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**Visual Storytelling in the Cape Flats Gang Biopics *Noem My Skollie* (2016) and *Ellen: Die Storie van Ellen Pakkies* (2018)**

**A mini-thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in History, University of the Western Cape, January 2021.**

## Declaration

I, Leslé Ann Arendse, declare that “Visual Storytelling in the Cape Flats Gang Biopics *Noem My Skollie* (2016) and *Ellen: Die Storie van Ellen Pakkies* (2018)” is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Leslé Ann Arendse



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To my father Stanford Holtman who always has a story to tell and who instilled  
in me a love for history.

To my late mother Moira Opperman who taught me the value of being a life-long  
learner.

And to Professor Andrew Bank, who cultivated all this in me.



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## Abstract

This M.A. mini-thesis seeks to open up the post-apartheid South African biopic as a topic for serious historical scrutiny. While book-length written biographies published in the post-apartheid (and apartheid periods) are the subjects of a now quite extensive historiographical literature, biography on film – including in the form of filmic dramas – has been hitherto entirely ignored. Social history or marginalised lives and not political lives of struggle against apartheid have been the predominant subgenre within this emerging field: with sixteen biopics having been produced in the 2010s. But the field is dominated by white men. This thesis showcases the story-telling gifts of one young coloured film-maker through a meticulously detailed analysis of “visual story-telling” and “visual language” used in his two award-winning gang biopics, *Noem My Skollie* (2016) and *Ellen. Die Stories van Ellen Pakkies* (2018). Read in the context of the extended processes of production of these two films in which the central protagonists played a shaping background role, the thesis explores and compares the linear chronological, four-chapter, narrative structure of *Noem My Skollie* with the architecture of “the parallel narrative” used in the deeply disturbing *Ellen. Die Storie van Ellen Pakkies* (2018) The thesis is a celebration of the film-making talent of Daryne Joshua.

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## Introduction

In 2016 I saw a trailer on television about a film that was coming to the cinema circuit. The caption accompanying the film's title stated that it was based on true-life events about a man's journey to save himself from absorption into the notorious Number Gangs in prison through his gift of story-telling. This immediately caught my attention and I decided to go see *Noem My Skollie* (2016) at the cinema.

I had developed an interest in filmic analysis during my second year of undergraduate studies in History when I first learnt about Robert Rosenstone's theory of "true invention" and "false invention" used as a means for measuring the merits of historical films which we applied to Steven Spielberg's historical drama *Amistad* (1997). Although I had seen *Noem My Skollie* in 2016, I went on to do my Honours research on *Krotoa* (2017) in 2018. The film had caused a huge uproar among South African movie-goers, film critics and academics. Although the film won several international awards, local critics panned it. They claimed it "whitewashed" colonialism, depicted Krotoa and the Khoi as powerless, without voice or choice and thus without agency against colonial domination.<sup>1</sup> I was primarily interested in this radical divergence in local reception. How and who decides whether a film like *Krotoa* is good history?

At the beginning of 2019 I contemplated continuing my research in film for my Masters research project. At that time, the goals were very general. I considered examining the possibilities offered by film as a contemporary archive and source of visual representation linked to topics and aspects of history such as slavery, colonialism, identity, race, gender and sexuality. However, my motivations changed when I became aware of a surge in locally produced films within what was fast becoming known as the "Skollywood film industry" in Cape Town. Between 2013 and 2018, a total of five films within this gang genre had been produced. These films gained prominence

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<sup>1</sup> *Krotoa*, DVD. (Honours Research Essay, UWC, Department of History, November 2018).



both locally and internationally. *Four Corners* (2013) won six Golden Horn Awards at the 2015 South African Film and Television Awards (SAFTAs) and was selected as South Africa's official submission for the Best Foreign Language film at the 86<sup>th</sup> Academy Awards.<sup>2</sup> *Nommer 37* (2018) won seven Golden Horn Awards at the 2019 South African Film and Television Awards (SAFTAs) with the film's director, Nosipho Dumisa winning the Cheval Noir Jury Prize for Best Director at the Fantasia International Film Festival in Montreal, Canada.<sup>3</sup> The popularity of these films made me wonder whether these films portrayed a social anxiety amongst people on the Cape Flats about the continued pervasiveness of gang violence, or whether gangsterism had just become a new trend within the local film industry.

Delving further into the nature of these films, I discovered that the films' creators intended to tell stories more than glamourise the social ills of the Cape Flats. After speaking to my supervisor about this in early 2019 and expressing my interests in films classified as gang movies, he prompted me explore Rosestone's theory about "visual language" and "visual story-telling".<sup>4</sup> After careful scrutiny of film releases since 2013, I selected two films within this "Skollywood film industry" on the grounds that they are, for reasons that the thesis will explain, outstanding examples of South African history on film. In addition, both are biopics, that is, both use the life path of a particular individual who has had a central role in the scriptwriting and film-making process as the primary technique of telling their visual story. The first film *Noem My Skollie* (Cape Town: Gambit Films, 2016) tells the life story of the film's late central protagonist and scriptwriter John W. Fredericks (1974-2019), whose history of being a child victim of sexual violence and then a perpetrator of gang violence, leading to a traumatic experience of prison life

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<sup>2</sup> "Four Corners | Giant Films", *Giant Films*, 2021, <https://giantfilms.tv/work/four-corners#:~:text=Four%20Corners%20%7C%20Giant%20Films&text=Four%2>.

<sup>3</sup> "Nommer 37 Wins Best Director Award At International Film Festival | Channel", *Channel 24*, 2018, <https://www.news24.com/channel/movies/news/nommer-37-wins-best-director-award-at-international-film-festival-20180804>.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past. The Challenge of Film to Our Idea of History* (Cambridge, Mass. & London: Harvard University Press, 1995), 45-77.

is structured around the theme of Fredericks' gift for telling stories.<sup>5</sup> The second, *Ellen. Die Storie van Ellen Pakkies* (Cape Town: The Moving Billboard Production Company, 2018) details the harrowing account of a troubled relationship between a coloured mother and her drug-addicted son, whom she eventually murders out of desperation, and is narrated along two parallel timelines.<sup>6</sup>

Both films are directed by a young Cape Town-born and based film-maker Daryne Joshua, and both have attracted considerable critical acclaim internationally. This thesis examines why these films have been so highly regarded by paying attention to the extended process of production in both cases, and then by means of close critical analysis of filming techniques with particular attention to visual story-telling in both cases.

While the post-apartheid genre of films about gang violence and gang culture is dynamic and by no means confined to Cape Town gang culture,<sup>7</sup> this thesis proposes that the recent spate of movies about drugs and gangs on the Cape Flats is a social commentary of a regional and local kind. This is expressed in the choice of the films to work in a vernacularized form of Afrikaans and to express ideas of space and social networks distinctive to the local Cape Town context and history.

The post-apartheid biopic field is dynamic and fast developing. My sincere thanks and heart-felt appreciation goes to Sue Ogterop for sourcing a list of post-apartheid biopics needed for this research project. (For her full list see Appendix 1.) The term "biopic" is used here to refer to a historical drama. Biographies in documentary form on film are not considered in this statistical

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<sup>5</sup> "Noem My Skollie: Call Me Thief (2016) - Imdb", *Imdb*, 2016, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4567500/plotsummary>.

<sup>6</sup> "Ellen: Die Storie Van Ellen Pakkies (2018) - Imdb", *Imdb*, 2018, [https://www.imdb.com/title/tt7925418/plotsummary?ref\\_=tt\\_stry\\_pl](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt7925418/plotsummary?ref_=tt_stry_pl).

<sup>7</sup> For a selection of the best-known films within this gang genre, see *Tsotsi*, directed by Gavin Hood (2005); *Gangster's Paradise: Jerusalema*, directed by Ralph Ziman (2008); *iNumber Number*, directed by Donovan Marsh (2013); *Dora's Peace*, directed by Konstandino Kalarytis (2016).

overview that follows. According to this list, a total of twenty-five biographical films were produced between 1994 to 2019. Sixteen of these were produced between 2010 and 2019, a further six between 2003 and 2008 and three between 1996 and 1998. This reveals a heightened interest in the last decade: one might even call it “a biopic turn”.

Following Nancy Jacobs and Andrew Bank’s subdivisions of book length biographies written in the post-apartheid period,<sup>8</sup> I have divided biographical drama on film into three primary categories: political biopics, literary biopics and social history biopics. The social history category has been divided into sub-categories of colonial, gang and other.

The relative prominence of these categories is the opposite to that of written biographies. While the vast majorities of written biographies in the post-apartheid period are political biographies, the political subgenre does not feature nearly as prominently in the case of filmic history. In the biopic genre, social history film loom largest.<sup>9</sup>

In the political category, five out of the eight films are about male political figures and three are about women. The five films about men are *An Act of Defiance* (2019) (Dir: Jean van der Velde, Netherlands: Menemsha Films), a film about the Bram Fischer; *Kalushi: the Story of Solomon Mahlangu* (2017) (Dir: Mandla Dube, Johannesburg: Flash Films); *The Forgiven* (2017) (Dir: Roland Joffé, US: Saban Films), a film about Desmond Tutu; *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* (2017) (Dir: Justin Chadwick, Durban: Videovision Entertainment) and the-made-for-television *Mandela and De Klerk* (1997) (Dir: Joseph Sargent, Cape Town: Film Afrika Worldwide). The three included about women are *Winnie Mandela* (2011) (Dir: Darrell Roodt, Montreal: Equinoxe Films), *Mrs. Mandela* (2010) (Dir: Michael Samuels, UK: Diverse Productions), which is about Winnie Mandela and was a made-for-television production. The

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<sup>8</sup> Nancy J. Jacobs and Andrew Bank, "Biography In Post-Apartheid South Africa: A Call For Awkwardness", *African Studies* 78, no. 2 (2019): 165-182.

<sup>9</sup> I have not calculated the statistical ratios for the much larger subgenre of biographical documentaries where I suspect the political world predominate.

made-for-television *If This Be Treason* (1998) (Dir: Cedric Sundstrom, Johannesburg: Innervision Films for SABC), details Helen Joseph's personal account of the Treason Trial.

As in the case of political biography, literary biography is a relatively small category. Two out of the three films in the literary category two are about men and one about a woman. *Drum* (2004) (Dir: Zola Maseko, US: Armada Pictures) is based on the life of investigative journalist Henry Nxumalo who worked for *Drum* magazine during the 1950s. *Die Wonderwerker* (2012) (Dir: Katinka Heyns, Paarl: Sonneblom Films) tells the story of the famous Afrikaans writer, poet and researcher Eugene Marais's relationship with Jane Brayshaw. *Black Butterflies* (2011) (Dir: Paula van der Oest, Netherlands) tells the poignant and tragic life story of South African poet Ingrid Jonker.

Post-apartheid literature on South African film has developed into a subfield. There were histories of film in South Africa published during the apartheid period and before, notably Thelma Gutsche's detailed empirical account and Tomaselli's Marxist-influenced analysis of dominant class ideology and institutions of control in relation to South African film, but there was little engaged contextual and textual analysis. One of the very few exceptions is Vivian Bickford-Smith's frame-by-frame visual analysis of *Cry Freedom* (1987) and *The Wilby Conspiracy* (1975) in a 2001 essay published in a Special Issue on Visual History in Southern Africa.<sup>10</sup>

In post-apartheid South Africa, historians of film have shown an interest in what may broadly be called cinema studies, as well the use of film for educational purposes.<sup>11</sup> Jacqueline Mainguard, for example, notes that when recollections of cinema-going in interviews are analysed as

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<sup>10</sup> Vivian Bickford-Smith, 'Screening Saints and Sinners: The Construction of Filmic and Video Images of Black and White South Africans in Western Popular Culture during the Late Apartheid Era', *Kronos: Special Issue on Visual History*, 27, 1, Nov. 2001.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Rosenstone, 'The Historical Film: Looking at the Past in a Post-Literate Age', in M. Landy, ed., *The Historical Film: History and Memory in Media* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 50-60.

discourses of memory, three key themes emerge: cinema and place; cinema, culture and identity; and films, film shows and film stars.<sup>12</sup> Fernanda Pinto de Almeida examines the relationship between cinema and urban experience in twentieth century Cape Town and considers how cinema spaces act as a lens through which to understand changing imaginaries of race, public space and cosmopolitanism, from the time of cinema houses at the beginning of the century to decentralisation of cinema with drive-ins and the growth of black-owned cinemas in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>13</sup> This trajectory of examining cinematic spaces provides insight into Martin Botha's assertions of how the operations of power within the industry influenced viewers' experiences as well the ways in which audiences engaged the space and what they made of their viewing experience.

Well-known for his previous meticulous descriptions and analyses of South African film history, its artists and the industry, and history of filmmaking during the apartheid years, Botha shows how despite some landmark films by directors such as Ross Devenish, Manie van Rensburg and Jan Rautenbach, the structures and mechanisms of the film industry during apartheid discouraged filmmaking. He makes a case for the role of new post-apartheid structures like the Arts and Culture Task Group (ACTAG), leading to the establishment of the National Film and Video Foundation (NFVF), as organisations which have provided a space for the voice of "marginalised communities" According to Botha, the rise of feminist studies, racism studies, as well as men's studies and gay studies also allowed the space for film to become the privileged medium for the visualisation of the outcast, the marginalised and the stereotyped. These general observations in

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<sup>12</sup> Jacqueline Mainguard, *Cinemas in District Six, Cape Town, 1920s to 1960s: History, Politics and Memory*. Accessed at <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698016670786> on 28 September 2020.

<sup>13</sup> Fernanda Pinto de Almeida, "Cinema Desegregation and the Fall of a Drive-in's 'Berlin Wall'". Seminar Paper presented at the Centre for Humanities Research at the University of the Western Cape, Seminar No. 539, 2019.

his collection *Marginal Lives*<sup>14</sup> have obvious application to the protagonists in the two films under review: a sodomised gang member and a mother driven to homicide.

It is striking that social history is the most popular category for history on film. Over half of post-apartheid biopics falling into this category. This is in stark contrast to political written biographies that make up a much greater percentage. Whereas written biographies focus overwhelmingly on prominent political figures like Mandela<sup>15</sup> and the filmic literature shows more interest in sociological issues pertaining to film and in theatre spaces, filmmakers themselves have expressed growing interest in dramatising marginal lives through stories on screen. It is within this development over the last decade in particular that has evoked my interest.

The social history category may be subdivided into colonial, gang and other histories. Three post-apartheid biopics fall within the category of colonial history: *Krotoa* (2017) (Dir: Roberta Durrant, Cape Town: Penguin Films), *The Life and Times of Sara Baartman* (1998) (Dir: Zola Maseko, New York: Icarus Films) and *Rhodes* (1996) (Dir: David Drury, UK: BBC), an eight-part British television mini-series about the nineteenth century British businessman Cecil John Rhodes. Most films fall within the gang sub-genre. These include *Ellen: Die Storie van Ellen Pakkies* (2018) (Dir. Daryne Joshua, Cape Town: Moving Billboard Pictures), *The Number* (2017) (Dir: Khalo Matabane, Randburg: Born Free Media), *Noem My Skollie* (2016) (Dir. Daryne Joshua, Johannesburg: Maxi-D Productions), *A Lucky Man* (2013) (Dir: Gordon Clark, Cape Town: Lucky Man Pictures) and *Stander* (2003) (Dir: Bronwen Hughes, Germany: ApolloProMedia). All of these biopics explore the lives of marginalised people living in Cape Town and develop themes associated with social ills, including drug addiction, gang violence, sexual violence, unemployment and poverty set as harsh circumstances and environments.

