. Importantly, the protagonist, Reyka, and her policing of magic through controlling it, is preventing his rise to greatness.

Character determines genre. It is Reyka’s point of view on the world that makes it worth watching. She is the guide. The audience’s prospects for transformation rest exclusively in her hands. Therefore, it is in how she impacts on the world that we will understand and engage with it.

The character imposes limitations on the world, and shapes the audience’s experience of it. Once this truth was realised, a standard use of genre proved unsuccessful. The character would build the world. Her intrinsic nature would defy the conventions of the supernatural genre and transform it into her own personalised version of what it could become. At this point, genre became a fluid concept which I was constantly changing and redefining.

Led by the character’s investigative impulses, the structural design of the genre shifted to incorporate elements of the police procedural. I was inspired by the choices, in relation to tone, character and language, of an author who started off writing so called “pulp fiction”. The swift-moving hardboiled style of Raymond Chandler (*The Big Sleep*), with sharp rat-a-tat dialogue, and plots so complex and open ended was a decisive inspiration.

I discovered, through Chandler, that the ubiquitous need to explain things naturalistically won’t work for my project. The strategy became to hold back on attempted explanations and let the mystery build in order to work against and resonate with the spirit of bizarreness.

There was a need to not satisfy the reader's desire for resolution or climax and make the links between imagery and symbol more expressive than they already are. Creative ambiguity was critical to appreciating Reyka's world.

To further challenge genre convention I would utilise twisting narratives, which led me to surrealism, subconscious, dream logic and its pervasive use in the films of David Lynch (*Blue Velvet*, *Mulholland Drive*). It can be argued that the ideal surrealist medium is film, because film most closely resembles the structure of dreams. Lynch stimulated me to engage with the audience differently, to consider the interior mind as a canvass, and to be uncompromising about the expression of imagery and the telling of stories.

"I love dream logic; I just like the way dreams go. But I have hardly ever gotten ideas from dreams. I get more ideas from music, or from just walking around." (Lynch 2006: 63)

In Lynch's world ideas are the first piece of the puzzle that serve as indication of the rest. "But it comes, for me, in fragments. That first fragment is like the Rosetta Stone." (Lynch 2006: 23).

Similarly Reyka's world is a puzzle where there is lots of evidence but in the end only some of the clues will be relevant. It is striving to be viewer-created material, where you discover only what it means to you. The affect is hypnotic. There is no explanation. There may not even be a mystery,

In my previous screen writing work I have been interested in the positioning of an "outlaw heroine" at the centre of the story. In my short film, *Husk* (Palm d'Or Nomination and Official Selection, Festival de Cannes 1999) the positioning of a teenage female protagonist at the centre of a seemingly benign situation propels the action toward a venomous conclusion. In *Deadwood* it is the strong rebellious female anti-heroes who propel the action forward and are accountable for their choices. Unlike Jane Tennison (*Prime Suspect*), who realises that surviving and thriving in a male dominated profession is dependent on becoming like the men around her, Reyka is not trying to prove herself to her male colleagues. She is aware that truth is gained through insight outside of herself, and she's a reluctant participant in this.

Reyka became the antithesis to David Simon's cop-hero; where his boozy and ballsy Jimmy McNulty (*The Wire*) takes what he wants, asserts his individualism and is celebrated as a

source of knowledge, Reyka lets wisdom pass through her, deferential to a higher power. I resolved to challenge the archetype of the tough as nails, cynical cop character and, using genre and structure, make her a seductive and self conscious incarnation, like Gregory House (*House*) or Tony Soprano (*The Sopranos*).

In establishing and adjusting the rules of genre, I actively sought to limit her reach and contact with the world. This being a South African context, and her being a white woman in her mid thirties, served this approach. Her interaction with the cases she investigates positions her as an outsider. The police procedural conventions evolved because Reyka was unable to engage fully with her work and give reliable meaning to the symbols it threw up. The audience experiences the cases through her limited understanding of them, and is given a fresh outlook on the material. As a perceptive observer of human nature, Reyka became a conduit for our empathy in relation to the social codes at play.

At this point in the process, I drew on the use of social commentary in film and paid special attention to the social realism of Ken Loach (*Bread and Roses*), the controversial view of contemporary political and cultural issues in Oliver Stone's films (*Nixon*) and the promotion of Michael Moore's political beliefs in his documentaries (*Fahrenheit 9/11*). However, I didn't want to construct a narrative for the purposes of social comment. My primary goal has always been to entertain, not to inform. But I realised there was a layer of discourse that I had yet to mine. By putting pressure on accepted social codes I could get characters to react in defence of their own identity and conflict would ensue.

In "Dummy", the case of the kidnapped baby, I was able to get seemingly unrelated characters to "stand up on a soap box" and articulate their side of the story. I took a universally accepted set up, thrust it into a specific time and place, and observed how we as South Africans thrash about in our attempts to communicate and understand each other. The audience starts to recognise themselves within the Venn diagram of the social issue at stake and they adopt ownership of a point of view. They start to root for a possible outcome and are emotionally engaged by its conclusion. This is TV writing at its most effective and it became a strategy that I actively worked at achieving.

