PART TWO

From Script to Novel: An Exploration of Reverse Adaptation

A PhD in Creative Writing

by

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CHAPTER 1

REVERSE ADAPTATION: INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXTUALIZATION

The creative work of Part One of this thesis has been to reverse adapt my feature film script into a (hopefully) compelling and standalone novel. As such, this thesis offers for examination one example of the outcome of a creative process previously undocumented within an academic milieu. Further to this, the work of Part Two is to reflect upon critical and creative questions arising from and resonating with that adaptation. In particular, it firstly attempts to place reverse adaptation within a scholarly and historical context via comparison with its closest literary cousin, the novelization. It also attempts, through interviews and critical consideration of my own creative process and observations, to provide this field of study with the beginnings of a collection of primary and reflective data on the topic of reverse adaptation.

In attempting to locate reverse adaptation within its scholarly context, one turns immediately to the field of adaptation scholarship only to find a pointed lack of targeted discourse. Indeed, the very novelty of attempts at a literary reverse adaptation and its absence in scholarly literature must itself raise the first line of enquiry. Given the abundance of wonderful films adapted from non-film sources, why has there been so little of the 'reverse'? Clearly, the notion of adaptation itself is no prohibition.[1] Has the reverse of traditional book to film adaptation been so 'contaminated', as Baetens suggests, by "the contempt with which the genre is often treated" (Baetens 2005: 45), that writers and scholars want to maintain a sanitizing distance?

This chapter engages with novelisation as the closest relative to reverse adaptation. Using the work of Baetens and Van Parys it establishes a surprisingly long lineage for the modern commercial novelisation and examines how evolving storytelling environments have affected the

[1] Dietz (2011) tells us: "Since the early days of film, Hollywood has been adapting books to the big screen, and the practice is prevalent today – in fact, nearly one in every four movies still originates in a book, story, or article."

novelisation and cultural perceptions of it. Then, taking Robert Stam's well known list of 'hostilities to adaptation' (Stam and Raengo 2005) and applying them to an inverse process, it interrogates the question: Why is the novelisation so 'bad'?

This chapter also looks at the idea of reverse adaptation or novelisation as being a portal through which we can understand the current wildfire of transmedia adaptation apparent in the 21st century storytelling landscape. If one moves from a historically prejudiced notion, in which adaptation is both bilateral and necessarily book to film, it is impossible *not* to see adaptation everywhere. As I will also discuss, novelisation can possibly make a claim to be the earliest manifestation of transmedia adaptation in as much as it serves to 'continue the engagement' of an audience across mediums; even before the advent of 21st century technologies that enabled the transmedia landscape we now inhabit.

Defining Reverse Adaptation

Before going any further, however, it is necessary to dwell for a moment on this work's use of the imperfect term 'reverse' adaptation and what that precisely constitutes and implies. In the prologue I distinguish reverse adaptation from novelisation by means of *intent*. Where a novelisation is "a piece of original screen media turned into a book" (Archer 2014: 212) that is "ordered by a publisher to fulfil certain commercial needs" (Baetens 2010: 51), reverse adaptation as it applies here, refers to the adaptation of an *unproduced* script to a novel, where the progenitor artefact is not widely familiar to the adapted novel's audience. This in turn implies that, unlike a novelisation, the success (creative or financial) of the adapted artefact is not dependent upon knowledge of the originating artefact.

A novelisation, as we currently understand it, is commissioned from an already produced, successful screen work, normally from film or television, as a kind of merchandising 'tie-in'. Consequently, with reverse adaptation, questions of commercial motivation arise only as a (wished for) future prospect and not as the primary driver for the adaptation to occur. A reverse adapted novel is thus understood to be a work begun on "the initiative of an individual author eager to give a personal form to certain ideas

or feelings" (Baetens 2010: 51). Or as we shall see in Chapter 2, in practice, it is quite likely to be motivated by an individual screenwriter wishing to 'get their story out there', in the face of the harsh economic realities of the screen industries. All three reverse adaptations discussed at length in this thesis were independently motivated in large part by this desire.

In a rare recent article focussing on a novelisation, 'A Novel Experience in Crime Narrative: Watching and Reading *The Killing'* (*Adaptation* 2014), Neil Archer mounts a thoughtful argument for why Hewson's novelisation of the 'Nordic noir' television series *The Killing* should be seen, in conjunction with the television series itself, as literature. According to Archer:

> … hitherto, they [novelizations] have tended to be positioned at the margins of literary evaluation. While both novelization and adapted novel can share tie-in status at the level of marketing, the adapted novel can always justify its existence beyond the terms of commodification. (Archer 2014: 214)

This article provides a 'novel' way of 'reading' a novelisation and its progenitor as literature. (All puns intended.) What is particularly pertinent to this investigation, however, is Archer's adoption of the term 'adapted novel' to describe Hewson's screen to book adaptation. I believe that in some ways this term has merit over the term 'reverse adaptation' in describing a creatively motivated 'novelisation', especially in as much as it focuses attention on the *product* and not the source, or process, of the adapted work. A 'reverse' adaptation inherently implies that it is the 'opposite' of something, in this case, the opposite of traditional book to screen adaptation.

This term reverse adaptation would have been accepted without question any time during the 20th and early 21st century, during which era book to screen adaptation was spoken of simply and unequivocally as 'adaptation'. Adaptation *was* book to screen. As late as 2005, Robert Stam assumes a paradigm of adaptation as implicitly book to film, in his celebrated introduction to the "monumental" (Leitch 2008: 63) *Literature through Film* trilogy (Stam and Raengo 2005). In the 21st century, however, especially throughout this most recent decade, things have become more complex. With evidence of transmedia adaptation appearing on screens, big and small, throughout the world, notions of adaptation as 'binary' (Baetens 2007: 236)

and 'bipolar' (Littau 2011: 19) are increasingly fallacious. The term 'reverse' adaptation is thus tainted by its reliance upon a dated 20th century paradigm of film adaptation.

In his *Adaptation* article, Archer claims to want to "think beyond the one-directional movement of adaptation" and consider "locating these discussions within evolving, transmedia conceptions of 'literary' culture" (Archer 2014: 213). In the last ten to twenty years, in *practice*, and the last decade in adaptation discourse, the term adaptation has ceased to automatically mean book to screen adaptation. In 2008 in his meta-analysis of adaptation scholarship, 'Adaptation Studies at a Crossroads', Leitch wrote:

> Even though a growing number of films eligible for Academy Awards for Best Screenplay Based on Material from Another Medium borrow that material from print journalism, franchise characters, television series, comic books, video games and toys, academic studies of adaptation remain stubbornly attached to literature as cinema's natural progenitor (Leitch 2008: 76)… Instead of producing more anthologies of book-to-film analyses, which populate the field more and more densely without enlarging it, editors and publishers might consider collections that focus on specific problems in the production and reception of adaptations and the relations between adaptation and other intertextual modes. (Leitch 2008: 76)

Yet still in 2011, Clare Parody's ground breaking *Adaptation* Essay Prize winning article on 'Franchising/Adaptation', claimed that the "context for the modern prevalence of adaptations is rarely invoked in adaptation studies, and consequently, its implications for understanding adaptation as practice and adaptations as texts in the twenty-first century have gone largely unexamined" (Parody 2011: 211). At that time it was to convergence studies that I had to turn to find discussion on "The increasing prevalence of content's migration across media formats [that] characterizes the 21st-century media environment" in which "content is increasingly fluid across porous print and digital incarnations" (Murray and Weedon 2011: 3). Since 2011 though, the field of adaptation studies has embraced a less constrained, textual model of adaptation and now encompasses a wider understanding of what readily constitutes adaptation.

So while Archer's use of 'adapted novel' to describe Hewson's novelisation is useful in as much as it enables and reflects a transmedia

understanding of adaptation, it is also *broad*. It could apply equally to a novel adapted from any source artefact, a song into a graphic novel or a play or a comic strip into a novel. It could refer to a book adapted from many sources, or a book adapted from another book, a 'mash up,' for example.[2] For the purposes of this research, then, the limitations of the term reverse adaptation are as useful as they are a misnomer. And as it is the work of this thesis to investigate in detail the adaptation of a *script into a novel*, the specific 'reverse' of traditional 'adaptation', the term reverse adaptation, as flawed as it is, appears to best suit its purpose. Consequently, I will continue to use it.

Novelisations are New… (not)

In its simplest expression novelisation can be thought of as the adaptation of a story from screen to novel format, usually for purposes of commercialisation. Novelisation scholar Jan Baetens calls it "the 'translation' of an original movie into a novel", or "the novelistic adaptation of an original film or, more specifically, of the screenplay of this film" (Baetens 2010: 51-52).

The advent of modern novelisations is often thought to have coincided with the franchisation of blockbuster Hollywood movies such as *Star Wars* and the Indiana Jones series around the mid 1970s. It is often seen as a contemporary invention, a 'tie-in' developed alongside other forms of merchandising such as action figures and board games. However, as Baetens and Van Parys both tell us, novelisation has existed in the storytelling landscape for a long time. Indeed, Van Parys cites George Wilkins' *The Painful Adventures of Pericles, Prince of Tyre* (1608), a contemporary prose adaptation of Wilkins and Shakespeare's play, as being considered by some as "the earliest known instance of novelization." He further suggests that: "As an instance of transmedial adaptation, the film novelization is definitely descendant from the novelization of plays," a phenomenon "very popular in the years 1900-1915" (Van Parys 2009: 309). Often these play to prose novelisations were "enriched with stills from the play" which he claims "only

[2] In the *Journal Of Computer-Mediated Communication*, Jackson tells us " Mash-ups are communicative forms whose essential character is that they are compositions, combinations, assimilations, and appropriations of things that already exist to create something—and this is crucial—that need show no allegiance or even connection to those original works. (Jackson 2009: 731)

underlines further that the play tie-in was an immediate forerunner of the film tie-in" (Van Parys 2009: 309).

> The image has always been complemented by the word... novelization is symptomatic of a tendency to adapt cinema (and other media) to literature, whether into a novel, a short story, or a descriptive summary. Throughout the history of cinema, the novelization has shifted between various formats, which are interconnected and coexist against a widening horizon of other cultural phenomena. (Van Parys 2009: 305)

Concurrent with the flourishing practice of play to text novelisation, the unfolding of cinema as mass entertainment was taking place at the turn of the 20th century. Early cinema morphed over time from a spectacle based 'cinema of attractions' into a more narrative experience. Initially the text accompanying the early spectacle-based films were 'protonovelisations' of a descriptive nature, but as films evolved to become more story-driven and narrative in form, a culture of episodic storytelling developed (Baetens 2010: 53). This latter was in no small part due to the technological constraint of the twelve-minute reel, as only so much could physically be screened in one sitting. However, with typical ingenuity, filmmakers 'adapted' this limitation into a commercial advantage.

> The film producers of the period needed to find means to allure the audience into the theatres themselves. The serial presented an episodic structure that served this purpose, as each episode would entice the public – often with "cliff-hanger" endings – to return for the sequel chapter the following week. Significantly, the distribution of the movie serial was systematically accompanied by the serial publication of the story in the daily press. (Van Parys 2009: 306)

By the early 20th century, episodic storytelling through the medium of print was already a well-established practice. Van Parys tells us "the serial novelization was in fact a recycling of the popular serial novel of the nineteenth century" (Van Parys 2009: 307), as famously exemplified by Charles Dickens, amongst others. In the early 20th century, film producers and newspaper proprietors were quick to team up by novelizing the content of these short movies in popular newspapers, magazines and even books of the day. This tie-in was commercially advantageous to both outlets, functioning to mutually maintain audience enthusiasm. Baetens tells us that:

> After each cinematographic instalment, the public could read the adventure seen on-screen (or catch up with the story if an instalment had been missed) while using the newspaper or magazine version as a springboard to the next adventures on-screen. (Baetens 2010: 53)

Literature was still a dominant form of entertainment then, and "short fiction was a deeply ingrained part of everyday life at a time when the cinema was trying to expand its hold on the popular market" (Van Parys 2009: 306).[3] Of particular interest to me, though, is how "the very act of capturing the films in print" functioned to extend an audience's engagement:

> … because in those times there was no carrier to keep them available to the public. The silent films were produced in bulk, only stayed in local theatres for a few days, and then moved on, until the reels had been worn out... The gap that was left was filled by the novelization. (Van Parys 2009: 307)

Thus, even in the earliest days of cinema, filmmakers and publishers united as they do now, to continue the engagement of an audience within a story world across (or *trans*) media. Shultz in his 2013 *LitReactor* column echoes this idea in discussing his experiences with novelizations "before the VHS/VCR boom of the mid-to-late 1980s":

> Novelizations were a way to take that movie experience home with you, an opportunity to re-immerse yourself in its universe as many times as you wished, without having to wait until the film was either re-released in theatres or broadcast on television. The book was a memento, or a souvenir, reminding you of the summer you saw *A New Hope* for the first time. (Shultz 2013)

Novelisations are so 'bad'…

While the broader fields of adaptation (text to screen) and film/literature studies have attracted enthusiastic scholarship over the last several decades, the small number of writers who have chosen to engage with the topic of novelisation cannot resist comment about its lowly status. Baetens tells us that contemporary novelisations "seem so 'bad' that nobody thinks they deserve any serious interest", and "given its lack of prestige" the study of novelisation

[3] Here Van Parys is citing Ben Singer's 'Fiction Tie-ins and Narrative Intelligibility 1911-18.' (Singer 1993)

has a "near-absence in the scholarly field" (Baetens 2010: 51). Meanwhile, Pagels comments that:

> Film novelizations aren't written to be taught in English classes for the next hundred years. They're simply another part of the transmedia empire of a franchise along with action figures, clothing lines, and cereal boxes, solely intended to supplement the bottom line of a studio's budget. (Pagels 2012: 6)

In his well-known introduction to *Literature through Film: The Theory and Practice of Adaptation* (Stam and Raengo 2005), Robert Stam begins with a list of "eight sources of hostility to adaptation,"[4] one of which is particularly worthy of discussion here. This is Stam's powerful notion of the 'privileging of anteriority'. This principle inherently allots an "a priori valorization of historical anteriority and seniority: the assumption [is] that older arts are necessarily better arts" (Stam 2005: 4). Stam argues:

> ... the arts accrue prestige over time. The venerable art of literature, within this logic, is seen as inherently superior to the younger art of cinema, which is itself superior to the even younger art of television and so forth, ad infinitum. (Stam 2005: 4)

In traditional text to screen adaptation, which is the focus of Stam's 2005 introduction, the anteriority of the novel and the written word is *always* evident. That adaptation *is* book to screen is implicit, and thus he argues that, "film is perceived as the upstart enemy storming the ramparts of literature" (Stam 2005: 4). He suggests that literature "profits from a double 'priority': (a) the general historical priority of literature to cinema, and (b) the specific priority of novels to their adaptations" (Stam 2005: 4). Thus in Stam's paradigm, a film adaptation must always play catch up to the more venerable book in terms of perceived merit.

However, in the case of the modern novelisation it is clear by attitudes towards them that there is no inherent valourisation of the written word over the screen product. It is quite the reverse. It is the originating *screen* artefact that is culturally valourised. Why? I believe, in the first instance, it can be argued that this is indeed a validation of Stam's principle of the valued

[4] ... as described by Leitch in 'Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Adaptation. *Especially if you're looking forwards rather than back,' in *Literature Film Quarterly* (Leitch 2005: 238).

anteriority of the originating text. In a paradigm where adaptation is thought of as a simple linear translation from one discrete medium to another, 'dichotomous' (according to Stam) or 'bi polar' (according to Littau), the adapted work *must* be the imitator while the source is necessarily older and *in loco parentis*. The application of Stam's notion of the 'privileging of anteriority' seems sound in this case. However, when applied to novelisation, it creates an ironic *inversion* of the status or valourisation of the word and the image.

Perhaps the most easily identifiable reason for the lowly status of modern novelisations is their *raison d'être*. They are commercially motivated. The idea that "novelizations are blatant examples of commercial literature, that is, literature not written on the initiative of an individual author eager to give a personal form to certain ideas or feelings but ordered by a publisher to fulfil certain commercial needs" (Baetens 2010: 51), plays a seminal part in attitudes towards them. Authoring modern novelisations is generally not considered an act of inspired and insightful creativity, but a commercially driven process of content transference to a new market platform. In general, modern novelisations do not primarily seek to stand upon their own merits as a creative work, but rather to ride the bow wave of the successful mothership.

The commercial, popularist motivation for the novelisation makes relevant two other of Stam's eight sources of hostility to adaptation. Firstly Stam talks of there being a subliminal class prejudice against non-elitist forms of entertainment. In Stam's exclusively text to screen paradigm the non-elitist medium is film, whereas literature is perceived as being relatively elitist and worthy.

> The cinema, perhaps unconsciously, is seen as degraded by the company it keeps – [that is] the great unwashed popular mass audience, with its lower-class origins in 'vulgar' spectacles like sideshows and carnivals. Adaptations, in this view, are inevitably 'dumbed down' versions of their source novels, designed to gratify an audience lacking in what Bourdieu calls 'cultural capital'. (Stam 2005: 7)

It is easy to see how this applies almost exactly in reverse when it comes to novelisations. In the novelisation, it is in fact the book which is seen as the 'dumbed down' version of the celebrated source film, designed to 'gratify' an

audience generally perceived to be lacking in 'cultural capital', especially as many novelizations are written for a youth or 'fan' audience.

Stam's sixth source of hostility to adaptation is what he calls "the myth of facility" (Stam 2005: 7). In Stam's text to screen paradigm, this is described as a "completely uninformed and somewhat puritanical notion that films are suspectly easy to make and suspectly pleasurable to watch" (Stam 2005: 7). Stam's idea of 'facility' links the perceived cultural worth of a creative artefact to its ease of use, and possibly its intellectual opacity. Stam's view, framed exclusively to refer to traditional adaptation, can be expanded into what I suggest is a non-medium specific notion of the 'facility of engagement', in which the ease of use and accessibility of a story or a story medium is indirectly proportional to its perceived merit as 'art'. 'Cleverness' or 'weight' in a creative artefact, perhaps unconsciously, engenders a prejudiced notion of its artistic worth. The harder you have to work at enjoying something, the more culturally valourized it is.

This has been a feature of the storytelling landscape at least as far back as Jane Austen's time, as displayed by her satirical treatment of 'histories' versus 'novels' in *Northanger Abbey* (1817). Catherine Morland reads a little history as a duty as it is "very right and necessary", but she shamefully devours novels (especially in the Gothic genre).[5] That it was in Austen's day considered more worthy to read the venerable 'histories' than the newer, more accessible and popular novels can easily be translated to current attitude, in which it is generally perceived as more laudable to read *Transit of Venus* (Hazzard 1980) or *A Brief History of Time* (Hawking 1988) than to play *Halo 5* (Microsoft Studios 2015). Stam sums it up by quoting a former professor as saying it takes "no brains" to sit down and watch a film (Stam 2005: 6). Thus, purposefully popularist novelisations, of mass entertainment

[5]*Northanger Abbey*: Written in 1803, published 1817: "You are fond of history! And so are Mr. Allen and my father; and I have two brothers who do not dislike it. So many instances within my small circle of friends is remarkable! At this rate, I shall not pity the writers of history any longer. If people like to read their books, it is all very well, but to be at so much trouble in filling great volumes, which, as I used to think, nobody would willingly ever look into, to be labouring only for the torment of little boys and girls, always struck me as a hard fate; and though I know it is all very right and necessary, I have often wondered at the person's courage that could sit down on purpose to do it." (Chapter 14: para 21).

films, as is the current understanding of a novelisation are, by this estimation, *doomed* to be considered a bottom-dwelling form of storytelling.

A Wild Fire of Adaptation

While in the 21st century, the ''mining of books for films" continues unabated (Holman 2003: 10), we now live in a storytelling environment where one need only go online, walk into a games store or bookshop, download an app or turn on the TV to realise that adaptation is no longer a one-way street leading from bookstore to cinema. If one opens one's eyes to a broader fractal notion of adaptation, one finds it branching everywhere. In the 21st century, films become comics and comics become films and then get turned into books, which get turned into second-generation comic books and graphic novels. Computer games become films, films become computer games, which become books and online role playing games, which give rise to apps for smart phones and tablets so you can play with your favourite characters on the train, and then the whole thing gets remediated into text once again in the form of fan fiction which is uploaded to the net and then recast in audio and downloaded as a podfic, which inspires fan art; and so on and so forth in endless permeations of content transfer, of adaptation and (re)creation, from one storytelling platform to another, and then on again.

In her landmark *Adaptation* article *Franchising/Adaptation* (2011), Parody beautifully describes transmedia or franchised storytelling as "the systematic branching and extension of a narrative across multiple media of palimpsest outlets, or of a story world and its inhabitants built-up over time from repeated remakes, reimaginings, and remediations." Transmedia or franchise storytelling, Parody continues, "can offer audiences fictional experiences with length, depth and breadth, and multiple avenues of engagement with much loved fictional properties" (Parody 2011: 211). As ready examples of this Meikle proposes that:

> … adaptation scholars may very well start with those most massive of franchises, the comic book series that have dominated the global box office since the turn of the twenty-first century: the Dark Knight trilogy; the Spider-Man trilogy and its subsequent reboot and sequel; seven X-Men films; and the ever-expanding Marvel Cinematic Universe – ten blockbusters strong and counting. (Meikle 2015: 1)

Make that *twelve* block busters and counting, including three *Iron Man* films (the first of which began the series), two 'Thors', two 'Captain Americas', two *Avengers* ensemble films (which bring together several pre-loved superheroes), one *Incredible Hulk*, the (really excellent) *Guardians of the Galaxy*, plus the recent introduction of *Ant Man* to the universe. The year 2016 delivers *Captain America: Civil War* (which sees the Captain and Iron Man 'facing off') plus the introduction of *Doctor Strange*. Eight more Marvel Universe movies are already in production or scheduled for production through to 2019. But this is just the tip of the iceberg. The IMDB site *Marvel Universe: Complete list of Movies, TV Shows and Animation* lists 86 titles since Captain America's 1944 debut.[6]

Likewise, the many "vigorous and various" (Leitch 2007: 235) adaptations of Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes* series of books and short stories have attracted much scholarship in recent times. From Thomas Leitch in his seminal text *Film Adaptation & its Discontents* (2007), through Poore's (2013) 'Sherlock Holmes and the Leap of Faith', to most recently Richard Hewett's (2015) "Canon Doyle?" article for *Adaptation* journal, numerous scholars have engaged with the ever evolving story world and "unforgettable iconography"(Leitch 2007: 208) of Holmes and Watson. According to Poore:

> The past few years have been a period of renewed and intensified interest in the ever-popular characters and stories of Holmes and Watson, a trend no doubt influenced by the Guy Ritchie film franchise, starring Robert Downey Jnr and Jude Law, and the modern re-imagining of the partnership in the BBC's *Sherlock*, starring Benedict Cumberbatch and Martin Freeman. But to focus exclusively on Downey and Cumberbatch, Law and Freeman, would be to greatly underestimate the scope and scale of Holmes and Watson adaptations in the twenty-first century, from videogames (*Sherlock Holmes vs. Jack the Ripper* on Xbox and PC, the puzzle series on Nintendo DS) to zombie mash-up novels and graphic novels (*The Zombie Problem* (2010); the *Victorian Undead* series (2010). (Poore 2013: 158)

Hewett tells us that, "Few characters have been adapted more frequently than Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes*, yet… in Holmes' country of origin, only a handful of series featuring the detective have derived directly from

[6] This 'complete' list is actually an 'incomplete' list, stopping at October 2014. But, nonetheless, it indicates the overall scale of the Marvel Cinematic Universe – not counting print or video games (Fox 2014).

Doyle's work" (Hewett 2015: 192). Furthermore, "screen versions of *Sherlock Holmes* have, since his cinematic debut, accumulated a range of elements *not* deriving from Doyle's original source material" (Hewett 2015: 192).

The *Sherlock Holmes* story world is a good example of how transmedia storytelling franchises become self-evolving and self-referential. In his chapter 'Hero with a Hundred Faces', Leitch claims Holmes as the "most protean of all fictional franchises", and describes the franchise as being "complicated by the need to pick and choose which progenitor texts to follow, which to modify, and which to ignore" (Leitch 2007: 235). Obligations of fidelity are not to the originating text but to the agreed Canon, that is, what is generally accepted as the 'truth' of a story world. This changes over time. For example, "Everyone knows that Holmes is tall and lean, with piercing eyes and a hawk-like nose" (Leitch 2007: 208), because Watson says so in the original text. But the deerstalker cap, for example, was never specifically mentioned by Conan Doyle but *became* Canon through later magazine illustrations of the Holmes stories.

> The in-joke of Cumberbatch [as Holmes], against his inclination, being photographed in a deerstalker is one example, an allusion both to the famous Basil Rathbone image of the master detective, to its un-Canonical status, and also to Robert Stephens' similar objections to fame in *The Private Life.* Eventually, the Holmes universe will be stuck together by fan-fiction and adaptations. (Poore 2013: 170)

In referring to the popular 1980s *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* series staring Jeremy Brett, Leitch tells us:

> The true aspiration of the Granada adaptations is the same as that of all adaptations of any canonical fictional franchise. They do not want to be faithful to any particular members of the franchise. They do not even want to be faithful to the franchise in general. What they want is to become canonical members of the franchise themselves, as definitive as the progenitor texts they take as their point of departure. (Leitch 2007: 230)

Poore uses Simon Reynolds' evocative metaphor from *Retromania* (2011) to describe the simultaneous veneration and destruction of a beloved story product by conjuring "the image of the vinyl record or the analogue cassette, which becomes 'ghostified' through repeated play; the very means of

transmission degrades through overuse, as 'each listener kills the sound she loves'" (Reynolds 2011: 348). In this vein, such palimpsest adaptations "paradoxically *erode* the original Canon… by offering connections and resonances between adaptations, and between adaptations and fan fiction, rather than between source text and adaptation" (Poore 2013: 171).

Thus transmedia or franchise adaptation is not about the replication across mediums of any one creative artefact to another. It is about the creation of authentic and compelling story worlds through which one's beloved characters range and interact. Taken from its earliest incarnation, which I suggest may be seen as the novelisation, first of plays, then of early cinema, we can understand today's transmedia landscape as a vast, sprawling extension of that original conspiracy between publishers and film producers to profitably 'continue the engagement' of an audience within a story world.

Given the wildfire of transmedia adaptation of story product that surrounds us at present, it would be easy to assume that the desire to be immersed in a cross media story world is unique to the 21st century. However, a deeper understanding of the history and functions of the humble novelisation gives rise to the idea that perhaps this desire to continue the engagement within a story product has been in existence for much longer. Rather than creating the appetite for it, or seeing it as uniquely a contemporary phenomenon, it might be suggested that 21st century storytelling technologies simply enable, rather than drive, the wish for a prolonged and complex engagement within a beloved story world. In this way, the humble novelisation may be framed as among the first adapted product to *enable* audiences to continue that engagement with beloved characters across mediums. Perhaps writer and columnist, Grady Hendrix, sums it up most simply when he says of the place of novelisations in his 20th century childhood: "Movie novelizations are a bastard genre that gets no love, but for those of us who grew up before the VCR they were the only way to watch and re-watch our favorite movies" (Hendrix 2015: 1).

Having now discussed the genealogy, reputation and motivations of the 'lowbrow commercial' novelisation (Van Parys 2009: 305), and having identified how reverse adaptation sits in relation to it, this thesis now moves to a more practice-led approach in interrogating the process of reverse

adaptation. There are many ways in which to consider the intention of creative practice-led research within a wider academic environment. Creative writing research, according to Kroll & Harper,

> … is fundamentally 'practice-led'; or, to put it another way always has practice at its conceptual core, even when it is dealing with issues of critical understanding or with theoretical speculation… Creative writing research is, therefore, concerned with actions as well as outcomes, with the individual as well as the culture and, furthermore, with concepts and theories that illuminate these complex interrelationships. (Kroll & Harper 2013: 1-2)

This discussion about the meaning of practice-led research is active internationally. The National Association of Writers in Education (NAWE), in the United Kingdom, has on its website a 'Creative Writing Research Benchmarks Statement,' which asserts that, "The most common mode of Creative Writing research is that of creative practice, which is often referred to as 'practice-led research'.