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<sup>14</sup> Martin Botha, *Marginal Lives and Painful Pasts: South African Cinema after Apartheid*, (South Africa: Genugtig! Uitgewers, 2007).

<sup>15</sup> Jacobs and Bank reveal that as of 2018 there were already 59 published book-length biographies of Mandela, and some 225 books on political leaders, mostly men involved in anti-apartheid activism. See Jacobs and Bank.

I have classified seven social history films in a catch-all category as the “other”. Two of these are about women: *Poppie Nongena* (2019) (Dir: Christiaan Olwagen, Johannesburg: Helena Spring Films) and *Skin* (2008) (Dir: Anthony Fabian, UK: Elysian Films), a film about Sandra Laing a woman who was classified as coloured during the apartheid era due to her hair texture and skin colour and was expelled from her all-white school at the age of ten. The remaining five are about men including *Sew the Winter to my Skin* (2018) (Dir: Jahmil X.T. Qubeka, Johannesburg: Yellowbone Entertainment ), a film about John Kepe, a black rebel hero during the 1950s South Africa, *A Million Colours* (2011) (Dir: Peter Bishai, US : Cloverleaf Films ), a story about Muntu Ndebele and Norman Knox, the two child stars of the 1976 movie *eLollipop*, *Goodbye Bafana* (2007) (Dir: Bille August, Belgium: Banana Films), *Hansie: A True Story* (2008) (Dir: Regardt van den Bergh, Cape Town: Global Creative Studios) and *Faith like Potatoes* (Dir: Regardt van den Bergh, Cape Town: Global Creative Studios).

Of the twenty-five biopics listed here, eleven are international productions and fourteen local productions. Both local and international films, despite the diversity of their individual subjects, show a very strong white male director dominance. Of the eleven international films, eight were directed by white men (Jean van de Velde, Roland Joffé, Peter Bishai, Darrell Roodt, Michael Samuels, Anthony Fabian, Bille August, David Drury) with only one directed by a black man (Zola Maseko) and the remaining two directed by white women (Paula van der Oest and Bronwen Hughes).

Out of the fourteen locally produced biopics, only two were directed by (white) women (Katinka Heyns and Roberta Durrant), whereas the remaining twelve were directed by men. Of these six were white (Christiaan Olwagen, Gordon Clark, Justin Chadwick, Regardt van den Bergh, Cedric Sundstrom and Joseph Sargent), two were black (Jahmil X.T. Qubeka and Zola Maseko, two films), with only one coloured (Daryne Joshua, two films). Interestingly, van den Bergh and Joshua both directed social history films two years apart. Van den Berg directed *Faith*

like *Potatoes* in 2006 and then went on to direct *Hansie: A True Story* in 2008. Joshua debuted with *Noem My Skollie* in 2016 and then directed *Ellen: Die Storie van Ellen Pakkies* in 2018.

In the context of this overwhelmingly white male dominated directorial pattern, I have chosen to explore the craft of the only coloured director, the hugely talented Daryne Joshua (1985) still just thirty-five years of age. Joshua was born and raised in Cape Town. He grew up on different parts of the Cape Flats between middle and lower-class coloured and black communities. Many of the social problems such communities encounter shaped the kind of creative content he became attracted to as a filmmaker and director. The extraordinarily marginalised circumstances that ordinary people in his native Cape Flats find themselves in forms the basis from which he tells his stories on film.

Joshua traces his love for story-telling back to early childhood. He started visual-storytelling at age seven when he would draw and sell comics to friends. He was also intrigued by films. Apart from playing football on Saturday mornings he, along with friends and cousins, would spend the rest of their Saturday afternoons at the Cine 400 in Rylands, Athlone. They would watch the most recent Hollywood blockbusters. It was here that his love for cinema blossomed. He recalls having been particularly intrigued by Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* (1993) and how "real" the dinosaurs looked. And it was from that moment that he knew he wanted to be a filmmaker. Having grown up on the Cape Flats, however, he did not believe that this dream could become a reality and it was only in his early twenties that it started to seem possible.<sup>16</sup>

Joshua graduated from the CapeTown film school AFDA. Immediately thereafter, he founded Gambit Films, a Cape Town based film and television production company that creates innovative content. The company has been hugely successful, producing the very popular local

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<sup>16</sup> The paragraph above is all taken from *Noem My Skollie* Is SA's Official Entry To The 2017 Academy Awards - Screen Africa". *Screen Africa*, 2021. <https://www.screenafrica.com/2016/09/28/film/em-noem-my-skollie-em-is-sa-s-official-entry-to-the-2017-academy-awards/>.



Afrikaans soap drama *Suidooster* for DSTV and Kyknet, as well as creating many permanent and freelance jobs within the film industry. Part of Joshua's vision for Gambit Films was to provide mentorship for aspiring film directors in Cape Town which he found to be a challenge in his own career. From a business perspective, he credits Rob Carlisle, founder of CFX, Jaco Loubser, the founder of Homebrew Films, Simon Hansen, founder of Inspired Minority, and more recently film-maker David Max Brown, whom he worked with on *Noem My Skollie* (2016), for expanding his insight into the film industry and knowledge on film.<sup>17</sup>

Joshua has a promising career as a young home-grown film-maker. Apart from filmmaking, he lectures on cinema and film studies at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT). He has immense experience in editing, animation, sound design, media advertisement communications and scriptwriting. He wrote the script for the short film *Nommer 37* (2018), directed by Nosipho Dumisa, which was later adapted into a feature film. The script went on to win the South African Film and Television Award (SAFTA) award for this category. His current project is a local television series, *Blood and Water* (2020) of which he is the scriptwriter and director.<sup>18</sup> Joshua sees himself as a story-teller and prefers content that entertains and enlightens over being genre specific.<sup>19</sup>

The examination of Joshua's two films in this thesis delves into his notions of story-telling and explores how he brings this to life on screen. But how do we analyse story-telling in historical film? My suggestions about ways of analysing story-telling in historical film are by no means exhaustive or even comprehensive. In the two chapters that follow I draw a broad distinction between what I think of as "contextual" and "textual" analysis, in line with that conventionally adopted in relation to literary criticism. A contextual analysis of a given film involves an

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<sup>17</sup> Bontle Ntsie. "Conversations On Creativity - Daryne Joshua". *Creativenestlings.Com*, 2017. <https://www.creativenestlings.com/conversations/daryne-joshua>.

<sup>18</sup> *Noem My Skollie* is SA's Official Entry.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

examination of some of the following types of questions. How was the film produced? What were the motivations behind the making of the film? How was it directed? How was the screenplay crafted and the cast selected? What more ad hoc decisions were made about the film as it was under production?

In the case of the two films under review in which the subjects of the biopic were active agents in the production processes, I examine the relationships between the filmic subject, on the one hand, and the director, producers and scriptwriter (for *Ellen: Die Storie van Ellen Pakkies*) as closely as possible. To what degree were John W. Fredericks and Ellen Pakkies the “authors” of their own stories? While I have chosen to treat both films as “biopics” invented by the director Daryne Joshua, another analyst might have approached them as “auto-biopics” crucially shaped by the central protagonists, both of whom I show played very active roles in their production.

The subsequent “textual” analyses of each film involves questions about the story, plot and characters, and how these are presented by the camera. Although we tend to think of film as “realistic” because the medium renders people and objects in such life-like detail, one can actually only see what the camera shows. With this in mind, I will explore the ways in which the director sets up, or manipulates a shot or a sequence of shots. This form of “textual analysis” addresses questions like: How does the director select the scenes and background for filming? What sequencing does he use in this regard? How does he try to create a sense of “authenticity” in relation to setting? In the case of one of the films under review, for example, Joshua uses historical footage to create a sense of Cape Flats life during the apartheid era.

Then in relation to the details of the framing of specific images, what type of shot is the director using? Is it a long, medium or extreme close-up shot? Is the shot taken from a high or low angle, or from eye level? Is the camera placed in an “objective” location, or does it represent the point of view of one of the characters? Does the camera move, or does it film from a fixed vantage-

point? Is it handheld or stable? How are shots arranged in sequences? How are actors, objects and lighting used to create the effect of the scene? The analysis of these questions is only possible in a scene-by-scene way, ideally followed from beginning to the end of each of the biopics, which I attempt to do in both cases although admittedly more fully in the case of *Ellen: Die Storie van Ellen Pakkies*. Obviously, such scenic selection is subjective and partial. I could have selected other scenes for detailed textual analysis. In each case, I explain why I have chosen these particular scenes. This is aimed at understanding how much a scene functions as a form and component of story-telling.

Other questions that aid this understanding will also be examined in relation to the mood of the films. Here I pay attention to the atmosphere created by the acting, music, sound effects, colours and costumes, as well as the repetitions that cue in the things the director thinks are important. These include recurring music and/or song, camera techniques and special effects that add meaning to a film. I also examine editing, such as cutting from shot to shot, scene to scene and consider whether these are long takes or short takes, as well as whether these are fast or slow. This is an important part of the films' creation, because it directly affects the audience's viewing experience to an even greater extent than the plot. These techniques are used to evoke emotions. They can create a unified and continuous effect which may not really be noticed, or they can have a jarring and destabilising effect, as is more often the case in the two emotionally disturbing film under review.

Let me conclude this introduction with a slightly fuller chapter overview. Chapter one, begins with an account of the very long process of the production of *Noem My Skollie* (2016), one which effectively extended over a full decade from 2006 to 2016. Here I provide a critical engagement with the film's trajectory from the time of conception by John Fredericks many decades earlier, to its methods of production when he came to write the script, to the date of release. It also examines his relationship with the director and the film's creators.

The second part of the chapter provides a close textual analysis of visual story-telling and visual language in this film, reading the film as a text. With story-telling at the very heart of the narrative, I pay close attention to the structure of the visual narrative. In particular, I examine the four stories (or “chapters”) within the longer life narrative. *The Young Ones* tells about Fredericks’ formative years. *Die Nommer* and *Die Storieman* narrate about his experiences in prison, including how he uses his gift for story-telling to avoid absorption into the Number Gangs. *Ballade van ‘n Bandiet* tells of his release from prison and how story-telling again saves him this time in court from a looming life sentence for a murder he did not commit. This chapter will examine in close detail the underlying structure or “architecture” of these “stories within stories” and how Joshua skilfully employs visual language to convey this fascinating and complex narrative structures. Part of this focus is on the visual symbolism including the typewriter, the story-teller, even the Hollywood film called the *Young Ones*. In a short concluding section, I explore how the film has been reviewed and the afterlife of the film in the form of John Fredericks’ 2017 autobiography, a reversal of the usual sequence of the relationship between a book and a film.

Chapter Two provides a parallel exploration of context and text in the case of *Ellen: Die Storie van Ellen Pakkies* (2018). I begin by highlighting the difference in the production process between a film effectively and initially written by the central subject in the case of the John Frederick story and that in which the central protagonist was approached by others with an interest in making her story. Nonetheless, I highlight the comparable centrality of Pakkies as an agent in the making of her own life story, by examining the reliance of scriptwriter, producer and director on her testimony in the form of personal conversations with her and guided tours of the places that shaped her life. I also emphasise the role she played on set, shaping the filming of specific scenes. The production process in the case of this film was shorter and, in a sense, smoother. The experience of Joshua in having already made an internationally claimed biopic

might also have contributed to the streamlining of the production process in this case: one which ran across two years rather than a decade!

The body of the chapter consists of an extended critical engagement with the architecture of the film in relation to the concept of parallel narrative. I draw on film critic Linda Aronson for a theoretical framework within which to locate this complex filmic structure. I then analyse how *Ellen: Die Storie van Ellen Pakkies* works as a parallel narrative, effectively analysing the visual storytelling along two lines across the full two-hour-and-three-minute period of screening. Where the stories-within-the-story are the focus of my analysis of *Noem My Skollie*, symbolised by “the prison cinema” of Part III of the film, the traumatic concluding scene in which Ellen Pakkies strangles her son Abie with a voice-over from the court trial, the final coming together of form of the narrative about the past and the present, is the dramatic denouement of my textual analysis in the case of this film. Here, too, I conclude the chapter with an analysis of the reception of the film. A full engagement with audience reactions by means of interviews or questionnaires, or even active participant observation of screenings would have provided a richer and deeper understanding of how these films have been received, ideally with attention to differences between local and international reactions, but these methods are beyond the scope of this M.A. mini-thesis.

## Chapter One: The Production Process and Visual Story-Telling in *Noem My Skollie* (2016)



Figure 1: *Noem My Skollie*, Maxi-D TV Productions/Ster-Kinekor Pictures, 2016. “Prison Cinema” in *Die Storieman (The Storyteller)* in Part III. AB (played by Dann-Jacques Mouton) is shown with his back to the camera, telling a story about a slave ship mutiny.

“My friends asked me to write this story, when they died on the gallows.”<sup>20</sup>

John Fredericks never wanted to write his story because he felt too embarrassed about his past, but it continued to haunt him. He recounted in a television interview that while he was “writing a lot”, he was also “always beating about the bush”. A friend told him one day: “But John, you not telling the story. You must tell the story!”<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup>“John Fredericks On Surviving Gangsterism, Prison Through Writing”, *Youtube.Com*, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jEw3Ke-Cs5k>.

<sup>21</sup>““Noem My Skollie” Interview With Writer And Director”, *Youtube.Com*, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jMGrfXFXnW8>.

And so it was through the process of writing and his late life reflections on asking himself where he went wrong in his life that he was able to face up to the sodomy he had suffered as a child forty years earlier. As he sat crying uncontrollably that day with this revelation, his son walked into the room and asked him why he was crying. He was unable to answer. And it was there and then that he realised that he *had to* tell his story because “there are many kids still being molested today”.<sup>22</sup>

John W. Fredericks (1946-2019) was born on the outskirts of Cape Town and grew up on the Cape Flats in a place called Kewtown, close to Athlone. His father was a dustman and his mother worked in the abattoirs. He spent his formative years on the streets and at refuse dumps, searching for books to read and anything else he could find of resale value. Reading opened his mind to a whole new world. He decided at a young age that he wanted to become a writer even though his formal education only went as far as Standard Six, or Grade Eight as it is called today. Being poor [he recalls] was “normal”, just like living and growing up during apartheid was “normal”. Drugs, gambling and knives were “normal” too. In that place and during that time, there were no heroes and “bare-fisted brawls” were a “rite of passage”, even if they could eventually end at the gallows. But it was through his love for reading that Fredericks realised that these harsh realities of poverty and violence that threatened to suck the life out of him were, in fact, not normal at all.<sup>23</sup> And so it was through strife and struggle - and with very little formal education - that he set out to reach his goal of becoming a writer. The film follows this very trajectory of Fredericks’ life.

Set in the 1960s with story-telling as its central theme, *Noem My Skollie* (2016), depicts the harsh realities of life on the Cape Flats for the late writer John W. Fredericks who wrote the film’s screenplay. Following a chronological story-line of life experiences of Fredericks from

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<sup>22</sup> “John Fredericks on Surviving Gangsterism”.