I started to construct the episodes around a particular issue. In each case, it was important to clarify the dramatic question: How could a baby be stolen out of a maternity ward? Then I could examine the social structure of a hospital and give voice to opposing sides of the

debate. Tension was inevitable and in taking the story to an open ended conclusion, few answers were given. But what was left behind was a sense of who we are as people. How we behave in crisis and how we are defined by, and in this particular episode, the way in which we look after our children.

An important consideration in terms of genre was the choice of high profile cases. This was done partly to distinguish the material from conventional police procedurals (*Homicide: Life on the Street*) but also to diversify the range of social codes that could be explored. By choosing to focus the cases on the daughter of a member of parliament, the first African woman in space, a bestselling novelist and popular rhythm and blues singer, I could reflect on a range of social patterns and find unexpected contrasts and similarities.

Through challenging genre convention I started to reinvent a new template for myself. The evolution from supernatural to police procedural to social commentary enriched the material and made it resonate with possibility and contrast. As a result, it became more difficult to categorise and therefore more independent of spirit and lighter of touch. I was very taken by the idea of giving earnest material a funny bone. It was a liberating choice and changed the outlook of the project. My concerns about audience and accessibility were moderated and I started to enjoy the creative process more than before.

4. Character

Director Elia Kazan channelled his bruising and unbridled creative voice into three of the most important American films of the 1950s, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *On the Waterfront*, and *East of Eden*.

As a commentator on the craft of film making, few have stimulated my understanding of character as Kazan has. In most cases, texts on the theory of screenwriting lack purpose or value, and end up either as minor league journeys through a career in film writing or dreary technical analysis of the craft – neither of which elevate the subject to the status of art form.

The reason why William Goldman's *Adventures in the Screen Trade* is one of the very few books on screen writing worth reading is because Goldman paid his dues and earned success working in the movie business, culminating in two important contributions to American cinema, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (Academy Award; Original Screenplay 1969) and *All the President's Men* (Academy Award; Adapted Screenplay 1976). His observations come from the trenches, so to speak. This too is undoubtedly the case with Kazan.

I will never forget the impact Kazan's vigorous and uncompromising views on character had on me as a young writer. Kazan was insistent on finding personal empathy and connection within his character's internal life. The antithesis can be seen in the work of Stanley Kubrick (*2001: A Space Odyssey*), whose films are often perceived as a reflection of his obsessive and perfectionist nature. Kubrick seems to treat his characters as though studying an insect under a microscope with meticulous attention to detail. Kazan, however, chooses his subjects to express personal and social events and situations that he is familiar with. He describes his thought process before taking on a project:

I don't move unless I have some empathy with the basic theme. In some way the channel of the film should also be in my own life. I start with an instinct. With *East of Eden* ... it's really the story of my father and me, and I didn't realize it for a long time... In some subtle or not-so-subtle way, every film is autobiographical. A thing in my life is expressed by the essence of the film. Then I know it experientially, not just mentally. I've got to feel that it's in some way about me, some way about my struggles, some way about my pain, my hopes. (Stevens, Jr. 2006: 389)

However this critical approach comes at a risk. Personalised engagement breeds self indulgence and produces dull material. It became important to exercise restraint and caution. As E.M. Forster states in his treatise, *Aspects of the Novel*, “the novelist who betrays too much interest in his own method can never be more than interesting; he has given up the creation of character and summoned us to help analyze his own mind, and a heavy drop in the emotional thermometer results.” (Forster 1962: 83)

I set about making Reyka a character I could identify with. Her contradictions and flaws would organically reflect and become extremities of my own. As a creator of character there could be no other way. The MA programme was the first opportunity I had to communicate with an audience on my terms and share a common memory.

The preliminary process of writing and receiving feedback pushed me in directions I didn’t envisage and the project developed its own momentum. Conceptually, the character went from a sci-fi to an action hero. On reflection the sci-fi conventions meant that fate and hidden forces beyond Reyka’s control dictate the narrative rhythms and structure. This felt at odds with the need to create a complex dramatic character.

Likewise, the visceral archetype of the action hero prevented the exploration of self, and employment of ambiguity in the character. Reyka needed to be someone who’s dangerous to know, but who we want to know on an empathetic level, an ambivalent personality who makes us laugh as quickly as she repulses us. We should feel rewarded by knowing her, and become complicit in the primary conflict of her life. These initial incarnations served too few of those dramatic needs. Ultimately the character became a flawed and ambivalent hero of a comedy/drama who is motivated by unresolved events in her past. She became real when I was able to voice personal questions and emotions through her.

I needed to lay claim to my voice before I could introduce a unique character. I decided to focus in on the details and looked at the dramatic possibilities that could emerge from anxiety. I took obsessive-compulsive disorder as a starting point and investigated how it could interfere with a character’s everyday life. It felt like an appropriate entry point into her mind and yet, in early drafts, Reyka’s “fear of blue” was simply a quirky tic which had little impact on the dramatic action. It was not until I linked it to the visual cue of Angus Speelman’s maid’s uniform in the “Jukebox Jeopardy” flashback sequences that it took on substantial meaning and power.

In the opening scenes of the “Pilot”, when we are first introduced to the character, she is seen stalking her daughter and arriving drunk at her own disciplinary hearing. We are told that this situation comes as a result of her recent behaviour in Cape Town, where she solicits sex, is arrested for drunk driving, assaults a policeman and breaks into a stranger’s house. She also, importantly, solves the case. This tension between dysfunction and brilliance, between moral ambiguity and integrity, has always fascinated me and is integral to Reyka’s journey.