> Practice-led research in Creative Writing uses creative practice to explore, articulate and investigate. The range of explorations and articulations is as broad as the range of possible subjects, emotions and ideals prevalent in the world. However, the simple definition is: that the creative writer will undertake this research through the act of creating; that they will invest knowledge and understanding into this practice, and that they will develop their knowledge and understanding through their practice. The results of this practice-led research will demonstrate this knowledge and understanding. (NAWE 2016)

Such definitions help give form to what Webb suggests can be seen as the "vagueness" of "how art functions as research" (Webb 2012: 4). Finnish researcher Maarit Mäkelä gives further shape to this 'vagueness' in her article 'Knowing Through Making: The Role of the Artefact'.

> The central methodological question of this emerging field of research is: how can art or design practice interact with research in such a manner that they will together produce new knowledge, create a new point of view or form new, creative ways of doing research? (Mäkelä 2007: 157)

One such way, she proposes, is:

> The [creative] artefact can be seen as a method for collecting and preserving information and understanding. However, the artefacts seem unable to pass on their knowledge, which is relevant for the research context. Thus, the crucial task to be carried out is to give a voice to the artefact. This means interpreting the artefact. During the process of interpretation, furthermore, the artefact has to be placed into a suitable theoretical context. In this process, the final products (the artefacts) can be seen as revealing their stories, i.e. the knowledge they embody. (Mäkelä 2007: 158)

This resonates with the intention of my research. Through a combination of creative and critical research into reverse adaptation, my aim is to give rise to the consideration of a little discussed, but increasingly observed, field of creative endeavour. This exegesis, in particular, aims to give voice to the creative artefact and, in so doing, to reveal the occluded investigation and knowledge embedded within it. Thus, through a "synergy between the creative, the practical and the critical" (Kroll & Harper 2013: 1), it seeks to contribute to the body of scholarship within the field.

Chapter 2 of this thesis, 'The Interviews,' takes a practice-led and case-based approach in discussing the continued engagement of two screenwriters with their own beloved characters via the reverse adaption their scripts. This chapter presents extended and synthesised primary interviews with two trained screenwriters, Graeme Simsion and Tilney Cotton. Through these interviews, I interrogate some of the creative and professional issues arising from their attempts at reverse adaptation, including observations pertaining to reverse adapting storytelling elements such as person, point of view, voice, tense, writing style, story structure and word count. This chapter also explores issues surrounding the place of the writer in the film and publishing industries, for example creative control and copyright, as well as barriers and thresholds to enabling the 'publication' of a writer's story and getting it to an audience. Transcripts of the full interviews are annexed at the end of this thesis.

Chapter 3 of this thesis discusses my own 'continued engagement' with George, Ann and Liam (my beloved characters) via the process of reverse adapting my film script, *Reasons to be Cheerful,* into the novel, *The Art of Detachment*. In this chapter I outline and interrogate, with particular reference to the point of view of a *screenwriter* accustomed to the rigours of

scriptwriting, my process, experiences and observations in adapting a film product to prose – a medium which I found less constraining to the writer. Using information gained through the synthesised interviews in Chapter 2, as well as wider scholarly and professional discourse, I contextualise my journey through reverse adaptation, its joys and challenges, and discuss some of the inherent differences in writing for the two mediums, as experienced by a screenwriter.

CHAPTER 2

THE INTERVIEWS

In undertaking a creative adaptation of any kind there are many issues a writer must take into account. What is at the heart of the originating artefact? What is the creative intention of the adaptation? What is essential about the originating work to be preserved within the adaptation? Or more simply, 'What gets included and what gets left out?' (Hong 2012: 314). These questions are important because, as Kroll and Jacobson tells us, "During this transformation the author's original conception of the creative work alters as additions, modification and deletions take place" (Kroll & Jacobson 2014). Further to these fundamental questions are issues of craft faced by the writer. Decisions made about craft elements such as tense, person, dialogue, voice and structure will play a vital role in determining the audience's experience of the adaptation. According to Deutelbaum in 'How to Make an American Quilt' for *Literature Film Quarterly*, one way to frame traditional book to screen adaptation is to consider, "the relationship constructed between the elements retained from the novel, in whole or in part, and the elements newly created for the film" (Deutelbaum 2004: 305). Similarly, for reverse adaptation, these creative and craft choices must also be considered, but in the opposite direction: from script to novel.

This chapter takes a case study approach, profiling contemporary, creatively (as opposed to commercially) driven reverse adaptations. To my knowledge, no scholarly data exists on the writer's experience of reverse adaptation, specifically from unproduced screenplay to published novel. As seen in Chapter 1, I have attempted to contextualise my work through its proximity to the novelisation, but as this is invariably commercially commissioned and different in creative intention to my own reverse adaptation, and those profiled in this chapter, it does not serve as an exact enough foil to thoroughly contextualise my own practice-led research. In order to give greater context to my research, and to provide some small beginning to the existence of primary data on the topic, is was necessary to seek out interviews with writers undertaking a similar process.

At the commencement of my candidature in 2010, there was no single example of an Australian (or indeed international) author whom I could identify for interview. This astonished me. There were occasional examples of literary reverse adaptations from *produced* scripts, for example, *The Piano* by Jane Campion (1995), *The Other Facts of Life* by Morris Gleitzman (1985) and *Animal Kingdom* by Stephen Sewell (2011) but these were either more than a decade old or written by a second author brought on specifically for the novel. Furthermore, none of these examples were adapted from an *unproduced* script and thus not analogous to the creative process under study. There were numerous examples of book authors writing or co-writing the adapted screenplay of their own book, but not the reverse; or at least none that were publicly recognised as reverse adaptations.

Happily, during my candidature (but as late as 2013) two Australian reverse adaptations from unpublished screenplays came to light, including one that had enormous international success. I interviewed both these writers. This chapter thus provides a small foundation stone upon which to build further research into this topic. It describes and reflects on the motivations to write a reverse adaptation. It examines the working methods undertaken by these two screenwriters and interrogates notions of craft and creative choice in translating script to novel, such as person, voice, point of view and word count. It also discusses the contractual and cultural differences experienced by writers within the film and publishing industries and seeks opinion from the two writers interviewed about the relative place of the writer within those industries. In particular, it focuses on their experience and observations of reverse adaptation in general. Thus, as Batty suggests, the experience of the screenwriter "is at the centre of this investigation; a negotiation between creative and critical, practice and theory, doing and thinking. Although creative and critical artefacts are separated in presentation, they combine to produce a singular understanding of the research question" (Batty 2009: 3).

Interview Subjects

Graeme Simsion: *The Rosie Project*

Graeme Simsion is the international poster boy for reverse adaptation. His first novel *The Rosie Project* (Text Publishing 2013), adapted from his own

unproduced film script of the same name, has "sold 150,000 copies in Australia and over 1.5 million copies worldwide" (Jaffe 2014: 1). *The Rosie Project* is currently being developed for screen by Sony Pictures in Hollywood and recently Simsion wrote the first draft script of the film *The Rosie Project* for them. In 2014 he published his second novel, the sequel entitled *The Rosie Effect,* which also headed straight to the *New York Times* Best Selling list. My interview with Graeme Simsion will form the basis of this chapter.

Tilney Cotton: *Little Chef, Big Curse.*

Tilney Cotton, aka Andy Porter, is an Adelaide-based independent film and television writer and novelist who reverse adapted his unproduced children's feature film script *Matty Swink* under the title *Little Chef, Big Curse* (Scholastic Australia 2014). The book is being distributed to schools in Australia and New Zealand. Cotton is a graduate of the Victorian College of the Arts School of Film & TV and of the MA in Creative Writing at the University of Technology Sydney. His background is mainly in writing for children. Cotton's reverse adaptation experience will be used to add contextual depth to this discussion of reverse adaptation.

Background and Motivation of Reverse Adaptation Projects

Until attempting his reverse adaptation of *The Rosie Project,* Simsion identified himself as a filmmaker, rather than a novelist. He had written "virtually no prose" (Simsion interview 2014: 8) until, in mid-life, he enrolled in a screenwriting course at Melbourne's RMIT University in 2007, where he began stretching his wings as a prose writer. In 2014, not long after the publication of *The Rosie Project,* I interviewed Simsion at his house in Melbourne. He began by explaining:

> I hadn't written any prose fiction since high school. So once I decided I was going to do this, I sat down and wrote some short stories. I wrote one short story, in the first person, which was a work up for the Don character [The first person protagonist of *The Rosie Project*]. Right at the beginning of my screenwriting course, we'd been asked to write a short story about character so I'd written that short story. So then about two months before I started *The Rosie Project* I wrote three short stories and

> entered them into a competition. They all got published which was tremendous encouragement for me and it was a little exercise, to see if I could do it... So I thought, 'Okay, I now know that I can write at least a couple of thousand words of prose. I could handle the dialogue tags, those little technicalities. So by the time I actually sat down to write *The Rosie Project* I had that behind me. (Simsion interview 2014: 8)

Prior to the publication of his novel, Simsion had studied and practised screenwriting. He had also written and produced a number of independent short films and was a regular member of a writers' group. In a former life, he had also previously gained a PhD in computer systems and had worked at an international level as a data analyst. He is an intelligent and disciplined individual who takes a pragmatic as well as creative approach to writing. I questioned Simsion on his motivation to undertake a reverse adaptation of *The Rosie Project*.

> There were two strong motivations, and a third one which kind of became a hindsight justification. One motivation was to gain interest in the film script. I thought, 'If I've got a novel out there, that will be something which indicates to the market, the story and so forth.' It's also much, much easier to get a novel published than to get a screenplay produced. (Simsion interview 2014: 1)
>
> The second motivation was that I actually wanted to write a novel more than I wanted to make a film. It was a much more deep-seated ambition. It was much longer standing. All my life I wanted to write a book, whereas the desire to write a screenplay and be involved in screen production was much more recent. It was really driven by the fact that I thought I might be *able* to do it, whereas I didn't think I was capable of writing a book. But I'd now got to a point where through my screenwriting studies, I'd learned a lot about storytelling, and through my other work, my writing skills had improved. I had more maturity around ideas and so on. So at 50, I'd reached a stage that when I sat down to write the novel, I was in a position to do it. I just knew a lot more. And I *had a story* too. Actually, I had story, characters, everything... so the amount of new stuff I had to do, to write the novel was a lot more manageable. (Simsion interview 2014: 2)
>
> And the third reason, which was not so much a driver at the time, but became more important as I did the project, I see this now looking back on it, was that I could tell the story better in a novel. (Simsion interview 2014: 2)

Simsion freely admits to pragmatic as well as creative motivations for beginning his reverse adaptation, claiming it is "still easier" (Simsion interview 2014: 15) to get a novel published than a feature film produced: "It's just a question of numbers. I mean, how many books are published every year and how many films are made? I think there is about 600 [sic] studio films made every year in the US... a lot more are published" (Simsion interview 2014: 15).

Simsion is correct. According to statistics compiled by Thorpe-Bowker, the leading provider of bibliographic information, in 2013 there were 50,498 new fiction titles published in the United States (with over 300,000 new paper book titles all told).[7] By contrast, figures issued by the Motion Picture Association of America indicate that there were a total of 659 feature films released in the US and Canada combined in 2013.[8] In Australia, in 2013 there were 27 Australian feature films released.[9] In the same year 28,234 books were published in Australia. Even allowing that 45% of those were non-fiction, this still amounts to approximately 12,700 fiction books published,[10] of which approximately half were children's books (Thorpe-Bowker 2014: 5). Very crudely, that equates to roughly 500 fiction titles published for each film reaching the screen. Simsion continued:

> If you're an established screenwriter, that doesn't mean you're going to get a film made in the next few years. But if you're Matthew Reilly or whoever, you're going to walk in and you're going to get your next book published. It's a no brainer. Until you start really losing sales you're going to get your next book published. It's always hard for new writers, in whatever medium, but there will be plenty of new novelists published this year, more than new screenwriters getting films made.
>
> And there's this attitude, it's a very tight community in the film world, whereas there are a lot of competing publishers in Australia. So if you're not getting financed, if the film distributors or Screen Australia don't

[7] This does not include almost 33,000 'juvenile' titles. Thorpe-Bowker. Print ISBN Counts USA (2013). Retrieved March 2016 from http://www.bowker.com/news/2014/Traditional-Print-Book-Production-Dipped-Slightly-in-2013.html

[8] Motion Picture Association of America. *Theatrical Market Statistics* (Report) (2013). Retrieved March 2016 from http://www.mpaa.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/MPAA-Theatrical-Market-Statistics-2013_032514-v2.pdf

[9] Screen Australia: Australia & the world International comparisons (Report) (2014). Retrieved March 2016 from http://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/research/statistics/internationalcomparisonsfeaurefilms.aspx

[10] All raw data available (March 2016) at https://issuu.com/bpluspmag/docs/thinkaustralian2014

> like what you're doing, forget it. In fact, if just the distributors don't like what you're doing it's going to be very, very hard. Whereas in publishing, if Text doesn't like you, you can go to Allen and Unwin. You can go down the road to Penguin. You can go overseas. (Simsion interview 2014: 15)

Fortunately for Simsion, even as a first-time author, once his reverse adaptation was completed, the book did not wait long to attract a publisher.

> The reason I got published was that I won the [Victorian] Premier's Literary Award for an unpublished manuscript and that attracted the attention of publishers. Now, Text was already one of the publishers that I had submitted it to, and I said, 'Hey guys, I've been shortlisted for the award', and at that point they came on board. So the shortlisting was enough. [Not actually winning]. But they were adamant that they would have got to it and published it. The prize just accelerated the 'getting it read' process. (Simsion interview 2014: 15)

The consequent advance sales Text Publishing was able to negotiate on *The Rosie Project* were nothing short of phenomenal, with Simsion being described as a "mega-selling" and "supernova" debut novelist by *The Guardian* (Delaney 2104). The novel has since sold to 38 countries.[11]

Tilney Cotton also describes being both creatively and pragmatically motivated to undertake the reverse adaptation of his children's feature film script then entitled *Matty Swink*. The background to Cotton's reverse adaptation, however, is more protracted than Simsion's, as Cotton's originating script was optioned by a film producer at an early stage.

In 1998 Cotton met a producer on a film set "hanging around the film split and chatting" (Cotton interview 2014: 1). Cotton pitched the idea of the script to the producer – about a gifted, isolated teenage chef, forced to live and work in his evil stepmother's diner, where he interacts with a race of mice from the moon, who search out and assist his culinary skills. (Cotton stresses that his original story predates Pixar/Disney's *Ratatouille* (2007), but admits that the similarities have not been helpful to him in getting the story 'out there'). The producer took an option out on the script and it went through two rounds of development funding from the South Australian Film

[11] *The Rosie Project*. (facebook page). 'About'. Retrieved March 2016 from https://www.facebook.com/TheRosieProject/timeline

Corporation. After a period of time, however, when the script failed to attract further funding, Cotton sought to reclaim the rights to the script. Following a lengthy legal dispute over specific disputed contractual conditions, the case was eventually settled out of court and Cotton regained copyright to his story. He was thus able to formally begin writing the reverse adaptation. According to Cotton:

> I always wanted to write the novel. In my initial contract with my producer it was stipulated that I was to be given first go at writing a novel from this story. Not a novelisation, but a novel. The treatment itself was 30,000 words, which isn't that much different from the book, which is about 40,000 words. Although, of course, it wasn't written as a novel… It didn't feel like a novel. (Cotton interview 2014: 2)

Like Simsion, Cotton enrolled in a creative writing course in 2004, in Cotton's case at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS), where Cotton began to test his skill as a prose writer.

> At my second year at UTS I had to do a major prose project and I chose to do this project [*Matty Swink*]. That was while all the legal issues with the producer were still going on and at that stage it felt like the book would never happen. (Cotton interview 2014: 2)

In 2011 after failing to attract interest in his manuscript, Cotton decided to self-publish the first half (only) of his novel under the title *Matty Swink and the Moon Mice* – hoping to attract an audience to the sequel by means of a cliff hanger at the end of 'Part One' and because it was cheaper. Cotton self-printed an initial run of 1500 and sold approximately 1300 copies. On occasion Cotton 'took to the streets', entrepreneurially selling his novel direct to the public at book festivals and other gatherings. Through this street exposure Cotton attracted a literary agent, who went on to sell the book, in its entirety, to Scholastic Press. It was published in 2014 with an initial print run of 5000. Commenting on the lengthy, convoluted and painful journey it took him to finally reclaim copyright Cotton reflects that: "The only good thing to come out of that scenario was that I had eight years to develop the story – and the story in the published novel is infinitely superior to the original script" (Cotton interview 2014: 1).

Before going down the untested path of reverse adaptation, both Simsion and Cotton describe various failed attempts at getting their scripts to the screen. Simsion claims to have written 20-30 drafts of the feature film before deciding to try to reverse adapt his script. Cotton's story concept was picked up for development at an early stage, but the following two funded drafts failed to gain further traction. In deciding to reverse adapt their scripts both writers cite a driving desire to get their story and characters "in front of an audience" in one form or another (Cotton interview 2014: 4). Reverse adaptation was seen as a practical, more achievable option through which to do this. According to Cotton:

> I remember Tim Winton saying that someone asked him why he didn't get into screenwriting, all the money and glamour, etc. He said, 'I'd hate to be a filmmaker. Contemporaries of mine who are screenwriters are fifty before they make their first feature.' He said that would be soul destroying. I understand where he was coming from. It was so important for me personally to get a story, this story, in front of an audience. That was the primary motivation for writing the novel. If the film went ahead, I may never have written the novel. (Cotton interview 2014: 4)

At the time of commencing the reverse adaptation, both writers' strong intention was to attract interest in the film via publishing the novel. However, as the novel evolved and materialised it became more important as a creative work in its own right. This resonates strongly with my own motivation to, and experience of, reverse adapting my film script *Reasons to be Cheerful*. Following the process of writing their novels, and in some instances concurrent to it, both authors went back to re-develop their script of the same story, as I also have.

Simsion describes how in rewriting his script, which was bought by Sony Pictures following the success of his novel, it was "of huge importance" (Simsion interview 2014: 3) to him that his film script be viewed and credited as an 'Original Script', not as an 'Adapted Screenplay'.

> This is one of the curious things that happens with reverse adaptation. Everybody is so used to the paradigm where the book comes first and the screenplay is adapted. I really had to make sure with my contract and in all my dealings with them, I had to keep reminding them that, "No, you've purchased an *original* script. You've purchased a spec

> script, which happens to have a novel behind it." If this thing were to get an Oscar, the Oscar would be for Best Original Screenplay, not for Adapted Screenplay. And that hugely affects my status as a screenwriter in terms of credits. (Simsion interview 2014: 3)

Simsion was also careful to document the existence of the script.

> The script was registered, and I can prove its existence. You have to be careful with that sort of thing. I had registered it with the Australian Writers' Guild, and it was short listed for an AWG award for an early incarnation. Later on, again, before I started the book, it won the Writers' Guild award for Best Unproduced Dramatic Comedy Screenplay. So it's got a very clear provenance. A history that we can all see existed before the book... Now we're starting to talk more legal issues than anything else, but they are quite important... We haven't tested all this yet, when it comes to credits. Basically, it's now with Sony. I've done my contractual part of it. They've got my draft and they're in a position where they can bring other writers on as they see fit. (Simsion interview 2014: 3-4)

Later in this chapter I further interrogate the relative conditions of a writer's creative control within the film and book industries.

THE WRITER'S CREATIVE EXPERIENCE OF REVERSE ADAPTATION

This section will describe and discuss the practical writing methodologies used by the writers I interviewed. It also looks at the creative storytelling choices employed by writers in adapting script to book. In Chapter 3 of this dissertation, I will go on to describe and contextualise my own writing process of reverse adaptation in relation to this data.

Working Method

Graeme Simsion describes beginning to write a screenplay or a novel only at the point where he has fully worked up the story through the use of a 'scene breakdown'. A scene breakdown is a tool commonly used by screenwriters to separate the story into discrete scene units. It briefly describes the major action in each scene and sometimes the key moments of character and theme development or transformation. It can be visualised as a dot point outline of the film. The scene breakdown is one of a handful of industry-standard short

documents commonly used by screenwriters to develop the story of a screenplay before going on to expand the scene breakdown into a longer document, such as an extended 'treatment' or a fully written script. It is primarily a tool to develop and clarify story and plot structure.

Simsion describes using the scene breakdown technique to develop and clarify his story regardless of whether he is writing a script or a novel.

> A scene breakdown is just every scene summarised in one sentence or two, which says 'Don goes to a ball and screws up,' or whatever it might be (Simsion Interview: 4)... Basically I use cards, as screenwriters do, on the floor, on the wall, whatever, but paper cards, not Final Draft [computer program].[12] I work with the cards for quite a long time until I'm really comfortable that I have a scene-by-scene breakdown. Then I move from the cards to a scene breakdown, which is basically just transcribing what's on the card and sticking in anything I can which might just flesh out those individual scenes. And then from that, I will sit down and write either a screenplay or a novel (Simsion interview: 10)… I've got a base for writing with just a set of cards and a scene breakdown, which could apply to either form. (Simsion interview 2014: 11)

Rather unusually, even for a screenwriter, Simsion claims that it takes him "longer to do the cards, than to write the novel or the script."

> Once I've got a very clean idea of what's going to go in there, I write really fast. I actually wrote the first draft of *The Clara Project*, which was the earliest predecessor of *The Rosie Project* screenplay, in about 4-5 days because I knew what I was writing. I had everything plotted out. So, broadly speaking I would say I spent six months on the cards and the remaining six months was writing multiple drafts. Those drafts are for myself that is. And I would go back to the cards during that time as well. (Simsion interview 2014: 11)

Simsion describes a back and forth process between cards, breakdown and script; not a simple linear transference from cards through breakdown to final draft script or novel. He claims he will write one draft then go back to the cards to resolve the issues depending on the problem. He will then adapt the scene breakdown accordingly and only then go back to the script to write the

[12] *Final Draft* computer software is the international standard computer software for screenwriters. It is used almost universally, by professional screenwriters, to ensure standard international formatting of screen projects.

next draft. He goes through this process many times in working towards a final draft. Simsion observes that generally he deviates more from the cards the further into writing a draft he progresses.

> You do deviate from the cards, I think particularly in the third act. I find the first act stays very strongly the same as I've set up in the cards, the second act starts to drift a little bit and the third act is often quite different. You can see it's going to a different place. (Simsion interview 2014: 11)

Simsion suggests that this happens because, "You've laid down so much material now [in the expanded script or novel], that you are obliged to draw on that and follow its natural consequences" (Simsion interview 2014: 11).

Thus, having gone through this rigorous cards to scene breakdown process, when Simsion sat down to write the initial draft of the reverse adaptation of *The Rosie Project*, he was armed with both the new scene breakdown in hard copy on the desk, and the relevant draft of the script, open as a Final Draft document in a window on the computer screen in front of him. Simsion wrote the first draft of his novel referencing directly from both the scene breakdown, for structure, and the open script, primarily for referencing existing dialogue.

> I started writing the story. I had the screenplay open in front of me… [with] two windows open. Two documents. One Final Draft document [the script] and a Word document [the scene breakdown]. I was clipping things sometimes out of the Word document. In the end there wasn't much that was adapted word for word. Maybe some occasional bits of dialogue. (Simsion interview 2014: 5)

By contrast, Tilney Cotton's approach to reverse adaptation was less defined than Simsion's. In reverse adapting the first draft of *Little Chef, Big Curse* Cotton worked directly from an existing extended treatment and his second draft script, having both documents open before him. Cotton didn't use cards or a reworked scene breakdown to restructure the story but began immediately writing the first draft. He would cut and paste passages directly from both documents into a third manuscript document, then manipulate the words to build a framework of the story.

> I'd take the script and the treatment and I'd just move it around [cut and paste] until I had the story. And then I'd re-read it through and think, 'Can I actually read that as a book', and then I'd start paraphrasing it. There are some sentences that are identical in the treatment and in the book. Not many. Just some of the descriptions. (Cotton interview 2014: 7)

Initially, story and structure were paramount for Cotton, even to the detriment of other craft elements. When Cotton read extracts of his first draft adapted novel to his class of creative writing students at UTS the response was tepid.

> My thing was that I was seeing it as a movie in my head. I wasn't relating to it as a prose story. The way I began writing – it was just instructions for a movie in my head. And that's how I was writing it at that stage. I'm more aware now that there are techniques you can use in prose writing to adjust the flow and to give different shifting points of view of the scene. You can go into someone's mind and pull out what they're thinking. But at first, at that stage, if you couldn't see it I wouldn't write it. (Cotton interview 2014: 2)

In reflection Cotton feels the first draft would have read more like a treatment than a novel: "For those first few chapters the story was just a film script in prose. It read awkwardly" (Cotton interview 2014: 2).

Screenwriting is Structure

During his time as a screenwriter Cotton has written many screenplays, some of which have attracted development funding. He has also "read all the books" and "spent years in film school" and consequently he has a firm understanding of the craft. I asked him to consider the differences between the craft of writing long form screenplay and prose.

> In my experience, screenwriting is structure. Story. I mean it's called 'Story'. Robert McKee's famous book is called 'Story'.[13] He's a story consultant. The Hollywood commercial film industry is all about the

[13] Robert McKee is arguably the pre-eminent screenwriting consultant and teacher in the world. According to the *Los Angeles Times* (Gettell 2014), among the field of twelve Academy Award-nominated films in 2013, eleven were worked on in some capacity by "alumni" of the highly regarded McKee STORY seminar. *The New Yorker* (Parker 2003) describes McKee as a screenwriting "guru" whose "alumni" include *David Bowie*, *John Cleese*, *Kirk Douglas*, *Faye Dunaway*, *Quincy Jones*, *Diane Keaton*, *Barry Manilow*, *Joan Rivers*, *Julia Roberts*, *Meg Ryan and Gloria Steinem.*

> story. Whereas creative writing is not about that... In creative writing you're diving under all that and looking at the entrails of the beast.
>
> Creative writing is much more flexible. There is far less emphasis on structure. It's almost like the structure comes last. You research and collect the material and the intention of the novel and then structure comes last... In screenwriting, you don't get past first base without getting the structure right. It's much tighter. (Cotton interview 2014: 2-3)

This obsession with structure is evidenced by Simsion's ardent use of the card to script breakdown system. This working methodology is primarily focussed on structure and story; on how, and in what order, the characters' actions unfold into plot. According to Simsion:

> Screenwriting focuses very firmly on structure and on plot and to a certain extent characters. If you *learn* writing, creative writing, often in my experience, in my limited experience, the focus tends to be on the beauty of the writing and on the execution of the writing, and on reviewing 2000 word excerpts, rather than on structure. You talk to a novelist and they say, 'I hate doing synopses. I just don't want to do one.' It's because their synopses don't make any sense.
>
> Whereas screenwriters just *have* to. You've got to have a pitch. You've got to have a synopsis. You've got to have a treatment. You've got to have a scene breakdown. You've got to have a beat sheet. All those things are our language in screenwriting. And the whole formality of structure, which for all the objections to it, you know, all that stuff about 'on page twenty two you've got to have the first act turning point', the Syd Field's stuff [14] and so on. It means story drives film.
>
> We've got our Syd Fields and we've got our Robert McKees and all these different screenwriting texts, almost all of which emphasise structure, and you pick up books on novel writing and there's not much about structure. The books on novel writing are about how to write beautifully and not so much attention to structure. (Simsion interview 2014: 12)

Simsion's comment here does not, perhaps, reflect the full breadth of books available on creative writing, for which texts focussing on structure and plot development certainly exist; for example the prolific Martha Alderson's *The Plot Whisperer* (2011), James Scott Bell's *Plot and Structure* (2004), Jane

[14] According to Parker (2003), "The first modern best-seller in the genre was *Screenplay* by Syd Field. First published in 1979." Parker continues: "Movies had always had beginnings, middles, and ends. Since *Screenplay* they have had three acts: Act I is the setup; Act II is the confrontation; and Act III is the resolution. 'Plot points' spin the story around, from act to act. [Field] argues that he is teaching 'only form, not formula.'"