<sup>23</sup> “Noem my Skollie” Interview with Writer and Director.

childhood onwards, the film centers on Fredericks' gift for telling stories. It is through his stories that he avoids being absorbed into the brutal ruthless and notorious numbers gangs inside Pollsmoor prison. After being imprisoned with one of his friends for a petty crime, he raises his status in jail by enchanting the toughened prisoners of the Numbers Gangs with his flair as a raconteur and so becomes the "prison cinema", while his childhood friend, Gimba, becomes the "boy-wife" of a gang boss.<sup>24</sup>

Like book chapters, the film is divided into four parts with each announced in white scripted letters against an ink-black backdrop. Each part tells of the events that shaped a distinct phase of Fredericks' life. The first, titled *The Young Ones*, dramatises the sodomy he suffered as a child, which becomes the driving factor in the formation of a brotherhood with three of his friends, first as a means of protection, and then as a means of survival. But this brotherhood spiralled into a life of petty crime and at the age of sixteen Fredericks was arrested for theft along with one of his brotherhood friends and sentenced to two years in Pollsmoor Prison. Here he very quickly learnt that fighting his battles with physical force would no longer cut it. He had to harness another skill, his ability to tell stories, as a means of safety and survival. This takes further shape in the second and third parts of the film, titled *Die Nommer* (The Number) and *Die Storieman* (The Storyteller). The last part, *Ballade van 'n Bandiet* (Ballad of a Thief), tells how upon his release, he unites with his childhood sweetheart and aims to give up on his gang life but gets charged for a murder which one of his former gang friends committed. Once again, his ability to tell stories, here in a courtroom speech in mitigation of his pending death sentence, that ensures his survival.

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<sup>24</sup> This practice of the members of the Numbers Gangs taking younger men as boy-"wyfies" is shown by Charles van Onselen to have had its origins in the prison gangs of "Nongoloza" Mathebula on the Witwatersrand of the 1890s to 1900s. See Charles van Onselen, *The Small Matter of a Horse: The Life of 'Nongoloza' Mathebula, 1867-1948* (Johannesburg: Raven Press, 1984).



The film is set in the coloured townships of the Cape Flats, where coloured and Black South Africans were resettled during the period of apartheid forced removals in the 1960s and 1970s. It vividly depicts the dilapidated apartments and houses and corrugated shack dwellings of people during that time. The director uses old film reels at the beginning as a means of framing the film, skillfully setting its tone. The dialogue is that of the vernacularised Afrikaans of the Cape. This draws the viewer into the space of the Cape Flats. The film features subtitles in English for international audiences.

The film is hard to watch at certain points. Audiences are made to sit through the sexual assaults, physical violence and murders that were part of the brutal and brutalised life of John Fredericks. But it is the skilful contribution of story-telling, in particular of the reconstruction of “stories within the story”, that is the most compelling technique developed by the scriptwriter and director. This forms the focal point of my analysis of this film as a text. The riveting performances, face pacing and technically adept cinematography plunges the viewer into his story of hardship and struggle, alongwith his lifelong hope for love and a better life.

This chapter is divided into four parts. The first part tells the background story of Fredericks’ extended but determined quest to turn his story into a film. I tell of his journey of giving up his job, how he went from street story-teller to creative writer, and how this gave him the chance to script his own life history. Yet it still required the interest of a film-maker. The chapter explores how he eventually came to choose Daryne Joshua as director.

In part two, I provide an overview of the theory of American historian of film Robert Rosenstone about how we might go about analysing historical films in relation to “visual storytelling” and “visual language”. The third and most extended section then applies this theory to *Noem My Skollie*. I examine the architecture of this film and its linear, chronological structure, one which takes storytelling as both its central theme and its primary filming technique. I investigate the

technical elements of the chronological form with its beginning, middle and end, what this looks like, and how it works to explore core themes of friendship, betrayal, forgiveness, love, and the hope of a better life. I then select scenes from the film and provide a close critical analysis with attention to music, camera and editing techniques, including cutting from shot to shot and scene to scene. I have devoted the closest attention to the stories within the story in the third section of the film, *Die Storieman* (The Storyteller). I conclude in part four by analysing the reception of the film locally and internationally. I then reflect on the autobiography that Fredericks wrote after the film.

### **Part I: Scriptwriting and Production Process (2005-2015)**

Fredericks participated in a creative writing workshop sponsored by the Afrikaans Language and Culture Association (Afrikaanse Taal- en Kultuurvereniging or ATKV) after his release from prison in the 1970s. He only started working on the film script in 2000 after his revelation, as mentioned above, about his need to confront the past and share his story with others. His determination would see him make his own hand-written business cards and go to film festivals and just hang around, handing these cards out to whomever would take them. Besides his contact details, the cards included his sketched outline about the film he wanted to make. But nobody seemed particularly interested. It was only after a chance encounter with producer David Max Brown that began he the long process of writing the script for the film, beginning over a decade prior to the film's eventual release in 2016.<sup>25</sup>

Brown met Fredericks in 2005 while hanging out on the steps of the building at the Sithengi Film and Television Market in Cape Town. He recalls how Fredericks had written a script about his life and how he had used his gift of story-telling in jail, helping him raise his status behind bars.

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<sup>25</sup> "On The Couch With The Makers Of "Noem My Skollie"", *Youtube.Com*, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mRaz2P-QQyQ>.

“Wow! That’s unique. I have never heard of that before. He was telling made up stories in jail, but his story was true. John is a really good natural story-teller”.<sup>26</sup>

While Fredericks’ draft was gripping, according to Brown, it was still not developed enough for a film script. Brown advised him to find a good script-writer if he wanted to produce the film. But Fredericks wanted to write the film himself using the Afrikaans of the 1960s and 1970s and the prison language of that time. He thus had to learn how to write a screen-play. He consequently gave up his job as a security guard at the age of fifty and attended courses in screenwriting in Johannesburg from 2007 to 2008, travelling between Cape Town and Johannesburg in order to do so. This journey was not easy for Fredericks. He had to balance his time between travelling and submitting assignments.

Even after he had written the script, problems with funding made him doubt whether he would live to see the film through to production. At times he wanted to give up.<sup>27</sup> It was only after M-Net came on board that Brown and co-producer Moshidi Motshegwa of Maxi-D productions were able to get the go-ahead to produce the film, with this finance from M-Net as well as support from the National Film and Video Foundation (NFVF), and the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI).

Fredericks was already sixty years old when he wrote the initial screenplay, motivated in effect by a sexual assault that he had suffered half a century earlier. The script was written in what is known as Afrikaaps, a vernacular Afrikaans peppered with English that uses metaphorical language to add depth of meaning and expression to events as portrayed in the film which helped retain the authenticity of that period.<sup>28</sup> In this regard, one could argue that the film is directed specifically with an Afrikaans audience in mind, and more so a coloured Afrikaans audience.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

This is not the case. Brown asserts that English subtitles were always part of the plan to ensure a more inclusive audience, catering for the broader South African and international markets.

Fredericks recalls going through the painful process of working unsuccessfully with six directors who “just didn’t understand” what he wanted to convey in the film.<sup>29</sup> The seventh, Daryne Joshua was only fifteen pages into the script when he had made up his mind that he wanted to direct the film. He tells of how the first section of the script, which sets out the lives of Fredericks and his four friends on the Flats, immediately reflected his own life history. While many years younger than Fredericks, he too had grown up on the Flats, and as with Fredericks and his three friends, Joshua and his friends faced similar trials set in a similarly impoverished urban landscape. The story of Abraham Lonzi, or AB, as the “protagonist who continuously tells stories as a means to save his life” resonated powerfully with the life of Joshua the film-maker. As noted in the introduction, Joshua also had a gift for stories and an interest in story-telling dating back to early childhood. With so many correlations and similarities within the first section of the script, Joshua, recalls, that “I could identify with the characters. I looked at John and almost saw myself, because I used story-telling to escape when I became a film director”.<sup>30</sup>

Fredericks also felt an immediate connection with Joshua. Despite the thirty year age gap, he had the sense that here at last was a director who immediately understood what he wanted to do in the film. For example, Fredericks tells of how one prospective director who had read the script prior to Joshua wanted to portray his mother as a whore, which she was not, says Fredericks. Other directors did not understand nuances in the symbolism within the street and gang culture of that time, like “eating the flower” at a funeral of a “brother” who had been killed by rival

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<sup>29</sup> “John Fredericks on Surviving Gangsterism”.

<sup>30</sup> DidintleNtsie, "Conversations On Creativity - Daryne Joshua", *Creativenestlings.Com*, 2017, <https://www.creativenestlings.com/conversations/daryne-joshua>.

gangs. Eating the flower was a promise that his death would be avenged.<sup>31</sup> Joshua grasped these nuances from the outset because of their shared background.

The key to bringing the experiences of the script to light though the direction lay for Joshua in the casting. He only cast people who were from the Cape Flats. This he felt was crucial to crafting an authentic story, his first as a director. “If you’re not from the Flats, you’ll know something isn’t ringing true. You can pick up if whoever made the film never lived there. Authenticity was my thing from the start”.<sup>32</sup> Producer David Max Brown recalls that they went to dozens of schools across the Cape Flats hunting for older as well as younger versions of the boys who could play the characters in the film. Almost all were first-time actors which also brought challenges for producer and director.<sup>33</sup> They sifted through literally hundreds of actors over several months to ensure the right fit. The process was made more difficult by the time jump in the film that required casting of both young and adult versions of the same characters. By the time “something ridiculous like 542 boys” had auditioned for the role of young AB, Joshua made his decision and started filming. The production process had in effect taken a decade.

## **Part II: “Visual Story-telling” and “Visual Language” in Historical Drama**

Historiographical debates about historical drama as a potentially powerful means for representing the past opened up in the late 1980s, beginning in the United States. The turning point came in the late 1980s when a special issue of the *American Historical Journal* argued for the legitimacy and value of film as representation of the past, as well as a means to interpret it.<sup>34</sup> Robert Rosenstone was then and has remained an ardent champion of the dramatic feature film as a legitimate way of representing history, even though it is largely fictional. Rosenstone’s essay

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<sup>31</sup> Kwanele Sosibo, "Noem My Skollie, Noem My Skrywer", *The Mail & Guardian*, 2016, <https://mg.co.za/article/2016-10-12-noem-my-skollie-noem-my-skrywer/>.

<sup>32</sup> DidintleNtsie, "Conversations On Creativity".

<sup>33</sup> "On the Couch".

<sup>34</sup> Robert A. Rosenstone, "History In Images/History In Words: Reflections On The Possibility Of Really Putting History Onto Film", *The American Historical Review* 93, no. 5 (1988): 1173-1185, doi:10.2307/1873532.

in this Special Issue was republished in an influential collection of his essays in a book in 1995 titled *Visions of the Past: The Challenges of Film to Our Idea of History*.<sup>35</sup> Rosenstone's recommendations here about how we might develop ways of reading historical film, the distinctions between different genres and filmic history, and the centrality of understanding the degree of invention in analysing "the visual language" and "visual story-telling" techniques developed by film-makers remain crucial interventions thirty years after they were publicised. Although a vast literature has developed since Rosenstone republished his article in 1995 and while many of his observations might seem beguilingly simple or even obvious, his essay still remains, in my view, the most condensed, accessible and useful account of how to think about analysing filmic narrative and visual language. I will therefore provide a detailed summary of its most salient points before applying his ideas about visual language in particular in my extended scenic analysis of *Noem My Skollie* in part three of the chapter.

Rosenstone begins by making the case that historians ought to begin taking history of film seriously, despite the reluctance of mainstream practitioners to do so over many years (prior to the 1990s). Film, he emphasises as a great proponent of the medium, has very significant advantages over written history in its ability to condense its message and to transport its viewers into imagined worlds of the past. He goes on to write in more detail about the capacity of film for conveying the dramatic and in the case of the two films under review, one might say the traumatic.

His essay identifies three primary genres of history on film: drama, documentary and experimental film. His concern (and mine) is exclusively with historical drama. In a subsection that examines "How Mainstream Films Construct a Historical World", Rosenstone identifies

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<sup>35</sup> Robert A. Rosenstone, "Chapter 2. The Historical Film. Looking at the Past in a Post-Literate Age" in Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past. The Challenge of Film to Our Idea of History* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press), 1995), 45-79.

several significant characteristics that he sees as common to all historical dramas. They all apply on screen directly, with one partial exception, to the two biopics under analysis in this thesis. Historical dramas, he suggests, typically present stories in the past that heighten the focus on the individual. They present history in a sequential way, depicting a process whether they use linear narrative as in the case of *Noem My Skollie*, or experiment with parallel narrative as in *Ellen: Die Storie van Ellen Pakkies*, in ways that I will explore in great detail across these first two chapters. In this sense, then, he asks us to pay close attention to this “storied” nature of film, to what he elsewhere refers to in the article as “visual story-telling” sometimes I refer to his as “the architecture” or “the structure” of the filmic narrative.

What about “the visual language” of film, another term he foregrounds? Here he highlights the degree of invention involved in every part of every scene in historical drama. “Film so obviously gives the ‘look’ of the past – of buildings, landscapes, and artifacts ... In film period clothing does not just hang limply in a glass case, as it does in a museum; rather, it confines, emphasizes, and expresses a moving body”. This raises the question as to how clothing, landscapes, buildings are mobilised by one film-maker, Daryne Joshua, to recreate the sense of past-ness in relation to the two Cape Flats gang biopics under review. How does Joshua go about inventing “the look” for us as viewers, situating the casts of characters in a particular time and place?

Film – and here historical dramas differ from documentaries in their ability to this – invest these storied parts with heightened emotion. This is an aspect he writes about in more detail in his later work: the uniquely intense ability of film to convey the torture of human emotion, a depth of experience individually and collectively. Here we might simply reflect, as he does, on the power of film in relation to the history of the holocaust (or the Atlantic slave trade.)

The one characteristic of mainstream film that does not squarely apply to Joshua’s films is that relating to the moral tale with a usually happy ending. The Hollywood romance is not deemed

appropriate in Joshua's efforts to render authentically and with an authentic cast, stories of tragedy and despair. There is a somewhat redemptive ending in the case of both films, but neither can afford to give us as viewers a sense of people living happily after in a world marked by such dysfunction and brutality. It is the trauma and suffering that remain imprinted in our minds after viewing Joshua's biopics rather than a fuzzy feeling about a better world having emerged. Given the desperately bleak subject matter of the two biopics under review here, a life marred by sodomy and what it takes to murder your own son, he would have seen little point in concluding with any Hollywood-style flourish about moral improvement or regeneration.