This idea challenges the Hollywood notion of the empathetic character that the audience is going to fall in love with. Few main characters are as repulsive and as human as Tony Soprano (*The Sopranos*) and Dexter Morgan (*Dexter*). They are both daring and provocative incarnations of the modern anti-hero and are asking new questions of the audience, like: ‘Why are you rooting for a mass murderer, and hoping against all hope that I get away with it?’

With Reyka I wanted to challenge this recent trend toward ‘the seductive anti-hero who will kill or betray to protect himself or his family’ archetype. Her choices are light weight and domestic in comparison, but once we understand more about why she is who she is in the Speelman flashbacks her behaviour takes on a more disconcerting timbre.

I started to discover who Reyka could be through my own confessional process. This meant I could be patient and wait for her to reveal herself to me. At her core, she is a shy observer, not a woman of action. I didn’t intentionally intellectualize the complexity of her personality or contrive literary references onto her. I trusted that imposing choice and action on her would be denying her potential for surprise. By placing her at the centre of the stories, as the emotional conscience, I gave her all the space she needed to grow and impact on the world.

The subject of writing for the theatre or screen defies easily formulated rules. The best rule of screen and play writing was given to me by John Howard Lawson, a onetime friend. It’s simple unity from climax. Everything should build to the climax. But all I know about script preparation urges me to make no rules, although there are some hints, tools of the trade, that have been useful for me.

One of these is ‘Have your central character in every scene.’ This is a way of ensuring unity to the work and keeping the focus sharp. Another is; ‘Look for the contradictions in every character, especially in your heroes and villains. No one should be what they first seem to be. Surprise the audience.’ (Kazan 2009: 260)

What a simple, yet crucial, observation on storytelling and character. As Reyka would appear in every scene, except in the teasers that start each episode, she needed to be the point of view through which the audience would experience this world.

In *Aspects of the Novel*, Forster introduced the notion of “round” characters who are capable of surprise, contradiction, and change; they are representations of human beings in all of their complexity:

The test of a round character is whether it is capable of surprising in a convincing way. If it never surprises, it is flat. If it does not convince, it is a flat pretending to be round. It has the incalculability of life about it—life within the pages of a book.

(Forster 1962: 81)

Getting to grips with the shading within Reyka became harder once I introduced the idea that she is driven by a need to negotiate through her own childhood trauma. In the “Pilot”, in hot pursuit of Alfonso Zwanga, Reyka makes a decision to hunt him down, alone. She orders Nkabinde to get back-up and she traps the serial killer in a shed. But she is unable to shoot him, unable to destroy the “monster” that has held power over her for years, unable to finish the job because, in this guise, he is an innocent looking boy who offers her the gift of a blue ladybird.

On one level this confrontation with a childhood memory justifies why she is like she is, with all her idiosyncrasies and defence mechanisms, but on a deeper level, it also explains how she is able to do what she does. Healing derived from trauma is a central theme in the piece and is explored through the way that she accesses her gift of intuition to solve cases. This trauma stays unresolved until she stops questioning her legitimacy. Once she demystifies the power the experiences in the cellar have over her, she is able to move on with her life, symbolised by her walking into the swan pool at the story’s resolution.

An important consideration was the choice to work on characters that don’t simply fit genre expectations. In this regard I examined the notion of “buddy cop”. The “buddy cop” is a subgenre of buddy films and crime films with plots usually involving two men of very different and conflicting personalities who are forced to work together to solve a crime and/or defeat criminals, sometimes learning from each other in the process.

Reyka and Nkabinde is somewhat of a departure from the “buddy cop” template established with agents Fox Mulder and Dana Scully in *The X-Files* in that Reyka was in charge and that has been reversed. The younger man has been charged with supervising his mentor. This is the central tension between them and makes Reyka’s life difficult because, although she is a maverick, she is constantly under scrutiny, on probation as it were. Instead of Nkabinde being afforded the role of sidekick, his is more that of parole officer.

In addition, the strategy on support characters was to provide a kind of kaleidoscopic view of a country in transition: priests, doctors, nurses, gardeners, hotel staff, teachers, parents, lawyers and the police force, both urban and rural. With few exceptions, these characters are opinionated and express their views with verbal conviction. They are positioned in deep contrast to Reyka who is mostly quiet, absorbing patterns and detail.

Ultimately, they are reflections of the main character, providing signals to the audience about Reyka’s interior. In many ways they are akin to a Greek chorus, who comment on the dramatic action. The difference of course is that in my text they are individualised and stimulate argument based on how they view the issue at hand.

5. Structure

The final episode of *The Sopranos* (“Made in America”; aired on HBO, June 10, 2007), the culmination of six seasons of epic storytelling, polarised fans and caused an uproar in social media. Most of this reaction was centred on the enigmatic final scene. Writer/Director of “Made in America”, David Chase has made various comments about the finale; however, he has not provided an explanation to the meaning of the final scene.