Vandenburgh's *Architecture of the Novel* (2010), and Stephen James' *Story Trumps Structure* (2014). The latter work ironically (to the mind of a screenwriter at least) is anti 'structure' and dismissive of the recent "glut of plot and structure books that have flooded the fiction writing and screenwriting market in recent years" (James 2014: 3). He opens with the suggestion that novelists now need to "Step back from your preconceptions about stories, from what you've been told about plots and three act structures," proposing that these paradigms can get "in the way of readers' engagement and emotional investment in the story" (James 2014: 3). To a screenwriter, this verges upon heresy, and while, clearly, not all novelists will agree with James' attitude on this, it does I believe, reflect a real difference in the emphasis that each discipline accords the systematic development of story structure, especially in the early stages of writing. This is difficult to quantify, but it is a difference observed independently by both Simsion and Cotton, as well as by myself. I discuss this and the use of short development documents at greater length in the following chapter.

In response to Simsion's comments on books available on novel writing and screenwriting however, one small 'real world' comparison may be gained through the results of a search of the *Writer's Store* website [15] using the keyword 'structure'.[16] Of the top 50 results, four items related specifically to creative or novel writing (three books and one webinar) and 45 books related specifically to screenwriting. Vogler's *The Writer's Journey* (1999), based on Joseph Campbell's (1949) seminal text, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces,* came up in the search(es), and is applicable to both disciplines, but is more typically considered as a screenwriter's tool. One might question then, whether to some extent this is an issue of semantics, with novel writers discoursing in terms of 'plot' while screenwriters think in terms of 'structure'. Consequently, I did a keyword search using the word 'plot' as well. Creative writing texts fared somewhat better in this search, with 18 out of 50 titles

[15]The *Writer's Store* website describes itself as 'The Premier Resource for writing and filmmaking tools', where most current and classic 'writing tools' pertaining to both screenwriting and creative writing are available for sale.

[16] I did these searches three times each on different days (so as to avoid anomalous results) and here state the average results of the three searches.

relating specifically to novel or prose writing.[17] However, the same key word search brought up 24 results specific to screenwriting, with the remaining texts relating to either field.

As both Cotton and Simsion observe, for a professional or aspiring screenwriter, it is virtually impossible to discuss a script without addressing structure. Text after text extols the importance of structure as possibly the most elemental aspect of the craft of screenwriting. According to Syd Field, author of the seminal text, *Screenplay: The Foundations of Scriptwriting*,[18] that was originally published in 1979 and has never subsequently been out of print: "Structure is like gravity. It is the glue that holds the story in place; it is the base, the foundation, the spine, the skeleton of the story" (Field 2005: 37). The equally, if not more revered, McKee's *Story: Style, Structure, Substance, and the Principles of Screenwriting* takes a less paradigmatic approach than Field, though the centrality of structure to screenplay is still in evidence. 'The Structure Spectrum' is the book's first chapter, in which he tells us, "We cannot ask which is more important, structure or character, because structure *is* character; character *is* structure. They're the same thing, and therefore one cannot be more important than the other" (McKee 1997: 105). Most experienced screenwriters are likely to agree that this is not overstating the case, as given the sound and movement nature of film, a character is revealed and understood primarily through his or her actions. Those actions amount to plot, and plot, or how the story unfolds through screen-time, is effectively structure.

Point of View, Person and Voice

Another area of craft that the reverse adapter must negotiate is 'point of view'. The point of view of a story is "the angle of telling" (Simpson 1993: 2) or stance taken by the writer, and thus the reader, in relation to the story and characters: "In literature, point of view is the mode of narration that an author employs to let the readers 'hear' and 'see' what takes place in a story, poem, essay etc." (Literary Devices Editors 2013). In narratological studies, the term *focalisation* is also commonly used:

[17] Six of these titles were by the same author, *The Plot Whisperer's* Martha Alderson, and included several that were 'workbooks'.
[18] S. Field, *Screenplay: The Foundations of Scriptwriting*. Random House. 2005 (revised edition).

> Questions related to the point of view within a narrative text are nowadays discussed under the narratological rubric of focalisation… Modern narratological studies makes use of the term and concept of 'focalization' in order to differentiate between, on the one hand, the agent who narrates the events (narrator) and the agent who perceives the events (focalizer). (Nunlist 2003: 61)

Rimmon-Kenan also prefers the term focalisation because of its lesser implicit emphasis on the "purely visual sense" that "has to be broadened to include cognitive, emotive and ideological orientation" (Rimmon-Kenan 2002: 73). Although screenwriting discourse prefers the term point of view, Rimmon-Kenan's comment may be worthy of consideration for use within the field due to the existence of an awkward double usage of the term 'point of view'. A film's point of view, as in literature, firstly relates to the psychological 'angle of telling' and through whose world view the events of the film is understood. The term 'point of view', however, is also used to describe the physical point of view of an individual shot or sequence, that is, the camera sees and hears the action literally from the eyes or physical point of view (commonly called POV) of the viewer. In the Hollywood blockbuster *Predator* (McTiernan 1987), for example, physical point of view was used provocatively by intermittently placing the audience inside the body of the antagonist and experiencing the hunt through the eyes (and other senses) of the predator itself. In this way, screenwriting discourse could potentially benefit from the distinctions of meaning gained through employing the term 'focalisation', but as it is not current practice within the industry or wider contextual discussions, I will continue to use the more widely used phrase of point of view.

All writers, including those undertaking an adaptation, need to make choices as regards the point of view of their narrative. This will dramatically affect how the work is received by an audience. In Simsion's case, while the original script closely followed the journey of the protagonist, university professor Don Tillman, in his search for a wife, it didn't strictly adhere to the point of view of the protagonist. Consequently, there were several scenes in which Don did not appear. When reverse adapting the script, however, Simsion felt that it was essential that the novel be written in first person. This was influenced by the fact that the Tillman character is on the autism

spectrum. Simsion wanted the audience to experience "a real immersion in Don's world" (Simsion interview 2014: 7) and strongly identify with Don's unique worldview:

> This is all about Don Tillman's quirky take on the world. If I write [the book] in the first person, then everything we see is through his eyes. Every sentence in the book, except dialogue spoken by other people is Don Tillman speaking to us... You see, every time we'd get out of the world we'd lose sympathy for Don. You'd start seeing him outside of his point of view... What I lost in doing that was my own ability to intervene as the narrator and tell you how the trees looked or whatever. (Simsion interview 2014: 7)

In screenwriting dogma, the writer is compelled to keep descriptive prose or 'action description' (commonly referred to as 'big print'[19]) to an absolute minimum. Brevity is an essential part of the screenwriting toolkit, the idea being to keep the experience of 'the read' moving forward for prospective investors.[20]

In writing prose, there is no such compulsion, and it is word choice and its effect on the reader, rather than word count, which appears to be emphasised. Thus, it would be reasonably expected that screenwriters undertaking a reverse adaptation, and whose prose writing practice is limited, may experience some initial difficulty in writing expanded narrative description. This was the case for me as well as for Tilney Cotton. However, according to Simsion, in writing *The Rosie Project* this was not as much of an issue for him as he may have expected. He believes that this was due to the specific nature of his first-person protagonist.

> For me it was okay, because my character was autistic. You know, Don Tillman, he has Asperger's Syndrome and he's not particularly conscious of the physicality of his environment. He's cerebral. It's all in his head, so he's not going to spend a lot of time telling you how beautiful the trees are. And I was in first person, so it relieved me of that

[19] Called 'big print' apocryphally because until two decades ago script action description used to be written, literally, in BIG PRINT, that is in all capital letters, as the standard format. This is attributed to supposed poor typing skills of early Hollywood writers. This formatting style changed during the 1970-80s, but action description is still commonly referred to as 'big print'.

[20] According to Michael Ferris in the *Writer's Digest*, "When looking at a page of a screenplay, the more white space you see, the better. Aspiring screenwriters can impress by doing one thing: writing a "fast" read… writing a fast or "quick" read can make you seem like more of a seasoned pro than you might be" (Ferris 2012).

> a bit [The pressure to use descriptive prose]. So I was able to write quite a spare sort of novel. But if I were writing something else, it would be a real issue. (Simsion interview 2014: 5)

Making the decision to write in first person also meant that Simsion had to go back to his scene breakdown and rework the narrative structure to get rid of any scenes in which Don Tillman did not appear.

> Because I'd made that decision, I could only write scenes in which my protagonist was present. And that actually affected the logic of the story as well... I knew the shape of the script, and I then revised that scene breakdown, so that I had the shape and structure that was going to work for the book ... Not so much within scenes. It was more a case of saying, 'Does the scene have Don in it?' If it doesn't have Don in it, I'm going to have to find another way around that one. So I will delete that scene and I will replace it with whatever I need to do, which might be changing something out of another scene or adding a scene in or whatever. So I had a new scene breakdown which was maybe 20% different (Simsion interview 2014: 4)... Then I sat down with that scene breakdown and I started writing the story, with the screenplay open in front of me. (Simsion interview 2014: 5)

Simsion gives the example of the 'meet-cute'[21] between Don and Rosie as one scene where he had to find a new way of telling the story as a result of writing in first- person narration.

> When Don meets Rosie, the way it was done in the original screenplay is that Gene goes to Don and says "I'll send a few women for you to check out" [for the Wife Project]. Then, we see Rosie talking with Gene, without Don being there. They need to settle a bet on genetics. Gene says 'Go ask Don Tillman.' So then, we see Rosie come into Don's office and *we know*, that Rosie has walked into Don's office to settle a bet, and *we* know that Don thinks that she is an applicant for the Wife Project, and that they are at cross purposes. It's an absolutely classic humour set up... we are sitting there as the observer, and we know that the two people in the room are coming from different places.
>
> But, in the book, being in first person, we can't know what happened in Gene's office with Rosie. So what we get is Don just being a bit puzzled about this woman who is behaving a bit oddly, and it's only much later

[21] McDonald in *Romantic Comedy: boy meets girl meets genre* (2007) says: "In this trope [the meet-cute] the lovers-to-be first encounter each other in a way which forecasts their eventual union. Billy Wilder, first a scriptwriter, then a director, is one of the foremost proponents of the 'meet cute'; he is supposed to have kept a notebook of ideas of cute meetings where the eventual couple would meet in a humorous, unlikely or suggestive manner."

> that there is the reveal, where she tells him "No, no. I never came to your office for that. I wasn't applying for the Wife Project." But the timing, the play of that, still works in the book I think, as humour, but in quite a different way. (Simsion interview 2014: 6)

Writing in first person also allowed Simsion to give primacy to Don Tillman's distinctive character voice. While Don Tillman had the same voice in the script, writing the novel in first person allowed it to play out more powerfully, both dramatically and comedically. It is one of the distinguishing features of the novel.

> The voice was inspired by a friend of mine. I've got a friend who talks a lot like Don Tillman and I modified that a bit in certain ways. Probably the big difference from my friend, other than the practicalities of his life and so forth… is that early on I took on board the idea that we will empathise with people if they are really strongly in pursuit of a goal. So I made Don an absolute 'take no prisoners', 'never give up' type of person. My friend is a lot more normal and average in that, but Don just never gives up. He just keeps going. (Simsion interview 2014: 9)

In writing the many drafts of the original script, Simsion generally resisted the obvious temptation to use voice over; which could be said to be the filmic equivalent of the literary 'first person' and may have created a similar impact on the audience. In this, Simsion appears to have been influenced, at least in part, by the way in which screenwriting dogma (and film schools) often revile the use of voice over, seeing it as a lazy way around the screenwriters' maxim of 'Show Don't Tell'.[22] According to Simsion, "You're taught not to use voice over" (Simsion interview 2014: 2). But interestingly, when commissioned by Sony Pictures to rewrite his original 'Rosie Project' script (after the success of the novel) Simsion, at the request of the studio, introduced the use of voice over into the opening of the script.

> If I look at the current script [for Sony], I actually use a bit of voice over at the beginning, but fairly creatively, and not to access his inner thoughts, not as that sort of device. We're watching action at the beginning of the opening scene and [Don's] describing what he sees happening and we're watching the action. So we get to see the

[22] In the film *Adaptation* (2003), written by Charlie Kaufman and directed by Spike Jonze, the character of real life script 'guru' Robert McKee as played by Brian Cox blurts out: "God help you if you use voice-over in your work, my friends. God help you. That's flaccid, sloppy writing. Any idiot can write a voice-over narration to explain the thoughts of a character."

> disconnect between the way he's describing it and the way *we* would see it. (Simsion interview 2014: 2)

For Tilney Cotton the issue of person and point of view was not as complex. The progenitor script was written from a traditional detached narrative standpoint and this translated directly to a third-person narrative in the novel, allowing Cotton freedom to structure his story as he wished. In *Little Chef, Big Curse* there are scenes in which the protagonist is not present, as there were in the originating script *Matty Swink*.

In terms of *how*, through what technique, the story unfolds, however, I observed that Cotton's novel contained a great deal of narration and very little dialogue. Matty Swink is an isolated protagonist, being 'trapped' in his evil stepmother's diner. In film writing, having no one or nothing to talk to gives limited options for non-action character exposition. I suggested to Cotton that in an adaptation whose originating artefact is a film, particularly in a kids' film of this sort, one might expect a sidekick character or a similar device, to allow Matty to talk out his inner thoughts, back story and situation. This is a common filmic device.[23] According to Cotton:

> In the first two drafts of the script Matty did have a sidekick. And for that very reason. So that he can talk to it. He talks a lot to his sidekick... The character was a balloon giraffe who came to life and hung around with Matty (Cotton interview 2014: 5)... But then in the novel, that's the difference, you didn't need a sidekick anymore because you [the writer] can *say* what Matty is thinking and feeling. No doubt if it gets turned back into a film the sidekick might appear again. (Laughs.) I don't know what. Or maybe voice over. Matty's voice over. I never really thought about it consciously, but that must have been why the sidekick disappeared. It was the form. I didn't need it, and I had reservations about it even in the script. (Cotton interview 2014: 6)

In Chapter 3 I will discuss how issues around voice, point of view and person affected my own reverse adaptation of *The Art of Detachment*.

[23] Such as in *Cast Away* (Zemeckis 2000), in which the cast away Tom Hanks character anthropomorphises and talks to the volleyball 'Wilson' or Thumper the Rabbit in Disney's 1942 animated feature, *Bambi* (Disney 1942).

Tense, Dialogue and Action

Film and Television scripts are invariably written in the third person and almost invariably in the present simple tense. This latter restriction, in particular, mirrors the corporeal experience of the audience when watching a film. According to the Hollywood screenwriting website *Screenwriter to Screenwriter*: "The active voice keeps the reader firmly planted in the present reality of the screenplay. The more passive voice detaches us... The reason why we write in the simple present tense using the most evocative verb choice is because it brings the reader into that moment on the page" (Partridge 2009). Thus the screenwriter is limited to words that evoke for the reader *only* what the audience can see and hear in the moment.[24]

For the writer working exclusively in screen product, this 'third-person, present tense' rule severely reduces one's experience of working in a variety of tenses. For Tilney Cotton, inexperience in working with different tenses led to significant creative issues in the early drafts of his novel:

> The tenses were shifting all over the place. Because I'd been cutting and pasting there was actually plenty of stuff still left in the present [tense]. I didn't even pick up on it. I was so focussed on purely the story (Cotton interview 2014: 8)... For me the technical challenge of keeping the tenses consistent was difficult. It was almost like a form of dyslexia. I wouldn't even pick it up. I'd read a lot of novels, even classics from hundreds of years ago, and authors would play with the tense. They'd do it really subtly, you wouldn't even notice it, but it somehow has an effect on the audience. They obviously had great control over it. I had to become acutely consciously aware of how that was done. It felt like a conductor with his baton and the tempo changing here and there. (Cotton interview 2014: 5)

This was an issue for my own reverse adaptation that I exemplify further in Chapter 3.

Both Cotton and Simsion describe using dialogue as an anchor in reverse adapting their screenplays. Dialogue was cited as the one element of the actual words on the page with a reasonable possibility of surviving the

[24] "Only write what we can SEE or HEAR on screen – and nothing more" (Ferris 2012).

adaptation process word for word. This applied at least in the first draft. In writing for screen and prose, dialogue writing is an equally important skill, with the creative aim of avoiding, as Leitch puts it, "speech that feels like a speech rather than someone talking" (Leitch 2013: 73). According to Simsion:

> My starting point would be the dialogue. Often you expand it in the book. You've got a bit more room in the book to do that. You're adding in as you're writing. You're adding more description of what's going on around. You're summarising. So that you might, rather than putting something in dialogue on the page, you might say, "Gene told me that things had gone badly with his wife", rather than Gene saying in the actual dialogue, "It's gone badly with my wife." (Simsion interview 2014: 5)

Simsion described how, while he felt he was doing the correct 'literary' thing by converting some of the screenplay dialogue into more novelistic narrative description, he discovered that the opposite was often true.

> Interestingly, when it got to the editor, the [book] editor frequently asked me to expand those parts out again. 'Can we *show* this? Which I think just shows how much our sensibilities have been affected by film. We don't write like Victorian novels anymore. Most popular writing is quite filmic (Simsion interview 2014: 5)... Also, you can write a bit longer [in a novel]. The rule of thumb with screenplays is no more than one page of dialogue. Well, you can do more than that in a novel. You can extend your conversations quite a lot more. (Simsion interview 2014: 10)

Simsion went on to reflect on differences between dialogue writing training for prose and screen.

> I think, in fact, that screenwriting teaches you a pretty good discipline about keeping your dialogue precise. I think sometimes the fact that those rules aren't so strong in prose writing can be a trap. You can write sloppy dialogue. It's interesting. Just going the other way at the moment for *The Rosie Effect* [the sequel], which is the book I'm writing at the moment, and concurrently writing the screenplay... I found that if I'd written the dialogue first in the book, without having written the screenplay... putting it on the page of the screenplay, you'd start to see that it was over written... Stuff I wouldn't have noticed on the page (of the novel), but you notice once it's a screenplay. It's that discipline. The dialogue is very spare and there's nothing much else on the page in the screenplay. (Simsion interview 2014: 10)

I asked Simsion if he would then go back and cut the dialogue in the book in a similar way:

> Yes. I'd go back and cut it. Yes, the screenwriting training has, once again, encouraged me to just go back and cut some of the dialogue. Often, the editor would say, can you cut [back] this scene? And you realise that you can cut the scene [back], just in the same way as you would in screenwriting. Let's get this dialogue sharp. Let's get in late. Get out early. Pruning that dialogue down to its essence. (Simsion interview 2014: 10)

Cotton believes that his background in screenwriting has led him to develop a preference for action over dialogue in both mediums.

> I don't particularly like lots of dialogue. I'd say it was a film thing. The less dialogue the better, personally. I love great dialogue, the classics you know, but that's not this project. It's not my talent. I wasn't actually conscious of the 'Show Don't Tell' rule while writing the novel, but I naturally try not to put too much dialogue in to my script... The script was very action driven and the dialogue was secondary. I guess it's from my film background. Because my first love was film... I wasn't consciously doing it. But it's a style I like. Yes, it's been commented on actually in some of the reviews I've had. That [the book] is very full of action. (Cotton interview 2014: 5)

Word Count and Engagement with Character

One of the most self-evident features of reverse adaption is the increase in the number of words on page available to the writer through which to tell their story. This is the opposite, of course, to traditional book to film adaptation. In his article for *Publishers Weekly*, Hollywood screenwriter, Vincent Patrick, describes traditional book to screen adaptation as the process of "shoehorning 300-plus pages into 120 script pages"(Patrick 2005: 19). According to Patrick, this is achieved by:

> ... cutting interior (and sometimes inferior) monologues; dropping a character who provides color and interest but doesn't move the story forward; dropping effective anecdotes for the same reason (a veteran producer on a screenwriting project asked what I was going to do with the novel's terrific "antidotes", and I never thought fast enough to say I planned to poison them). (Patrick 2005: 19)

Interestingly, before speaking with me, neither Simsion nor Cotton had attempted to quantify the difference in word count between their scripts and novels. They certainly had a sense of the novel being larger, and that each form had its own appropriate length, but there was no comparative number put on this. One reason for this omission may be the fact that the length of these creative products is measured in different ways and is, thus, not directly comparable. Script length is invariably spoken of in number of pages, while novel length tends to be spoken of in terms of word count. Nor is the page count across the two forms directly comparable as there are significantly fewer words per page on a film script than for a novel.

Through my practice-led research I was able to observe that my own reverse adaptation consistently demonstrated a word ratio of approximately 1:3: script to novel. I put this to Simsion. He commented that:

> It's a bit hard to map because I don't think about word counts in screenplays. But we're talking about a one and a half hour screenplay. Call it 100 pages. And that converted into a novel which came in about 350 pages or 75,000 words. Rosie's Project is about 75,000 words and the corresponding screenplay is about 90 pages. So if you want to count words on the page, you're probably right. It's probably about three times. (Simsion interview 2014: 6)

Simsion immediately began to interrogate what those extra words might be made up of.

> So three times. And what is that? What's that made of? It's certainly description. It's expanded dialogue. It's dialogue tags and such like. 'Gene walked into the room and smiled at me and said *de de de de*...' when he speaks, rather than just dialogue under a character's name [as per script format]. It's also a few more scenes and a little bit more plot complexity. So once I'd done just one pass through, which was really just telling the story of the screenplay and any adjustment it needed to go into the first person… I also added a little more complexity to the plot. There is a little more 'who dunnit' plot around who is Rosie's father. (Simsion interview 2014: 10)

Simsion described one of the ways in which he added depth to the plot.

> I added an extra red herring: Geoffrey Case. There is a character Geoffrey Case who committed suicide and Don travels to get his mother's DNA. So that's in the book and not in the screenplay. So there

> was a bit of room with the novel to say 'let's add a little more complexity' to that part of the story and give the reader something more to think about. (Simsion interview 2014: 7)

In Simsion's case, my observation is that there were also the added words used to allow a first-person narrator to establish and exercise his 'voice': to set the tone; to talk about his observations and history; to be funny; to give the audience time to engage with the protagonist's world view and how it came to be. This all requires additional word count.

Simsion's *The Rosie Project* has also been produced as an audiobook[25] that offers another kind of measure of 'length'. According to Simsion:

> It's interesting, if you want to compare them for length. It takes seven and a half hours to read the book… The audio version of the book is seven and a half hours. So on that basis it's five times as long [as the film]. But of course, the film has the advantage that you can experience several things at once. You're seeing things and hearing things at the same time.[26] (Simsion interview 2014: 7)

This latter point, that of simultaneously layering information, is an important feature of screenplays, or rather, of screen product (television product, films, etc.) and contributes significantly to word count differences; as is the fact that screenplays are a blue print, a 'sketch' for a creative artefact and not a creative end product in themselves. These issues are further discussed in the following chapter.

Tilney Cotton's reverse adaptation, on the other hand, didn't follow the 1:3 word ratio as closely as my research might predict. In Cotton's case, however, there are clear reasons for this lack of adherence to the 1:3 ratio. His second draft script, the work upon which his reverse adaptation was primarily based, was approximately 30,000 words. The novel was approximately 40,000 words. The novel was written for children and, thus, at 40,000 words was significantly shorter than the average 70-80,000 word adult novel. In addition, his second draft script was also 'over length', exceeding the industry norm of 90-110 pages (equal to approximately 19-23,000 words.)

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[25] G. Simsion, *The Rosie Project*. Unabridged Audiobook. Read by Dan O'Grady. Penguin Books. (2013)

[26] An average feature script is approximately 90 pages long, or 'reads' at 90 minutes. Thus 5 x 90minutes = 7.5 hours = 450 minutes long. (I note that Simsion did this calculation instantly in his head.)

Both Cotton and Simsion commented without prompting that they felt their novel was better and goes "deeper" (Cotton interview 2014: 16) or has more "depth" (Simsion interview 2014: 16) than the film script. I suggested to both writers that, if nothing else, this might be caused simply by the fact that the audience spends more time with the characters in a novel and that consequently you end up closer friends. Simsion agreed:

> I think that is absolutely true. There's just more to it. And more to it, particularly on an intellectual level. I'm a fan of words. You can possibly do things comically, even emotionally more efficiently [on screen] than in a novel, with the right actors and so forth, but intellectually you're not going to get there. Intellectually, the novel is going to take you a lot further. In a film, you're only immersed for an hour and a half, two hours. And yes, you can concisely make people laugh. You can concisely make people pull emotional strings, but the intellectual side is pretty much limited... I think there's a lot more depth in the book. (Simsion interview 2014: 16)

THE WRITER'S PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE OF REVERSE ADAPTATION

This section contrasts the professional conditions of a screenwriter with those of a novelist and interrogates how this affected the writers interviewed while undertaking their reverse adaptations. Simsion and Cotton both asserted that they preferred the conditions of working as a novelist to working as a screenwriter. They also described experiencing greater creative control and cited greater respect shown to them as an author of books than as screenwriters. This was not surprising as it has been long been recognised that the screenwriter's situation has "been tinged with a sense of grievance, deriving from insufficient respect and recognition" (Sinyard 1986: 8).

> The professional screenwriter in Hollywood has always been undervalued. Think of only some of the great original screenplays that have come from Hollywood and have, in many cases, become part of our common culture and artistic heritage: *Citizen Kane* (Herman J. Mankiewicz and Orson Welles, 1941)… *North by Northwest* (Ernest Lehman, 1959), *Bonnie and Clyde* (David Newman and Robert Benton, 1967), *Chinatown* (Robert Towne, 1974), to name but a select few. How

> many of those names would mean anything at all to most literary academics, and even some film buffs?" (Sinyard 1986: 8)

Following the enormous success of *The Rosie Project*, Simsion is now in the rare position of having a greater than usual degree of power in negotiating contracts and creative control within the film industry. Even under these conditions, Simsion says:

> Given a choice now between having a career as a screenwriter or as a novelist, I'd choose to be a novelist... When I go to Hollywood, I'm wearing two hats. I'm both the novelist, and also the screenwriter. As a novelist I get respect. As a screenwriter, I won't say I'm disrespected, but you are well down the hierarchy. In the publishing world, the novelist sits at the top of the heap. Yes, there are publishers and there are editors and all that, but the novelist, whether they're well known or the flavour of the month, lots of people know who the writer is. Nobody knows who the publisher or the editor is. But then you go to the screenwriting world and it's your producers and directors and actors who sit above the screenwriter. And who are also very significant creative partners. (Simsion interview 2014: 12)

Internationally respected author (*Atonement* 2001) and screenwriter (*The Good Son* 1993) Ian McEwan has also commented on his comparative experiences in the film and book industries:

> I just got tired of the disappointments that always seem to gather around film projects, particularly when they relate to Hollywood… There's a great difference between writing a novel and writing a screenplay – not that you've got to collaborate, although that's significant. It's the fact that you don't own your work. You sell the rights, and you can be sacked. You can be off the project before you know it. I've become a little impatient with the whole business and I've got a feeling that the only satisfaction one could ever have from the process is to direct. If you write it, you've got to direct it. I don't think being a screenplay writer is work for a grown man, really. I think it is by convention a director's medium. (Morrow 2010: 41)

This is underscored by the fact that in the film industry a film product is usually considered to be 'by' the director, not 'by' the writer, and is typically credited as such. This generally applies even when the director is *not* a film's *auteur*, that is, where the director (usually) both wrote and directed the script and their creative influence is a hallmark of the film. According to Lothe in

Narrative in Fiction and Film: An Introduction, "The main reason why the *director* is usually regarded as the film's 'author' is that he or she not only has overall responsibility for according priorities and co-ordinating the activities that are a part of the production process, but also functions creatively in relation to the screenplay and the thematics of the film" (Lothe 2000: 31). Simsion describes working in the film industry as a collaborative process and suggests that:

> Some of the greatest experiences in life are being part of a team, but the way a screenwriter is part of a team is pretty limited. You are not actually in there on set. Not these days, [like] in conventional Hollywood filmmaking, making adjustments and so on. You tend to throw your thing in and it gets kicked around. Whereas, as a novelist you have final cut. You get the final word. (Simsion interview 2014: 13)

Cotton echoed Simsion's position.