It is through a close reading of his analysis of "Reading and Judging Historical Film" in the penultimate subsection of Rosenstone's article that we get the clearest clues as to how, in practical terms, we can go about reading history on screen. "History as drama is shot through with fiction and invention from the smallest details to the largest events." The invention of setting, scene and props have been mentioned above. The same is true with regard to "character": "all films will include fictional elements or invented elements of character". The same is true of "incident" or event: "here invention is inevitable ... to keep the story moving, to maintain intensity of feeling, to simplify the complexity of events into plausible dramatic structure that will fit within filmic time constraints". Rosenstone mentions, albeit relatively briefly in the course of his analysis of illustrative case studies, some of the most important techniques used by film-makers to create these illusions of the past: close-ups, camera angles, lighting, and so on.<sup>36</sup> This is what he means by "visual language" which he distinguishes in what I regard as a radical way from the conventions of written texts. Reading film is simply not the same as reading a book, he insists. So these are the general insights that I take to my analysis of "visual story-telling" and "visual language" of *Noem My Skollie* in the remainder of this chapter and *Ellen: Die Storie van*

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<sup>36</sup> The central points in this subsection are all drawn from Rosenstone, "Chapter 2. The Historical Film. Looking at the Past in a Post-Literate Age" in Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past. The Challenge of Film to Our Idea of History* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press), 45-79.



*Ellen Pakkies* in chapter two, where I also introduce important theoretical insights from Aronson on “parallel narrative”.

The only scholar in South African post-apartheid film studies to apply Rosenstone using the kind of attention to scenic detail and visual language that his approach demands is, on my reading at least, Vivian Bickford-Smith in a 2001 essay entitled ‘Of Saints and Sinners’. Bickford-Smith adopts what one might term “a frame-by-frame” style of analysis with truly meticulous attention to dialogue and image, and the interplay between, in his analysis of specific films produced in the late apartheid and early post-apartheid historical drama as “texts”. My approach has been informed by this pioneering example of the benefits of reading film as closely as possible, demanding as this may be for the analyst. More generally, Bickford-Smith has also made an insightful case for the value of Rosenstone as the theorist of film. In this regard his work has paid attention to another significant theoretical strand in Rosenstone’s landmark essay analysed above: the relationship of histories on screen to “the written discourse of history” which space constraints have prevented me from pursuing in this thesis. My work may be seen to fit within the tradition of the social historian’s engagement with film but in a way that puts the language of film, the analysis of film as “text” centre-stage.

### **Part III: Analysis of select scenes: *Noem My Skollie* (2016)**

Here I examine scenes from *Noem My Skollie* in relation to what the cinematography entails and how it captures moments and events in a way that the artistic aesthetic supports the director’s vision of the kind of story being told.

While this film has many emotionally traumatic scenes, my choice of scenes for analysis here is based on my interpretation that Fredericks’ unique gift for story-telling is being the main theme of the film. I thus focus on scenes related to his telling of stories.

The cinematography forms the cohesive narrative across the one-hundred-and-fifty-three minutes of the film. As noted in my chapter outline in the introduction, broken into four parts like book chapters, *Noem My Skollie* is divided into four parts: *The Young Ones*, *Die Nommer (The Number)*, *Die Storieman (The Storyteller)* and the last *Ballade van 'n Bandiet (Ballad of a Thief)*.

These four chapters are preceded, however, by a profoundly disturbing opening scene. A person comes into view through an extreme close-up camera shot that appears in vintage quality. The decrease in contrast and slight increase in brightness in this shot accentuates the lightish brown sack that covers the head, while a similarly khaki-coloured shirt covers the shoulders and chest, as the hangman's noose tightens around the neck. It produces somewhat of a haze effect that is almost not noticeable at all, but that somehow transports the viewer to a past. Eerie music in a low tone accompanies the hopelessly despairing last-minute noise of this person's low-stuttering voice, uttering what sounds like a prayer. The sound of a wooden trapdoor slams upon release, while the camera shows an extreme close-up shot of the person's shackled lower legs and feet in the same khaki-coloured pants as the shirt and brown shoes. One of the feet kicks involuntarily, it seems to slow down, as the viewer imagines this hanging body drawing its last breath. This is followed by a the voice of a young coloured Cape Town man, evident by his accent and dialect: "Is ja! Is ja! Is ja! (Yes! Yes! Yes!) Live fast, die young! You make a good-looking corpse. But that wasn't the idea, my brother. Your eyes pop out. You get a hard on and you shit in your pants. A man can't meet the Lord in such a state." Then the film's title *Noem My Skollie (Call Me Thief)* appears slowly on the screen in a Times New Roman font, like that of an old cardboard file taken from an old metal filing cabinet. The font is coloured in the same dull yellow as that of the police vans and casspirs during the apartheid regime.

The scene changes to a bygone Cape Town which sets the stage for the context of the film. The viewer gets to experience this as momentary video clips run through old film reels that alternate

with each other. It starts off with a full view of Table Mountain that intercuts to scenes of olden-styled buildings, street shops and semi-detached houses, like those of District 6. Coloured people work as vendors along the streets, sell fruit and flowers, while sounds of children's voices and the bustle of people going about their daily business mix with the sound of traffic and barking dogs. These two opening scenes are crucial. The language of the young man in the first scene and the clips of a bygone era in the second scene set the mood for a performance closely linked to everyday feelings, such as anger and desire, and functions as a means of communicating the storyline of this production to the audience.

The picture quality then changes from that of the old film reel back to the faded or vintage effect from the opening prisoner scene. The camera moves slowly from an aerial shot to street level capturing a sunny day as the laundry-lined balcony of a scarlet painted, white trimmed Liesbeeck House comes into view on the left. A coloured woman leaning over the wall of the balcony watches a church band marching past her building and along the bustling street below. The words *Church Street, Athlone, Cape Town, 1962* then appear in the bottom right-hand corner of the screen.

Chapter one begins and the words *The Young Ones* appear. The scene from Church Street develops into other scenes that introduce us to the 1960s Cape Flats of young AB and his three friends, Gimba, Gif and Shorty. The first seventeen minutes present a chronological portrayal of the lives of these young boys during that time, with camera shots ranging from mostly medium close-ups to a few wide angles in the same vintage picture style that is to be carried throughout the film. Life on the Cape Flats, we soon learn, offers the boys little or no hope of bettering themselves. They constantly teeter between their dreams of a better life as depicted in the films they watch at the bioscope, like *The Young Ones* referenced in the chapter title, and the reality of their lives where absorption into gangs, violence, poverty, strife, unemployment, incarceration, alcohol, drugs and sexual abuse follow their every move like a shadow. These

themes are woven skilfully into the visual narrative of these early parts of the film as the boys navigate the perils of everyday life.

Young AB frequents the rubbish dump with his father. His father once gave him an old typewriter as a gift that he found on the dump. The typewriter changed AB's world as he began to write the stories he imagined. But on this particular day, he is alone at the dump. He is no more than nine or ten years old. The camera captures him in the heat of the day between two desolate rubbish hills (or tips as they are locally known). He is captured in a wide-angled shot scrummaging through the rubble. A long shot from above one of the rubbish hills taken from behind AB shows he is not actually alone. It brings into view a German Shepherd guard-dog from the right of the screen. Ballie, the tip's overseer, has been deviously watching the unsuspecting AB for a while now. It is hot and the dog's panting is unusually loud. An extreme close-up shot with contrasting colour and brightness puts emphasis on the dog's large white incisors and focused eyes. As AB turns away from the rubbish to look behind him, an over-the-shoulder shot brings this dog into view, alongside another dog of the same breed leashed with ropes held by Ballie.

AB tells Ballie that he is looking for books to read. Ballie responds by warning him ominously about being alone so far away from home. A medium close-up shot then reveals Ballie's rotten teeth, his sweaty and unshaven face, his dishelleved hair and tacky clothes against a bright blue sky. Ballie licks two fingers and checks the direction of the wind while seeming to survey the tip at the same time. Ballie warns him again. Only this time, the warning comes across as a threat. This shot immediately changes to a full angled shot of the dogs. It shows them now standing at attention, shining white teeth exposed and eyes unblinkingly fixated on AB. There is no sound or music through these scenes. We now only hear the rapid panting of the angry dogs and their low tone growls, and the uneasy silence adds to our anxiety about what is about to follow.

A medium close-up shows the young boy turn to walk away, perplexed at this evil man's words of warning. The scene now starts to intercut between AB's view from the bottom of the rubbish hill and Ballie's view from the top, while the sound of a steady high-pitched violin is introduced to heighten the tension. The dogs in close shot show a willingness to attack as Ballie lets them loose. They immediately bolt down the hill with Ballie in hot pursuit. The next scene shows a wide-angle view of a setting sun behind the rubbish hill on the left as AB turns and starts to run from the dogs. He tosses away the book he had picked up, as the dogs take the bend at the hill from the right of the screen and onto the straight. Gaining on AB, the camera holds steady and still, focused on the straight. One hears the growls and shrill barks of the excited dogs as they chase the young boy past the camera.

The camera does not turn to follow them. We only hear AB's desperate cries for help amidst the sounds of vicious dogs that are closing in on their prey. The rest of this incident plays out as a sexually violent attack on AB by Ballie with his dogs guarding the scene. The out-of-focus camera angle shows a dazed and disorientated AB get up from the ground, straightening out his clothes after the ordeal as the sky darkens in the background. A close-up from behind shows his legs, blood flowing down the inside of one, as he walks into the vastness and eerie quiet of the tip, back up the same straight that he had just run down.

This incident sets the stage for all of the events that unfold in the chapters that follow. As we have learnt, this rape was the very reason that Fredericks was so determined to bring his life story to the screen - even fifty years after this event! AB is plagued and tormented by the memory of the sodomy. He has nightmares where he dreams of killing Ballie. Because of his secret, he sits crying alone in the den where he and his friends regularly meet. His hurt and sadness turn to anger, and it is then that he and his friends decide to form a brotherhood. They make a pact to stick together as a gang for protection, and as a family, and to make their own money. They define their roles and ranks with Gif as the enforcer, Gimba as the merchant, Shorty as the money

man, and AB as their leader. Their motto dictates that whoever gets caught for whatever must stand alone for the punishment. The chapters that follow unfold as a tale of the almost inevitable and then severe series of consequences that emerge from this brotherhood and pact.

*The Young Ones* tells of how the boys move from innocent and naughty everyday activities, like smoking dagga and telling stories, to a life of petty crime. They start to hustle and work the streets through gambling on dice games and taking an interest in the dagga smuggling business of Gimba's father's (known as Mr Carelse or Mr C), coupled with an unflinching attitude towards physical violence. Their lives, however, take a turn for the worse as they become arrogant and dangerously over-confident. They begin to broaden the scope of their criminal activities, getting drawn into knife-wielding street fights. When they break into a store at night, AB and Gimba get caught and are sentenced to two years in Pollsmoor Prison.

Chapters two and three *Die Nommer (The Number)*, and chapter three, titled *Die Storieman (The Storyteller)*, are where AB's character really comes to life. Here the director skilfully merges the experiences of jail time for Gimba and AB, as their pact of brotherhood for protection is crushed by the social order of the Number Gangs. AB is forced to choose a separate path purely as a means of survival. Gimba gets absorbed through physical and sexual violence into the strongest faction of the Numbers Gangs, the 28s. AB and Gimba are introduced to the factions by Timer, a 27s gang member jailed for murder and doing life in prison. The 28s faction not only reign supreme in terms of rank and file within the ordering of the factions, but also in their strength in numbers inside of the prison walls. The 26 and 27 factions thus pose little threat to the 28s and Gums, played by David Manuel (an actual prisoner out on parole at the time of the film's production), their leader or "general", refuses to stand down when he puts his claim on Gimba as his "wyfie". He aggressively asserts "the Law of the Number", that is, that blood must be

spilled by the killing of a warden if this matter of Gimba is to be resolved. Outside of that, his claim to Gimba is “legit” and shall stand as such.<sup>37</sup>

AB proves to be another matter entirely. His resistance to the Numbers is not well received, particularly by Gums, whom AB challenges for compensation in exchange for telling a story. The leaders of the factions decide to take the matter of his fate to “*die tafel*” (the table) to decide which faction has the right to him.

His first opportunity to showcase his gift comes that very same night after the ruling at “*die tafel*” (the table) that he be given this chance to impress but that failure would see his absorption into the Numbers. The scene opens with AB sitting on folded blankets in the centre of the cell, head bowed, hands folded on his knees as if silently in prayer while what seems like a heavenly light softly illuminates him from behind. (See the still on chapter title page). It is dark and quiet in the rest of the cell. The prisoners are sitting on the floor, or lying on their beds. They are all focused on AB as they wait for “the movie to start”. The camera now moves to a peeking position from behind one of the bars of the bunk beds, switching to a medium close-up shot as AB lifts his head and begins to tell his story.

The story begins with an aeroplane preparing to land at Cape Town International Airport, but Gums’ right-hand-man The Dog<sup>38</sup> immediately interrupts AB, wanting to know the name of the story. He is irritated. Timer reprimands The Dog and allows AB to resume. AB takes two deep breathes and then gets up. He lifts his arms in the air. His body language changes, as he looks intently over the prisoners as if fixed on something in the distance. There’s a “bra” (guy), he says, dressed very smartly in a chalk-stripe suit, hat, silk scarf, dark glasses and boots, with a

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<sup>37</sup> On the Witwatersrand origins of these Number Gangs in the life story of “Nongoloza” Mathebula as gang leader see van Onselen, *The Small Matter of a Horse*, 6-9, 28-31.

<sup>38</sup> This character “The Dog” corresponds to the real life prisoner “Doggy Dog” who features in Jonny Steinberg’s *The Number: One Man’s Search for Identity in the Cape Underworld and Prison Gangs*, (South Africa Johnathan Ball Publishers: 2004). See “Chapter 4 and the Fate of Doggy Dog”, 64-83.

rolled-up newspaper underneath his arm. The camera intercuts between medium close-up shots and long shots as AB struts round the centre of the room, mimicking the swagger of the person he is describing. The lights from outside the cell catch him through the prison windows, creating just enough dimness with the feeling of being in an actual cinema.

AB's ability to add depth and detail through his body language as he tells the stories is what truly captivates and intrigues the prisoners (and the viewers). His gestures move in sync with his voice as he goes from slow low tones, to quick movements when his voice pitches. In the story of the airport, for example, we see how he sets himself up almost as a third person present observing the scene, as well as telling his audience how he sees what he sees as he speaks in the present tense. "*Ons oë volg syne*" (Our eyes follow his), he tells, extending his arm and pointing away from his face with his fore-finger and middle finger as if to follow the eyes of the mobster in the chalk-stripe suit. The mobster is brought to life through detailed descriptive analysis of what he wears, the tattooed inscription on his forehead, as well the reproduction of the swagger in his walk, while the "cinematic" style soft lighting through the windows and medium close-up camera shots carefully draws the viewer's attention to how he slowly lifts his hat off his head as the look on his face intensifies through a frown while his attentive eyes scan the perimeter. AB's vocal imitation of things and sounds, like the double doors "swooshing" open and the gunshots sounding "bah, bah!", adds to the excitement and action in his story. He captivates his audience by using this mimetic style of communication, a physical form of theatre.