In his first interview after the broadcast of the finale with New Jersey paper, *The Star Ledger*, Chase stated:

I have no interest in explaining, defending, reinterpreting, or adding to what is there. No one was trying to be audacious, honest to God. We did what we thought we had to do. No one was trying to blow people's minds, or thinking, 'Wow, this'll piss them off.' People get the impression that you're trying to fuck with them and it's not true. You're trying to entertain them. Anybody who wants to watch it, it's all there.
(Sepinwall 2007)

In order to upend the conventions of television drama, the strategy became to construct a show design and episode template that would complement the hybridised concoction of genres and anti-heroic use of characters while ensuring that the promise of the first episode was being fulfilled, that the narrative, in Chase’s words, was “all there”.

Pressure is essential. True character is revealed in the choices a human being makes under pressure. Structure creates pressure. The ultimate challenge for a screenwriter is to build dramatic action toward a unified climax. It’s about exploiting rhythm; tightening and releasing tension so that the audience is engaged for the duration of the journey. In this way, structure is story:

Structure is a selection of events from the character’s life stories that is composed into a strategic sequence to arouse specific emotions and to express a specific view of life.
(McKee 1998: 33)

With Reyka I worked on creating a structure that could fit the specific requirements of a TV drama series that investigated internal conflict and revolved around a semi-passive protagonist. The standard three act structure used for feature films would not suffice. Its basic principles are: inciting incident, complication, crisis, climax and resolution – useful for action

adventure movies, too prescriptive for a story that uses minimalist technique to build toward open endings. Reyka was to be made up of a similar DNA to what McKee refers to as “mini-plot”:

As the word suggests, minimalism means that the writer begins with the elements of Classical Design but then reduces them – shrinking or compressing, trimming or truncating the prominent features of the Arch-plot. I call this set of minimalist variations Mini-plot. Mini-plot does not mean no plot, for its story must be beautifully executed as an arch-plot. Rather, minimalism strives for simplicity and economy while retaining enough of the classical that the film will still satisfy the audience, sending them out of the cinema thinking, “What a good story!” (McKee 1998: 46)

There has been a trend in recent TV drama series (*Carnivale*, *The Wire*, and *Treme*) toward long arc storylines, where a grand arc narrative would extend across a twelve part episode framework and conclude on a climactic cliff-hanger, which would propel the narrative into the forthcoming season.

In an attempt to establish a unique story model I drew on the success of this convention and combined it with an efficient and modular template where storylines were resolved within the confines of each episode (*House*, *Life*, and *Boston Legal*). I discovered that a hybrid story design would suit the open ended, dream-like quality of the material and would provide the most adventurous canvass to explore Reyka’s character.

The “Pilot” would be the prototype for the series. The strategy was to introduce the audience to the main character (and, via flashbacks, to the show’s storytelling strategy), and leave them with all kinds of intriguing questions about not just what was going to happen to her, but what kind of show we were watching in the first place.

Structurally, the “Pilot” deals with a contained case, opening with a teaser, and followed by four acts, comprising forty to fifty scenes, scripted at around fifty-two pages. It is structured around twenty four story beats; with six beats per act. Each narrative consists of A, B and C stories.

A story beat can be defined as the next logical coil in a grand helix of dramatic tension:

This tension may or may not be the result of conflict between people on the screen – it doesn’t necessarily have to be at the level of plot (though plot suspense is no bad

thing). It is rather a tension in the imagination of the audience that leads to feelings of curiosity, suspense and apprehension (for example the audience being torn between contradictory elements of a character). (Mackendrick 2004: 11)

Each subsequent episode would be determined by the DNA established in the pilot, but, like wayward offspring, would venture into undiscovered terrain to see what possibilities existed away from the order of the maternal base. This explains the acceleration of pace and energy in episodes two to four. Their job is not to orientate the audience. Their job is to deliver a weekly dose of *Reyka* that fulfils all the expectations created in the viewer by the pilot.

The storylines were structured to maximise the audience's time with Reyka. The following breakdown serves to illustrate the technical considerations that go into fulfilling the promise made to the viewer:

The A story: the engine room of the episode, where Reyka investigates and solves each case, consists of sixteen of the twenty four beats. This is a self contained case which is introduced in the teaser and investigated over the course of the four acts, resolving in the final beat of the episode. The case is never referred to again in the series.

The B story: the dramatic skin of the episode, where layers of Reyka's character and her long-arc are unravelled, making up six of the twenty four beats. This arc will focus on her internal journey and will flash back to the experiences in the cellar with Angus Speelman.

The C story: the soul of the episode, where Reyka's relationship with Nkabinde will come to the fore and reveal something quirky, funny or poignant about their partnership. It will comprise two of the twenty four beats.

The next step in the process was to write detailed story treatments for each episode. These scene by scene breakdowns are a technical document intended as a blueprint from which to script the episode. They are important as a way to test the episode's architecture: character and story continuity, major plot points, tone, climaxes, aims, turns, reversals, props, research and texture.

This treatment document is essential for television writing and ensures that all departments of production have a strong sense of the requirements needed for an episode. Mainly, of course, it gives the writer a secure foundation from which to write the script. The hope is that, once

the treatment is approved, all that is needed is to indicate action and put voices to the characters.