> It's much more taxing to be a screenwriter, if you want to have creative power. It just involves a huge amount more energy. You have to deal with more people, and you may have to deal with people you don't want to have to deal with. A lot of the stuff screenwriters have to do is pissing in the wind. That stuff is more taxing. Emotionally taxing and sometimes soul destroying. With a novel, you don't have to worry about all that. You still have to worry about how you're going to get your story to the public, to a market. But there's less stress (Cotton interview 2014: 7)… You don't have to worry about logistics. You don't need to think about how this is going to be filmed. (Cotton interview 2014: 3)

Cotton commented that he experienced very little creative pressure in reverse adapting his novel for publication.

> With the novel there was almost none of that at all. The word count was the main thing. They wanted it down. A good 10,000 words had to go. There were economic considerations. The longer it was it cost more to print. And in terms of the market they were after, it was a bit too long for that market. They wanted to change the title. They wanted a title which reflected what the story was about. The title was *Matty Swink and the Curse of the Moon Mice*... They felt changing the name to *Little Chef, Big Curse* would sell the book. It would give an idea of what the book was about... I could have [chosen to disagree with that] but I didn't. I understood the logic of what they wanted. But it's moot as to whether that would make any difference. (Cotton interview 2014: 7)

In his article 'Chop Shop' for *Publishers Weekly*, Patrick suggests that, "If screenplays generally require more craft than art (William Goldman likens screenwriting to carpentry), then adaptations are certainly *all* craft" (Patrick 2000: 19). I asked Simsion if he felt that there was a cultural attitude of the screenwriter as tradesperson and a novelist as an artist. Simsion replied, "Absolutely. You really feel that" (Simsion interview 2014: 12).

Copyright, Contracts and Control

In the film industry, even in cases where a feature film project is initiated by the screenwriter, the writer is invariably obliged to assign copyright of the script to the producer of the film before production can take place. Film funding bodies, completion guarantors, distributors, etc., require that the producer, generally a production company, be contractually in control of the film; thus (usually) enabling them to have final say on creative choices such as casting, script and the 'final cut' in editing. They also need to have contractual freedom to make deals about where best to distribute the film and generally to deal with the creative product as they see fit, without having to negotiate separately with the writer (or director). According to Writers Victoria (2014):

> Once you sell the copyright on a piece of your work it no longer belongs to you. It is customary in the film industry, for example, for a screenwriter to assign the rights of their film script to a film company, meaning the film company then owns it and can do what they like with it. However, this is not customary in the world of book publishing.[27]

In the publishing industry the creative novelist can more often 'license' copyright of their work to a publisher than 'assign' it. In a 2013 interview entitled 'Copyright Now and In the Digital Age', Australian Society of Authors Executive Director, Angelo Loukakis, tells us that "copyright is the ability to protect your work as contracted and to maintain certain rights around your work. As an author, or any kind of creative for that matter, under the guiding principles of copyright, [it is something that] you can give away, if you like. The fundamental point is that the choice is yours" (ASA 2013). The creative literary novelist, then, is generally allowed to retain

[27] Writers Victoria Website. (2014). 'Copyright'. Retrieved January 2016 from http://writersvictoria.org.au/help-for-writers/publishing-tips/copyright

copyright ownership, and a greater degree of control over their original work, while the equally creative screenwriter invariably signs it away.

This necessity to assign copyright is generally attributed to the fact that feature films and television product cost so much money that risk to the investor needs to be minimised. As Simonton claims in his study of cinematic creativity and production budgets in the *Journal of Creative Behavior*: "There is no doubt that feature films represent among the most expensive forms of creative achievement. The 1997 movie *Titanic*, for instance, cost approximately $200 million" (Simonton 2005: 2). While according to Patrick, "A publisher [of books] generally risks tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars, a studio risks tens of millions" (Patrick 2000: 19). Thus, there would appear to be a 'threshold effect' (Simonton 2005: 2) between the cost of production and 'publication' of a work. This in turn has an impact on the ability of the writer to maintain creative control of that work. It is hard to say with certainty whether these financial realities is causative or consequent to the relative position of the writer within their relevant industries, but it appears to be proportional, reflecting the scale of financial commitment on behalf of the publisher to eventually bring the work to an audience.

Similarly, and somewhat ironically, due to the huge success of *The Rosie Project*, and to the unusually large advances offered by publishing companies for its sequel, *The Rosie Effect*, Simsion found himself in the position of having to negotiate creative content changes with his international publishers. This was a complex process as his books have different publishers in different territories. Simsion describes one example of a creative discussion with a publisher.

> There was a request from the US for a change which they flagged as may be big for their edition. Basically in *The Rosie Effect*, Don gets arrested and the copper who arrests him says: 'Okay. I've got you but I'm going to have to get you assessed. It's more than my job is worth. I mean next week you could go out and shoot up a school.' Now the Americans say, 'That's just too close to home for us. The idea that someone with Asperger's might go and shoot up a school...' And my comment is, 'Well that's what I wanted here. This is not just a comedy. This is actually what it's like to go through life with Asperger's and encounter people who think that you're the kind of guy who might go and shoot up a

> school.' So as far as I'm concerned, that stays! So they'll look at things like that. (Simsion interview 2014: 13)

Alternatively, Simsion describes a situation in which he may allow some creative flexibility.

> Don's a strong atheist who takes on religion. Nobody is worried about that. But I'm told that the censor might have a problem in China because there's a Chinese student who cheats [in a university assignment] in *The Rosie Project*. It's been sold to China, but it hasn't gone past the censor yet... We may have to decide that he is an Indian student. (Laughs). And really, I wouldn't have a huge problem with that, because I don't think you're damaging the spirit of the story. But if they said, 'In the end Don has to convert to religion' or something like that, I'd say, 'No. I don't think so.' But ultimately I've got way, way, way more control as a novelist, whereas in a film what you see on the screen may bear little resemblance to what you've written. (Simsion interview 2014: 13)

Perhaps Simsion's experience of having greater control as a novelist can be at least partially understood by the fact that the creation of a novel does not depend upon the means of production and publication. A book can be written speculatively either way. With first-time literary authors, the book is generally already written before seeking publication. In contrast, when negotiating prospective film deals, often an investor's financial backing (be that a production company, funding body, distributor, etc.) is *essential*, and an absolute threshold to raising enough money to enable that film to be produced. Thus the high cost of producing a film or television product appears to have the effect of reducing the writer's creative control, and increasing the investor's control, via the producer. In effect, though, it appears that no matter which medium a writer is working in, the bigger the financial commitment, the more creative interference a writer is likely to experience. However, the fundamental difference between the two media remains that the writer of a novel generally retains control of 'final say' on what changes can be made, whereas a film writer assigns copyright to the producer early in the development process.

In summary, both Cotton and Simsion regard reverse adapting their scripts as a valuable and (in Simsion's case a literally as well as metaphorically) enriching experience. Their experiences through the creative process of reverse adapting their respective screenplays to the novel format,

and their subsequent professional activities within the publishing industry, shed light on several under explored aspects of screen adaptation, both as a creative practice and as a professional arena. For both Cotton and Simsion, their experiences of the comparative industrial conditions of being a writer within the book and film industries, led them to prefer the conditions of being a novelist, especially as regards personal status as an artist, copyright requirements and creative control of the story product.

On the business side of things, Simsion's reverse adaptation, in particular, functions as a lens through which one can observe the impact of the cost of production and publication upon both creative freedom. Following the unusual success of Simsion's novel and the subsequent enormous rise in budgets involved with the project, Simsion's journey illustrates the direct impact that cost of production and publication can have upon creative freedom, even within the publishing industry. For both Simsion and Cotton, the decision to reverse adapt their unproduced and 'unwanted' scripts acted as a threshold breaker in getting their stories to an audience. Indeed, the low cost of production and the relative viability of achieving publication (of a book rather than a film) was one of the major drivers to begin a reverse adaptation. It was also hoped that publication of a novel would attract attention to their script. However, as each novel developed and progressed, it became increasingly valuable to the writer as an artefact in its own right.

On the creative side of the equation, reverse adaptation, especially from script to novel (as opposed to film to novel), allows the screenwriter new comparative ways of understanding the rigid traditions of screenwriting. The strict imperatives of writing concisely, writing in the present (usually simple) tense, and in third person are far more prescriptive than their word-rich, dogma-'lite', literary counterparts. Other essential creative script elements, however, such as point of view, voice, character empathy, dialogue writing and world building are writing skills needed equally by the screenwriter and the novelist.

The creative learning curve experienced by Simsion and Cotton in undertaking their reverse adaptations will resonate with many screenwriters who try their hand at prose. It is also fascinating to observe the different emphasis on formalised story structure within the screenwriting and prose

writing disciplines. Screenwriting not only venerates structure as a storytelling *El Dorado*, but has evolved several dedicated developmental tools, such as the scene breakdown, the treatment and the card system to facilitate this obsession. In undergoing the reverse adaptation process, it was also felt by both authors that the book went 'deeper' than the script, and that in the end was a richer product than the originating unproduced script. It is interesting to note that Simsion and Cotton both returned to their respective scripts subsequent to, and in some instances concurrent with, writing the novel and consider their rewritten scripts to be improved as a result of undertaking the reverse adaptation. In writing my own reverse adapted novel, *The Art of Detachment*, I found many similarities in my own experience to those described by Simsion and Cotton. The following chapter will discuss my own practice-led creative research, the process taken to reverse adapt the script and my observations surrounding that process.

CHAPTER 3

SCRIPT TO NOVEL: A screenwriter's journey

To the regret of many perhaps, no way has yet been discovered to reverse the direction of Eddington's Arrow of Time. Not so with traditional book to film adaptation. As the previous chapter illustrates, not only can this reversal be achieved, it can be done with enormous éclat. Coming from a background as a professional screenwriter/director and lecturer, I found that reverse adapting *The Art of Detachment* involved embracing seismic shifts in the way I approached writing. Long learned habits of brevity and stylistic obeisance had to evolve into a more individualistic, word rich and generally less constricted manner of writing. Once I fully understood that *my* words on the page were the event horizon of engagement with the audience/reader, I was able to embrace and delight in this. This understanding and mental leap was, for me, the key to transforming myself from a script-to-prose 'translator' into an (aspiring) novelist.

There is much overlap in the skills and personal capacities needed to be a good fiction writer, whether for the screen or in print. The first, I believe, is having something to say to the world. Following this, I would suggest, are qualities such as a vivid imagination, creative empathy, the ability to walk in the shoes of a character, a capacity to envisage and describe rich authentic worlds, an instinct for telling a story through compelling action, and great word skills. Other, often undervalued writer's skills, include such qualities as tenacity, self-motivation and the passion and self-discipline to systematically apply oneself to writing. But while there are swathes of similarities in the experience of being a writer for screen and for the page, there are also differences.

Taking as its baseline the point of view of a screenwriter, this chapter interrogates and contextualises my experiences, not only of reverse adapting the story of *The Art of Detachment*, but of having to adapt my personal writing skills to suit the potentials and limitations of a new form. It exemplifies some of the challenges a screenwriter faces in encountering specifically literary elements, such as character-action description, use of multiple tenses and

speech tags. It also discusses challenges faced when reverse adapting other more universal storytelling elements such as voice and narrative point of view. This chapter also continues work begun in the previous chapter, examining the difference in how screenwriting and novel writing approach the rigours of story structure or plot, and asks whether a screenwriter's armoury of formal structural discourse and short development documents might be of use to the novelist.

While scholarly and creative discourse in the fields of both screenwriting and novel writing expound and interrogate general principles for what makes writing 'good', the emphasis of this discourse and the expectation placed upon a writer to conform is, I propose, quite different for each medium. Both screen and novel writing propose rules or at least principles for writers, but those of screenwriting are far more proscriptive as to style and form. Cook and Miller describe it as working on "a larger canvas with fewer restrictions. And you'll need to abide by guidelines that actually are guidelines rather than hard, fast rules" (Cook and Miller 2010: 312). One of the major differences in writing for the two mediums is that a screenwriter is required to curtail or adapt much of their personal writing style in service of universal film industry standards. In the next section, by way of establishing a basis for comparison, I outline the basic rules that professional screenwriters necessarily comply with and the rationale for why these rules exist.

Reverse adaptation and the God Author

In Jeri Kroll's article 'Treading a Fine Line' (1999), based on her interviews with lauded children's book author, Morris Gleitzman (*Two Weeks with the Queen* 1989, *Blabber Mouth* 1992), Kroll describes Gleitzman's career as having begun as a screenwriter. Then in 1985 Gleitzman wrote a script to book adaptation of *The Other Facts of Life,* written during production of its successful progenitor TV series of the same name (also written by Gleitzman). Of this Kroll tells us:

> Gleitzman remarked that screenwriters go through 'a normal process of grief' whenever they see their work tampered with by all those involved

> in the production process [of film]. By writing fiction, however, he felt he had a 'chance to tell the story to posterity, where I was the producer, director, actors, and make-up people.' He became, in effect, the God-Author, in total control. (Kroll 1999: 159)[28]

There is no such thing as the 'God Author' in the film industry. In the *Journal of Screenwriting*, Koivumki tells us, "The aesthetic independence of an artwork is usually defined by the direct relationship between the viewer and the artwork. The screenplay, however, is actualized for the viewer only via cinematic performance" (Koivumki 2011: 25). For better or for worse directors, producers, distributers, actors, logistical concerns and budget demands invariably come between the writer and their audience. Actors interpret and embody the writer's vision of a character using their own psychological and physical characteristics, as well as their own life experience and professional skills. Directors interpret or remediate words into vision and sound, bringing with it their own interpretation of the text and creative biases. A producer's focus on budgets (generally lack of) and box office, create challenges, sometimes leading to major changes to the script's locations, era, action and even story.

Unlike a literary novel, even the most compelling of scripts is not a finished work of art, but a sell-document whose primary function is to attract interest and finance to the project. It is a blueprint for an imagined end product, that is, the produced film.

> Novels are an artistic end, not a means-to-an-artistic end as screenplays are… No one person can claim they 'birthed' a movie, unless they literally did everything from the scriptwriting, acting, directing, set designing, costuming, lighting, etc. (Cook and Miller 2010: loc. 473)

Importantly, a film script not only acts as an indication of the film's *creative* appeal, but also as a logistical business brief. Hollywood scriptwriter and author of *The Screenwriter's Bible*, David Trottier tells us:

> A properly formatted screenplay serves two purposes. The first purpose is to tell a story… When you read a great screenplay, you see the movie in your mind and can't wait to see it on the big screen… But a

[28] These comments are based upon Kroll's previous interviews with Gleitzman (Kroll 1993)

> screenplay also serves a necessary secondary purpose as a tool for the filmmaker. A screenplay is a working document – a blueprint, if you will – that makes it possible for the director, the cinematographer, the actors, and the many crew members to do their jobs. (Trottier n.d: 1)

Reading a well-written and conventional Hollywood-style script that "works with traditional models of linear narrative" (Batty 2009: 2), also gives the experienced prospective investor/distributor/insurer a preliminary indication of such things as: the length of the film; production requirements, such as the type of locations and number of shooting days (and thus catering, transport and accommodation requirements); safety issues, casting costs, as well as post production requirements such as editing, music and visual effects; all of which collectively give the knowledgeable reader a reasonable first indication of the likely ball park budget of the prospective film.

On its website, the prominent Hollywood institution *The Black List*[29] tells us:

> There are strict standards for screenplay formatting to ensure that any given script can be compared to another on relatively even terms… Screenplay formatting is very complex, adhering to a specific set of standards that make the script more efficient to read and analyze. Virtually every aspect of a screenplay has been standardized, from the margin sizes to placement and style of the page numbers. (Black List Guides 2015: 1)

All professional scripts are written in Courier 12 point font,[30] and adhere to a strict page layout, that, amongst other functions distinguishes easily between big print (action description) and dialogue. It also demarcates the script into scenes whose headers indicate location, interior or exterior and night or day.[31] The 'read' of the script is also meant to reflect the corresponding experiential screen time.

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[29] *The Black List* functions as an intermediary between screenwriters seeking to have their films made and producers looking for scripts. It has assisted in the development of over 200 feature films including *Slumdog Millionaire* and *The King's Speech*. https://blcklst.com/about/ (Black List 2015)

[30] "Courier is a fixed-pitch font, meaning each character or space is exactly the same width. Since standard screenplay format is designed so that one page approximately equals one minute of screen time, consistent character spacing is important." (Screenwriting.io 2016).

[31] Scripts are broken down into scene units as, technically, they indicate a change of location only. This is so as to facilitate the shooting schedule, as generally all scenes in one location are shot in one 'shooting block', as are blocks of 'day' and 'night' shoots.

> … standardized font size allows executives to estimate the length of the film based on the length of the script. It is no exaggeration to say that 99% of studio executives will NOT read a spec script that is written in a different font …[32] Industry executives and producers use a simple rule of thumb when reading a screenplay: 1 page equals 1 minute of screen time (this is where the standardized font size and margins come in. (Black List Guides 2015: 2)

A typical commercial feature script is between 90-110 pages (or 90-110 minutes in length), thus these strict style parameters make it easy to see if a script is over-length. So (unless you're George Lucas), a writer can't present a three-hundred page/three hour script to prospective investors.

Indeed, screenwriting format is now so proscribed that the majority of professional and aspiring screenwriters across the globe use the same screenwriting software, *Final Draft*[33] or its free downloadable counterparts, primarily *Celtx*.[34] These software programs have utterly homogenised the formatting of scripts, so that, barring language, there is no technical barrier to scripts being read (creatively and logistically) by individuals in different countries. When I began working professionally as a writer/director approximately twenty years ago, there was still some room for minor differences in script layout and style, but now there is very little tolerance to deviations from the pre-determined standard.

Further to these script layout rules, the strict dogma of screenwriting style also extends to the *creative* words on page. Good screenwriting is brutally concise, precise and evocative of the experience of the prospective film. The 'read' moves quickly. Big print, for example, is written in short, efficient bursts.

> A savvy author will always find a way to make the scene direction dynamic. An unbroken 8-line block of prose to start each scene is boring to look at and can be a slog to get through. (Black List Guides 2015: 2)

A script also tells the action of the story in the *order* that it will unfold on screen, describing only what can be *seen* or *heard* in the moment, as these are

[32] This applies equally to 'gatekeepers' in the Australian industry.
[33] The Australian Writers' Guild 'The peak body representing Australian performance writers' describes Final Draft as the 'industry standard' and the 'number one selling scriptwriting software in the world.' (Australian Writers Guild. 'Final Draft'. 2016)
[34] https://www.celtx.com/index.html

the only two senses available to the screenwriter. Information is also revealed only *at the same moment* at which an audience member, watching the film, would be exposed to it. As discussed in the previous chapter, the writer is also limited to the present tense and third person. In short, the script is "meant to mimic the feeling of watching a film" (Black List Guides 2015: 3).

Busy film production gatekeepers (investors/distributors/agents) read numerous scripts each week. A fundamental function of this strict adherence to rigid style limitations is to make the writing itself invisible to such readers, thus allowing these gatekeepers to focus wholly upon *envisaging the content*; that is, story, character and theme. The absence of 'flowery' writing also ensures a quick read for busy people.

There are no equivalent absolutes for format and style in the world of the literary novel. Indeed, a novelist is lauded for discovering their own fresh literary style. This can vary infinitely from, for example, the poetic elegance of Nobel Prize laureate Tony Morrison's *Beloved* (Morrison 1987), through the rollercoaster ride of a Stephen King or J. K Rowling novel to, the 'inner world' of Salinger's (1951) first-person narrator Holden Caulfield in *Catcher in the Rye*, or the comic formality of P.G. Wodehouse's Wooster and Jeeves novels. The range is infinite. In his lauded and much reprinted text, *On Writing Well*, William Zinsser tells us:

> There is no style store; style is organic to the person doing the writing, as much a part of him as his hair, or if he is bald, his lack of it… Readers want the person who is talking to them to sound genuine. Therefore, a fundamental rule is: be yourself. (Zinsser 2001: 19)

(It appears *women* neither 'do the writing' nor go bald...) Brian Klem, in his popular Writer's Digest blog, reinforces this notion, suggesting:

> Some writers have a writing style that's very ornate – long, complex and beautiful sentences, packed with metaphors and imagery (think Frank McCourt and John Irving). Others have a more straightforward style – sparse prose, simple sentences, etc. (Klem 2012: 2)

The comparison between the stylistic dogma of screenwriting and novel writing is further discussed below, especially in relation to their approach to the development of narrative structure.[35]

Big Print and Tense

At the point of embarking upon the reverse adaptation of my screenplay, I had been writing screen stories 'without the flesh on' for decades.[36] Consequently, when I started actually putting words on the page, the cornucopia of creative options and the sheer *number* of words available to me as a writer felt like I was taking part in an orgy of words. In some ways it was like being released from a creative prison. However, upon reading the 'first' draft of *The Art of Detachment* (novel), I felt that some parts of the book were not singing from the page as richly as I was seeing them in my head. They felt a little thin, not in story, but in their *effect* upon the reader. After due consideration, I realised I was still unconsciously clinging to certain Spartan writing habits.

One area in particular in which this was manifest was in character-action description. By this I mean phrases like 'George looked down, confused', or 'He stood by the window thoughtfully stroking his beard,' which describe the physical actions and experience of the characters, expressions, gestures, looks, reactions, quirks, personality, and so forth. Typically, in screenwriting, the writer includes a strict minimum of this type of "actable actions" (Scheller 2015: 19) in their description because: "It may be intrusive for a writer to suggest how an actor should play a line. Indeed, some vagueness may even be preferable" (Brown 2014: 1). It is another rule of thumb, therefore, that if an actor can *do* it, there is no need to describe it, unless it's vital to the *meaning* of the scene or story. McKee tells us that:

> This old Hollywood admonition asks the writer to provide each actor with the maximum opportunity to use his or her creativity; not to overwrite and pepper the page with constant description of behaviors,

[35] It is important to note that here I am referring to rules only as they apply to format and style of writing. A good screenwriter's imagination is no more limited as to content (except by budget and logistics) than that of a novelist.

[36] Miller and Cook describe screenwriting (as opposed to novel writing) as 'bare-bones' writing (Cook & Miller 2010: loc. 196).

> nuances of gesture, tones of voice… An actor's reaction to a script saturated with that kind of detail is to toss it in the trash, thinking, "They don't want an actor, they want a puppet." (McKee 1997: 381)

With regard to character description in prose, however, Deborah Westbury tells us:

> The best writing is generous. To show the readers what you saw, felt, touched, tasted, smelled is to enable them to enter into your original experience. To simply 'tell' them leaves the reader on the outside of your experience. It is not generous or interesting. (Westbury 1992: 150)

While best-selling author and *Writer's Digest* columnist, Elizabeth Sims, further suggests that:

> Agents and editors love the five senses, but they want and expect more. They want physical business that deepens not just your setting, but your characterizations. Here's the key: The best authors use body language in their narratives. Odd thing is, I have never once heard an agent or editor comment on my (or any author's) use of body language, and I think that's because it goes by so smoothly it's almost unnoticed. Yet it absolutely gives texture and depth to your work. When it's missing, fiction feels flat. (Sims 2012: 8)

In many ways it might be argued that these literary character-action descriptions play a similar role to the filmic 'reaction shot', the latter of which is a visual cut away to someone listening to, or observing the simultaneous dialogue or action of another. Both of these creative elements flesh out a character (emotionally and intellectually), and can reveal more about the *truth* of a character than what he or she says or does. They add to the emotional impact and deepen an audience's understanding of character and scene. Once I became fully cognisant of the fact that, in novel writing, my words were the end point of the communication between myself and the audience, and that I had been unconsciously avoiding writing these character-action descriptions, I went about introducing more such description into my writing. I found this to be a key difference in writing for the two mediums.

One instance of how this was exemplified in my reverse adaptation process was at the point of the story where, after George and Ann have rowed together for the first time at training, the girls are in the boathouse gym together. George has just finished a time split trial and Ann sits down next to

George on the rower bar. Ann suggests to George that they compete in doubles together. The originating script reads as follows:

Ann leans in closer - too intimate for George.

ANN
(low) I've heard a scout from Berkeley is coming to the regatta.

GEORGE
(pulls back) I haven't rowed doubles for years.

ANN
Were you *there* when we rowed the other day...?

BEAT. Eye contact.

GEORGE
I don't do teams.

ANN
Then don't think of it as a team. Think of it as one race... *BEAT*... You can still try to beat me in the single. Good luck with that by the way.

In the first draft of the reverse adapted novel this became:

> Ann leaned closer into me and said in a low voice, "I've heard a scout from Berkeley might be coming to the regatta."
>
> "I haven't rowed doubles for years," I said.
>
> "Were you even there when we rowed the other day?" Her eyes held mine.
>
> "I don't do teams."
>
> "Then don't think of it as a team," she whispered. "You can still try to beat me in the single. Good luck with that by the way."

And in the final draft it became:

> "A scout is going to take note of that," she said. I took a moment before speaking.

> "I d… don't do doubles," I said.
>
> Ann's eyes went dark with excitement, like she sensed an opening. She leaned in close to me. I could feel her breath on my ear.
>
> "Were you even *there* when we rowed together the other day?" Our eyes locked. I remembered. It took me an unforgivably long time to speak.
>
> "I d… don't d… do *teams*," I spat out the last word with unintentional emphasis.
>
> "So don't think of it as a team," she persisted. "Think of it as a race. Just one race on the day."

To me, these three examples illustrate the transition from a script's word-lite style, through a simple script to prose translation, to a richer, more effective style of prose writing.

Another literary element that was awkward for me to adjust to, on beginning to write prose, was speech attributions or speech tags; 'he said', 'she said', etc. A screenwriter never uses them, as dialogue is attributed by means of the character's name in capital letters above the following block of dialogue. As essential as speech tags are to prose dialogue, and as accustomed as I am to *reading* them, it felt unnatural for me to write them and I was hyper-aware of them on the page, as though they were written in neon ink. I also struggled with the degree to which they should be 'creative', for example, she implored, he crooned, etc. In seeking guidance on this, I came upon Elmore Leonard's 2001 article for *The New York Times* entitled, 'Writers on Writing; Easy on the adverbs, exclamation points and especially hooptedoodle', which is the precursor to his better known 2007 book, *10 Rules of Writing*. Rule number three states, "Never use a verb other than 'said' to carry dialogue"(Leonard 2001); the idea behind this principle is that a reader's experience of dialogue isn't interrupted by 'he said' or 'she said', as it is accepted without notice, whereas something like 'she asseverated', makes the reader conscious of the author's hand.

> The line of dialogue belongs to the character; the verb is the writer sticking his nose in. But said is far less intrusive than grumbled, gasped, cautioned, lied. I once noticed Mary McCarthy ending a line of dialogue

> with "she asseverated," [37] and had to stop reading to get the dictionary. (Leonard 2001)

In his lauded *On Writing: Memoirs of a Writer,* Stephen King (2000) seconds this by begging his readers not to "do these things. Please oh please. The best form of dialogue attribution is said, as in he said, she said, Bill said, Monica said" (King 2000: 126). Adverbs get an equally bad wrap, but this is no surprise to a screenwriter. Leonard's 'fourth rule' of writing tells us that the use of adverbs is "a mortal sin" (Leonard 2001: 4), while King insists that "the road to hell is paved with adverbs, and I will shout it from the rooftops" (King 2000: 125). It appears, however, that the greatest sin is the combination of the two. According to King:

> I can be a good sport about adverbs, though. Yes I can. With one exception: dialogue attribution. I insist that you use the adverb in dialogue attribution only in the rarest and most special of occasions… and not even then, if you can avoid it. (King 2000: 126)

Not only did these comments make me laugh, but they resonated with my own style of writing and gave me a rule of thumb by which to proceed. It also suited my straight-talking first person narrator (George's) voice. Consequently, I changed most, but not all, of the speech tags in my novel to conform to this principle.