In another story, AB asks the prisoners to become one in their thinking. He asks them to forget about their gang affiliation and begins his rendition of the 1766 Meermin slave mutiny.<sup>39</sup> He tells them how the slaves were released from their shackles and made to clean weapons and

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<sup>39</sup> For a written history see Dan Sleigh and P.E Westra, *The Taking Of The Slaver Meermin, 1766* (Cape Town: Africana Publishers, 2013). For an hour-long historical documentary see "SECRETS OF THE DEAD: Slave Ship Mutiny", Cape Town, 2016.



entertain the crew. The prisoners grow excited on hearing about this obvious error in judgement on the part of the ship's senior officials. AB then tells of how the slaves seized the ship in an effort to regain their freedom. The excitement is short-lived, however, when they hear that after a truce gone wrong, the ship's captain gets his crew to head for the coast of southern Africa instead of Madagascar as the slaves had thought. After making landfall, the slaves are captured on the shore by a militia of Cape Dutch farmers. They surrender and are once again shackled. The prisoners are heart-broken when they hear the miserable ending of this story. The melancholic sound of the piano draws the story to a close as the camera centres on AB in a long shot from behind the prisoners telling them that after three-hundred years, they, the descendants of these slaves, are *still* prisoners while their families struggle on without them. The camera pans slowly over the prisoners in a medium shot, as for a moment, they are quiet and seem to reflect deeply on what they had just heard. Ultimately, nothing has changed. Their unifying moment is abruptly interrupted as the (white) warders burst into the cell and shove them up against the walls.

Chapter four *Ballade van 'n Bandiet* (Ballad of a Thief), the final part of the film, continues with this central theme of story-telling. After AB and Gimba's release from prison, AB tries to make something of his life by signing up at the local library, as well as for a local writer's circle. He meets his childhood sweetheart, Jenny, who works there as a librarian. Jenny is brought into the scene through a medium close up shot, in bright natural light that streams in through the library windows, wearing feminine clothes and loose hair that hangs over her shoulders; a stark contrast to the grim dimness of the prison cell and brown clothes worn by the inmates.

AB's life seems at long last to be coming together with Jenny and his love for writing. A left side medium camera shot in his bedroom at home, flooded by natural light, also shows him sitting at his desk setting up the very typewriter that he acquired from his father while scouting the rubbish dump many years ago. He is ready to write. Throughout this chapter we see how his love for

reading, writing and story-telling keeps drawing him away from the dark social forces of gang life that keep threatening to swallow him in.

These dark forces gather in a furied assault when AB is falsely accused for the stabbing of an old man. He is arrested again, along with Gimba, Shorty and Gif. At the trial, the detective states that Gimba, Shorty and Gif have identified AB as the one that shot the old man. They have been bribed by Mr. C who has orchestrated AB's imprisonment in a bid to further his illegal drug business inside the prison. But at the eleventh hour from the dock AB refuses to play along and makes a passionate plea for his innocence. A long shot from across the court room shows AB in jump up stating that the charges against him are false. He turns to his friends to remind them of the pact they made as young boys, urging them to take responsibility for this murder they committed without him. A medium close up shows the white magistrate sternly warn AB that the charges against him are serious and that the death penalty is applicable. He is to address the court if he has anything to say.

AB turns to the magistrate. He composes himself and asks he may address the court. The court is deathly silent. A narrow-depth of field shot centres AB into the frame as he begins his story. He recalls that the evening of the murder, he and his friends were together and that they had planned a robbery. He did not want to accompany them because he had just been released from jail. Eventually gave in to their insistence. He was on his way home to fetch his firearm when he unexpectedly met Jenny along the way. Soft piano music enters the scene as he turns to look at her. Turning back to the magistrate, he says he believes that meeting Jenny was not a coincidence, but a divine intervention. At that moment he decided he was done with criminal activity for good. The camera focuses squarely on AB as he looks directly at the magistrate, revealing the full details details of what truly happened that night. His eyes are steady and intense. His words are fluent and flow without restraint as he assures the magistrate that he has told the truth. His emotional plea is so moving that Gimba, Gif and Shorty admit to their guilt. The story ends with

AB being acquitted, while his friends who are sentenced to meet the hangman's noose. It is, we only now learn, one of them and not AB who is the hooded body that is strung from gallows in the opening scene. Daryne Joshua's story has come full circle.

#### **Part IV: Reception and Afterlife**

*Noem My Skollie* swept the awards ceremonies locally and internationally. In 2016 and 2017 the film won seven awards and was nominated eight times. Locally, in 2017 it won five South African Film and Television Awards (SAFTA) Golden Horn Awards in the category for Feature Film. This included Best Achievement in Production Design for a Feature Film (Warren Grey), Best Supporting Actor in a Feature Film (Abduraghmaan Adams who plays Mr C or Mr Carelse, Gimba's dad, the drug merchant), Best Actor in a Feature Film (Dann Jacques Mouton who plays AB), Best Achievement in Make-up and Hairstyling in a Feature Film (Gale Shepard, Maxi-D TV Productions), Best Achievement in Costume Design for a Feature Film (Emma Moss, Maxi-D TV Productions). It also won Best of South Africa and Best Original Screenplay (John W Fredericks) RapidLion.<sup>40</sup>

The nominations were for the SAFTA Golden Horn Best Feature Film (both producers David Max Brown and Moshidi Motshegwa and Maxi-D Productions), Best Achievement in Directing (Daryne Joshua), Best Achievement in Scriptwriting (John W. Fredericks), Best Achievement in Original Music/Score in a feature film (Kyle Shepard) and Best Achievement in Editing for a Feature Film (Simon Beesley). Other nominations included the 2016 Silwerskerm Festival for Production Design (Warren Grey) and in 2017, the African Movie Academy Awards (AMAA) for Best Production Design (Warren Grey). The film was the platinum award winner for this very same category at the International Independent Film Awards.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> "Noem My Skollie: Call Me Thief - Imdb", *Imdb*, 2021, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4567500/awards>.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*.

The film was chosen by the National Film and Video Foundation (NFVF) as South Africa's official entry to the 89<sup>th</sup> Annual Academy Awards (Oscars) for the category of Best Foreign Language Film Award. It was not nominated though.<sup>42</sup>

The NFVF's 2016 Box Office Report statistics show that *Noem My Skollie* was the fifth highest grossing South African film among twenty-five local film releases in 2016. It made just over R3.4 million during eleven weeks on circuit. This, it is assumed, is largely due to the continued market domination by Afrikaans films, both in terms of production volumes as well as box office performances.<sup>43</sup> The local media gave the film excellent reviews, putting it alongside *Tsotsi* (2005), South Africa's 2006 Academy Award winner for Best Foreign Film, as an example of the heights which South African films had achieved after apartheid.<sup>44</sup>

As a consequence of the popularity and success of the film, John Fredericks was approached by Penguin Random House two weeks after the film launch to write a memoir. The publishers offered him a six-month contract to write an 80 000-word manuscript in which he would share the full story on which the film was based.<sup>45</sup> Despite the loss of sight in his left eye at that time, he finished the book in four months, typing with one finger.<sup>46</sup> The book provides an in-depth account of Fredericks' experiences from early life, through school and prison, his decision to turn his life around and then his journey to turning his life story into a film. The book is divided into five parts. The first four parts titled *Birth of a Rebel*, *The Young Ones*, *Pollsmoor*, *Once You're In, There's No Way Out* follow the same trajectory of characters, scenes and stories as portrayed in the film. The last part of the book, *Telling Our Story* delves into his determination

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<sup>42</sup> "Noem My Skollie Nominated As SA'S Official Entry To The Oscars", *Media Update*, 2021, <https://www.mediaupdate.co.za/media/121435/noem-my-skollie-nominated-as-sas-official-entry-to-the-oscars>.

<sup>43</sup> *Nfvf.Co.Za*, 2021, <https://www.nfvf.co.za/home/22/files/2017%20files/Box%20office%20report%202016%20reviewed%20.pdf>.

<sup>44</sup> "Artslink.Co.Za - Noem My Skollie Now On DVD And Dstv Boxoffice", *Artslink*, 2021, [https://www.artlink.co.za/news\\_article.htm?contentID=41322](https://www.artlink.co.za/news_article.htm?contentID=41322).

<sup>45</sup> John Fredericks, *Skollie: One man's struggle to survive by telling stories*. (Cape Town: Penguin Random House, 2017).

<sup>46</sup> Barbara Maregele, "John Fredericks: 'I've Been Labelled A Skollie All My Life'", *Groundup News*, 2017, <https://www.groundup.org.za/article/helping-kids-road-hell/>.

to turn the story of his life into a film and the challenges he faced of giving up his job to follow his dream, learning scriptwriting. An easy read, the book is written in English, although the Afrikaans dialect of the Cape Flats is inserted in italics after specific English dialogue.<sup>47</sup>

While the film and book were glowingly received locally and internationally, alleged members of the 28s faction did not share the public's and critics' enthusiasm. A short YouTube video went viral showing David Manuel, the former Numbers prisoner, who plays Gums in the film being repeatedly smacked, punched and pushed around by a group of men, apparently members of the 28s, who were very unhappy with what they considered to be his inaccurate portrayal of the 28s.<sup>48</sup> In the video he can be seen trying to explain to the attackers that it was a story about John Fredericks' life and not about gangsters. The men are heard refusing to accept what he was saying, insisting that his portrayal makes them look like child rapists. Manuel eventually moves away from the men. While Manuel was not hurt in the incident, he did tell reporters that he was fearful that something worse could happen.<sup>49</sup>

John Fredericks died at his home on Sunday 7 July 2019 at the age of seventy-three after a long battle with pancreatic cancer. His sister, Francis Thorne says that he had made peace with the fact that he was dying. On the morning before his death, he did not get up out of bed to have his usual cup of tea. He passed away peacefully the following.<sup>50</sup> Brown says that while everyone was aware that Fredericks was very ill, the news of his death was devastating. Referring to him fondly as "The Weaver of Dreams", Brown says that Fredericks' ability to tell stories and change

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<sup>47</sup> "John W. Fredericks Talks About His Popular Book "Skollie"", *Youtube.Com*, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ne-ywhxR1Ig>.

<sup>48</sup> Movie Actor Assaulted by Real gangsters for acting as a gangster <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oC0J7qC90Qo>

<sup>49</sup> News 24. "I don't know if it was 28s or drunk people" – *assaulted Noem My Skollie* actor. <https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/news/i-dont-know-if-it-was-28s-or-drunk-people-assaulted-noem-my-skollie-actor-20161214>

<sup>50</sup> Vincent Cruywagen, "Tributes Pour In After 'Noem My Skollie' Author John Fredericks Dies At 73", *Iol.Co.Za*, 2018, <https://www.iol.co.za/capeargus/life/tributes-pour-in-after-noem-my-skollie-author-john-fredericks-dies-at-73-28886765>.

the circumstances of his life was an inspiration to many people who now, at last, have the chance to read - or better still – view his life story.<sup>51</sup>



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<sup>51</sup> "Producer David Max Brown Remembers Legend And Close Friend John W Fredericks In Moving Statement | Channel", *Channel 24*, 2019, <https://www.news24.com/channel/Movies/News/producer-david-max-brown-remembers-legend-and-close-friend-john-w-fredericks-in-moving-statement-20190708#:~:text=Cape%20Town%20%2D%20South%20African%20author.>

## Chapter Two: The Production Process and Parallel Narrative of *Ellen: Die*

### *Storie van Ellen Pakkies (2018)*



Figure 2: *Ellen. Die Storie van Ellen Pakkies*, The Moving Billboard/Ster- Kinekor Films, 2018. Tik-addict Abie Pakkies (Actor Jared Geduld) sets fire to his mother Ellen Pakkies' home.

Unlike John Fredericks, Ellen Pakkies did not have life-long dream of wanting to document her life experiences, nor did she ever think her story would come alive on screen. She was approached by film producer Paulo Areal who, from the time he first read a newspaper article about her story in 2008 through to the time he first met with her in 2014, felt that her story was compelling enough to be reproduced on screen. She agreed in 2014, and so the film *Ellen: Die Storie van Ellen Pakkies* (2018), directed by Daryne Joshua, went into production. It tells of the tragic, troubled and disturbing relationship between Pakkies and her drug-addicted son, Abie

Pakkies.<sup>52</sup> His death caused a worldwide controversy when it was discovered that his mother was the person who murdered him. The case was taken on by advocate Adrian Samuels who was determined to prove that Pakkies, who had given up on finding outside help, had not intentionally set out to kill her son and was not in a rational state of mind when she did so. At the end of an extended trial, she was acquitted of murder on the grounds of extreme extenuating psychological abuse.

Unlike *Noem My Skollie*, the film is told across two timelines. It uncovers/unpacks the story of Pakkies' troubled and deteriorating relationship with her increasingly destructive son Abie across a period of eight years. Joshua foregrounds the end from the beginning, by starting off with Ellen Pakkies, the character, played by Jill Levenberg being introduced to viewers immediately after murdering her son, played by Jarred Geduld. For the next 123 minutes, the audience jumps back and forth through time, moving between past and the present, learning ever more about the disturbing and shocking events that would eventually lead Pakkies to take the life of her own son. A series of flashbacks in the early parts of the film introduce us to Abie as a young lively high school pupil, with dreams of becoming a rap musician and hopes of buying his mother a house with a pool. These flashbacks show mother and son, along with husband and father, as a close-knit small family who love and care deeply for each other.

The film is set in the actual locations that were the scenes of the dramatic events it narrates. These include the Steenberg Police Station, Pakkies' local church, Pollsmoor Prison, and Pakkies' own house in Lavender Hill where the murder took place. (She still lives there.) The narrative captures the sense of a community gripped by a destructive cycle of drug, gang and sexual violence. It does so through a documentary-type realism, characteristic of the filmic work

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<sup>52</sup> Bontie Ndlovu, "Local Movie, 'Die Ellen Pakkies Storie', Gets Noticed For All The Right Reasons." [online] CapeTalk. Available at: <<http://www.capetalk.co.za/articles/318566/local-movie-die-ellen-pakkies-storie-gets-noticed-for-all-the-right-reasons>> [Accessed 10 October 2020].



of Joshua, as revealed for example in his old reel section in his first film. The script is uncluttered without being expositional about this well-publicised court case. Most of the dialogue is again conducted in the vernacular Afrikaans, the Afrikaans of *Noem My Skollie*. It too features subtitles in English to ensure its accessibility to a wider South African and an international audience.

The film is even more difficult to watch than the most violent and disturbing scenes of *Noem My Skollie*. The extremity of emotional distress of both mother and son is such that viewers feel a sense of discomfort that very soon mirrors the desperation of a mother who comes to fear her deranged son. The film is a rich from a storytelling perspective and a technical viewpoint.

This chapter is divided into four parts. The first part examines the relationship and agency of Pakkies with the film's creators as the key factor in the production process of the film. Then it explores in Parts II and III how the "authenticity" of her story is crafted using parallel narratives as the primary storytelling technique. Part II draws on film theorist Linda Aronson to lay bare the technical elements of parallel narrative as a filmic technique that uses non-linearity, jump cuts, and flashbacks.<sup>53</sup> It is a mode often employed to deliver intensely realistic representations of the disorderliness of human experience by reproducing or imitating the way we experience the world. In Part III I apply theory to *Ellen: Die Storie van Ellen Pakkies* in detail, again on the basis of close attention to narrative structure and visual language in particular scenes. I conclude with reflection on its reception.