Interestingly, this part of the process made my interactions with the MA workshop extremely frustrating at times. The treatments are, and always will be, technical blueprints for the writer to use as a guide. They are not meant to be appreciated or critiqued as a piece of creative writing. However, it was essential to my writing process that I completed the treatments before I scripted the episodes. As a result I submitted them to the group for commentary and analysis. The workshop candidates mostly found them bewildering and impossible to comment on, which meant I was gaining no objective insight into the work. Once I submitted drafts of the actual scripts, however, the class were fully engaged and I benefitted greatly from the feedback.

In order to create uniformity for each episode I designed a template for the A story:

Teaser: the case is introduced, setting up the dramatic question for the episode and stimulating the visual world of the show back into the audience's consciousness. These scenes are the only ones where Reyka doesn't feature.

Act 1: Reyka's world is introduced, focusing on her contradictions and ability to interpret the crime scene. She will resist using her skills, but is instinctively drawn into the ambiguity of the case and introduced to the "community": the victims, their families or those impacted on by the crime.

Act 2: Reyka's first findings will be wrong, alienating herself from the "community", and her status as an outsider will throw her into crisis.

Act 3: Reyka tries everything but the case remains open. The spiritual unity of the "community" is at stake and Reyka misinterprets what she sees, will do something unexpected or obnoxious and her actions threaten to ruin the case.

Act 4: The problem is one that only Reyka (and Nkabinde) can solve and through a synthesis of their personalities and skills, the case is closed and unity is restored to the "community".

The manipulation of structure was especially significant in the treatment of Reyka's B story, the scenes in the cellar with Angus Speelman. These shifts in time were partly designed to inform the viewer about a very specific part of her back story – nine days that impacted on

her, that resonate in the present and from which we, in these four episodes, will see her escape.

This time shifting device references the use of flashbacks in *Dexter* which aim to show how he came to be the serial killer he is. The visual identity of the cellar has a hypnotic and disorientating quality, reinforced by repetition. For most of the scenes, Reyka and Angus watch their favourite TV show, “Jukebox Jeopardy”. The ambivalence of childhood memory is rooted in this TV programme.

Reyka recalls details with ease, her mind gets stuck in repetition, she is unable to release herself from the power that those images have over her. Her current fears are represented within the game show reality. It is a grotesque and horrifying sequence of questions and answers that she is unable to escape.

Paradoxically this childhood trauma is also what gives Reyka her healing ability. As her mind becomes stuck on repeat, she must focus on patterns to unfreeze it, so to speak. Training her mind to interpret patterns gives her insight into human behaviour which helps her solve the cases.

The handling of the ending of each episode is ambiguous. On one level it concludes the A story with an ironic nod to a mainstream audience’s need for closure. The dramatic question of the episode is answered, but not quite as expected. In contrast, the B story is unclear and the contrapuntal placement makes the point: that the actual ending is neither of these two options.

An actual Reyka ending intends to give meaning to the information created by the structure and show design but leaves the audience in an indeterminate state, partially satisfied that they’ve been told a story from beginning, middle to end, but left reaching around in the dark as though having woken suddenly from a dream.

The final scene of *The Sopranos* was created and designed for fans of the show. It is a glorious denouement to the greatest TV show in history, and is as complete an ending as the show deserved. For a start, it is perfect in its construction. Every detail is positioned for optimal meaning: the menus, Journey’s “Don’t Stop Believin’” playing on the jukebox, the bowl of onion rings, Meadow struggling to park her car, and the visual foreshadowing of the Man in Member’s Only Jacket and his movement to the bathroom and the anonymous point

of view shot from the door of the diner to set up the expectation/suspicion that in a few seconds from now Meadow will witness her father's murder. The final few minutes of Tony Soprano's life are seen as a looping pattern as he watches the door to the diner open, as the bell rings, patrons enter, and the members of his family enter, sit and comment on the events of the day. When Soprano glances up that final time, the screen cuts to black, the song stops dead, and *The Sopranos* ends.

Owen Gleiberman of *Entertainment Weekly* called "Made in America" "the perfect ending" and wrote about the final scene: "One's shock of that cut to black, the marvelous way it got you to roll the scene over, again and again, in your mind's eye. Rather than bringing the series to a close, that blackout made *The Sopranos* live forever." (Gleiberman 2008)

6. Language

Speech reflects the interiority of character:

...what one should do is to keep an eye always on the necessary or the probable; so that whenever such-and-such a personage says or does such-and-such a thing it shall be the probable or necessary result of his character... (Aristotle 1963: 26)

Reyka is most comfortable being mute, but she is forced into encounters with people who insist on projecting language onto her. In childhood she is abducted and kept in a cellar by a man who is preoccupied with role playing. He gets Reyka to play female archetypes (the mother, the wife) and manipulates the game so that she either chooses to express the point of view of this character or risks disappointing him. These roles are expressed in adult language that she doesn't understand which confuses her and impacts on her understanding of relationships, compassion and empathy as an adult.

In addition, Angus Speelman is addicted to a TV game show, "Jukebox Jeopardy", which he insists Reyka watches with him. It is a music quiz show where contestants have to guess the title and artist of songs. The host, Eugene Neff, bombards the viewers with the force of his ebullient personality and goads the contestants to express themselves. This surreal sonic nightmare is embedded in Reyka's psyche and explains her resistance to language as an adult.