Another useful piece of advice garnered by me from Leonard's '10 rules' was rule number six: "Never use the words 'suddenly' or 'all hell broke loose'" (Leonard, 2001). The latter wasn't an issue, but I 'suddenly' realised that I had been over using the former and consequently tried to employ it as little as possible, which was not as easy as it may seem. Likewise, Leonard's rule number five: "Keep your exclamation points under control" (Leonard 2001), was a timely warning to me as I can be an enthusiastic writer!!!

As a writer with a background in film, another literary element that presented itself as a challenge in the reverse adaption of my screenplay was the creative use of tense. Kress tells us that:

---

[37] Me too… "Asseveration: The solemn or emphatic declaration or statement of something: *I fear that you offer only unsupported asseveration. (*Oxford Dictionaries Website. n.d. http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/asseveration).

> Telling a story in the past tense has been the convention in English for more than two centuries. Readers usually expect this, so even though the verb forms do imply that the action is already over, readers don't experience any lack of immediacy. In fact, few will even notice that the story is told in the past tense, as long as that tense is used consistently throughout the work. Past tense therefore disappears, leaving the reader free to concentrate on the story. (Kress 1994: 8) [38]

In contrast to this, as previously noted, screenwriters uniquely employ the present tense, usually the present simple tense. Thus while, at that stage of my journey, I understood "the importance of using the appropriate tense" in novel writing (Preziosi 2007:8), I didn't understand how to craft with it. Like Cotton suggests, I simply hadn't had enough practice. Consequently, in the first draft of *The Art of Detachment*, inconsistent use of tense was possibly its most obvious stylistic weakness.

This wasn't made easier by writing in the first person. In writing it, I found George's voice wanted to switch between a fully reflective past tense: 'It bounced off my left temple and fell to the floor at my feet,' and a more active storytelling voice; 'So anyway, I'm writing my name down in the rowing column and I hear a voice to the left.' As a storyteller, I instinctively felt that switching between these two forms was acceptable as it reflected the way people actually speak when they are telling a story, and in the first draft several whole scenes were written in this active voice. However, in reworking the next few drafts and under guidance from my supervisor, I began to understand the unintentional jarring effect of switching tenses like this. These short extracts below (from the moment that George and Ann first speak together) indicate the development of the adaptation over drafts.

6. INT. SCHOOL CORRIDOR - MORNING .6

Pan across a row of typed headings: CHESS — DEBATING — ARCHERY — ROWING... A hand enters and adds a name to the rowing column: *George Symons*.

[38] I find this comment interestingly akin to my earlier observation that a primary function of rigid script style rules is to make the writing itself invisible to the reader, thus allowing focus on content of the story. It is only when you break the stylistic convention that the attention is consciously drawn to the writing style.

ANN(OS)
Georgia, isn't it.

George turns to see Ann next to her, smiling.

GEORGE
George.

George turns back to the board.

ANN
You a rower?

Ann offers her hand.

ANN
I'm Ann Cavanaugh.

Which in an early draft became:

So anyway, I'm writing my name down in the rowing column and I hear a voice next to me.

"Are you a rower?"

It was Blondie-locks-the-brain-box… otherwise known as Miss Small Target. I look at her and turn away. Sooooo not interested.

"Georgia isn't it?"

"George," I say, without looking at her. She sticks out her hand like I'm meant to shake it. I can't see her, just her hand in my peripheral vision, but I'm sure she's smiling *nicely*.

"I'm Ann Cavanaugh."

And in the final draft:

So anyway, I'm writing my name down in the rowing column and I hear a voice to the left.

"Are you a rower?"

It was Blondie-locks-the-brain-box, otherwise known as Miss Small Target. I ignored her and turned back to finish writing my name.

"Georgia isn't it?"

She looked me up and down, assessing my physical characteristics. Anyone who knows anything about rowing can see that I'm genetically blessed. Brain-box nodded, stuck out her hand and sent me a *winning* smile. Beautiful teeth, btw.

"I'm Ann Cavanaugh."

In this third excerpt there remain moments of present tense usage, but only to 'conversationally' introduce the sequence, and for when a comment is continuing into the present; that is, 'I'm genetically blessed.' This last excerpt also further illustrates my previous comment about adding more character-action description to the prose. Also note that in the first and second excerpts, as I will go on to discuss, George hadn't yet acquired her stutter. In the final draft of the novel, some sequences of present tense writing remain, but only, I hope, where it is not consciously noticed, but only creatively felt by the reader.

Voice, Person, Point of View and Genre

In her well-known text *The Writing Book*, Kate Grenville suggests, "Point of View isn't an optional extra. Every piece of writing, no matter how neutral it seems, has a point of view" (Grenville 2014: 69). "Point of view," she continues, "is the voice a story speaks with, so it has to be the right voice for the right story" (Grenville 2014: 71). On deciding to adapt my screenplay to a novel, I knew immediately that it would be written in the first person. The originating script uses the protagonist (George's) voiceover as a central device and this sets the tone and point of view of the film. The creative link between voiceover and first person narration is well established in book to screen adaptation.

> Much like direct address, voice-over narration [in film] simulates the action of a [literary] narrator (who may also be a character in the story) speaking directly to us, providing context for a commentary on the story… Voice-over is often used in literary adaptations in which verbatim passages from the original text are "read into" the film. (Lewis 2014: 159)

If indeed "A narrator mediates the meaning of what we read through his or her point of view" (Masterpiece 2011: 3), I wasn't daunted at allowing George to 'speak' directly to the reader in first person, as I felt I knew George well enough to write extendedly from her world view. My intention, above all (like that of Simsion), was to have the audience empathise primarily with George on her unique journey and emotional learning curve. According to

author and creative writing teacher James Scott Bell, "There is a range of intimacy in POV. The most intimate is first person, where the narration is coming from the head of the character. We get the closest possible connection to the thoughts and feelings of the Lead" (Bell 2007: 3). In using first person narration, this was the effect I was aiming to create.

Writing in first person also raised the issue of adapting George's voice from script into prose. This extract below illustrates the tone of the originating script and George's voice. It is the second scene of the film, in which George, upon arriving at Greystones for her first day of school, detachedly observes the first-day events around her.

2. EXT/INT. SCHOOL/SIDE STREET/CAR – MORNING 2.

The Lexus stops around the corner at a side entrance to the school. George, 17, sits in the driver's seat. She has 'attitude' and badly applied black eyeliner. She watches girls stream into the gate.

GEORGE (VO)
So it was obviously February, right.

George climbs out of the car, runs a hand through dark, chopped-at hair.

GEORGE (VO)
Why else would I be wearing another new school uniform.

She looks at the school and straightens her moss green blazer. Resigned.

GEORGE (VO)
This one was like some sort of Hogwarts meets – I dunno – Russian schoolgirl porn-flick thing... Depends on your attitude I s'pose.

George straightens up and strides towards the gate - zapping the car alarm without looking back.

GEORGE (VO)
Whatever.

3. EXT. SCHOOL — GROUNDS — MORNING 3.

George walks confidently across the school courtyard through a sea of girls.

GEORGE (VO)
A lotta chicks would'a freaked out about having to start over as often as I have.

As she walks, George's uniform 'morphs' from the blue checks/moss green blazer of Greystones' uniform, through four contrasting private school uniforms: Navy, maroon, lemon and purple with a silly hat.

GEORGE (VO)
But the nomad thing didn't get to me. It's like... The secret is pretty simple... First you gotta understand that everything, like everything in life is transitory, right... Everything changes and like...

Her clothing returns to Greystones' uniform as she exits.

4. INT. SCHOOL CORRIDOR — MORNING 4.

(George's POV) A label: Room number '12B'. Searching, we walk along a corridor filled with girls on their way to class.

GEORGE (VO)
... there's no point getting attached to stuff and making a big deal of it and you know, like, dropping a fit if things go wrong or change or whatever... It's spiritual.

George arrives at the door of a classroom full of Year 12 girls. (End POV.) She looks in at them disdainfully.

GEORGE (VO)
Buddhists call it learning The Art of Detachment... Me...

George sighs - superior.

GEORGE (VO)
I call it the art of Just Not

Giving a Shit.

She walks into class.

In adapting script to novel, it was at the heart of my creative intention to keep this sassy, (transparently mistaken) over-confident tone to George's voice. This was relatively easy for me to achieve in a script because she is actually talking, but in the novel, even though George is speaking to the reader through prose, it wasn't actual dialogue as is the case with scripted voiceover. In *Fiction's Inexhaustible Voice* Stephen Ross tell us that, "[Literary] Authors employ many different techniques – most are conventional, some experimental – to fulfil the functions of mimetic voice" (Ross 1989: 72). In attempting to create an authentic and intriguing voice in the novel, I relied heavily on grammar, vocabulary, style and content, to create what I hoped was an equivalent thought-scape (rather than literal voice) of George's inner world. For example, I experimented with style and voice in the opening words of the novel, which corresponds to part of the above script extract.

> You could tell it was February because I was wearing my new school uniform. It was simple math.
>
> February + New School = New Uniform
>
> This uniform was a sort of Hogwarts meets, I don't know, Japanese schoolgirl porn kind of thing, depending on the attitude you take to it I suppose.

For the most part in the novel, in writing this narrator's "inwardly created voice" (Bishop 2013) I avoided the phonetic writing of colloquial speech, as was used occasionally in the script, for example, 'got to' becomes 'gotta'. I felt that on the page, in a novel, this technique (generally) felt mannered and distracted the 'read', whereas in the script a limited amount, within dialogue, functions relatively unnoticed as an efficient way to communicate George's voice to the actor/reader.

Another moment of interest in the extract of the script (above) is the montage in which George's school uniform morphs colour and style as she

walks across the schoolyard, visually suggesting to the viewer, without need for words or (very importantly) additional screen-time, that George has changed high schools several times. There is no equivalent way of doing this on the page of a novel, especially in first person. The information has to be given more laboriously as (hopefully somewhat disguised) exposition: "I hadn't been through five high schools for nothing." This is also a good example of how, as identified by Simsion in the previous chapter, a script needs to function on many levels simultaneously.

While writing in first person was to my mind the natural and best creative choice for this adapted novel, it did raise certain issues with point of view and storytelling structure, similar to those observed in Simsion's case with reverse adapting *The Rosie Project*. The vast majority of the script was written from George's POV but there were a couple of moments where this changed. The first one was at the beginning of Act 2 (just after George and Ann row together for the first time), when Christine and Grace observe George from the change room as she argues with Thomo about not doing team sculls. In the originating script, the action moves briefly away from George's POV at this moment:

```
12. INT. BOATHOUSE - LOCKER ROOM - DAY                12.

Grace, in a state of half undress, and another rowing
mate, Christine, peer through the locker room door at
George, who is in the boatshed arguing vehemently with
the coach.

                    CHRISTINE
          (low)... I bet you a million
          million bucks she's on a sports
          scholarship.

                    GRACE
          So totally.

The sound of a toilet flush. Ann walks out. The girls
hastily 'act natural'.
```

In the script, this is an important establishing moment which serves several functions: it lets us know that everyone thinks George is on a scholarship

(which helps set up Ann's later misunderstanding); it demonstrates the high level of interest upon George's joining the rowing squad; and it lets us see how the girls stop talking when Ann enters the room, leading us to surmise that Ann is on a scholarship herself and that this is a sensitive topic, thus setting up (unseen by George) Ann's difference from the others. In the novel, however, it was impossible to write this in first person as George is not aware of what is being said. In the end I chose to keep the moment, but as seen from George's POV.

> "I d... don't do teams." I said, as firmly as I could. I tried to move past him, but he kept talking at me.
>
> Across the busy boathouse, I could see Ann's friend G-R-A-C-E peering out the locker room door at me. Another tall, half dressed friend joined her, gawking. They couldn't hear what I was saying but my body language must have been signalling it loud and clear.

Thus, in the novel, this moment has the luxury (from a screenwriting perspective) of serving only one function, that of illustrating the interest in George's arrival. (It also sets up for the joke about Christine looking more like a horse than a proper human, that always makes me laugh and consequently I found hard to cut out.) I had to let go of the speculation about George being on a scholarship and the set up about Ann's scholarship and find other places in the novel to compensate for this.

The other moment of narrative switch away from George's POV in the originating script was more challenging and complicated to adapt. In the script, at the end of the second act, after George races the country train and possibly collides with it, the screen cuts to black without us knowing what happened. We then cut away from George and to the regatta, where Ann and Thomo are wondering where she is. This shift in POV is intended to create tension and suspense as we don't know what has happened to George.

```
Bells ring. Lights flash. George takes a deep breath,
willing the car faster. The train closes in on the
crossing. The car streaks forward. The train roars
closer. George grips the steering wheel like a
Kamikaze...

                    GEORGE
          Ahhhhhhhhh!!!!!
```

Blur of the train rushing. Blur of car wheels. Red-light flashes. George squeezes her eyes shut and puts her foot down.

CUT TO BLACK. SILENCE.

44. EXT. RIVER/BOAT HOUSE - DAY 44.

Sun rises over the river. The day of the inter-school regatta arrives.

Hundreds of young people and their families gather on the banks of the Yarra River. People sit in temporary stands. Rowers prepare their boats. An official checks his starting gun. A buzz of excitement and expectation is palpable in the air.

Ann stands by the water's edge next to a doubles boat. She glances at the time, anxious. She looks around but no sign of George. Thomo paces nearby, listening on his mobile. He clicks it off.

THOMO
Switched off or unavailable.

Ann says nothing. Not far away she notices a man watching the racers warming up.

ANN
Is that the guy from Berkeley?

Thomo turns to see the man. Another coach introduces a young rower to him.

THOMO
That's him.

Thomo, distracted, looks at his watch.

THOMO
Call Christine.

Thomo hands Ann his mobile phone. Reluctantly, she opens the phone.

CUT TO:

From a distance, we see the boathouse and river, overflowing with people. The atmosphere buzzes.

CUT TO:

(POV) Walking through the crowd we see faces of people pass us by. As we glimpse the boathouse and head towards it, students in racing kit turn and stare. Through the dance of the crowd, we glimpse Ann talking animatedly on the mobile. As we come closer she looks up and sees us and slowly lowers the phone.

CUT TO:

George walks onto the dock. She looks like hell. The wrecked vestige of last night's hair-do, clothes and makeup still evident. Ann is dismayed.

ANN
George?

George strides past her, heading towards the boathouse. Thomo sees George.

THOMO
Hey...

GEORGE
I'm just here for the single.

She disappears into the boathouse.

In scriptwriting terms, it is unconventional to have cut away from George's POV after the accident, having established the narrative stance of the film as consistently being from George's POV. It is also unconventional to come back to the regatta using George's *physical* POV; that is, the audience literally seeing through her eyes, i.e., through the lens of the camera. These devices were employed to delay revealing George after the accident, thus prolonging the tension ('What happened to her?') and to increase the shock when we eventually see her (looking like a strung out wreck). But in film, using these techniques was *possible*. In writing the novel, I wanted to similarly 'cut away' from the protagonist and create the same doubt and tension at this moment in the story. But how? I would have to either switch to a different first-person narrator or switch to the third person. I felt that either of these (stylistically unestablished) choices, at this climactic moment, would have been distracting and counter productive. I struggled with this over several drafts and tried

many styles and techniques. Eventually I settled on the existing draft, which cuts away to an apparently disconnected reflection by George.

> I pumped the accelerator. Nearly there… But so was the train. Look right. Headlights grow huge. White washed tracks in front of me… I jam my foot down and shut my eyes.
>
> I hear myself scream.
>
> **CHAPTER SEVENTEEN**
>
> Once upon a time, there was a high priestess. She lived on an island in the middle of a secret lake. There was also this guy who lived in a castle. For various reasons, the priestess needed the guy to fall in love with her […] Anyway, this priestess wove this like, super powerful, super complicated love spell around the poor guy […] And it worked. The guy fell like, stupidly in love with her, until he was so blinded, so spellbound, that he would have walked over razor blades for her.

This sort of reflective 'cut away' was only a viable option, I felt, as the same stylistic device had been used previously for other tangential reflections by George, for example, her reflections on water and musings on The Art of Detachment. This tangent then evolves to a more obviously connected two-page reflection by George on Ann's possible motivations for starting a relationship with her, which begins:

> Looking back on everything that happened over those last two months at Greystones, from where I am now, there's still lots of things I don't have answers to. Top of the list… *Did Ann ever really give a shit about me?*

I left the time/narrative point of view of this reflective sequence deliberately and provocatively ambiguous, which allowed the reader to temporarily speculate that George might actually have been narrating her story, all along, from beyond the grave. This "dead-narrator trope" (Flood 2015: 10) is now a

well-known literary device, especially in teen fiction[39] and would have been believable, if shocking, at this point, as a narrative twist. These combined creative decisions of 1) buying time away from the action of the story (through using tangential reflection) and 2) creating doubt about what had actually happened to George (via an ambiguous narrative point of view), was intended to have the effect of creating tension and suspense in the reader. This was hoped to produce an analogous audience response to that created by the script devices of 'cutting away' from George after the accident and momentarily adopting her literal POV. This was certainly a challenge while writing in the first person and I feel that this moment in the book continues to be less impactful and to feel more contrived than its filmic equivalent. Thus this moment in the adaptation process is not only indicative of issues arising from first-person point of view but also illustrates one example of the different creative opportunities and limitations of the two mediums I was working in.

In discussing George's voice it is impossible not to address the issue of her stutter, which in fact appeared in the novel only in the late stages of re-drafting and never appeared in the originating script. It was introduced for several reasons, by far the most important of which was to make incarnate, or give action to, the pain George suffered at the time of Nathan's death and the effects of the disintegration of her family; emotional effects which continue into the 'now' of the story. It gives her otherwise invisible emotional damage an *active* manifestation, which brings it into the present, rather than being relegated to (exposition requiring) backstory. This is the action equivalent of visually wearing a bandage (over an unhealed wound). In doing this, I may well have unconsciously been drawing on my screenwriting sensibilities, which requires that character be demonstrated only through what an audience can see and hear in the present moment.[40]

---

[39] "A teenage girl narrating a novel from beyond the grave isn't a new idea, though it is often a wildly successful one. Consider Gabrielle Zevin's critically acclaimed *Elsewhere*, or look at Alice Sebold's *The Lovely Bones*, Jay Asher's *Thirteen Reasons Why*, and Lauren Oliver's *Before I Fall* - all *New York Times* bestsellers" (Sales 2012: 2).

[40] Time shifting devices such as flashbacks are always written in the present tense and events shown are, in screen time, always happening 'now'. The audience, however, interprets the events as having happened in the past.

In researching stuttering, I found that while the vast majority of stuttering begins early in childhood and often disappears by adolescence, it was reasonable that George's stutter could have come on psychogenically, as a consequence of trauma. This is a rare but established possibility.

> DS [developmental stammering] may be distinguished from neurogenic stammering, which can occur subsequent to neurological damage of various aetiologies (for example, stroke, tumour, degenerative disease) and psychogenic stammering, whose onset can be related to a significant psychological event such as bereavement. (Ward 2008: 68)

The second reason to introduce the stutter was a more literary one. I wanted to underscore the emotional gulf between George's inner (cynically over-confident) voice and her outer experience of actually using that voice, thus underlining the fragility of her professed superior and detached self-image. It also serves to give further motivation to her social isolation, whose function, in my mind, is of lesser importance as there is already enough reason for her to believe that relationships cause pain and should be avoided (for example, Nathan, her mother, moving schools).

In order to write the stutter convincingly, I researched different manifestations of stuttering in adults.[41] I watched videos of stutterers[42]. I read medical articles[43] and literature designed to support stutterers themselves, in the hope of discovering such details as how emotional and situational stress affects fluency. I discovered that all stutters are not created equal and indeed that there are significant differences between individuals as to how and when an individual's stutter may manifest, be aggravated or reduced. There is also

[41] Post adolescent onset of stuttering is considered to be 'adult' onset.

[42] For example:
1) Stuttering School: Intensive therapy for overcoming stuttering. (Part 1). (2012). You Tube video. Retrieved February 2016 from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pFmu27GM9-k
2) Stuttering School: Intensive therapy for overcoming stuttering. (Part 2). (2012). You Tube video. Retrieved February 2016 from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZrDFCmPRkJI
3) Meeting other women who stutter. (2013). You Tube video. Retrieved February 2016 from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MR4RrTTciMw
4) National Stuttering Association (NSA) Testimonial 18. You Tube video. Retrieved February 2016 from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h25DM3mISLc

[43] For example:
1) http://www.icommunicatetherapy.com/adult-communication-difficulties-2/adult-speech-hearing-difficulties-deafness/stammering-stuttering-adult-dysfluency/
2) http://www.sltinfo.com/does-stuttering-have-a-psychological-cause/

considerable overlap.[44] For example in *Developmental Neuropsychology*, Glozman tells us that, very often, even a severe stutter will disappear "in specific situations: while reading aloud, singing, and talking to inanimate objects or animals" (Glozman 2013: 131). The discovery of this latter quirk led to the introduction of Sandra's pet cat Angel (named after my own dog) whose function is to let the reader experience George's voice without the stutter, as well as attempting to create a moment of pathos between Angel and George, two lost souls alone together.

At first, I wrote George's stutter on the page near accurately, informed by recordings of people with quite severe stutters. Most of these people repeated sounds multiple times before eventually, and with great frustration, moving past the 'block' onto the next word. For example, "I'm a sc… sc… sc… (rest and breathe) … sc … sc… sc… sc… sculler. I d d d d d d d… (rest and breathe) don't d… d… d… do teams." However, both myself and my supervisor, Professor Jeri Kroll, felt that, written on the page, even a tempered version of this came across too mannered and interfered with the read. Thus I massively reduced the representation of stuttering on the page to something more like: "I'm a sc… sculler and I d… don't do teams." In this way, I am in agreement with film director Michael Mann when he claims that, in storytelling, a sense of "authenticity is more important than precise accuracy" (Mann 2015: 5).

In *Genre* (2015), John Frow tells us that "genre matters." Contemplation of genre, he suggests, "and the distinctions between them is built deep into ordinary talk and writing and into systems for the ordering of texts and talk" (Flow 2015: 10).

> Genre, we might say, is a set of conventional and highly organized constraints on the production and interpretation of meaning. In using the word 'constraint' I don't mean to say that genre is simply a restriction. Rather, its structuring effects are productive of meaning; they

[44] The Stuttering Foundation website (USA) tells us that "Stutterers report having 'good days' and 'bad days'… Stuttering increases when saying one's name, speaking on the telephone, speaking to an authority figure, or speaking to an audience… Stuttering decreases when saying a phrase repeatedly, speaking in chorus with another person, when speaking alone or to animals, when singing, using a lower pitch, using a different accent, using electronic anti-stuttering devices, and when crawling on all fours!" (Stuttering Foundation website, 2007) http://stutteringworld.com/faq.html

> shape and guide, in the way that a builder's form gives shape to a pour of concrete. (Frow 2015: 10)

However, when it comes to 'constraining' my own writing within the boundaries of one genre, like many writers, I secretly prefer to stick my fingers in my ears and avoid the question. In the spirit of contextualisation, however, it seems appropriate to briefly consider where *The Art of Detachment* might sit within the publishing landscape.

A traditional assumption upon reading a novel like *The Art of Detachment*, whose characters are teenagers, would be to slot it into the 'Young Adults' (YA) genre. In *Text's* special edition on Young Adult fiction in Australia, editors Seymour & Beckton propose:

> YA fiction explores identity, growing up, and environmental, social and political concerns, often portraying violence and sexuality with startling precision and empathy. Australasian YA fiction, in particular, frequently draws on the relative isolation of the setting to bring issues of identity and belonging into sharper clarity. (Seymour & Beckton 2015)

Certainly, many of these qualities resonate with *The Art of Detachment* and the 'growing up' experiences of its characters. Personally, though, I have never felt entirely comfortable in claiming the novel as strictly YA. Rather, I have felt I was writing for a 'teenage and up' audience. It has been more comfortable for me to situate this novel within "the growing trend of young adult 'crossovers' or YA novels that also appeal to an adult audience" (Wetta 2013), or what Rachel Falconer describes as, "Adult novels focalized through young adults, and narrated in a hybridized 'young/old' narrative voice (Falconer 2009: 19). Since beginning to write *The Art of Detachment*, however, and within the duration of my PhD candidature, a new genre of fiction has evolved to occupy "the space that exists between young adult and adult fiction" (NA Alley 2016).

> The newest addition to the genre pool is 'new adult' fiction. That's the label that has been created for books in which the main characters transform from teenagers into adults and try to navigate the difficulties of post-adolescent life: first love, starting university, getting a job, and so on. (Chappell 2012)

New Adult (NA) fiction, "typically features protagonists between the ages of 18 and 30" and "is typically considered a subcategory of adult literature rather than young adult literature" (Good Reads 2015). In attempting to define the boundaries of YA and NA, Engberg & Seaman suggest that, "In YA fiction, the characters' lives are circumscribed by school, family, and sometimes work. In NA novels, the characters have more freedom: they're in college or the workforce (or trying to enter the workforce)" (Engberg & Seaman 2014). While my protagonist, George, is still at school, she ranges through life with a freedom and independence comparable to that of an older person. Also, the sexual discovery and erotic passages in *The Art of Detachment* lend themselves to situating the novel more within the NA than YA genre. Perhaps my favourite definition of NA is on the Harlequin website, defining it as comprising 'unique stories filled with monumental firsts.' (Harlequin 2014). I would like to think my novel fits this description.

The genesis of this 'New Adult' label and genre can be traced to a writing contest hosted by St Martin's Press in 2009. The competition wording states:

> St. Martin's Press is actively looking for great, new, cutting edge YA with protagonists who are slightly older and can appeal to an adult audience. Since twenty-somethings are happily reading YA, St. Martin's Press is seeking YA that can be published and marketed as adult; kind of an 'older YA' or 'new adult'. (Sambuchino 2009)

Although the competition ran in 2009, the genre "really began to gain credence in 2012 when many independently published NA novels began to appear on bestseller lists before being picked up by traditional publishing houses" (Wetta 2013). Wetta also asserts that this phenomenon was "reader driven." My further investigation unearthed some intriguing 2012 statistics from Thorpe-Bowker that appear to support this.

> More than half the consumers of books classified for young adults aren't all that young. Fully 55% of buyers of works that publishers designate for kids aged 12 to 17 – nicknamed YA books – are 18 or older, with the largest segment aged 30 to 44. Accounting for 28 percent of sales, these adults aren't just purchasing for others – when asked about the intended recipient, they report that 78 percent of the time they are purchasing books for their own reading. (Thorpe-Bowker 2012)

One of my fears for the publishing prospects of *The Art of Detachment* has been that it might be the sort of book adults would *enjoy reading*, but because of the characters' age, would not actually *buy*. These Thorpe-Bowker statistics and the advent of the New Adult genre has given me hope.

Adaptation, Translation and Parallel Writing

On beginning this reverse adaptation, my belief was that writing the novel would be quick work. After all, it was going to be a simple matter of translating directly from script to novel, scene by scene. Wasn't it? The first draft began as envisaged. Similar to Cotton and Simsion, I had my laptop before me with two documents open. One was the 'final'[45] draft of the script, the other a blank word document that was gradually to become the adapted novel. To begin writing a scene of the novel I would cut and paste the corresponding scene of the script into the prose document. Then working with those words as a guide, I began 'interpreting' the action and dialogue, more or less in the same order, into prose. It's interesting how similar Simsion, Cotton and my own mechanical methods were at this stage, in spite of an absence of information on the topic.

It wasn't long before I figured out an even easier way to merge script and novel. I copied the entire script into the bottom of the novel document and coloured the script font blue (to distinguish it from the black words of the progressing novel). As I came to each new scene of the script (yet to be adapted), I copied and pasted that section directly into the end of the growing novel. Therefore I had a small section of blue script, usually 2-5 pages, directly under the black text of the novel. I would then write that section of the novel, easily able to cut and paste and still identify what was old and what was new. When I was satisfied with that section, I changed it all back to black font, to integrate it into the progressing novel. I then cut and pasted the next (blue) scene from the script, worked on it, integrated it, and so forth. This meant I was working with only one document open, which was more efficient.