## **Part I: The Role of Ellen Pakkies in the process of production (2014-2017)**

As mentioned earlier, Pakkies did not have dreams to turn her story into a film. In fact, she never thought her story would ever go beyond the court case and the days of community service to which she was sentenced. Her direct involvement in the creation of the film, from the script to

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<sup>53</sup> Linda Aronson, *Six Types Of Parallel Narrative*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.lindaaronson.com/six-types-of-parallel-narrative.html>> [Accessed 9 November 2020].

her interactions with the cast and crew, as well as how the scenes were recreated on location, however, would be crucial in redirecting the director's ambition to reconstruct an authentic personal story. What follows is an examination of how Pakkies' direct collaboration and partnership in the actual making of the film sets the film apart in its delivery as a parallel narrative.

Producer Paulo Areal remembers reading about Pakkies' court case in 2008. His motivations for wanting to make the film stemmed from his own "run-ins with substance abuse", from which he had been clean for eighteen years. "Within fifteen minutes" of meeting Pakkies in 2014, he was convinced that he wanted to make the film. He could not reconcile how this lovely mother, who still adored her son could have committed "that act".<sup>54</sup> He saw the film as a means of coming to terms with his own life, but also as a way of understanding this disturbing contradiction.

It had been only four years since his production company The Moving Billboard Picture Company, formed in 1995 in the music industry, had decided to move into the making feature films. Areal recalls that after meeting Pakkies, he felt that it was imperative that they remain "true to her story". He did not want it to be turned into a "Hollywood cliché". As an independent film company, most of the film was self-financed with local broadcaster KYKNET buying some equity. He was also assisted by a government rebate through the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI). A solid pre-production phase allowed for a well-managed budget with producer Schalk Burger on set to manage last minute decision-making.<sup>55</sup>

Like Areal, the film's director, Daryne Joshua, very clearly remembers the day he first heard the story. He was driving and saw a newspaper headline pasted on a roadside lamp-post. It announced that a Cape Flats mother had killed her drug-addicted son. He recalls, that he "wasn't

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<sup>54</sup> Ndlovu, "Local Movie".

<sup>55</sup> Interview with Paulo Areal. *Paulo Areal On Producing Ellen: The Story Of Ellen Pakkies*. [online] indieactivity. Available at: <<https://www.indieactivity.com/paulo-areal-producing-story-ellen-pakkies/>> [Accessed 16 October 2020].

shocked that something like this took place on the Flats”. He had grown up with addicts in his home, as did many of his friends, family and other people in Cape Flats communities. (Joshua does not specify who this was.) And so, to personally know someone addicted to drugs was a “very normal thing”. He went on to reflect that he was “very saddened” by how desensitised he had become, to the extent that he “just read it, shook [his] head and drove on”.<sup>56</sup>

The film project was already in the pipeline when producers Areal and Burger approached Joshua to direct. Joshua was initially reluctant to take on the project, because the content was “too close to home”.<sup>57</sup> The producers were persistent. Joshua’s meeting with Pakkies swayed him. He spent two hours talking to her about her life and what she went through. He too came to recognise her as “a genuine mother who came across extremely warm.”<sup>58</sup> He vividly recalls how Pakkies told him that “I’ve become tired of repeatedly telling my story for the last decade, and that making the film would mean my story was out there, once and for all. And that it would be a relief to me and hopefully a cautionary tale for other parents who find themselves in a similar situation”. It was then that he knew he really wanted to direct this film.<sup>59</sup>

This conversation put Pakkies herself at the centre of an artistic process which spanned three years. The authenticity of her story, as envisioned by the producers and director, meant that they embraced her willingness to participate in the film’s creation wholeheartedly. They consulted with her at every stage of the film’s development, from pre-planning to casting to shooting. Joshua recalls that a large part of the development process included meetings with people who

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<sup>56</sup> Interview with Daryne Joshua. Screen Africa. *Ellen Pakkies’ Tragedy Comes To Life On The Big Screen - Screen Africa*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.screenafrica.com/2018/08/26/film/film-content/ellen-pakkies-tragedy-comes-to-life-on-the-big-screen/>> [Accessed 7 September 2020].

<sup>57</sup> Facebook Watch. 2018. [online] Available at <[https://www.facebook.com/EllenPakkiesFilm/videos/working-with-daryne-joshua/2258475817515597/?\\_so=\\_permalink&\\_rv=\\_related\\_videos](https://www.facebook.com/EllenPakkiesFilm/videos/working-with-daryne-joshua/2258475817515597/?_so=_permalink&_rv=_related_videos)> [Accessed 16 October 2020].

<sup>58</sup> Gezzy S. Sibisi, “Ellen Pakkies story made into movie.” [online] Cape Argus. Available at: <<https://www.iol.co.za/capeargus/news/ellen-pakkies-story-made-into-movie-13193974>> [Accessed 10 October 2020].

<sup>59</sup> Sibisi, “Ellen Pakkies”.

were involved with and affected by what happened between Pakkies and her son. They interviewed family and friends of Abie, the detective who was handling the case at the time, Pakkies' lawyer Adrian Samuels, her husband Odneal Pakkies, and the clinical psychologist Dr Martin Yodaiken whose testimony in court provided the professional evidence on which Samuels built his case for her being in a state of 'disassociation' when she murdered her son. Yodaiken stated that her personality had two distinct sides – the loving mother and the abused woman, who, having suffered molestation, rape and sexual abuse from early childhood onwards (her son Abie was also the product of her being raped) reached a breaking point that made her murder him.<sup>60</sup>

Areal characterised Pakkies' role in crafting the story as a process of "excavating". By his account, each of the key role-players had the privilege of spending time just talking to her. Each time something different would come up, "something she told one of us, she didn't tell the other". For example, he recalls that they did not even know that she had been in Pollsmoor Prison until she had mentioned it to someone in passing. So then that essential element also needed to be written into the story.<sup>61</sup>

Areal had already begun working on the project when he approached the screenwriter Amy Jephtha in June 2016. She immediately agreed after meeting with Pakkies. Like Joshua, she "found a warmth in Ellen and immediately had a connection to her and her story". Jephtha had also grown up on the Cape Flats, and had witnessed and experienced the toughness and resilience, but also the humour and joy that mothers on the Flats needed to face daily challenges. The theme of a mother's love for son, a son's love for his mother, and "love above all" inspired the way she wrote the story. It would have been "too easy to focus on victimhood and the evil of

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<sup>60</sup> Screen Africa, "Ellen Pakkies tragedy".

<sup>61</sup> Facebook Watch. 2018. *#Dieellenpakkiesstorie*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.facebook.com/EllenPakkiesFilm/videos/700819886932807/>> [Accessed 17 October 2020].

a drug abuser”. Pakkies’ input proved invaluable here. Jephta was able to bring the script to life, as the court record only offered the bare bones of the story. Script development can take up to two years but according to Jephta, Pakkies remained central to her decisions about which parts of the story to keep, what to let go of, and how to frame the story. She was still working on it, rounding the script off up to the time before shooting was due to begin. She wrote the script in the six months between July 2016 and January 2017.<sup>62</sup>

Casting proved, yet again, to be a demanding task. Joshua recommended that Jill Levenberg be approached. Levenberg was already tied into the local television soap opera *Suidooster* and had to be contractually released. This set production back by three months. Levenberg says that upon auditioning, she “didn’t care whether [she] played a cat or a dog or even a neighbour”, she just wanted to be a part of telling this story. Weeks went by until she finally heard that she had been cast in the lead role. She recalls then having spent a lot of time talking to Ellen Pakkies over the phone, as well as visiting her at her home in Lavender Hill. The two women walked together around the neighbourhood where Pakkies lived. Pakkies took her to places like her church and the school that Abie had attended. Levenberg did this in order to be able to better understand Pakkies’ experiences as a mother and her state of disassociation when she killed her son.

Jarred Geduld plays Pakkies’ son Abie in the film. He made such an impression on Joshua that when he was called in a second time, it was evident that he was perfect for the role of Abie. Geduld himself had battled drugs at one stage of his life and so understood the emotional and mental state of a drug addict. His preparation for the role included immersing himself in it by

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<sup>62</sup> Daniel Dercksen, 2018. *Amy Jephta On Writing The Screenplay For Ellen: The Ellen Pakkies Story*. [online] Bizcommunity.com. Available at: <<https://www.bizcommunity.com/Article/196/482/181562.html>> [Accessed 20 September 2020].

emotionally retreating to a place of isolation and loneliness. He lost fifteen kilograms in order to appear as the gaunt tik-addict we see on screen!<sup>63</sup>

The storyline was therefore developed around Pakkies' account of events. The film was shot over five weeks, beginning in February 2017, with most of the filming taking place at the actual locations of the incidents portrayed in film: the Steenberg Police Station where she gave herself over and was charged with murder; Pollsmoor Prison where she was held pending her bail application; Wynberg Magistrate's Court where she stood trial; and her home at Dover Court in Lavender Hill, which included the outside room where she murdered her son. She graciously declined the production company's offer to be accommodated at a hotel, and instead chose to move in temporarily with her family while filming took place. Her input on set was also essential. Joshua recalls that she would arrive at her home after the crew started filming and would describe in detail things that took place around a specific incident that was currently being shot. This ensured the authenticity of her story, one which did not glamorise the Cape Flats or whitewash the actions and plight of addicts. This was crucial to the film.<sup>64</sup>

## **Part II: Parallel Narrative as a Filmic Story-telling Form**

A unique attribute of the parallel narrative is its prioritisation of the experiences of its main protagonists over separate causal links. American film analyst Linda Aronson notes that parallel narratives link various stories through character or theme rather than through the conventional linear structure, as had been in *Noem My Skollie* for example. Often, audiences are emotionally connected to the film through desires, experiences as well as the adversities that the characters face. She notes that the parallel narrative avoids the more conventional single protagonist and

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<sup>63</sup> Graye Morkel, 2018. *Jarrid Geduld On Playing Abie Pakkies: 'I've Been Clean For 10 Years And That's Why The Story Is So Important To Me'* [online] Channel 24. Available at: <<https://www.news24.com/channel/movies/news/jarrid-geduld-on-playing-abie-pakkies-ive-been-clean-for-10-years-and-thats-why-the-story-is-so-important-to-me-20180907>> [Accessed 26 August 2020].

<sup>64</sup> Interview with Daryne Joshua. Screen Africa.

single central plot devices.<sup>65</sup> In the case of *Ellen* for example, the experiences of the two main protagonists are part of the emotional continuum running throughout the film, which allows for a complex form of story held together by the central protagonists' actions and inner struggles. There is the potential risk in this genre that the heightened focus on character rather than chronology could obscure the narrative's overall coherence. But Joshua chose this genre with its non-linearity, time jumps and flashbacks as the most effective story-telling form to convey the deep underlying sense of the disorientation and disturbance that run across the narratives.

I would also argue that the complex nature of the parallel narrative requires the audience to remain constantly engaged in critical thinking in order to follow the sequencing of the fractured timelines or jump cuts. This means having to follow separate plotlines and complicated information that can cause confusion while attempting to understand what the film is conveying as a whole. So that a parallel narrative such as we see in *Ellen*, while it may create initial confusion for the viewer, also creates an opportunity for the viewer to be more intellectually engaged than a film with a linear chronological narrative. It requires a different level and arguably a deeper or more intense level of engagement, as the viewer is mentally and emotionally drawn into the film. It requires a viewer's thoughtful engagement in order to make sense of what is being brought to life on screen as it unfolds. Thus, much like a puzzle that needs to be pieced together where one does not have access to the picture on the cover of the box, one continually has to work out how the pieces fit together.

In order to understand why the parallel narrative as a filming technique works so well in the film, it is first necessary to understand in a little more detail how the parallel narrative is structured.

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<sup>65</sup> Linda Aronson, *Screenwriting Updated: New (and Conventional) Ways on Writing for the Screen*, (Los Angeles, Silman-James Press, 2001), 187.

What are its technical elements? How does non-linearity, jump cuts and flashbacks visually function? Here I draw on Linda Aronson.

According to Aronson, parallel narratives can be grouped into six sorts that fit into two main categories: films that use jump cuts and films that do not. The focus here is on *Ellen*, a film that uses jump cuts, that is, one that moves between two storylines. Within Aronson's category of films that use jump cuts, she identifies what she calls "the fractured tandem form". Within this category, Aronson distinguishes films by their subject matter, including a subcategory of films in which the "consequences and chain reactions [are] linked to one usually horrific event".<sup>66</sup> For the purposes of this examination, *Ellen* thus warrants consideration as a parallel narrative of "the fractured tandem form" directed towards "the harmful event". Parallel narratives, she continues, consist of "equally-weighted stories, often in different time frames, fractured and truncated and put together again in such a way as to steal jeopardy and suspense from the ending and create it at the beginning and throughout."<sup>67</sup> This brings us to *Ellen*'s opening scene. The film begins the story within minutes of Abie's death, foregrounding the end from the beginning.

### **Part III: Scene Analysis of a Parallel Narrative Film: *Ellen Pakkies: Die Storie van Ellen Pakkies* (2018)**

This analysis is not intended to provide the technical depth of the expert. I am not a film-maker. Instead, this close analysis of the film's visual language is aimed at understanding how images and sound are interwoven to create a feeling regarding Pakkies' and Abie's changing life experiences. This involves examining, with close attention to detail, how the film combines visual elements with auditory elements to create a series of historical events that occurred between 2002-2008 in Lavender Hill on the Cape Flats in the Western Cape, but along two timelines.

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<sup>66</sup> Linda Aronson, *Six Types Of Parallel Narrative*.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*



My analysis of scenes focuses on the progressive personal and social isolation of the film's two central protagonists as the connecting theme in the film's parallel narratives. I examine how the director interweaves the effects of larger social and even political topics such as poverty, drugs, lack of efficient mental healthcare systems, unequal civil rights and an impoverished segregated neighbourhood into the characters' personal and psychological struggles. This theme of progressive personal and social isolation works well within the parallel narrative form as storylines initially progress in tandem without any contact, only to collide at the film's climax, where it is vividly revealed in all its disturbing depth to the viewer. In this way, each character's psychological and personal struggle is developed, but brought together in a final compelling incident.

The first two opening scenes of the film employ Aronson's description of a parallel narrative as a fractured tandem that conveys equally-weighted stories in different timelines. The opening scene starts when Pakkies is seen looking at her bruised hands in the bathroom minutes after she has murdered her son. It then jump cuts to an earlier time where mother and son are depicted in loving conversation in happier times, before Abie's downward spiral into drug addiction. In this first thirty-seven seconds of the film then, the two timelines through which Pakkies' story unfolds have already been introduced. At this early point in the film, the viewer is not yet aware that the film will follow the parallel narrative form across the next two hours.

These scenes, differ in their use of light and colour. In the opening scene Pakkies is set in a low-lit bathroom that creates shadows in the shot. In the second scene, she and her son are shown in a well-lit room through close up and medium shots where the camera draws your focus solely on each actor by closing off the world around, creating an almost compressed effect that highlights the affection towards each other in their facial expressions and tone of voice. It produces an effect of being "with" the character.

Following the scene where Pakkies and her son are depicted in happier times, the director jumps back to the previous scene in the first time-line, where she is looking at herself in the mirror. Her facial expression gives the impression that she snaps out of her reverie as she seemingly realises something and turns to walk away from the mirror. The camera then reveals her, in a long shot from across a bedroom, alone in a peach nightgown scrambling to take clothes out of a wardrobe and putting them down on the bed. The clothes – elbow cut, formal collared blouse and dark blue pants – appear to be some sort of uniform. A maroon hooded overcoat lies underneath.