As an investigative psychologist, Reyka utilises technical language to get at the truth. However, like a forensic scientist, she is only concerned with the cold facts, the detail that she believes language and expression conceals. In *Steeped in Blood: the Life and Times of a Forensic Scientist*, David Klatzow describes a comparable objective:

Forensic science exposes the frailties of humankind, leaving behind only the naked truth about people. When someone ends up dead or in a situation beyond their control, the veneer of civilisation drops away, social airs and graces evaporate and the reality of life is what is left for the forensic scientist to investigate. (Klatzow 2010: 197)

For Reyka, language is deception. Her identity and self preservation are connected to her experiences in the cellar where distrust for language was instilled in her. As a result, eloquence and persuasion makes her feel claustrophobic and out of control. Her communication with Reyjeanne, her daughter, is either passive, viewed from the muted distance of a mother watching her child at school, or in the heightened context of "Jukebox

Jeopardy” where Reyjeanne, who articulates herself like an assertive adult, confesses her private life to the TV audience as one might do as a special guest on a talk show.

Other than when she has been drinking, when anyone’s a potential audience, Reyka only articulates her thoughts and feelings in the scenes with Nkabinde. Their snappy and clear banter, refined over years of working together, is a rare form of human connection for her. This intellectual sparring has a healing quality and is the only time that we see Reyka relaxed and content.

When it comes to language, *Reyka* is also interested in the inner workings of various South African social groups and the rules and codes that govern them. Each group has their own language full of slang and jargon. It is when these contrasting social codes collide that the characters in *Reyka* feel compelled to express themselves and lay claim to their identity. This is an interesting attempt at creating authenticity and a testament to how much we use language to define ourselves and the roles we occupy.

The world of books, movies and television is one of influence. Everything is derivative of something else and contains the subtle or obvious imprint of other creations that have come and gone in the past. The intention was to embrace this but determine a new identity – a new South African language which is not an extension of Americanised English.

In working with language the intention was to make the dialogue lean and muscular but with a recognisable vernacular that aligns it intrinsically with a specific time and place. This stylised use of language, with its local rhythms and identity, gives it unique character.

There are elements of social satire that sit in the language that people speak. In this project I wanted to explore the extent to which American phraseology has seeped into our identity and to understand whether it is possible to explore a South African context without falling into that popular culture discourse.

The “Pilot” best illustrates how the construction of dialogue seeks to capture everyday language in a satirical way. The characters are so steeped in their own history, and their use of language contrasts so explicitly, that deeper exploration into society is possible as the linguistic tensions come to the fore.

Rory Philander is a cop from the Cape Flats who speaks in a sincere, homespun vernacular which is in conflict with the precocious pop cultural mockery of Katherine Kruger.

Chairman, Pre-Paid, Nana and Ezekiel represent a small town mythology and they use figurative language that conveys the languid pace of the rural setting. In addition, their detached discourse gives the maize fields a gothic quality. This is held in deep contrast to the frenzied seduction of Eugene Neff on “Jukebox Jeopardy” who uses repetition and false charm to unsettle and probe. Angus Speelman’s dialogue is lean and direct, which gives it a hypnotic quality, and his questioning of Reyka forces her to respond with artist’s names, evoking a kind of surreal pop cultural gibberish.

This exaggerated use of different South African registers enables the writer to construct identity and therefore comment on it, through the use of language. This element of satire intends to elevate the work into the field of “comedy of manners.”

7. Theme

Reyka addresses a number of psychological, philosophical, social and political themes that relate to issues of race, class, religion, family, gender, sexuality and crime. The story is also an allegory that draws explicit parallels between the struggle of a country to liberate itself from an oppressive regime and a young woman's journey to negotiate her way through post traumatic stress.

Plot, structure and character illuminate theme. The use of a fast paced story, accelerated by its momentum-driven structure, and propelled forward by a truth seeking protagonist, enhances the story's ability to resonate with profound common concerns. This unique show design manifests a 'deep structure' of issues that relate to questions around what it means to be human in contemporary South Africa.

The teasers encapsulate the major themes of each episode. In the "Pilot", Amy Self is fleeing and takes her own life instead of being hunted down. This plot point introduces the dramatic question: "Who is Amy running from?" and sets up one of the grand themes of the series: individual desire versus subordination to the group's goals.

Katherine and Amy join the cult as a way of expressing their individuality but find that the group's goals destroy their identity and dreams. In this instance, the group is portrayed as an unforgiving master who strips away all the vitality and personality that makes us human.

In "Dummy", a baby is abducted from a maternity ward. The episode is procedural, dealing with the mechanics of the investigation and the discovery of what happened to the baby. However, deeper tensions revolve around the question of parenthood.

Reyka is a reluctant and careless mother who shadows her daughter and does surveillance on her ex-husband's new partner. This behaviour is as a result of an "incestuous" role-playing dynamic which was established with her abductor when she was nine years old. Reyka is not the only negligent caregiver in the story. The hospital fails to protect the child, the parents may or may not be complicit in his abduction, if they are in fact the parents at all, and a nurse, having suffered personal loss, is so filled with maternal kindness that she breaks the laws of nature.

The point of conflict in "Maghrib" centres on whether a homeowner, in her attempt to secure her property, is culpable in the death of a gardener she kills with a banana laced with poison.