As predicted, this was a relatively quick process. Given I believed, at the time, I had already nutted out the characters and the story, I wasn't

[45] Every screenwriter knows there is no such thing as a 'final' draft until the film is 'in the can'.

interested in making big picture changes to character or structure. I just wanted to get the first draft of the novel onto the page, more or less blow for blow. On reflection, at this stage, I was functioning as a simple script-to-prose translator. I wasn't yet speaking fluent prose or truly seeing the novel as its own entity.

This translation process worked 'fine' until I hit the first roadblocks. I had unconsciously been using Golden's process of identifying what was "directly filmable and indirectly filmable", only of course in reverse (Golden 2007: 27). What could be directly adapted to prose or what needed a more creative approach to survive the reverse adaptation process? Action and dialogue based scenes and sequences were relatively easy to 'translate' into prose, but as the adaptation progressed, I noticed that I was needing to think harder about how to reverse-adapt various sequences. For example; how do you reverse adapt a montage? I was finding that the deeper, more word rich, less sound and movement nature of novel writing, often required a more detailed explanation of events/feelings, etc., and this in turn brought to light holes, or at least a thinness in either the internal logic or the structure of the script; a thinness which it seems could be masked, or even rendered unimportant, by the distracting spectacle of film. This was the antithesis of Patrick's "shoehorning 300-plus pages into 120 script pages" (Patrick 2005: 19). Where the book to film adapter has to leave out 'stuff', I had to create, or at least solidify or amplify, 'stuff'. Writing the novel exposed weaknesses in the script, and since this was an *adaptation*, I felt I needed to go back to the source and fix that before I could proceed with the adaptation. Thus, much of the process of writing/adapting the *first* draft of the novel became about rewriting the script.

Indeed, in some ways, the process of writing the first draft of the novel might be better described as parallel writing, rather than strictly adaptation. As the process went on, I found I would write something in the novel, for example, a piece of dialogue or a moment between characters, which I felt was better than what was in the original script. So I would go back to the script and massage that improvement into that document. This happened countless times in re-dreaming the "dozen branching possibilities" (McKee 1997: 415) of what the characters might do or say; so that the process of

writing and developing the story (at first draft) became a messy flow, back and forward, between the two documents; the script and the first draft novel. This occurred, I believe, in particular because of the depth and breadth with which one engages with character in a novel, as supported in the previous chapter with Simsion and Cotton's observations that a novel goes 'deeper' than a script. On commencement of writing the novel, I felt that I truly *knew* George, Ann and Liam and indeed their essential characters changed very little during the writing of the novel, but the *scope of my imaginings* of what they might say, feel or do, was less broad for the script than in the novel.

It's important to note that this impulse to rewrite the script (in order to progress the first draft adapted novel) was permissible in my reverse adaptation process only because of two specific conditions of my particular situation, conditions similar to those of Cotton and Simsion. Firstly, the script was unproduced and, thus, unlike with a commercial novelisation (which is adapted from a finished film or screenplay), I was adapting from a non-fixed originating artefact; and secondly, like Simsion and Cotton, I was the uncommissioned author of both script and the novel, and consequently could make any changes I wanted. For better or worse, it was these two conditions that enabled this parallel writing to be take place. I note that neither Simsion nor Cotton felt the need to rewrite their scripts in order to write their first draft novels (but went back to re-write their scripts only after having finished the novel).

I believe that now that I'm more comfortable with writing prose, in a similar future situation, I would most likely follow the creative path trodden by Simsion and go back to 'the cards' to work through creative issues before transferring that information directly to a draft of the novel, omitting redrafting the script en route. In the process of adaptation under examination, however, redrafting the script was useful to me, possibly because I was simply more accustomed to writing for the screen. However, I also instinctively felt that writing the script was a quicker way of testing out the dramatic effectiveness of the changes I was making. The script format, being inherently word-skinny, reveals the bones of its narrative structure more readily than does a novel. With a typical screenwriter's instincts and discipline, I wanted to get the narrative structure or plotting working *before*

fleshing out the full document. Thus in this instance, the script became a sort of short document for developing the novel, analogous with the way in which screenwriters use scene breakdowns and treatments to get the drama right before they proceed to flesh out their scripts. It's easier and quicker to turn around a yacht than an ocean-liner.

I'd also like to observe at this point that this discussion of my working method is primarily applicable to writing the first[46] draft of the novel. It was for that draft only that I leant heavily on the script as a primary source. While I did occasionally refer back to the script for subsequent drafts of the novel, this was rare, and the drafting process of the novel became self-evolving, as I imagine it would for any novelist. In subsequent drafts, however, I continued to use screenwriting development techniques, as discussed in the following section, but did not apply those changes to the script. I believe, as both Simsion and Cotton observed, that when I go back to redrafting the script (again), after having written the novel, the script will be deeper and richer for having undergone a reverse adaptation process – and back again.

Structure, Plotting and Short Documents

Through the process of writing the first draft of the adapted novel, *The Art of Detachment*, I became aware of the need for structural revision of the story. Consequently, my first task was, as Simsion described, to go to 'the cards' and break down the film into scenes. I do not use physical cards as Simsion does, but rather a list of one-line 'dot points' that simply label the scene and might include one phrase of the major action which occurs in that scene. The better I know the script/story, the briefer these notes can be, as the list becomes a kind of shorthand memory prompt.[47] For example:

> Doubles race – Elation. Introduce Norwegian girl
>
> Kissing in tent
>
> In front of tent with Liam – celebrating

[46] 'First', in my case, meaning many passes/drafts conflated into one draft and labeled as such, so as to be at a reasonably developed stage.
[47] McKee tells us that the average feature film contains 40-60 scenes (McKee 1997: 415).

> Waiting for singles race – distance between Ann and George
>
> Singles heat – George tests Ann then lets her win

When these notes are done, I will generally have 2-3 double-spaced pages of scenes listed.[48] I then cut and paste the scenes many times, analogous to Simsion rearranging cards "on the floor, on the wall" (Simsion interview 2014: 16), experimenting with potential new story structures and arrangement of information. I will also re-allocate existing action, plot points and conversations, etc., into different (existing) scenes, or outline possible new action or scenes, depending on the changes needed, such as greater narrative drive, character development, world setting, etc. The ultimate aim of this process is to make the dynamic flow of the film better; to increase tension; to create an effective rhythm for character/relationship development, etc. In short, to make the structure or narrative flow of the film *work* – with a view to maximising its audience engagement.

This use of working documents to develop story, plot and structure is a usual process for screenwriters, and one which Robert McKee, possibly screenwriting's most universally respected 'guru', describes as "writing from the inside out" (McKee 1997: 412). In his view, "successful" screenwriters tend to use these story development techniques: "If you write from the inside out, you'll realize in the outline stage that you can't get the story to work" (McKee 1997: 417). This comment once again supports both Simsion and Cotton's observations that screenwriting is comparatively focused on story and structure. McKee asserts that writing 'from the inside out' is also quicker. McKee's optimistic comment, below, very much reflects Simsion's earlier description of his own adaptation and writing process.

> If, hypothetically and optimistically, a screenplay can be written from first idea to last draft in six months, these writers typically spend the first four of those six months writing on stacks of three-by-five cards: a stack for each act – three, four, perhaps more. On these cards they create the story's *step-outline.* (McKee 1997: 412, original emphasis)

McKee employs the term 'step-outline' for what Simsion and I refer to as a

[48] In the specific instance illustrated below it was physically much shorter, because I was trying to get all the action onto one page so I could 'see' its shape.

scene breakdown: "As the term implies, a step-outline is the story told in steps. Using one or two-sentence statements, the writer simply and clearly describes what happens in each scene" (McKee 1997: 412). This 'writing from the inside out' is a typical process for the professional screenwriter.

Interestingly, Stephen King, Kate Grenville and Sue Woolfe, among other well-known novelists who have written on the process of story development, tend to advocate a different creative pathway from that of McKee. They focus on the structure of a novel only after a substantial amount of work has been done on the first draft. In her 'writing class' for *The Sydney Morning Herald* (2011) entitled 'Don't think about it – just keep scribbling', Sue Woolfe advises aspiring writers:

> When you have written 100,000 words about anything, only then allow yourself to read it through. Don't allow yourself to think: what weirdo wrote this rant? Instead think: what bits might go with what bits? The treasure in the dirt will become your plot. As the king of plots, Stephen King, says: "Plot is the good writer's last resort and the dullard's first choice." Then impose on this incoherent – but intriguing – mess some narrative techniques and suspense, edit according to them, and you'll have the novel you knew you could write. (Woolfe 2011: 33)

In her chapter 'Design' in *The Writing Book*, Grenville also tends to encourage writers to write out their ideas first *then* let them form into a plot later.

> Some writers start with a plot and flesh it out with characters, places, vivid language, and so on. However, many writers reverse the process and start with their characters, their places, and their language. Then, in later drafts those elements will gradually suggest a plot, which will emerge organically out of the material they have. Both ways can work.
>
> If you start off with a plot, the danger is that it can become a tyrant: in order to stick to the plot, the writer might be forced to distort the characters or ignore interesting ideas that emerge during the writing. If you start off without a plot the danger is that it might be difficult to come up with one later. My own feeling is that the second danger is less damaging to the quality of writing. (Grenville 2014: 168)

Stephen King is more emphatic. In his celebrated *On Writing. A Memoir of the Craft*, King describes the writing of his novels thus:

> In no case were they plotted, not even to the extent of a single note jotted on a single piece of scrap paper, although some of the stories (Dolores

> Claiborne, for instance) are almost as complex as those you find in murder mysteries (King 2000: 170)… I [do plotting] as infrequently as possible. I distrust plot for two reasons: first, because our lives are largely plotless, even when you add in all our reasonable precautions and careful planning; and second, because I believe plotting and the spontaneity of real creation aren't compatible. It's best that I be as clear about this as I can – I want you to understand that my basic belief about the making of stories is that they pretty much make themselves. The job of the writer is to give them a place to grow (and to transcribe them, of course). (King 2000: 163)

King describes his writing process rather as consisting of the "careful excavation" of his stories, which he describes as buried "relics", already formed and waiting to be unearthed (King 2000: 167). In my position as Convener of Screenwriting Programs at Australia's premier university film school, The Victorian College of the Arts,[49] I can suggest with some certainty that for better or worse, this resistance to an early focus on story structure would be considered near blasphemy within the academy and amongst professional screenwriters. King does go on to say, however, that each of his novels were "smoothed out and detailed by the editorial process" (King 2000: 170). This leads me to surmise that, although King doesn't overtly state it, structural fixes, among other revisions, would be undertaken in later drafts. Grenville, likewise, dedicates a chapter to a process of 'Revision' that "looks at the overall shape and structure of the piece and considers overall changes" (Grenville 2014: 196). McKee would describe King, Woolfe and Grenville's process as "Writing from the outside in" and would consider it a time-consuming method (McKee 1997: 410). However, with over two hundred writing credits on his IMDB page, one could hardly accuse Mr. King's writing process of anything approaching *slow*.[50] These two approaches to creative story development reflect a difference in emphasis, as observed by both Simsion and Cotton. This is not to say, however, that all novelists are 'pantsters' – who "fly by the seat of their pants when they write a story" (Sambuchino 2013: 1). Many well-known novelists such as J. K. Rowling[51] and

[49] Faculty of the Victorian College of the Arts (University of Melbourne), School of Film and Television website. http://vca.unimelb.edu.au/artistic-disciplines/film-and-television

[50] Stephen King IMDB website http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000175/?ref_=fn_al_nm_1

[51] An illustration of Rowling's plotting block matrix can be found (March 2016) at http://www.openculture.com/2014/07/j-k-rowling-plotted-harry-potter-with-a-hand-drawn-spreadsheet.html

John Grisham are 'plotters'. According to Grisham:

> I don't start a novel until I have lived with the story for a while to the point of actually writing an outline and after a number of books I've learned that the more time I spend on the outline the easier the book is to write. And if I cheat on the outline I get in trouble with the book. (Grisham 2016: 1)

Tara Brady's online article in *The Daily Mail* (Brady 2013) literally illustrates the various methods used by other plotters such as William Faulkner, Henry Miller, Sylvia Plath and Norman Mailer by appending photos of their worksheets. Most of these are hand drawn charts or diagrams of one form or another that effectively breaks the story into its component parts – similar in intention to a scene breakdown. This fascinating assortment of documents suggests that while plotting is frequently practised among literary authors, there is great individualization in their method of organising story, unlike in screenwriting, where writers are trained to employ a similar set of methods and tools.

But just as novel writers are not all 'pantsters', then nor are all screenwriters 'writing by numbers' when adhering to a process of writing 'from the inside out'. All screenwriting gurus are eager to point out that understanding structural principles and analysis of structure does not equal formulaic writing. The opening paragraph to McKee's seminal text *Story* states:

> *Story* is **about principles, not rules.** A rule says, "You *must* do it *this way."* A principle says, "This *works"*… *Story* is **about eternal, universal forms, not formulas.** All notions of paradigms and foolproof story models for commercial success are nonsense. (McKee 1997: 5, original emphasis)

Anecdotally, it is also interesting to observe that virtually all key practitioner texts in the film industry are written by script 'gurus', not specifically celebrated for their own screenwriting, but rather for their work as story consultants or script doctors. Robert McKee (*Story: Substance, Structure, Style and the Principles of Screenwriting* 1997), Syd Field (*Screenplay* 1979), Christopher Vogler (*The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Storytellers and*

Screenwriters 1992), Linda Seger (*Making a Good Script Great* 1987) and Michael Hague (*Writing Screenplays that Sell* 1991) are among this handful of gurus. In contrast, many of the prominent 'how to' texts pertaining to writing novels are written by well-known novelists themselves. Stephen King's influential *On Writing. A Memoir of the Craft* (2000), Elmore Leonard's *10 Rules of Writing* (2007), Ray Bradbury's *Zen in the Art of Writing* (1992) and Kate Grenville's *The Writing Book* (1990), all typify this category. These books also tend to be written in a less paradigmatic, more personal, even anecdotal style. One might speculate that this difference may, at least in part, be a manifestation of the previously discussed comparative invisibility and impoverished status of the screenwriter, as compared to the literary author's more public and revered profile.

Returning now specifically to the screenwriter's use of developmental documents, in particular scene breakdowns, McKee makes the point that these are work in progress documents only: "The writer never shows his step-outline to people because it's a tool, too cryptic for anyone but the writer to follow" (McKee 1997: 413). This is true. However, at my own peril and for purposes of illustration, I'm about to do just that. The table below exemplifies one such scene breakdown. This particular working document was done while writing the first draft of the novel, with the main aim of understanding how effectively (or otherwise) the story structure or plotting drove the narrative forward, particularly across Act 2. In the case of this document, I first briefly labelled the existing scenes,[52] then split them into rowing action and personal action; achieved atypically in this case by using two columns so I could see at a glance upon which side of the fence the action fell. (This two-column layout is not usual but I felt it would help for this particular task.) I then also allocated Sandra and Nathan a colour each, as I felt that the way their characters sat within the script needed attention, and I wanted to *see* how this sub-story was structured within the overall flow of the script. The red font indicates my thoughts at the time about what might happen in the next draft. As one can see, there are several scenes in this document that have been either deleted from or added, as well as many scenes reordered.

[52] In this case I kept each scene description to a few words as I knew the story and characters so well I didn't need to elaborate, and I was the only person looking at this 'working' document. I also wanted it to fit on one page.

Act 1

George arrives at school
Meets Ann – note

Sign up for rowing

See George's home. Nathan hint.

First workout.
First rowing morning – Ann captain
INCITING INCIDENT
Ann/George row together
Locker room

Start Act 2 Meet Sandra - Breakfast/Shopping *Make shorter*
Introduce Nathan/Buy tree
George gets dressed

Blue Train – George/ Ann set up
Meet Liam

Night driving. Race first train. Home alone – cut?.

Montage – George training – settles in
ERGO?? First practice race to bridge
Ann suggest doubles (both up early -two races can't lose- there's something I want you to think about) Invite to Ben's house.

George/Sandra plant tree-
pix Nathan/George in doubles boat

Doubles training with boys?
Liam kissing
Ben's boathouse-
Southbank sequence – cut? Combine previous and following scenes?
Ann/Liam replacing Nathan in boat).
Go back to Ann's house
George realises scholarship confusion
Girls make love- Nathan hint? (shorten scene?)
MID POINT REVERSAL
Ann's place breakfast/Goes Home – sees Sandra
– sunglasses/shirt-given at school
(look what I bought. I really just want to kiss you)
Coach? A&G doubles training- competition gonna beat you

George/Ann @ Ann's house - make love dialogue from sc previous

Liam apologises- coaches George

George realises – Ann/Ben still together- conflict
Call Liam to accept invite.

montage/kissing/ergo/southbank fountain?

Liam's boat party. /Meet Cassie
Ann/George betrayal *CRISIS TURNING POINT*
Sandra money crisis.

Start Act Three - Regatta George races train.
George missing.
George fucks up first race.
Ann furious. Realises George is rich. Betrayed
Liam switches allegiance to Ann
CLIMAX Final race – George throws race for Ann
George – epiphany

Dénouement
Ann/George resolution scene?
Mum in China
George has car, etc.

When working with short documents like this, the writer derives several benefits from the process. In this particular instance it assisted me to get an overall feel for the shape of the script, allowing me to see how structural story elements such as acts, turning points, the climax, and mid-point reversal were sitting within the script; to see how much and at what points various characters appeared in the flow of the story, and thus the rhythm with which relationships developed; and to literally *see* the shape of the script vis-à-vis where the rowing and personal action fell. This outline made literally visible a lack of rowing action in the second act; which manifested (in that draft) as a lack of narrative drive across the second act (or more specifically, a building of tension towards the climax of the singles race). The story had lost sight, in Act 2, of what McKee amongst others describes as "the Major Dramatic Question" (more commonly referred to in the Australian film industry as the central dramatic question) – which is always "a variation on 'How will this turn out?'" (McKee 1997: 198).

The central dramatic question is the question raised during McKee's "Inciting Incident", also referred to by Vogler as the "call to adventure" (Vogler 1999: 16), which invariably falls within the first act.

> In Hollywood jargon, the Central Plot's Inciting Incident is the "big hook." … this is the event that excites and captures the audience's curiosity. Hunger for the answer to the Major Dramatic Question grips the audience's interest, holding it to the last climax. (McKee 1997: 198)[53]

In *The Art of Detachment* the inciting incident can be understood to be the first time Ann and George get into a doubles-boat and row together and become aware of each other's true abilities. The story's central dramatic question of 'Will George beat Ann in the Open Singles Final?' is provoked by that inciting incident. The central dramatic question always begins with the word 'Will…' For example, in *Jaws* (Spielberg 1975) the question posed might be, 'Will the sheriff kill the shark or be killed by it?' or in the *Wizard of Oz* (LeRoy 1939), it might be, 'Will Dorothy find her way home?' The 'how' that answers the central dramatic question is the *action* of the film.

[53] McKee loves capital letters.

Another way of framing this discussion within screenwriting discourse is through what Cattrysse (2010), amongst others, describes as a character's 'want' and 'need', or what McKee describes as the character's 'outer journey' and 'inner journey'. In 'The protagonist's dramatic goals, wants and needs', published in the *Journal of Screenwriting*, Cattrysse suggests:

> Screenwriting manuals tell us that narratives should have a protagonist and that a protagonist should have an important dramatic goal to achieve. With respect to this goal, manuals often mention another common distinction, that between a protagonist's 'want' and 'need'. Wants are generally understood as external and/or conscious dramatic goals, whereas needs are defined as internal and/or unconscious dramatic goals. (2010: 83)

The want or outer journey is generally what the character *knows* or *thinks they know* they want to achieve at the start of the film; i.e., George *wants* to win the Open Single. The need or inner journey is the *unconscious* lesson the character needs to learn via the events of the film; that is, the change, realisation or transformation the character needs to make to move forward. Thus, the dramatic question, 'Will George beat Ann in the Open Singles Final?' enacts her physical want or outer journey. The other important dramatic question posed in the story is something like, 'Will George embrace her past and learn to re-join life?' which dramatizes George's emotional need or inner journey. Overcoming this block is how George *needs* to transform – through her encounters with Ann and, to a lesser extent, Liam. The audience intuits this need early in the piece, but until the climax of the story, George does not.

Thus, through using the short document above, it was quite easy to see that the second act gave too much action to, or enacted too much of George's *need*, through her emotional interactions with Ann and Liam, at the cost of enacting her *want* through rowing action. In this case, it led to a lack of narrative drive or story tension across the second act. In general, the want creates dramatic tension or narrative drive, because it is the *action* storyline of the film; the narrative engine, if you like. The need storyline generally elucidates and enacts the story's theme.

The action or storylines of the want and the need are by no means mutually exclusive. In his PhD thesis aptly entitled, *When What You Want is Not What You Need*, Batty describes story structure as comprising "two

individual yet interwoven threads" (Batty 2009: Summary). Indeed, the actions of the want and need *must* intertwine and collide, especially at the climax, or one risks that the film's story does not enact the theme. For example, in the case of *The Art of Detachment*, the want and the need both culminate simultaneously at the climactic moment (*SPOILER ALERT!)* when George throws the singles race because she finally understands that Ann, too, feels the pain of being *other*.

The above discussion is quite a technical analysis of a film's story or structure but this type of discourse of wants and needs, inner journeys and outer journeys, of inciting incidents and calls to adventure (and much more), falls comfortably within the realm of how experienced screenwriters, theorists and filmmakers might discuss and analyse a script and is well supported by both scholarly and practitioner focussed literature in the field. Indeed, there is much more that could be discussed here to exemplify the rigorous examination of a script's structure using this type of analysis on *The Art of Detachment*, but for the purposes of illustrating the nature of screenwriting's structural discourse, I believe this is enough. This type of story analysis is the stuff of the Hollywood machine, and most readily fits a mainstream film like *The Art of Detachment,* with "a traditional, linear model of storytelling" and "narrative causality from beginning to middle to end" (Batty 2009: 2). This discourse has been developed within the mainstream (read Hollywood) film industry, along with a handful of widely used short development documents, with the objective of maximising an audience's emotional engagement with a film and, ultimately, putting 'bums on seats' and making bigger profits.

This chapter has, I hope, begun to chart the largely unexplored creative journey of reverse adaptation, especially as seen from a screenwriter's perspective. It is a journey better described, perhaps, as an *escape*. It is a breaking free from the fascist regime of screenwriting's rigid formatting and layout rules to the creative writer's lush garden of style choice. The screenwriter travels from a world where the only two senses in one's toolbox are sight and sound, into a land where anything that can be sensed, felt or thought can be expressed on the page; and from a world experienced only in the present tense, to one in which the past, present and future are all at the writer's disposal. In novel-writing land, screenwriters also discover a new and generous economy where all story elements are 'free of charge', no matter how epic their character's actions, or rich and costly their imagined worlds. The

novelist need not ask, 'How much will that cost?' or 'How will this be achieved?' Logistics need not limit the writer, except perhaps as regards the means of publication, and this too, is vastly less expensive than for their filmic counterpart. Once a screenwriter traverses the isthmus connecting the two forms and fully grasps that they are now in unmitigated, intimate and direct communication with their audience, they will have arrived at the outer edge of this opulent new land.

This is not to say that the two worlds have nothing in common. Indeed, I believe this chapter illustrates that there is far more in common than there is difference. The essentials of storytelling are the same. Vivid characters, rich authentic worlds and compelling action are mutual currency. Many storytelling elements are the same, only expressed though different modes. Point of view and voice, for example, are of equal importance to the script or novel, but in crossing between forms, new ways of constructing and expressing them need to be found. I discovered in my adaptation journey that it was not enough to simply translate content from one medium to another. Translation was only the first staging post in a richer transformative journey of story content across these creative landscapes. To truly *adapt*, I discovered the reverse adapter needs, at some point, to put aside the script and fully inhabit the new land they find themselves in. Like learning any new language, one begins to become fluent only when one starts *thinking* in the language one is adapting to.

The screenwriting environment, like any complex system, has its strengths and weakness. One of its advantages is, I believe, its ready ability to highlight flaws and strengths in narrative structure. As we have seen, the word-lite, dogma-heavy nature of screenwriting purposefully diverts attention away from the words on page and refocuses the spotlight upon story and content. The *industry* of screenwriting has, over decades, developed standard discourse and methods, such as the scene breakdown, for identifying and improving story structure, which ultimately is aimed at capturing audience engagement and putting paying 'bums on seats'.

Conclusion

Using Stephen King's metaphor, the work of this thesis has been to excavate unbroken ground and bring into the light for examination a previously invisible creative process. Reverse adaptation, defined in this research as being the process of adapting an *unproduced script into a stand-alone literary novel*, has been 'unfound' in scholarly discourse and rarely discoverable in practice.[54] Script to prose adaptation, as manifest through the commercial novelisation, has had a presence, but as novelisation scholars have noted, Baetens and Van Parys among them, it has rarely been considered an area worthy of study. This absence of interrogation becomes remarkable when framed against the rich and lively discourse that surrounds book to film adaptation, which, over decades, has given rise to innumerable articles, shelves of books and even dedicated academic journals.[55] I hope that in spite of a notable absence of discourse on reverse adaptation, as well as an apparent lack of reverse adapted novels themselves, this thesis has uncovered a topic worthy of examination.

The most elementary task of this research has been to identify and name a previously invisible form of creative practice. 'Script to book' or 'film to text' adaptation, while known since the beginning of the 20th century, has been understood in practice and scholarship to mean *novelisation*. The simple act of spotlighting reverse adaptation as a form in itself has enabled a broader conception of the ways in which script to novel adaptation can be differentiated. Reverse adaptation, for example, can be understood as allowing the script to novel adapter greater creative latitude than in the process of commercial novelisation. This is largely due to two preconditions. The first is that a novelisation arises from a usually well-known progenitor screen product. Consequently, readers may bring with them

[54] Excepting a small number of published articles authored by myself as a product of this research such as 'The Rosie Project: Discussions with Graeme Simsion on reverse adaptation', *Journal of Screenwriting* (Murphy 2016).

[55] Adaptation studies journals have traditionally focused on book to film adaptation although this, as I have discussed, is now changing. In 2014 Leitch tells us in peak adaptation studies journal, *Literature/Film Quarterly* – of *Literature/Film Quarterly* – that "adaptation studies has enormously expanded its purview from the novel-to-film pairs that thronged earlier issues of *Literature/Film Quarterly*" (Leitch 2014: 490). My own observation of *Adaptation* journal shows a widening of focus away from book to screen adaptation in the last five years, possibly following Parody's 2011 breakthrough article on 'Franchising/Adaptation.'

a preconception of what the content of the novelisation might contain, which in turn is likely to limit the writer's creative scope. The novelisation does not stand-alone, whereas the reverse adapted novel does. Secondly, authors of reverse adaptations, as typified by Simsion, Cotton and myself, are un-commissioned, self-motivated writers, adapting story content from an unproduced and unknown script. This means that the reverse adapter, unlike the writer of a novelisation, has only oneself to answer to as concerns the creative development of the novel – at least until point of acceptance for publication. These two conditions reveal reverse adaption to be a relatively unconstrained, creatively motived form of writing, whose intention can perhaps be more closely aligned to that of a literary novel and as such is "written on the initiative of an individual author eager to give a personal form to certain ideas or feelings" (Baetens 2010: 51). Thus, compared with Van Parys "lowbrow commercial" novelisation (2009: 305), the reverse adaptation can potentially be revealed as a new, more literary, form of script to book writing.

It has also been the work of this research to consider the position of reverse adaptation within the creative landscape. Script to book, or perhaps more precisely, film to text adaptation, finds its genesis in the novelisation of short films in the early days of cinema. These novelisations were routinely published in periodicals of the day (Van Parys 2009). Early entertainment proprietors banded together, in the same way modern entertainment companies do, to share story content across media platforms, with the intention of drawing customers, and profits, to a new medium via the consumer's attachment to a beloved story world. Understanding this background, which "tends to be overshadowed by the contemporary Hollywood film tie-in" (Van Parys 2009: 305), facilitates a new way of framing script to book adaptation as being among the earliest forms of transmedia adaptation, in as much as it functions to continue the consumer's engagement across media platforms. Part of the motivation for attempting my own script to book adaptation was to continue my engagement with my own beloved characters. I felt I hadn't finished with them and I wanted them to get their chance in front of an audience. Likewise, novelisation and other forms of transmedia adaptation entice an audience through "fictional experiences with length, depth and breadth, and multiple avenues of engagement with much loved fictional properties" (Parody 2011: 211).