A jump cut now takes the viewer back again to the loving mother and her son. The camera seems to be in a position peeking from behind the woman's waist. Her silhouette from this angle is dark, but this long shot shows Abie sitting on his bed, headphones around his neck with book and pen in hand. Posters of Michael Jackson on the wall tell of his interests in pop culture. She comments about the noise of police sirens outside, revealing that this is a regular occurrence in their neighbourhood, but also anticipating the long-term narrative. We hear the sound of a guitar's sombre notes, while the police sirens and barking dogs can be heard in the distance. The camera remains steady in the long shot from the doorway as she moves towards him, asking him whether he is scared of the sirens and needs a hug. He giggles in response, saying that it was only that one time that he was scared of the sirens and that he does not need a hug from her to feel safe.

The non-linearity created through jump cuts in these opening scenes serve to illustrate two sides of Pakkies. This juxtapositioning deliberately creates differences for the viewer to compare and contrast, complicating her as the subject on the one hand, and then on the other, creating a sense of curiosity about her, the unfolding plot and plight. Much of the film progresses in this manner through jump cuts, where the viewer is invited to consider the loving relationship between Pakkies and her son, and wonder how it is possible that it could deteriorate to a point where this mother could bring herself to murder her own son.

The subsequent scenes document the period of roughly eight years from when Abie, aged fourteen, starts using drugs to the time of his death at the age of twenty. This period is compressed into individual scenes in the “present” time-line. The narrative along this line plots her increasingly desperate and despairing efforts to find help once she has become aware of her son’s problem with drugs. The first failed source of support is his school. Pakkies seeks help from the school’s principal after Abie is expelled for fighting and smoking at school after being warned countless times. Pakkies then visits the white minister at their local church for spiritual guidance. He is shown as a man detached from worldly matters naively sporting ideas about the afterlife that ultimately offer yet another cul-de-sac in relation to the brutal realities of working-class life on the Cape Flats. Next, she tries the local clinic where she is told that a doctor cannot help him but that she should try the social welfare office. Here she is told that Abie would need to present himself physically to get assistance. When he does, he is late for his appointment and so is turned away in an angry mood. Pakkies goes so far as to ask a magistrate for help after she has Abie locked up for stealing from her, even if that means having him locked up and/or forcing him into rehabilitation.

By this time the trajectory of the second time-line, the “past”, has followed Abie’s teenage spiral of decline. By an hour and ten minutes into the film, Abie’s mental state starts to become violent and threatening, not only to himself but also to his parents, and especially towards his mother. Here the director picks up the pace of the film with fast framed time jumps that contrast with those slower ones across the first half of the film. The scenes are now depicted as single events at different times that ‘feel’ chronological as one follows Pakkies’ seemingly endless search for help for her son. This adds to the feeling of hopelessness and despair that is building in the storyline as one tries to make sense out of her desolate social circumstances. Her husband has long given up on their son and one gets the sense of her intense and depressing isolation.

Abie's resentment and aggression towards his parents for locking him out of the main house and having him sleep in a separate quarter outside in the back yard as well as having had him locked up in jail, culminates in a physical violence. He takes everything he can from them by force to support his drug addiction. This includes cutlery, crockery, ornaments, furniture, kitchen appliances, jewellery, clothing and even his mother's underwear, as she would later reveal in her court testimony. He repeatedly breaks into the house, damaging the doors and windows and comes home at ungodly hours and harasses his parents verbally. This includes a deeply disturbing sequence of attacks on his family property and on his parents and his attempt to throttle and then stab his mother, and his theft of this father's treasure trove: R6000 in savings potentially accumulated over many years of hard work and hidden in a special place in the wall alongside his parents' bed. By this stage the viewer is in no doubt that Abie is mentally deranged.

The emotional turmoil intensifies in the last twenty-five minutes of the film with Pakkies' final encounters with her son bent on destruction. He is now a shell of the smiling teenage boy with the dream of making music. Here the director skilfully brings together the complexities of the parallel narratives to a meeting point at one horrific point, Abie's death. This is done through a series of filming techniques where the dialogue of the characters (Pakkies herself, her lawyer, the presiding magistrate at her trial, and the state prosecutor) from different scenes perform as "the story-tellers" in the time jumps to reveal explicit details of her life experiences. This dialogue bleeds from one timeline to another, as it carries the viewer through the events of Pakkies' therapy session where a flashback to her childhood reveals the start of the sexual abuse which she endured right into her adulthood, her final day in court, and then Abie's final violent act that culminated in his death. (Abie was the result of this rape after he marriage, and it is the revelation to the teenager of this closely guarded secret that, in fact, sent him off on his spiral of self-destruction.

Let us turn to the visual language in these final scenes. At the peak of the film, an unsteady tracking shot moves alongside walking feet, then moves in an upward direction momentarily pausing to draw attention to the axe in the person's hand before it moves further up to reveal this person as Abie in a medium closeup shot. It is night time, as revealed by the sound of those by now all too familiar extra-diegetic guitar strings plucking a slow melancholic tune that is the musical motif throughout. The ever-barking dogs can be heard in the background. An over-the-shoulder shot from behind Abie brings into view the open gates of his parents' home that will allow him access to the non-forbidden yard. His father is locking up the car, unaware of Abie coming up from behind. A medium close up shot from behind his father and the bright lights between the blocks of flats reveals the fury on his face as he verbally lashes out at his father and then hits him with the axe. He starts screaming at his father about being denied access to the house and demands house keys.

In a medium shot his mother is shown inside the house looking on and running towards the door. She hears her husband's shouts and realises that Abie is unlocking the security gate at the front door.

Once inside the house, the unsteadiness of the camera creates anxiety that starts to build tension in the viewer. We see an over-the-shoulder shot from behind Pakkies shifting to a frame that shows Abie swearing and screaming at his mother. He hits her in the stomach with the axe. His obscenities about her having him jailed reveal his deep-seated rage. He refers to her as a dog that must now remain lying down.

These unsteady camera shots to switch to medium close ups of Pakkies' husband who has now come inside the house as the terror of Abie's crazed violence unfolds. The dim lighting in these shots adds to the viewer's confusion and anxiety, while symbolically replicating the sense of Abie's darkly demonic state. His screaming becomes ear-splitting as the scene unfolds. As the

viewer you cannot begin to imagine what will happen next. The camera now steadies squarely on a medium shot of Abie as he points the axe at his parents and backtracks towards the wall. Still shouting and swearing at them for throwing him out of the house, he swings with the axe and starts smashing at the walls and the furniture. His mother begs for him to stop. The sound of his screaming voice starts to slowly die into a muffled echo as the increasing sound of a piano and violin playing a dark and disturbing tune brings on a feeling that something even worse is about to happen.

The camera, again moving in unsteady shots, creates a jarring effect as it shows Abie moving from lounge to kitchen. Squaring him off now in a long shot with a narrow-depth of field and low-key lighting that depict him as a satanic silhouette, he roars with manic laughter, his mouth agape like that of a man possessed. He now takes a cigarette lighter out of his pocket. He flicks at the lighter and sets alight the curtains that separate the lounge from the kitchen. The scene is horrific. The curtains burn with him standing laughing in a demented way (see still on title page) before turning and disappearing from the frame. The music dies and the camera shows his father starting to put out the flames. Ellen Pakkies stands dazed and astonished, holding her hands on her head, breathing heavily. “Jy’s mal, man! Huh! Jy doen duiwel’s goed! Jy’t ‘n duiwel in jou! Ek kannit nie meer wattie, ek kannit nie meer wattie!” “You’re mad man! Huh? You’re doing the devil’s things! You have a devil in you! I can’t take it anymore! I can’t take it anymore!” This will be the last act on the last night of Abie’s life, the night before his death.

Following the now first converging parallel narratives, the scene switches to the trial, where Ellen takes the stand to give her testimony. As viewers we really have now begun to understand the extent of abuse and trauma that induced this woman to take the life of the man who was no longer her son. In court, she details her experiences and tells the story about how she had searched and searched for years to find help for her son, but to no avail. She tells of the physical, emotional and psychological abuse and trauma that she and her husband had suffered because of Abie.

The time jumps are self-reflectively referenced as her court dialogue acts as a voice over or “storyteller” for the final scene. The camera takes the viewer back to the morning of Abie’s murder. An overhead shot shows Ellen lying on her bed, staring straight ahead. The room is lit by early morning sun rays which peer in through the partly opened curtains. As the scene unfolds, she is telling the court that nothing could keep him out, that he assaulted them, that he tried to break down the house with an axe, that he even tried to burn it down. The camera shows her in a medium-long shot getting up out of bed, sitting momentarily still with her legs hanging over the bed. She is wearing the peach-coloured nightgown that we recognise from the first scene which allows viewers to draw the unsettling conclusion that she is about to murder her son! She gets up and moves to the right of the camera, out of the frame, while her voice from the trial tells of the many nightmares he brought on. A wide-angled crouching shot from the lounge shows her come from the kitchen with a black bag in hand and starting to clean up the mess he had created. She appears emotionally numb as she goes about this work.

The events of that morning depicted by the camera and her voice-over of her court testimony unfold simultaneously. The prosecutor asks her whether she remembers what she did that morning, to which she responds that she does and very clearly too. At this point, the dialogue stops. The camera shows a close up of Pakkies putting a kettle onto a gas stove. It moves to a medium head and shoulders side shot of her looking straight ahead as the dim of the morning pushes through the kitchen curtains, crafting an image of her in silhouette. A close up shot taken from the right then shows her face. Her hair hangs in strings around her face. She looks aimless and dull. A close up shot shows the cup as she finishes stirring it and puts the spoon down on the table and proceeds to pick up the cup.

In the following scene, Pakkies is shown in a longshot taken from across a room, standing in the doorway of Abie’s makeshift room, this tea-cup still in hand. The longshot is taken from a low-level angle that shows Abie sleeping on the bed in the forefront of the frame. She speaks in a low

tone, checking to see whether he is awake. An eye-level shot from the front of the bed shows Abie asleep. Pakkies move past the camera to put the cup down on the bedside table. She tells him that she has made him tea to drink. Soft, slow piano music starts to play creating a feeling of uneasiness in the viewer. The room is dead quiet. For once there are no noises of police sirens and barking dogs. We now only hear the sound of her feet moving across the floor. The view returns to the long-shot from behind the bed and shows Pakkies walking out of the room, while it slowly moves down bringing Abie asleep into full view. The dialogue from the court room between her and the prosecutor begins again. She can be heard confirming that she put the tea down next to the bed and then went back inside the house.

Inside the house, the camera catches her in a low-level long-shot as she enters a room. She tells the court that she was not really thinking straight at that point, of quite how exhausted she was, of how sick she was, of how her own house had come to feel like a prison, and of how *this* is what she really had wanted to tell him that morning. The camera shot moves downward to bring a rope into focus. She reaches for the rope and her voice is heard saying that she wanted make him understand how much he was hurting her. She quickly turns around and walks out. The dialogue between her and the prosecutor continues as she starts to detail what happened when she went back to Abie's room with the rope.

The final scene begins with a shot of the rope being tied to the bottom bedpost in a focused close up. The camera follows the length of the rope in her hands in this close up as she moves upward towards Abie and then starts to put the rope around his neck. The melancholic sound of the guitar music starts up again, as the close-up shows a now focused expression as she moves down to the bottom of the bed in a very careful and deliberate manner. The camera angle shifts to a high shot that brings into view the tea standing on the bedside table and Abie starting to stir as she slowly pulls the rope.



He starts to wake up. His face is pale. He is confused. He tries to understand what is going on and make sense of the rope. He starts to wriggle.

A steady low-angle shot brings Pakkies into focus. The court dialogue is no longer audible. All our attention is concentrated in the room. The dialogue running as the background narrative has been distilled into this final moment of reckoning between her and son. She calmly tells him they need to talk. Switching back to Abie, the camera shows him now only belatedly realising what is going on. He tells her to untie the rope and then starts to thrash awkwardly. He then anxiously grabs at the rope around his neck. The narrow-depth of field shot here compresses him into the shot and focuses the viewer's attention directly on the unfolding event. As he starts to choke, the camera cuts back to Ellen and moves simultaneously with her into a crouching position as she tightens the rope by wrapping it around the palms of both hands and pulls. She is calm for the first time in the film. Her expression is determined. It is almost too disturbing to keep one's eyes open. The sound of his choking intensifies, creating a very uneasy feeling for the viewer at this point. An extreme close up from the bottom end of the bed in a narrow-depth of field hones in on Abie as his eyes seem to blacken during his now desperate attempts to loosen the rope around his neck. His voice is constricted. He is suffocating. The rope tightens. He threatens to kill her if she does not untie him. The camera quickly cuts to an extreme close up of Pakkies, also locked into a narrow depth of field shot, as she looks at him squarely. Abie is heard gasping frantically for air as the camera stays focused on her, while she questions him repeatedly about why he continued to hurt her so deeply after empty promises to change his behaviour.

Abie begs and pleads for his life, becoming more and more inaudible as he writhes on the bed. The camera cuts back to Pakkies, showing her in a medium long shot tighten the rope and pull harder, still concentrated and calm. The camera moves one last time back to Abie in the same extreme close up, a narrow depth of field shot showing him beginning to foam at the mouth and documenting his last breath while the grave guitar music plays softly in the background. The

camera again cuts back to her face in the same extreme close up and narrow depth of field shot. The dialogue from the court room now re-enters the scene as she confirms that she pulled the rope tighter when he wanted to fight back. An extreme close up shot sees her breathe with relief when she realises that he is not responding. She can be heard telling the court that all she wanted was silence. That just for one day, she did not want to be afraid for her life.

The final minutes of the film go on to show the woman judge's ruling that the very systems and institutions that were meant to help her had actually failed her. The judge sentences her to a three-year prison term, suspended for three years, and to 280 hours of community service. It is only now, right at the end, that there is some redemption for the subject and the viewer. She is shown as an inspiring motivational speaker in what we would read as the epilogue. A written message before the final credits begin sets the story in a wider human context.

Ellen's story continued to be of local and international interest for months following the trial. At the time, it was one of only a handful of known cases in the world where a mother had murdered her adult son.

#### **Part IV: Reception (2018-2020)**

As we have seen, the parallel narrative is influenced by its experimental storytelling techniques that involve non-linearity, jump-cuts and flashbacks, in the case of this film, that bring the storylines together in one horrific event. These complexities disrupt and fracture the temporal ordering of events, thus both breaking filmic conventions and challenging its audiences. While the Pakkies trial caused worldwide controversy, the employment of the story into parallel narrative form showcases craft of Joshua as the talented young South African filmmaker.

While *Ellen* did not sweep the awards ceremonies in quite the way that *Noem My Skollie* had done, it did win some significant honours. The film won three prestigious awards at the kykNET Silwerskerm Festival, including categories for best actress (Jill Levenberg), best actor (Jarred

Geduld), and best scriptwriter (Amy Jephtha).<sup>68</sup> It was also the winner of the 2019 South African Film and Television Awards (SAFTA) Golden Horn, which included awards for Daryne Joshua for Best Achievement in Directing for a Feature Film, Jarred Geduld for Best Actor in a Feature Film, Jill Levenberg for Best Actress in a Feature Film and Quinn Lubbe for Best Achievement in Original Music/Score in a Feature Film. The film got international acclaim. It was accredited at both the Rotterdam International Film Festival and Seattle International Film Festival, and was South Africa's entry for the foreign film category at the 2019 Golden Globes.