On the surface, this event exposes issues of miscommunication, intolerance, humility and entitlement. The family of the deceased want accountability, while the homeowner denies all liability, claiming that the gardener stole the banana thus committing theft. This set up is intended to show how we live in a country where social codes are firmly entrenched and divide us.

On another level the story enhances one of the other grand themes of the series: damage and healing. The banana is a symbol of infection that denotes the fear connected to the HIV needle. In *Three-Letter Plague* Jonny Steinberg relays some perspectives of a rural Transkei community:

“One person suggested that the food be given to an old-age home in KwaThema,” Hermann told me. “Others said no, it is not safe to do that because the whites may inject this food with poison in order to kill our old people. A few years later, a story circulated in South Africa. You know those oranges that look like they have blood inside, the ones with the red juice? I think they are called blood oranges. The story went round that those oranges have had HIV injected into them and that if you eat them you will get HIV.” (Steinberg 2008: 154-155)

The gardener’s family seek accountability for his loss. For healing to take place, they need Marlene to acknowledge the damage and her complicity in it. The tensions between them serve to illustrate that the resolution of crime often only touches the surface of more abiding issues. It is not important whether Marlene will be charged with culpable homicide and go to jail for her actions. What the episode seeks to examine is the impact a self serving individual, who in Marlene’s case is a model of achievement and success, has on society at large. Even if she locks herself in the house and avoids social contact, can she avoid disturbing the whole?

As South Africans we have lost a sense of community and belonging. Isolated and driven to succeed in a consumer market, individual goals are held in higher esteem than what’s best for the group. This episode is a caution that the relentless pursuit of individual desire will invalidate the communal need for rituals like mourning and grief, and will detach us from what makes us intrinsically human.

In “Swan Song”, moments before her wedding ceremony, a bride has a powerful erotic encounter with what she claims is a bird. Reyka is sent to find out the truth and she is forced into a confrontation with her own unresolved past.

This psychological terrain is the ultimate challenge for Reyka because she is forced to access her own trauma, suffered twenty-five years ago, in order to make sense of and heal a victim who suffered hers twenty-five minutes ago. In “Leda and the Swan”, Yeats asks:

So mastered by the brute blood of the air,
Did she put on his knowledge with his power? (Yeats 1994: 182)

It could be argued that in this poem, Yeats tackles, amongst other things, issues of rape, bestiality, and, for lack of a better phrase, sex communication with the divine. Add to that the controversial notion of psychological healing emerging from the aftermath of trauma. The intention was to explore these themes in the context of an unreliable victim who has good reason to “cry wolf!” as it were, and make up a story that would result in her wedding being called off.

After her attack, Baby is transformed. Gone is the anxious and erratic substance abuser, yielding to her family’s wishes by getting married. Instead, we follow the journey of a young woman who seems to wake from a coma and is trying to understand how she got there. This psychological rebirth is analysed in the context of her having suffered a violent attack, and mirrors Reyka’s inability to resolve her childhood experiences well into adulthood.

The series represents an earnest moral inquiry distinguished by both ambiguous and open ended circumstance, profound central themes and a deep vein of surrealism. It concludes with the visual suggestion of Reyka liberating herself from the power that Angus Speelman has held over her by wading into the swan pool and moving on with her life.

8. Edit

Reyka can be viewed as a four-part TV drama series where Reyka's long arc, in which she confronts her demons, concludes and is resolved at the end of episode four. Alternatively, the project can be seen as having established a modular template with four self contained episodes that serve as the prototypes for many more to come.

Throughout the MA programme thinking about choice and reflecting on the material exercised my critical eye and I learnt to edit my own work. In *Adventures in the Screen Trade*, William Goldman illuminates William Faulkner's phrase "In writing, you must kill all your darlings" (Goldman 1983: 195) as a way to explain what he believes is the single most important lesson to be learned about writing for the screen: screenplays are structure. And structure is about what you leave out.

One of the early stories that I submitted to the writing workshop, and subsequently wrote the script for, was the projected second episode of the series. Reyka travels to a backwater town to investigate the strange occurrence of a preacher who loses his life after being bitten by a black mamba. The preacher encounters the snake after paying a visit to an old farmer who has summoned him to help exorcise a ghost that he believes lives in the house.

As the whole started to take shape I discovered the identity of a typical Reyka episode. I could determine what elements were true to the character and the overall strategy of the material and what were not. Subsequently, in cleaning up the final product I had to make robust choices about what to eliminate. I decided to 'kill my darling' and leave this snake episode out of the final submission. I considered attaching the episode as an appendix to the project but choose to let the final product speak for itself as it would be expected to do when up on the screen.

There came a point in the process when I realised that the project was reaching its end. It certainly didn't happen as planned and I was guided by the conflict in the Angus Speelman storyline. What didn't occur to me until I wrote the scenes was that the organic conclusion to the Reyka long arc is when she is rescued from the cellar by the police. After Reyka smashes the TV set and destroys the role playing game between them, it is simply a matter of time before she is either discovered by the police or killed by Speelman. I could feel that Reyka was reaching a point of psychological and emotional closure, and unlike, say, in the Grimm's

fairy tale *Hansel and Gretel* where we must see the witch burned in the oven to get a cathartic resolution, once the audience realises that Speelman won't kill Reyka, the story is over.