While little known at present, it is my belief that reverse adaptation, as a creative form, can only continue to grow. Even within the relatively short timeframe

of my candidature, reverse adaptation has gone from unknown and invisible, with me being unable to find a single writer to interview, to at least visible on the literary landscape, albeit rare. This is mostly due to the enormous success of Simsion's *The Rosie Project*. Furthermore, while it has invariably been difficult for a screenwriter to get their work to the screen, current economic realities mean that it is even more challenging at the moment to attract finance to a script. At present, film industry gatekeepers such as production and distribution executives are demonstrably more reluctant than ever to take a risk on unknown story product. In this cautious era of reboots, sequels and remakes the screenwriter touting an original screenplay is, at an international level particularly, significantly less likely to attract production funding than in recent decades.[56] Screenwriters facing such conditions as these may well turn to reverse adaptation as a pragmatic means of getting their story in front of an audience. As Simsion observes: "It's just a question of numbers. I mean, how many books are published every year and how many films are made?"[57] (Simsion interview 2014: 15).

Further reason to speculate on a future growth in reverse adaptation, is that many young and aspiring writers are now training, or at least trying their hand at, screenwriting as their seminal form of writing. Where, in previous generations, writers more frequently came to screenwriting through prose, screenwriting is now formally taught within many high school English and media courses, as well as at university. When envisioning their stories, these film literate screen natives, having imbibed screen content since birth, are often thinking in film rather than prose as their creative mother tongue. Into the future, these many aspiring screenwriters are bound to come into contact with the reality that screen product has a significantly higher barrier to 'publication' than does prose, especially in relation to cost. It is my belief that these writers, like Simsion, Cotton and me, may increasingly turn to reverse adaptation as one way of more readily achieving the goal of getting their stories in front of an audience, regardless of medium. I find it fascinating that, for the three writers studied in this thesis, Cotton, Simsion and myself, one of the main drivers for beginning the process of reverse adaptation was to attract attention to our scripts. Then progressively, as it developed, the novel became increasingly more important in itself as a creative artefact. Undergoing a committed process of reverse adaptation made novelists out of screenwriters.

[56] As per research cited in the prologue. (Footnote 2)
[57] Refer to footnotes 8, 9 and 10.

Another means by which I hope this research has been of value is through conducting and contextualising the presented interviews with Graeme Simsion and Tilney Cotton. In the absence of any discoverable scholarly data on reverse adaptation, the appended transcripts and synthesised interviews represent a humble first step in accumulating a body of knowledge in the field. It is my hope that other scholars may be able to make use of them. Interviewing these writers about their reverse adaptation process has also led to critical examination surrounding the nature of writing for the screen and for novels. Of particular interest to me, as a trained screenwriter, is the apparently quite different, even contrasting, dogma surrounding the approach taken to developing story structure. This was not something I expected to find. In his article, 'What novelists can learn from screenwriters,' Chuck Wendig sums up this difference rather cheekily:

> Scripts are written with structure in mind… You simply cannot avoid it. In novels, you can avoid structure all day long, ceding to structure only when it's complete and recognizing that some skeleton has crawled his way into the skin of the thing to help it stand up. (Wendig 2001: 26)

While this comment might be a caricature of the status quo, I believe this difference could be fertile ground for future examination. It would be interesting at another time, for example, to interrogate the question of whether applying the screenwriter's structural rigour, early in the creative process, could be of value to the novelist. Or conversely, what would happen if screenwriters were encouraged to 'write from the outside in' – a creative pathway much maligned by McKee et al, and generally considered within the film industry to be time consuming and unproductive. How, for example, might such a change in traditional screenwriting practice affect screen product? Or, is this process even viable within the context of screen industry financial and time constraints?

The primary interviews with Cotton and Simsion, included in this thesis, also provoke enquiry into the different professional conditions faced by the screenwriter and the novelist within their respective industries. Both Cotton and Simsion prefer the professional conditions of being a novelist to a screenwriter and observe that the publishing industry affords them more respect, higher recognition as an artist and greater creative control. This research also suggests that the degree of creative freedom accorded to a novelist, compared to that of a screenwriter, is proportional to the level of finance needed to cross the threshold to publication and reach an

audience. Investing in the publication of a typical novel is significantly less expensive than the cost of delivering the average film – a circumstance possibly more causal than coincidental to the literary novelist retaining greater creative control of their work. Being allowed a rare glimpse into the world of Graeme Simsion's extraordinary success further enables us to see that when negotiating creative control, regardless of industry, the higher the sums of money concerned, the greater the degree of influence investors attempt to have over the work. The substantive difference, however, is found to be that, even when dealing with huge amounts of money, the literary novelist, unlike the screenwriter, generally retains copyright, and thus final say over which creative changes they are prepared to make, based upon their own cost benefit analysis of the situation.

Interrogating reverse adaptation as a creative pathway also allows new ways of understanding the rigid mores of screenwriting practice in comparison to the relative stylistic freedom of the novel. Screenwriting's strict imperatives of writing only in the present, usually present simple tense, of writing exclusively in third person and of writing only what can be seen and heard, stylistically constrain the screenwriter in ways not experienced by the literary novelist. Size also matters. Screenwriting is ruthlessly concise. The script page should be filled with white, not words. Speed matters too. A script must be a 'good quick read' that reflects its corresponding screentime. In short, the dogma of screenwriting aims at a uniformity and invisibility of style that, theoretically at least, allows its story content to be easily ingested and assessed by busy film industry gatekeepers. This invisibility quite disturbingly reflects the relative invisibility and impoverished creative status of the screenwriter within the film industry, as compared to the higher profile of the novelist within the publishing industry.[58]

My own journey through the process of reverse adaptation, contextualised by interviews with Cotton and Simsion, has also brought into the light the creative experience of a screenwriter migrating from a semi-totalitarian regime to the more liberal state of Novel-land. Perhaps the most interesting thing I have discovered on this journey is that the act of adaptation lies not only within the transitioning text itself, but also within the *writer*. The adaptor must also adapt. Armed with years of rigour and constraint, and acclimatised to flourishing upon a survival ration of

[58] As per Simsion's comment: 'In the publishing world, the novelist sits at the top of the heap… But then you go to the screenwriting world and it's your producers and directors and actors who sit above the screenwriter (Simsion interview 2014: 12).

words, the Spartan-trained screenwriter must learn to adapt their lean creative muscles to an unfamiliar, word rich and rule-lite environment. In my opinion, the skillset learned via screenwriting training is inherently useful in any storytelling environment. These skills include visualisation, evocative brevity and a deep understanding of how a compelling narrative is driven by its elements. However, upon reaching Novel-land, a new skillset must also be developed, if the screenwriter is to adapt and flourish. Important literary elements such as: the creative use of tense and person; effective character-action description; the creation of character voice in the absence of dialogue; the writing out of internal thought-scapes; even the use of the humble dialogue tag, all need dedicated training. These beasts do not occur naturally within the screenwriter's native environment and are not part of their repertoire.

Some mental adaptation need also be undergone. One of the first things requiring mental adjustment is the quantity of detail and description of story, world or character, that is not only *allowed* within novel writing, but may be *required* to succeed in communicating one's vision to the reader. This is a challenge to which the screenwriter is continually adapting. Both Cotton and Simsion observed that a novel goes deeper into world and character than a screenplay can, but the boundaries of those limits are more subjective in novel writing than in screenwriting. Perhaps the most powerful mental leap for the reverse adapter, however, is in fully comprehending that they are in direct communication with their audience, and that their words on the page are the event horizon of their audience's experience. There is nothing more on offer. In contrast to a 'shooting script', which is the end of the line for a screenplay before the film goes into production, nothing mitigates a novelist's connection with their reader. There are no actors, director, editor, sound effects, music, production design, etc., to get between their words on the page and the audience's received experience of the story. Once this mental leap is fully made, the reverse adapter is on their way to speaking fluent 'prose' and can take pleasure in the cornucopia of words at their disposal.

Finally, and by no means of least importance, a fundamental question posed by this thesis has been to discover whether Eddington's Arrow *can* be turned upon its head and interrogate whether reverse adaptation is a viable creative form, capable of producing a stand-alone literary novel of high quality. As this is a practice-led thesis, this has been at the core of my research. For both Simsion and Cotton, the

decision to reverse adapt an unproduced, rejected script enabled them to cross an elusive threshold to publication. This resulted in them getting their stories before an audience.[59] In my own case, I sincerely hope that the same may be true. Thus far, I haven't approached any publisher with my novel, *The Art of Detachment* (all suggestions welcome!), but this will be the next step on the journey of this reverse adaptation.

Clearly, it is not for me to be the arbiter of the success of my own work, but it is my hope that the creative artefact of this thesis, *The Art of Detachment*, demonstrates that reverse adaptation is a viable creative process. Far more certain, however, in proving that reverse adaptation is capable of resulting in literary success is the phenomenon of Graeme Simsion's international bestseller, *The Rosie Project.* Simsion's spectacular success surely demonstrates that, in the right hands, reverse adaptation can be a powerful creative choice. It is my hope that this research exposes a relatively little followed, but potentially useful, creative pathway. A path that may motivate writers to pull those doomed-to-die scripts out of the bottom drawer and begin their own process of reverse adaptation.

[59] In Simsion's case, it was a life changing decision.

APPENDIX A

Interview with Graeme Simsion. June 2014.

Let's start with why you decided to do a reverse adaptation in the first place. What was the motivating factor?

Okay well, there were two strong motivations, and a third one which kind of became a hindsight justification. One motivation was to gain interest in the film script. I thought, 'If I've got a novel out there, that will be something which indicates to the market, the story and so forth.' So um, and it's also much, much easier to get a novel published than to get a screenplay produced

Is it still, do you think?

Yes yes. And you've always got the option of self-publishing with a novel. Whereas financing your own film is going to be a real serious sort of job.

Are you a director as well as a writer?

No I'm not. I'm not a director. I'm a producer, but we're only talking about short films here.

Can I ask you how many drafts of the screenplay you did before deciding to turn it into a novel?

Lots and lots and lots. I mean, 20, 30, 40... those sorts of numbers. I know that the total number of times I went through screenplay plus novel in terms of drafts, is at least 70. I went through a little bit of backtracking, and only about 10-15 of those would have been the novel... so ... I was learning. It started off as a drama before it was a comedy. The story changed totally so, you'd almost say it was a completely different screenplay at the end, except that it still has the same protagonist so, that was the common thread.

So the character was the one constant throughout?

The constant was the character. His profession changed but his personality was *the* one constant.

And his ambition, the wife project, was that a constant?

No it wasn't actually, in the end the dramatic question, right across the whole thing, became 'Will he find a wife'. Whereas at the beginning, the original version was, 'Can he make a marriage work?' or 'Can he make a relationship work?', because Don was in fact hooked up with the woman by the end of the first act. And then it was about whether

the romance, whether the relationship, could survive. So they were living together for two thirds of the story.

So your first motivation was to attract finance to the script... and the second motivation?

The second motivation was that I actually wanted to write a novel more than I wanted to make a film. It was a much, more deep-seated ambition. It was much longer standing. All my life I wanted to write a book, whereas the desire to write a screenplay and be involved in screen production was much more recent. It was really driven by fact that I thought I might be *able* to do it, whereas I didn't think I was capable of writing a book. But I'd now got to a point where through my screenwriting studies, I'd learned a lot about storytelling, and through my other work, my writing skills had improved, I had more maturity around ideas and so on. So at 50, I'd reached a stage that when I sat down to write the novel, I was in a position to do it. I just knew a lot more. And I *had a story* too. Actually, I had story, characters, everything... so the amount of new stuff I had to do, to write the novel was a lot more manageable.

And the third reason, which was not so much a driver at the time, but became more important as I did the project, I see this now looking back on it, was that I could tell the story better in a novel.

<u>This</u> story better?

This particular story is better. Now I'm not saying that every story can be better told as a novel, although there is an argument for it, um but if you want to explore someone's inner world, the novel is the quintessential means of doing it. And.... it transformed the story from observing a weird guy to understanding a weird guy.

In the script, did you use voice over?

Not much.

Was it very much first person?

No. You're taught not to use voice over that much and ... I'm just going back in my mind, because the script went through various iterations, so if I look at the current script, I actually use a bit of voice over at the beginning, um, but fairly creatively, and not to access his inner thoughts, not as that sort of device... We're watching action at the beginning of the opening scene and he's describing what he sees happening and we're watching the action, so we get to see the disconnect between the way he's describing it and the way we would see it.

It's to help us understand his character? ... And that's the script that you are now adapting from the novel?

No no. I've never adapted a script from a novel really.

Sorry… just to clarify, the script that we were talking about then, is the script that you adapted the novel from, and at different times it had voice over or no voice over.

So the history of the script is that I wrote it purely as a script, with no novel in mind. In the beginning of 2012, I sat down and reverse adapted it as a novel. I then went back to the script, and with some of the insights I got from writing it as a novel, I actually went back to the script and put those into the script. Then later, after the book came out, I sold the script to Sony Pictures. I sat down with their producers and made other changes to the script. The producers had also read the novel, and so some of their notes were also inspired by the novel.

So the script that you adapted the novel from… you had gone back to do some revisions, because the novel had created some thoughts and that's the script that Sony have taken on.

Correct.

And are you now working on that script still or… where are you now with that?

Basically, it's now with Sony. I've done my contractual part of it. They've got my draft and they're in a position where they can bring other writers on as they see fit.

This is quite interesting because, they had it in their heads, this is one of the curious things that happens with reverse adaptation. Everybody is so used to the paradigm where the book comes first and the screenplay is adapted and I really had to make sure with my contract and in all my dealings with them, I had to keep reminding them that "No, you've purchased an *original* script. You've purchased a spec script, which happens to have a novel behind it." But if this thing were to get an Oscar, the Oscar would be for Best Original Screenplay, not for adapted screenplay. And that hugely affects my status as a screenwriter in terms of credits. Because, if it had been an adaptation… (unclear), then somebody else can start with a book and that book is seen as intellectual material that is available to everyone, so in so far as something was in the book, it's not original.

It's a fine line isn't it?

Oh, but it's of huge importance. Because, where do the characters come from? You say they came from the book, which is available to everyone, but if you say 'No, they came from the original screenplay' then I invented the characters, I invented the structure.

But you invented those for the book as well?

Yeh, I did, but afterwards.

After the screenplay?

Yes that's right.

Does it make a difference that you're dealing with an <u>unproduced</u> script. I mean this is an area which is completely unexplored. Because it's unproduced, where does the script stand in terms of the published book?

The script was registered, and I can prove its existence. You have to be careful with that sort of thing. I had registered it with the Australian Writers' Guild, and it was short listed for an AWG award for an early incarnation. Later on, again, before I started the book, it won the Writers' Guild award for Best Unproduced Dramatic Comedy Screenplay. So it's got a very clear provenance, a history that we can all see existed before the book.

So now we're starting to talk more legal issues than anything else.... but... they are quite important. I mean they are the difference between an adapted screenplay and an original screenplay and there is an enormous difference when it comes… We haven't tested all this yet, but when it comes to credits.

Have you known anyone to win a Best Adapted Screenplay Oscar that they have written the novel for?

No idea. There are people around like John Irving, I'm thinking *Cider House Rules* and so forth, who both wrote the novel and worked on the screenplay, um... They're not always the most successful films. *One Day*, David Nicolls did the screenplay I think or collaborated. I mean quite often there is a co-screenwriter.

Can I ask you about your exact working method. Did you put the screenplay aside or did you have a copy of the screenplay right in front of you? Were you going scene by scene as a direct adaptation? How did you actually go about writing the adaptation?

One of the things I did, was I went back to the scene breakdown. I went back to the scene breakdown that I had for the screenplay. One of the issues was that I'd decided to write in first person.

Yes.

Okay so because I'd made that decision, I could only write scenes in which my protagonist was present. And that actually affected the logic of the story as well.

The script didn't have that?

No.

Okay, so your script had scenes in which the protagonist was not present.

That's right. So what I did was, in terms of adapting it, I took the script and I went back to the scene breakdown, which is a tool that I use. A scene breakdown is just every scene summarised in one sentence or two, which says 'Don goes to a ball and screws

up,' or whatever it might be. So I knew the shape of the script, and I then revised that scene breakdown, so that I had the shape and structure that was going to work for the book.

Okay. In terms of changing the structure and action of the scenes?

Yep. Not so much within scenes. It was more a case of saying, 'Does the scene have Don in it?' If it doesn't have Don in it, I'm going to have to find another way around that one. So I will delete that scene and I will replace it with whatever I need to do, which might be changing something out of another scene or adding a scene in or whatever. So I had a new scene breakdown which was maybe 20% different. It wasn't hugely different, and then I sat down and with that scene breakdown, I started writing the story – but I had the screenplay open in front of me...

Printed?

No no, I used a soft copy.

So you had two computers going?

No just one. Two windows open. Two documents. One Final Draft document and a Word document, and I was clipping things sometimes out of the Word document. In the end there wasn't much that was adapted word for word. Maybe some occasional bits of dialogue...

So my starting point would be the dialogue, often you expand it in the book. You've got a bit more room in the book to do that. You're adding in as you're writing. You're adding more description of what's going on around. You're summarising, so that you might, rather than putting something in dialogue on the page, you might say, "Gene told me that things had gone badly with his wife", rather than saying in the actual dialogue, "It's gone badly with my wife", in the dialogue. Interestingly, when it got to the editor, the editor frequently asked me to expand those parts out again. 'Can we *show* this?' Which I think just shows how much our sensibilities have been affected by film. We don't write like Victorian novels anymore. Most popular writing is quite filmic.

I found that when I started doing my adaptation, I was not putting in things that the actors or characters <u>did</u>, like 'he turned his head' or 'he looked around'. I found I was writing really sparsely.

Yeh.

Not creating the atmosphere that a novel required.

Yep and for me it was okay, because my character was autistic. You know, Don Tillman, he has Asperger's Syndrome and he's not particularly conscious of the physicality of his environment. He's cerebral. It's all in his head, so he's not going to spend a lot of time telling you how beautiful the trees are. And I was in first person, so it relieved me of that

a bit. So I was able to write quite a spare sort of novel. But if I were writing something else, it would be a real issue.

For me I end up with a kind of 3:1 ratio between screenplay and novel. It seems that almost across scenes, across segments, and across the whole script it hangs around a 3:1 word ratio. So I've ended up with about a 75,000 word novel in the first draft, and around a 23,000 word script. Have you found anything like that?

It's a bit hard to map because I don't think about word counts in screenplays but we're talking about a 1 ½ hour screenplay, call it 100 pages, and that converted into a novel which came in about 350 pages or 75,000 words. Rosie's Project is about 75,000 words and the corresponding screenplay is about 90 pages. So if you want to count words on the page, you're probably right. It's probably about three times.

A feature script of around 100 pages is about 22-23,000 words.

So three times... and what is that? What's that made of? It's certainly description, it's expanded dialogue, um, it's dialogue 'tags' and such like. 'Gene walked into the room and smiled at me' and said *de de de de*... when he speaks rather than just dialogue under a character's name. It's also a few more scenes and a little bit more complexity, so once I'd done just one pass through, which was really just telling the story of the screenplay and any adjustment it needed to go into the first person... Let me give you an example, because it's quite important in comedy.

Classic comedy is comedy of misunderstanding, where we are sitting there as the observer, and we know that the two people in the room are coming from different places. When Don meets Rosie, the way it was done in the original screenplay is Gene goes to Don and says 'I'll send a few women for you to check out.' Then, we see Rosie talking with Gene, without Don being there. They need to settle a bet on genetics. Gene says 'Go ask Don Tillman.' So then, we see Rosie come into Don's office and *we* know, that Rosie has walked into Don's office to settle a bet, and *we* know that Don thinks that she is an applicant for the Wife Project, and that they are at cross purposes. It's an absolutely classic humour set up.

But, in the book, being in first person, we can't know what happened in Gene's office with Rosie. So what we get is Don just being a bit puzzled about this woman who is behaving a bit oddly, and it's only much later that there is the reveal, where she tells him 'No no I never came to your office for that. I wasn't applying for the Wife Project.' But the timing, the play of that, still works in the book I think, as humour, but in quite a different way.

So yes, there was a fair bit of that. ... And I also added a little more complexity to the plot. So there is a little more 'who dunnit' plot around who is Rosie's father.

Was that not in the original script at all?

Oh yes... Yes it was, but I added an extra red herring, Geoffrey Case. There is a character Geoffrey Case who committed suicide and Don travels to get his mother's DNA. So that's in the book and not in the screenplay. So there was a bit of room with the novel to say 'let's add a little more complexity' to that part of the story and give the reader something more to think about whereas … (*sound unclear*) …

It's interesting, if you want to compare them for length, it takes 7 ½ hours to read the book. The audio version of the book is 7 ½ hours, so on that basis it's 5 times as long. But of course, the film has the advantage that you can experience several things at once, you're seeing things and hearing things at the same time.

And spoken dialogue is quicker than read books.

Yep.

So you think you were working from about 80% of the screenplay to write the novel, given the scenes you had to reinvent.

Call it 70%, because there were two changes. One in order to deal with the first person aspect, in effect, to have Don in every scene. And then after I had done that, I did another pass, and that's where I introduced the Geoffrey Case character for example, and there are a few other little things like that.

What drove the decision to write in the first person?

Um, this is all about Don Tillman's quirky take on the world and if I write it in the first person, then everything we see is through his eyes. So every sentence in the book, except dialogue spoken by other people is Don Tillman speaking to us. And I wanted to add that up as much as I possibly could. So that was my way of doing it.

What I lost in doing that, was my own ability to intervene as the narrator and tell you how the trees looked or whatever.

Do you think you lost anything in terms of other characters by going into the first person, for example with Rosie or Gene, did you lose any complexity with them?

If I'd written close third person and I'd written it around Don, I would have had the same issue. I would had had to head hunt, I would have actually gone into Rosie's head to write some close third person from Rosie perspective, and I could have done that by alternating first person.

So you never considered a split point of view?

No. Never. I felt this was about a real immersion in Don's world. You see, every time we'd get out of the world we'd lose sympathy for Don. You'd start seeing him from outside of his point of view. I wanted us to be absolutely identifying with Don. I mean, deliberately, you don't meet Rosie until quite a long way in. It's unusual to leave it that

long before meeting a major character, and I was probably on the brink of – 'are we going to be sympathetic to it?' – but I wanted us to be completely locked in on Don before we met Rosie. So, particularly, a woman reading the book didn't say, I identify with Rosie. It's all about Rosie. How does she feel about Don. I wanted people, whoever they are, to be seeing the world through Don's eyes.

Does Rosie come in earlier in the script?

No.

So she's still quite late. Around page… what?

(thoughtful) Essentially, getting on board with the Father Project is the first act turning point. So she comes in late in the first act, around the 20 page mark.

Had you written a fair bit of prose before you started doing the adaptation?

I'd written virtually no prose.

Okay, so as a writer, what was your creative, even emotional, response to writing prose rather than screenplays, having been writing scripts for a long time?

Look, I think I had a job to do and I did it as well as I could.

So it was purely efficient. It was about getting it written?

It wasn't just efficient. It was doing it well. And that's creatively well.

What I did, was, I hadn't written any creative fiction since high school, other than what I'd done with my screenplay, I hadn't written any prose fiction since high school. So once I decided I was going to do this, I sat down and wrote some short stories. I wrote one short story, in the first person, which was a work up for the Don character. Right at the beginning of my screenwriting course, we'd been asked to write a short story about character so I'd written that short story. So I then sat down, about two months before I started *The Rosie Project* and wrote three short stories and entered them into a competition. They all got published which was tremendous encouragement for me and it was a little exercise, to see if I could do it. I put the Gene character in the centre of one of the stories, just to get him a work up as well. So I thought, 'Okay, I now know that I can write at least a couple of thousand words of prose. I could handle the dialogue tags, those little technicalities, so by the time I actually sat down to write *The Rosie Project* I had that behind me.

Structurally too, I was getting my cues from screenwriting, so I thought, 'Yeh, I can do this.'

For me when I sat down to do the adaptation, it had been years and years since I had written any prose, and it felt like an absolute luxury, like it was an orgy of

words that you could wallow in. You didn't <u>have</u> to, at any point, use the absolute minimum of words humanly possible.

(thoughtful) I enjoyed it. Certainly, once I started writing, I really enjoyed it. I felt I was writing funnier than I had been in writing the screenplay. That was all good, because I had more opportunity for humour. Because in the screenplay, your humour has to come largely out of the dialogue and out of character. Now there's going to be humour added on by the actors and the director, in terms of timing and the delivery in the performance. In the book you've got to do it all yourself.

You do have a couple of techniques up your sleeve and one of them is the observational comment. If you're writing in first person, Don's describing the world and there is lots of ways of making that funny.

I have to say thank you to you for this interview for another reason, because it gave me the excuse to sit down for a day and actually read. Usually there is so much other stuff going on that I can't justify sitting down for a chunk of time like that! I found it interesting that, while my story is completely different to yours, I have an innocent first person narrator as well. A naive narrator who knows less about themselves than the audience does.

An unreliable narrator.

Yes unreliable, but not deceitful. Not deliberately. Just naive.

In the same way that Don Tillman is. Don Tillman is in no way trying to deceive the reader, which I think is a strange way to write, but we learn about him through his own voice. One of the advantages of first person, is that we get character development *through* his descriptions of the world around him, and what's happening. Because we see that our world differs from that so we're constantly questioning, has he got it right? And those differences tell us something about his character.

How did you find developing the voice? How did you go about developing that, or did it just come naturally because you were already used to him because of the script?

Yes, um, the voice was inspired by a friend of mine. I've got a friend who talks a lot like Don Tillman and I modified that a bit in certain ways. Probably the big difference from my friend, other than the practicalities of his life and so forth, but in personality, is that early on I took on board the idea that we will empathise with people if they are really strongly in pursuit of a goal. So I made Don an absolute take no prisoners, never give up type of person. My friend is a lot more normal and average in that, but Don just never gives up he just keeps going. So that was a personality type of change but aside from that the voice was something I had in my head. I'd known this guy for a long time.

How would you say going from script to novel affected DIALOGUE?

Not much. Not much. In fact I'd say the interesting thing was that I was conscious of trying to do it differently and summarizing in particular, and as I say, I'd take it to my editor and she'd say 'Can you break this out into real dialogue?' And I'd think, but I've done that already, that's what I did for the script. Also, you can write a bit longer. The rule of thumb with screenplays is no more than one page of dialogue, well you can do more than that in a novel. You can extend your conversations quite a lot more.

Did you originally find that you were curbing your dialogue and then realised that it required more?

I think in fact that screenwriting teaches you a pretty good discipline about keeping your dialogue precise. I think sometimes the fact that those rules aren't so strong in prose writing can be a trap. You can write sloppy dialogue. It's interesting, just going the other way at the moment for *The Rosie Effect*, which is the book I'm writing at the moment, and concurrently writing the screenplay for *The Rosie Effect*, again so I can basically put a stake in the ground and say I wrote the screenplay at the same time as the book, it's not an adaptation from the book, um, I found that if I'd written the dialogue first in the book, without having written the screenplay... putting it on the page of the screenplay, you'd start to see that it was over written. Stuff I wouldn't have noticed on the page, but you notice once it's a screenplay. It's that discipline. The dialogue is very spare and there's nothing much else on the page in the screenplay.

And would you then go back to the book and make alterations to the dialogue in the book?

Yes I'd go back and cut it. Yes, the screenwriting training has, once again, encouraged me to just go back and cut some of the dialogue. Often, the editor would say, can you cut this scene? And you realise that you can cut the scene, just in the same way as you would in screenwriting. Let's get this dialogue sharp... let's get in late, get out early... Pruning that dialogue down to its essence.

Some people have suggested that the process I've been using, because the script is unpublished is actually, not so much adaptation, but parallel writing. Does that resonate for you?