9. Production/Publication

The intention behind the writing is and always has been to get the scripts produced and broadcast to a television audience. My major concern is that the material will struggle to find an audience in South Africa, in which case local commissioning editors may be reluctant to take on the project.

I won't focus on getting it produced locally and will instead utilise my contacts internationally to see if there is interest in a story set in South Africa. The next phase of development may prove to be a new beginning and the basis for a different type of project in order to free myself from a specific audience which can impose restrictions.

It was suggested in my final MA workshop that if all else fails I should take the existing world, characters and storylines and turn the material into a novel. I met with Andrea Natrass of Publishing and Permissions at Pan Macmillan, and pitched the series to her as a potential novel. She read the "Pilot" and "Dummy" and sent back the following feedback:

It's strong and intriguing material, though obviously written in a form that would need considerable adaptation and expansion to take shape as a novel. I like the complexity of Reyka's character and there is a depth (and past) to her that lends itself to being expanded on in the context of a book. The cases have great potential too in terms of the details which could be unpacked as well as their wider resonances. The distinctively South African flavour also permeates the writing in a way that I like.

Based on her response, I have decided to write the first three chapters of *Reyka*, the novel, and submit them as a starting point for evaluation.

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Appendix:

The Witchcraft Suppression Act, No.3 of 1957.

WITCHCRAFT SUPPRESSION ACT
NO. 3 OF 1957

[ASSENTED TO 19 FEBRUARY, 1957]

[DATE OF COMMENCEMENT: 22 FEBRUARY, 1957]

(English text signed by the Governor-General)

as amended by

Witchcraft Suppression Amendment Act, No. 50 of 1970

ACT

To provide for the suppression of the practice of witchcraft and similar practices.

1. Offences relating to the practice of witchcraft and similar practices.—Any person who—

- (a) imputes to any other person the causing, by supernatural means, of any disease in or injury or damage to any person or thing, or who names or indicates any other person as a wizard;
- (b) in circumstances indicating that he professes or pretends to use any supernatural power, witchcraft, sorcery, enchantment or conjuration, imputes the cause of death of, injury or grief to, disease in, damage to or disappearance of any person or thing to any other person;
- (c) employs or solicits any witchdoctor, witch-finder or any other person to name or indicate any person as a wizard;
- (d) professes a knowledge of witchcraft, or the use of charms, and advises any person how to bewitch, injure or damage any person or thing, or supplies any person with any pretended means of witchcraft;
- (e) on the advice of any witchdoctor, witch-finder or other person or on the ground of any pretended knowledge of witchcraft, uses or causes to be put into operation any means or process which, in accordance with such advice or his own belief, is calculated to injure or damage any person or thing;
- (f) for gain pretends to exercise or use any supernatural power, witchcraft, sorcery, enchantment or conjuration, or undertakes to tell fortunes, or pretends from his skill in or knowledge of any occult science to discover where and in what manner anything supposed to have been stolen or lost may be found,

shall be guilty of an offence and liable on conviction—

- (i) in the case of an offence referred to in paragraph (a) or (b) in consequence of which the person in respect of whom such offence was committed, has been killed, or where the accused has been proved to be by habit or repute a witchdoctor or witch-finder, to imprisonment for a period not exceeding twenty years or to a whipping not exceeding ten strokes or to both such imprisonment and such whipping;
- (ii) in the case of any other offence referred to in the said paragraphs, to one or more of the following penalties, namely, a fine not exceeding one thousand

rand, imprisonment for a period not exceeding ten years and a whipping not exceeding ten strokes;

(iii) in the case of an offence referred to in paragraph (c), (d) or (e), to a fine not exceeding five hundred rand or to imprisonment for a period not exceeding five years, or to both such fine and such imprisonment;

(iv) in the case of an offence referred to in paragraph (f), to a fine not exceeding two hundred rand or to imprisonment for a period not exceeding two years.

[S. 1 substituted by s. 1 of Act No. 50 of 1970.]

2. **Presumption.**—Where any person in respect of whom an offence referred to in paragraph (a) or (b) of section 1 was committed, is killed, it shall be presumed, until the contrary is proved, that such person was killed in consequence of the commission of such offence.

[S. 2 substituted by s. 2 of Act No. 50 of 1970.]

3. **Repeal of laws.**—The laws mentioned in the Schedule to this Act are hereby repealed to the extent set out in the fourth column of that Schedule.

4. **Short title.**—This Act shall be called the Witchcraft Suppression Act, 1957.

Schedule

LAWS REPEALED

PROVINCE OR TERRITORY	NO. AND YEAR OF LAW	TITLE OR SUBJECT OF LAW	EXTENT OF REPEAL
Cape of Good Hope	Act No. 24 of 1886	The Black Territories' Penal Code	Chapter XI
"	Act No. 2 of 1895	The Witchcraft Suppression Act, 1895	The whole
Natal	Law No. 19 of 1891	Natal Code of Black Law	Section <i>one hundred and twenty-nine</i> of the Schedule as substituted by Union Proclamation No. 168 of 1932
Transvaal ..	Ordinance No. 26 of 1904	The Crimes Ordinance, 1904	Sections <i>twenty-nine</i> to <i>thirty-four</i> inclusive
Zululand ..	Proclamation No. 11 of 1887	Laws and Regulations for the Government of Zululand	Regulations <i>nine</i> and <i>ten</i>