Well, at the moment, with *The Rosie Effect*, I *am* doing parallel writing. I'm writing the screenplay and the novel at the same time. It's pretty much parallel writing.

What's the method you use for that?

Basically I use cards, as screenwriters do. On the floor, on the wall, whatever, but paper cards, not Final Draft, or computer whatever, and I work with the cards for quite a long time until I'm really comfortable that I have a scene-by-scene breakdown. Then I move from the cards to a scene breakdown, which is basically just transcribing what's on the card and sticking in anything I can, which might just flesh out those individual scenes. And then, from that I will sit down and write either a screenplay or a novel.

But which one did you start with?

I'd do a whole draft of one of them. So at the moment, I did a whole draft of the novel first.

So it's kind of reverse, reverse adaptation?

Yeah. But what I'm saying is that I've got a base for writing with just a set of cards and a scene breakdown, which could apply to either form. It takes me longer to do the cards, than to write the novel or the script.

Really?

I've just written *The Rosie Effect* in basically one year, from when I started thinking about it, to when I handed in the first draft of the novel. I didn't have a first draft screenplay at that point but I could have in less than a week.

Really?

Yes. Easily.

Once I've got a very clean idea of what's going to go in there, I write really fast. I actually wrote the first draft of *The Clara Project*, which was the earliest predecessor of *The Rosie Project* screenplay, it took me about 4-5 days because I knew what I was writing. I had everything plotted out. So, broadly speaking I would say I spent six months on the cards and the remaining six months was writing multiple drafts. Those drafts are for myself that is. And I would go back to the cards during that time as well.

So I'll do a draft, I'll write a draft and then go back to the cards, depending on what problems I might be having with the draft and so forth. But you're making stuff up as you go along. You do deviate from the cards, I think particularly in the third act. I find the first act stays very strongly the same as I've set up in the cards, the second act starts to drift a little bit and the third act is often quite different. You can see it's going to a different place.

Why do you think that is?

I think with the third act, you've laid down so much material now, that you are obliged to draw on that and follow its natural consequences. And the second act you end up changing because one of the great faults in writing in novel writing is a lack of escalation in the second act. It just doesn't build up. And sometimes it's just a case of re-sequencing things... so if our hero is going to have to fight three demons... you want the toughest demon to come third not first. It's the same for both scripts and novels. Storytelling.

Do you feel that the awareness of that kind of plot structure and stakes raising, comes from having a background as a screenwriter?

Absolutely. Screenwriting focuses very firmly on structure and on plot, to a certain extent characters. If you *learn* writing, creative writing, often in my experience, in my limited experience, the focus tends to be on the beauty of the writing and on the execution of the writing, and on reviewing 2000 word excerpts rather than on structure. You talk to a novelist and they say, "I HATE doing synopsises. I just don't want to do one" and it's because their synopsises don't make any sense! Whereas screenwriters just *have* to. You've got to have a pitch. You've got to have a synopsis. You've got to have a treatment. You've got to have a scene breakdown. You've got to have a beat sheet. All those things are our language in screenwriting. And the whole formality of structure, which for all the objections to it... you know all that stuff about 'on page 22 you've got to have the first act turning point'... the Syd Field's stuff and so on...

We've got our Syd Fields and we've got our Blake Snyders, Robert McKees and all these different screenwriting texts, almost all of which emphasise structure and you pick up books on novel writing and there's not much about structure. The books on novel writing are about how to write beautifully and not so much attention to structure.

I wonder if there is something about the notion of the writer as an 'artist' and the screenwriter as a 'tradesman'?

Absolutely. I mean, you really FEEL that. When I go to Hollywood, I'm wearing two hats. I'm both the novelist, and also the screenwriter. As a novelist I get respect. As a screenwriter, I won't say I'm disrespected, but you are well down the hierarchy. In the publishing world, the novelist sits at the top of the heap. Yes, there are publishers and there are editors and all that, but the novelist, whether they're well known or the flavour of the month and lots of people know who the writer is. Nobody knows who the publisher or the editor is.

But then you go to the screenwriting world and it's your producers and directors and actors who sit above the screenwriter. And who are also very significant creative partners.

Following on from that, do you find it frustrating or do you just accept that as a novelist, your word is literally the last word whereas as a screenwriter your word is the first word and that it could be changed in any way from the time that you deliver a script to when it hits the screen.

I'll give you a simple answer. Given that I've got a choice now between having a career as a screenwriter or as a novelist, I'd choose to be a novelist. For exactly the reason you just pointed out.

A film is a collaborative process and some of the greatest experiences in life are being part of a team but the way a screenwriter is part of a team is pretty limited. You are not actually in there on set, not these days, in conventional Hollywood filmmaking, making

adjustments and so on. You tend to throw your thing in and it gets kicked around. Whereas, as a novelist you have final cut. You get the final word.

Sure, sometimes, editors can be pretty forceful, in fact, I'm finding myself, right now as we speak, in quite a tricky position because there are foreign publishers who have a substantial stake in the sequel to *The Rosie Project*, you know big advances, six/seven figures, and they want to have a say.

When you say 'publishers', do you mean there are multiple publishers who all have multiple independent input.

Yep.

Ouch.

Ouch. Yep! Because... I've got a different publisher in the US or in Germany or the UK or wherever, and the biggest ones of those, the ones that have put the biggest money in, particularly the English language ones, and in this case also the Germans, who have a pretty big stake... they want to say 'We at least want to have some input', and some of that input is pretty forceful. And ultimately we're in a position where contractually, they could pull their section of the money.

The idea is to end up with one book, not different books in different territories?

Yes that's right. Obviously in the US, there's different US spelling and that, but not different stories. There was a request from the US for a change which they flagged as may be big for their edition. Basically in *The Rosie Effect*, Don gets arrested and the copper who arrests him says "Okay. I've got you but I'm going to have to get you assessed. It's more than my job is worth. I mean next week you could go out and shoot up a school." Now Americans say "That's just too close to home for us," the idea that someone with Asperger's might go and shoot up a school. And my comment is, "Well that's what I wanted here. This is not just a comedy. This is actually what it's like to go through life with Asperger's, and encounter people who think that you're the kind of guy who might go and shoot up a school." So as far as I'm concerned, that stays! So they'll look at things like that.

Don's a strong atheist who takes on religion, nobody is worried about that, but I'm told that the sensor might have a problem in China because there's a Chinese student who cheats in *The Rosie Project*. It's been sold to China but it hasn't gone past the sensor yet.

I thought that was an excellent resolution, the way that that particular plagiarism dilemma resolved in the book.

Yeah, but given that he has actually cheated, we may have to decide that he is an Indian student! (laughs). And really, I wouldn't have a huge problem with that, because I don't think you're damaging the spirit of the story. But if they said, "In the end Don has to convert to religion" or something like that, I'd say, "No I don't think so." But ultimately

I've got way way, way more control as a novelist. Whereas in a film what you see on the screen may bear little resemblance to what you've written.

My process was different from yours but for the first run through I had the script on the screen literally cutting and pasting and I was going through literally adapting scene by scene like building blocks. There was no real issue with voice because my script was very first person anyway, using voice over and so on... so I just kind of went through from beginning to end, and then as I was going through I was thinking, like with dialogue or something, 'Oh that's so much better than the script'... and I'd go back to the script, and I found it was just, to-ing and fro-ing back and forth...

Yeah. Yeah, you do that.

I ended up doing two new drafts of my script before I got to the end of the novel!

Yes. That happened for me. One informs the other. I didn't actually go back immediately to the script. But once I'd written the novel there were things that were just... better.

And I feel like I've ended up with a better script because I've written the novel.

Absolutely. Absolutely. I think it's a standard sort of creativity practice, if someone's working in a different medium, it's going to give you some insights.

The other thing I felt was that, because as script is so much 'lighter' than a novel you can move things around more easily and transparently in a script, so in terms of structure, I found that it's easier to make structural changes in the script and then put them across into the novel. Did you have any experiences like that?

Yes. I was going back to the scene breakdown. I still do. So with *The Rosie Effect*, even though I wrote the novel first I designed a structure that was going to work for both of them. It's easier to move cards around than even scenes. And you want to be pretty flexible until you feel you have a pretty good story shape and screenwriting teaches you that.

For you, how did the book improve the script?

Um. Well I effectively went back to the script and decided to make it more first person and that. I really didn't need to go outside Don at all. Now that may well change in Hollywood but currently the script has Don in every scene, which is unconventional.

Did it increase the voice over?

Um...no. Actually, there is a little more voice over than it originally had, but not as a result of the novel. That was a result of discussions in Hollywood and finding a solution to a problem, so voice over was how I wanted to do it. There's only voice over in the opening scene really.

Did you find that writing the novel developed your relationship to the character?

Oh absolutely. I already had a pretty good idea of the character's personality but the novel is a much better vehicle for exploring someone's inner world and putting it on paper. When you're writing a screenplay, I think you need to know your character's inner world, but you do know it better when you are being forced to write it down.

One of my ambitions for writing the novel was that I really liked my characters, and I thought to myself, what is the chance of this film actually getting up, and writing a book is at least a way of people getting your story and your characters out there. Was that similar for you?

It was all wrapped up in the idea of "How do I get my story out there?" And there was a point where I did say, in effect, that even if the film doesn't get up, at least the book is up and the story is out there.

Even though it's a really hard time for publishing at the moment, do you still think that it's easier to get a book published than a film made at the moment?

It's just a question of numbers. I mean, how many books are published every year and how many films are made? I think there is about 600 studio-films made every year, in the US, I could be wrong, at best 1000s of films, but a lot more novels are published.

What about in Australia?

It's still easier. Absolutely. Particularly if you're established. If you're an established screenwriter, that doesn't mean you're going to get a film made in the next few years. But if you're Matthew Riley or whoever, you're going to walk in and you're going to get your next book published. It's a no brainer. Until you start really losing sales you're going to get your next book published. It's always hard for new writers, in whatever medium, but there will be plenty of new novelists published this year, more than new screenwriters getting films made.

And there's this attitude, it's a very tight community in the film world, whereas there is a lot of competing publishers in Australia, so if you're not getting financed, if the distributors or Screen Australia don't like what you're doing, forget it. In fact, if just the distributors don't like what you're doing, it's going to be very, very hard. Whereas in publishing, if Text doesn't like you, you can go to Allen and Unwin, you can go down the road to Penguin, you can go overseas.

How did you get published the first time?

The reason I got published was that I won the Premier's literary award for an unpublished manuscript and that attracted the attention of publishers. Now, Text was one of the publishers that I had already submitted it to, and I said, 'Hey guys, I've been short listed for the award', and at that point they came on board. So the short listing was

enough, but they were adamant that they would have got to it and published it. The prize just accelerated the getting it read process.

In terms of tone between the script to the book. How did that change?

My comedy teacher, Tim Ferguson, likes to say, "makes 'em laugh, make 'em cry, make 'em think." And I think the book was able to do all of those with more intensity and deeper. Every one of those things that you try to do, the emotional experience, the overall experience for the reader, is deeper than for the film script. I think people will watch the film and they'll have a few good laughs, but I think there's a lot more depth in the book.

I guess that just on the basis that you engage for a longer time, just on that basis, you end up closer friends with the character.

I think that is absolutely true. There's just more to it. And more to it, particularly on an intellectual level. I'm a fan of words. You can, you can possibly do things comically, even emotionally more efficiently than in a novel, with the right actors and so forth... but intellectually you're not going to get there. Intellectually, the novel is going to take you a lot further.

In a film, you're only immersed for an hour and a half, two hours. And yes, you can concisely make people laugh. You can concisely make people pull emotional strings. But the intellectual side is pretty much limited to what do.

So have you got a favourite character in the book?

Ahhh. Gene. Putting aside Don, because Don is the protagonist and he's absolutely the favourite character, the whole thing is built around him, everything is a vehicle really for Don. The Americans think it's about Rosie, but it's not about Rosie.

Why?

Because women read literature, women read. That's the audience in fiction. Fiction is a female audience, and if men do read, it tends to be crime fiction. Fiction about relationships is all about women. So they want big emphasis on Rosie because she is a female character.

For me, this is not a romantic comedy where the two protagonists play equally. It has one protagonist. It's about Don.

In the script though, it was more two handed?

No it's always been about Don. It's been as much about Don as I can make it. So in that sense, going to first person in the novel makes it more about Don. But that isn't because I wasn't trying as hard as I could to make Don the protagonist when I was writing the initial script.

So Don is what it's ALL about. MY favourite character is absolutely Don, but if you ask for my favourite secondary character, it's actually Gene. In the second book there's a lot more complexity around him. People might think of him as the evil guy but... I like people who are superficially unsympathetic but actually have some substance to them.

I was very happy that Gene didn't end up being the father. It's very cleverly placed early on so that you think Gene is going to be the father but then I was like, YES! He's not the father. I found that with the read the tension arced up a lot in the last third.

Yeh, that's the idea.

I think that with a book like this one, you have a long time, comparatively to invest in characters. Compared to writing a script.

Yes definitely. But again, screenwriting teaches us some good principles, like if you want the audience to invest in a character, you have to bring them in early... And not have too many.

Yes but you've gone against exactly that by bringing Rosie in so late in the first act.

Yeh right. It was a bit of a high wire act. It was important that we still cared about her but I didn't want that to overwhelm Don.

And no-one in Hollywood was worried about that?

No no. The most extreme example I can think of in a romantic comedy is 40 Year Old Virgin. The love interest comes in about half way through the film. There is a huge amount of set up. It's all about him. It's a very late entry. The rules are there to be broken. But we don't care that much about her.

APPENDIX B

Interview with Tilney Cotton. September 2014.

Summary of the conversation regarding the background of the project

In 1998 Tilney Cotton met with a producer on a film set "hanging around the film split and chatting." He pitched the idea of *Little Chef, Big Curse* (then called *Matty Swink and the Moon Mice*) to the producer. He liked it. (Cotton notes that this was well before *Ratatouille* was released in 2007, as the story bears some resemblance.)

Together they got script development funding from South Australian Film Commission (SAFC) for a first draft. Two years later they got second draft development from the AFC. There had been interest in the project from a major animation studio.

'The whole thing fell apart' and Porter went on to have legal issues over copyright with the producer. Cotton was seeking the rights to revert to him, so that he could write the novel. The issue eventually settled out of court and Cotton was able to proceed with the novel.

Cotton subsequently wrote the novel and self published a first version of the book *Matty Swink and the Moon Mice*. He chose to publish just the first half of what is now the full book – with the intention of creating a cliff-hanger ending to promote buying the second book in the series. (Also to save money).

Cotton self-distributed the novel, sometimes selling the book himself at literary and art events. He eventually sold almost all of the initial print run of 1500. At one literary event he met someone who became his literary agent and the book was subsequently picked up by Scholastic in 2008. The novel has since sold well in Australia and New Zealand in bookstores and to school libraries.

Of its long history Cotton says, "The only good thing to come out of that (extended legal) scenario was that I had 8 years to develop the script – and the story in the published novel is infinitely superior to the script."

Selected Interview Transcript

At what point, in what year did you decide to write the novel? What motivated you?

I always wanted to write the novel. In my initial contract with my producer it was stipulated that I was to be given first go at writing a novel from this story. Not a novelisation, but a novel. The treatment itself was 30,000 words which isn't that much different from the book, which is about 40,000 words. Although, of course, it wasn't written as a novel… It didn't feel like a novel.

At my second year at UTS (University of Technology Sydney) I had to do a major prose project and I chose to do this project. That was while all the legal issues with the producer were still going on and at that stage it felt like the book would never happen.

That was the first time I wrote it in prose properly. The response wasn't very positive. (Laughs).

*** Cotton studied a Masters in Creative Writing at UTS. As part of his course he decided to reverse adapt some of the chapters of the Matty Swink story as part of his course work. Or as he says 'based on the script'.*

Why?

My thing was that I was seeing it as a movie in my head. I wasn't relating to it as a prose story. The way I began writing – it was just instructions for a movie in my head. And that's how I was writing it at that stage. I'm more aware now that there are techniques you can use in prose writing to adjust the flow and to give different shifting points of view of the scene. You can go into someone's mind and pull out what they're thinking. But at first, at that stage, if you couldn't see it I wouldn't write it.

I was also being too literal. I was putting too much detail. I wasn't giving room for the audience to imagine the book. That's a critique I've had of my screenwriting - that I put too much detail. I've been accused of directing on page.

Maybe that's what a novelist does?

Yes. So for those first few chapters the story was just a film script in prose. It read awkwardly.

What's the difference between a screenwriting class and a creative writing class?

In my experience, screenwriting is structure. Story. I mean it's called 'Story'. Robert McKee's famous book is called 'Story'. He's a story consultant. The Hollywood commercial film industry is all about the story.

Whereas creative writing is not about that. Not the classes I've done. In creative writing you're diving under all that and looking at the entrails of the beast.

Creative writing is much more flexible. There is far less emphasis on structure. It's almost like the structure comes last. You research and collect the material and the intention of the novel and then structure comes last.

*(**He talks about a class where everyone had to buy something with $2 and write about that experience.)*

The structure comes last... I suppose an analogy would be [the process of film] editing. Creative writing is more like having the liberty to run around with the camera and film whatever you want, with no 'on set' pressures, and you get to the end of that and *then* you get to the editing desk and wonder, 'Now what have I got here?' And that's when your structure comes in... 'How am I going to build a story out of all this?'

In screenwriting, you don't get past first base without getting the structure right. Then you shoot it and put it into a film. It's much tighter.

How did your background in screenwriting affect the way you wrote this novel?

I've got a strong focus on story. I like to keep the story pacey. I work out the structure. I try to develop a three to five act structure. I think about pay offs. So anything I introduce to the script early, I think about how it will pay off at the end. It's not just a throw away 'gag' or concept. There has to be a pay off, a reason for it.

That can be formulaic. Like you see in TV dramas. You know if something is mentioned in the script, that it will have to come back later on in the story. No time is wasted. I suppose that the skill is writing it so that it doesn't seem so obvious.

Were you aware of scriptwriting structures while you were writing the novel?

Yes. I didn't just do creative writing courses. I was also writing a script as part of a screenwriting course too. So yeah, I was immersed in that way of thinking as well.

*** Cotton already had a background and training in screenwriting at this time.*

I had had AFC funding on a previous script, called the *Marsupial*, which actually was being script edited by my screenwriting teacher, Margot Nash. She was very good. So I was writing short stories and fiction at the same time as writing scripts. So in my head they were meshed... for good or for bad.

What was your experience as a writer going from script to novel. How did it feel?

(Long pause...) Well you don't have to worry about logistics. You don't need to think about how this is going to be filmed. In a film you have to visually show it. You don't want too much dialogue exposition. For example, in the novel whenever Matty thinks of his grandmother he imagines in his head that he gets a certain sensation. To do that in a script is quite laborious. You have to figure out how to do it. Whereas in a book, you can simply tell the reader 'he remembers back to when...' and he gets this itchy feeling in his

mouth and he hears the tune in his head. You can make it almost an aside. Not too pointed. Whereas in film, everything is there for a reason and if you signify the feeling or the memory, you know that it is significant and it can become obvious.

Do you enjoy one over the other?

No, I haven't really got a preference. The preference I do have at the moment is just seeing it in front of an audience – be that audience readers, or people sitting in front of a television or film. Or on their mobile phones! So far I've only managed to get it published. Which is fine. The most satisfying thing for me, and it was important during this whole legal problem, that something you put a lot of passion into, for better or for worse, finds an audience. I do believe the book is selling well and we've had strong interest overseas.

I remember Tim Winton saying, someone asked him why he didn't get into screenwriting, all the money and glamour, etc. He said, 'I'd hate to be a filmmaker. Contemporaries of mine who are screenwriters are fifty before they make their first feature.' He said that would be so soul destroying. I understand where he was coming from.

It was so important for me personally to get a story, this story, in front of an audience. That was the primary motivation for writing the novel.

If the film went ahead, I may never have written the novel.

If you had a choice between being a screenwriter and a novelist, which would you chose?

That's a very important question because I'm considering that right now. I want to be able to make a living. Basically, in Australia, unless it's a huge hit, it's very, very, very difficult to make a living writing novels.

There's kind of a contentious issue in screenwriting at the moment that some people can spend their entire career as a screenwriter going from one government grant to another and never making any money at the box office. And yet they have a whole career as a writer.

Is it more difficult to get a story to the public as a script than as a novel?

I don't know. It wasn't hard to get funding for a couple of drafts of Matty Swink through a funding body. But that was because I was attached to a producer who had a large number or feature film credits under his belt and he was in with the SAFC. But that's not getting the story to an audience. That just step one really.

The scale of money is different. The publisher had to put money towards publishing the novel, but it's not anywhere near how much it costs to make a film.

I got paid more for writing one draft of the script than I got as the author of a published novel. And the advance I got for writing *Little Chef, Big Curse* has to be paid back out of royalties.

What creative challenges did you find in adapting from script to book?

Well the first challenge is that you have to make it readable… Tenses. I wasn't very good at tenses... Film scripts are always set in the present tense. For me the technical challenge of keeping the tenses consistent was difficult. It was almost like a form of dyslexia. I wouldn't even pick it up. I'd read a lot of novels, even classics from hundreds of years ago, and authors would play with the tense. They'd do it really subtly, you wouldn't even notice it, but it somehow has an effect on the audience. They obviously had great control over it. I had to become acutely consciously aware of how that was done. It felt like a conductor with his baton and the tempo changing here and there.

What percentage of the script made it to the novel?

Certainly the premise. The whole concept is the same. A lot of things are different. Like *what* the curse is, is different… What the moon mice's motivation is, is different in the script.

I notice that with Little Chef, Big Curse there was a lot of narration, a lot of telling of the story as opposed to dialogue, etc. Do you have an explanation for that?

I suppose I don't particularly like lots of dialogue. I'd say it was a film thing. The less dialogue [and more action] the better personally. I love great dialogue, the classics you know, but that's not this project. It's not my talent. So, I wasn't actually conscious of the 'show don't tell' rule while writing the novel, but I naturally try not to put too much dialogue in to my script. A lot of the dialogue in my scripts was accused of being awful. And I have to agree with them. It was perfunctory. The script was very action driven and the dialogue was secondary. I guess it's from my film background. Because my first love was film.

It's very action driven.

I wasn't consciously doing it. But it's a style I like. Yes, it's been commented on actually in some of the reviews I've had. That it's very full of action.

As I was reading I could see it as a film because really it's one action sequence after another. But in terms of Matty's character… everything we know about him comes through internal monologue, not dialogue. There's very little dialogue. I would have thought that it might be the opposite. I would have thought that in a film he would have had a sidekick or someone or something to talk to.

Interesting you should say that because in the first two drafts of the script Matty did have a sidekick. And for that very reason. So that he can talk to it. He talks a lot to his sidekick. That was the purpose of the sidekick. The character was a balloon creature

made from that character Barnaby Onions. The character was a balloon giraffe who came to life and hung around with Matty. The sidekick was that balloon creature.

Then I thought that the balloon creature was a bit common, and the sidekick became something like a teapot or a dirty talking sponge. Actually the idea of the sidekick came from the producer who said that we needed to know what Matty was feeling and thinking.

But then in the novel, that's the difference, you didn't need a sidekick anymore because you can *say* what Matty is thinking and feeling. No doubt if it gets turned back into a film the sidekick might appear again (laughs). I don't know what... or maybe voice over... Matty's voice over.

Yes, I never really thought about it consciously but that must have been why the sidekick disappeared. It was the form. I didn't need it, and I had reservations about it even in the script.

Was the script intended to be animation?

It was. It depended on how much money we had. There was also talk about doing live action combined with CGI. We hadn't made a decision on what form the film would take. The most important thing would be to get an emotional response, whether that's fear, loathing or humour.

How would you describe the different experience for the audience between a film and a book?

In a book you can reflect. You can read a scene, imagine it in your head, rewind it, replay it, re-read it. You might get interrupted and go for a walk and you can imagine that scene in your head. In a film you have to wait until the whole thing is over, especially in a cinema. There's also this thing in film about style and spectacle.

Of course with a book it might take a day and a half to read, with a film it's 90 minutes.

In a book you can add more characters. In a film you have to be careful with the number of characters there is and you have to delineate them clearly... In mine the number of characters is about the same. Multimedia is interesting in stories like this. It's a bit of each. So you can watch it on screen but also if you want for example, background on a character, you can just click on a character and information about that character will come up on screen. In a book you might flip back a few pages and find the information you need. No doubt eventually there will be films where you can just press whatever button and get information – or whatever you want to know, about that character.

How would you compare the place of the screenwriter in the film industry as compared to the place of the novelist?

Well I'm still an unproduced screenwriter... In theory at least novelists are supposed to have much more esteem. In the eyes of the publishing house, you're the only person you're dealing with. You *are* the artist. So you get lots of kudos and respect. Talking from my own limited experience there's a general idea that screenwriters are at the bottom of the creative pile, even though they are essential initially. In many cases, writers let themselves be in that situation. I think a lot of writers disempower themselves by not making the bloody film themselves, learning, or wanting to engage in all the production stuff of filmmaking. Learning producing skills, directing stuff, lenses, shots and so forth. That's all a bit wearying. Writers often just want to play in the sandpit of their imagination.

It's much more taxing to be a screenwriter, if you want to have creative power. It just involves a huge amount more energy. You have to deal with more people, and you may have to deal with people you don't want to have to deal with. A lot of the stuff screenwriters have to do is pissing in the wind. That stuff is more taxing. Emotionally taxing and sometimes soul destroying.

With a novel, you don't have to worry about all that. You still have to worry about how you're going to get your story to the public, to a market. There's less stress.

How would you compare the creative interference for a writer between a novel and a film script?

With the novel there was almost none of that at all. The word count was the main thing. They wanted it down. A good 10,000 words had to go. There were economic considerations. The longer it was - it cost more to print. And in terms of the market they were after, it was a bit too long for that market. They wanted to change the title. They wanted a title that reflected what the story was about. The title was *Matty Swank and the Curse of the Moon Mice*. The first draft of the script was *Matty Swank and the Moon Mice*. They felt changing the name to *Little Chef, Big Curse* would sell the book. It would give an idea of what the book was about.

Were you able to disagree with that?

I could have but I didn't. I understood the logic of what they wanted. But it's moot as to whether that would make any difference. The blurb on the back cover is almost identical.

What was your practical working method for the adaptation?

***Initially – in his first draft of the novel – Cotton would 'cut and paste'. He would work on one 'scene' at a time and cut and paste sections of text from both the treatment and the second draft script. He would then manipulate the words to 'build a framework' of the story.*

Take the opening scene where he is in the diner where you first meet Fenella, I'd take the script and the treatment and I'd just move it around [cut and paste] until I had the story. And then I'd reread it through and think 'Can I actually read that as a book?' and then I'd start paraphrasing it. There are some sentences that are identical in the treatment and in the book. Not many. Just some of the descriptions.

At first it was simply cut and paste to get the structure there. Just working on the story.

So it was like a collage?

Yes, and that's why it would have read like a treatment when I started writing it.

The tenses were shifting all over the place. Because I'd been cutting and pasting there was actually plenty of stuff still left in the present. I didn't even pick up on it. I was so focussed on purely the story.

Do you have plans for the script now?

I didn't go back to the treatment until really recently actually. As recently as last month. If doing a reverse adaptation is 'reverse engineering', now I'm re-reverse engineering the novel into a kid's TV series. I had to go back to the book and re-adapt it to fit a TV series.

I had to break the whole story down into episodes. That's why I went back to the treatment because it's more episodic in its form. Also I've been working on the book for so long that going back to the treatment helped me to see the structure at a distance. Also I was looking for ways of doing it cost effectively and efficiently. There's no point in writing a scene again, if I've already got it in the treatment. The film bodies aren't going to judge it on its 'prose' as a creative writing piece. They are purely interested in the story. So I reversed the reverse of the reverse. I used the novel to be the foundation of the TV series, but went back to the treatment to help with the structure of the TV series, even though a lot of the story is different in the novel than in the treatment.

That's the screenwriter's skill. To know what to put in and what to leave out. I wonder to myself, 'am I putting the right stuff in?' I want to put everything in.

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