The film was described as one of South Africa's best films in recent times by *The Citizen*. It received a four out of five overall rating with Peter Feldman, praising the production, scriptwriting and lead characters.<sup>69</sup> The soundtrack as well as the "raw honesty and confessional drama" of the film was highly praised, alongside its message of social responsibility. Spring Movies who gave it an eight out of ten rating, recommended it as a model for other films.<sup>70</sup> The film went on to make over R6 million at the South African box office, coming in at the third highest return for a local film for 2018.<sup>71</sup>

While the film went on to win many awards locally, it was less successfully internationally than *Noem My Skollie* had been. The complex and experimental nature of the parallel narrative is perhaps still too experimental even though it reflects the changes in contemporary cinema.

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<sup>68</sup> Orielle Berry, 2018. 'Ellen, *The Ellen Pakkies The Story*': A Tragic Tale Of The Awful Cycle Of Abuse. [online] Iol.co.za. Available at: <<https://www.iol.co.za/entertainment/movies/reviews/ellen-the-ellen-pakkies-the-story-a-tragic-tale-of-the-awful-cycle-of-abuse-16901098>> [Accessed 26 October 2020].

<sup>69</sup> Peter Feldman, 2018. *Ellen: The Ellen Pakkies Story Review*. [online] The Citizen. Available at: <<https://citizen.co.za/lifestyle/your-life-entertainment-your-life/movies-and-tv/2006158/ellen-the-ellen-pakkies-story-review/>> [Accessed 26 September 2020].

<sup>70</sup> SPLING. 2018. *Movie Review: Ellen - The Ellen Pakkies Story - SPLING*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.splingmovies.com/2018/09/movie-review-ellen-the-ellen-pakkies-story/>> [Accessed 26 November 2020].

<sup>71</sup>T., Ads, T., movie, R., Lea Vivier, a. and Showmax original Skemerdans, i., Showmax. 2018. *The Surprise Box Office Hit 'Ellen: Die Storie Van Ellen Pakkies' Is Now Streaming On Showmax*. [online] The Media Online. Available at: <<https://themediainline.co.za/2019/08/the-surprise-box-office-hit-ellen-die-storie-van-ellen-pakkies-is-now-streaming-on-showmax/>> [Accessed 26 September 2020].

## Conclusion

This M.A. mini-thesis, short as it is, has sought to open up for historical scrutiny the significant and expanding filmic genre of the biopic in post-apartheid South Africa. Biopics refer to life-stories in historical drama on film as distinct from historical documentary about individual lives. While there is now a very substantial scholarly literature on biographies (and autobiographies) in written form, oriented to book length studies, biography on film has fallen beneath the radar. There is only one substantive essay addressing biopics in South Africa, James Burns' article on two biopics about Cecil John Rhodes. His essay focused on the contested politics of the reception of first of these biopics, Berthold Vierthel's *Rhodes of Africa* (1936), which was banned in South Africa and Southern Rhodesia shortly after release. He provided limited analysis of the second and post-apartheid biopic in the form of a six-part BBC film series, based on the biographical research of Anthony Thomas, which presents the obverse image of Rhodes: that of the founder of apartheid rather than the heroic British imperialist. Incisive as this essay is in its delineation of political context and ideological debates, its primary preoccupation with "reception"<sup>72</sup> contrasts with my focus on the "textual" reading of biopics, in this thesis in terms of their "visual language" and "visual story-telling" as defined by Rosenstone located in the context of the backstories of their processes of production.

I began by noting that of the twenty-five biopics of South African subjects that have been released between 1994 and 2020, sixteen have appeared in the 2010s, suggesting that there is a growing interest in this subgenre. Although these figures might seem relatively low when compared by the volume of written biographies in the post-apartheid period – Jacobs and Bank calculate that over a thousand book-length biographies published in English and Afrikaans across

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<sup>72</sup> James Burns, 'Biopics and Politics: The Making and Unmaking of the Rhodes Movies', *Biography*, 23, 1, Winter 2000, 108-126.

these thirty years<sup>73</sup> – we should bear in mind that the documentary is the usual biographical mode on film. At a rough estimate, based on an inventory of the almost one thousand films produced after apartheid compiled by Freddy Ogterop, there have been well over a hundred biographical documentaries released.<sup>74</sup> Space and time constraints have not permitted a full engagement with biographical film in this documentary format.

The relative prominence of different subgenres of biopic makes for interesting reading. Literary biopics and literary biographies are both rare creatures. While political biography “overwhelms” the written field, it is strikingly rare choice for film-makers of biography in the dramatic genre. Instead, I have argued that the “Marginal Lives”, which Martin Botha celebrates as the signal achievement of post-apartheid film-makers in South Africa, predominate. Where there are no more than thirty social history biographies in book-length written form,<sup>75</sup> that is, some 2.5% of the eight-hundred books in the field, social history represents over 50% of the filmic form. Indeed, the social history biopic, and within it the gang biopic, which outstrips by some margin colonial biopics and also all other diverse other forms of biopic, looms very large. In this sense, we might even argue that film is the favoured medium for histories of prominent and ordinary or marginalised people where the individual (following the Jacobs-Bank classification) is treated as the exemplar of a social group.<sup>76</sup>

The statistics also reveal that white male directors still rule the roost, as they did during the apartheid period. Whether the biopics are “international” (as eleven biopics have been), or South African directors (as 14 of them have) they are overwhelmingly white and very predominantly male. There has been no more than a scattering of black and coloured directors. I therefore chose, based also on an immediate affinity for his work, two biopics made by the only coloured director

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<sup>73</sup> Jacobs and Bank, ‘Biography in Post-Apartheid South Africa’, 165.

<sup>74</sup> Thanks to Freddy Ogterop for making his full inventory available to me for rough calculation.

<sup>75</sup> Jacobs and Bank, ‘Biography in Post-Apartheid South Africa’, 172.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 172-4.

Daryne Joshua: *Noem My Skollie* (2016) and *Ellen: Die Storie van Ellen Pakkies* (2018). As a coloured woman who had grown up on the Cape Flats, I felt a resonance with the vision of this new young unusual voice in the film-making industry, one that was say distinctive and different from say that of Roberta du Randt, the film-maker of the controversial *Krotoa* (2017). While I do not share the late literary critic Robert Kirby's assessment that "Produced by Roberta du Randt" are the four most feared words in the English language,<sup>77</sup> Joshua's films have a distinctive "home-brewed" feel and style that appealed and still appeals to me.

My introduction offered a sketch outline biography of Joshua. He was drawn to story-telling in comics and filmic form as a young boy growing up on the Cape Flats. He recalls having felt a lack of mentorship in his early years of interest in film during and after he studies at AGFA film school in Cape Town, but he was drawn into the field by Max Brown, the producer of *Noem My Skollie*, and several other senior figures in the industry. He has been a precocious talent and garnered an array of awards for his two outstanding biopics.

But how do we read these films? From my undergraduate days, poring over *Amistad* (1997) as a filmic text and examining the brilliant Spielberg's multiple modes of invention, I had been fascinated by the capacity of film to move, to transport its audiences. The articles I was encouraged to read, like that Robert Harms on whether the Africans in the film had been taken from a very large fort or a smaller mud hut,<sup>78</sup> seemed to miss the point and rather mundane when set alongside Spielberg's achievement. And so I was directed by my supervisor towards the writings of Robert Rosenstone with particular attention to his concepts of "visual language" and "visual theory". I learnt, as indeed I intuitively knew, that film speaks to its audiences in a different, distinct and frankly very much more powerful way than does written history. It, too,

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<sup>77</sup> Thanks to my supervisor for hauling this quip out of his recollections of the annals of the literary columns penned by the ever acerbic Kirby in *The Weekly Mail* and later *Mail and Guardian*.

<sup>78</sup> See Robert Harms, 'Films about the Transatlantic Slave Trade' in Bickford-Smith and Mendelsohn, ed., *African History on Screen*.

works by means of narrative, but it develops that narrative through a combination of sound and moving image with a very wide range of cinematographic techniques which increasingly fascinated me: not from an expert or a behind-the-camera perspective, but from that of an absorbed and critical member of the audience. In the second chapter of my thesis I highlighted why Rosenstone's 1995 republished essay on these concepts remains my touchstone, the most useful "theory to think with" in relation to film. Very few scholars of film in South Africa have paid the kind of detailed attention to films as texts, to the "language" of film that I believe they demand given their ability to move and transport, to render the dramatic, or indeed the traumatic in the case of the two films under review, within a compact, intense and compressed two-hour form.

The body of the thesis, Chapters One and Chapter Two, examines Daryne Joshua's two gang biopics. Here I have sought to apply Rosenstone's theories about "visual story-telling" and "visual language" with as full an attention as possible to detail. In both cases, I located my detailed analysis of "visual story-telling" across select scenes analysed in these terms against the backdrop of their very different production processes. In the case of *Noem My Skollie* (2016), the process of production took over a decade as the script-writer and central protagonist, the late John Fredericks (1946-2019) hung about at film festivals and went through prospective six directors "who didn't get it" before coming on Daryne Joshua. They auditioned hundreds of young boys; all first-time actors sourced at school across the Cape Flats taking many months to ensure the authentic voices played the historic characters who also had to be similar enough to be tracked through different life stages. I argued that Fredericks was absolutely central to the process of production in *Noem My Skollie*. He even wrote a book that came after the film given its success as a kind of promotional afterword that also tracked the long process of the script's conception and craft. (He had to give up his job to learn the script-writing skills having only formally studies as far as Grade eight or Standard six in his day).

In the case of *Ellen. Die Stories van Ellen Pakkies* (2018), on the other hand, the genesis of the film can be traced not to Pakkies' own desire to have her story told, traumatic though it had been, but to the eventual producer Paolo Areal's vision that her story contained a human tragedy of a universal kind. Once he had met her, he felt that there was a need to come to terms with the seeming paradox of a warm-hearted woman who was driven to the extreme act of murdering her own son. In the introductory section of Chapter Two I highlighted, however, that here too the central protagonist, although I suggest that we think of two central protagonists in this film, Ellen Pakkies, played a central role in every stage of its production. She was not the scriptwriter, but conversations with her and her tours of the places associated with the events shown in the film impacted profoundly, later interviews reveal, on the visions of the director Joshua, the scriptwriter Amy Jephta, and the producer Areal. She was also actively involved on set.

What about "the visual story-telling" in these two films? Here one might think in summary of two different modes of visual narrative, each deemed most appropriate to its subject and story, and each develop with consummate skill by Joshua. I analysed the "architecture" or "structure" of *Noem My Skollie* as that of the linear, chronological narrative, divided in this case into four life-history "chapters". It is, however, prefaced by two deeply disturbing opening scenes, one of which was the very motive for Fredericks having made the film fifty years after this traumatic event. The first is a 37-second scene of a hanging, leaving us to wonder who it was that was strung up by rope and noose. The second is the seemingly stretched scene documenting Frederick's (AB in the movie) brutal rape as a nine or ten-year-old boy on a rubbish dump (where he had once found and been given a typewriter, symbolic of his later life path) by a violent and disturbed man backed by his vicious dogs. The narrative, as analysed in Chapter One, unfolds through the four life stages when Fredericks was, successfully, one of "The Young Ones" (a chapter title echoing the title of a Hollywood movie he and his friends saw as young boys), in "The Number" (in *Die Nommer*) when imprisoned in Pollsmoor at age sixteen for the youthful



excesses of his brazen brotherhood, “The Storyman” (in *Die Storieman*) in the central part of the movie symbolized by “the prison cinema”, a still of which was used on the front page of the chapter, and finally, his saving story-telling swansong in *The Ballad of a Thief (Die Ballade van ‘n Bandiet)* when he saves himself from hanging by a speech in court. In the end it is his friends of his former gang, those who committed the murder of which he is charged, who are sentenced to hang, one of whom (we only now realise) is the man strung up and gasping for his last breath to the mocking words of his tormentors in the first scene. Fredericks gift for story-telling saved him from the Numbers Gangs in prison and now the hangman’s noose in court.

The focus of my visual analysis is “the prison cinema” where Fredericks saves himself by entertaining the brutal Numbers leaders and his fellow prisoners with a series of stories. Here Dann-Jacques Mouton is truly outstanding as the agent for Fredericks’ message in his ability to bodily convey, in a message that prisoners could relate to, the imagined worlds of his own construction: whether of the slave mutiny on the *Meermin*, or of a Numbers Gang member named Doggy Dog. Joshua’s use of light and changing camera angles, now from behind the story-teller and now peeping through the bars of an iron bunk bed and seeing him face on as his audience did is masterful and captivating. Like his convict audience we sway and rock, are lifted with emotion at the news of the mutineers having seized the ship and its guns only for our hopes to be dashed when they are steered ashore to be captured by settlers and sentenced to death.

As my close visual analysis of *Ellen. Die Storie van Ellen Pakkies* (2018) in Chapter Two sought to demonstrate, culminating in a six-page dissection of the final murder scene, Joshua’s second biopic is even more dramatic and undoubtedly far more disturbing and unsettling for viewers than his first. For while Fredericks’ had some agency in his life narrative, through his gift for stories, neither Ellen nor her beloved teenage son have agency in their life stories. Here Joshua turned to the parallel narrative form as the best means of conveying this much darker, at times one might say demonic story. I set my filmic analysis in the context of Linda Aronson’s general

analysis of parallel narrative as a filmic form. She characterises this mode of visual-storytelling as one which interweaves two timelines, sometimes converging as in the case of *Ellen* in one final horrific incident or event. On this basis I tracked the narrative development of the two lines, one “past” in which the teenage Abie Pakkies, a boy with a love of pop culture and dreams of buying a home for his mother gets progressively drawn into a world of drugs and becomes a tik-addict bent on a spiral of destruction both of self and others with deeply psychologically disturbing and physically threatening consequences to his parents and especially his mother. The other time line, “the present” is the tale of Ellen Pakkies’ frustrating and ultimately hopeless efforts to get help for her sick and increasingly tormented son. Here we see her going from school to church to clinic to rehabilitation centre none of which offer any socially responsible help to this increasingly isolated and increasingly despairing and desperate mother. The two narrative lines then converge in a final dramatic scene when Ellen Pakkies, herself a victim of childhood sexual abuse and of the rape which led to the birth of Abie, can no longer remain a victim and in what the psychiatrist in the case identified as “a state of dissociation” murders her son by throttling him in his bed while she looks on. It must rate as one of the most disturbing scenes, certainly in my view the most disturbing single scene, in South African cinematic history! In film, as in life, Pakkies was given a three year suspended sentence and 280 hours of community service; the inspirational beginnings of which we see in the final scene before the credits inform us that the murder of a son by his own mother is a very, very rare occurrence in human experience highlighting the universal and enormity of this compelling narrative.

There are, of course, themes that I would like to have explored in more depth, or in some depth. I would like to have found out more about audience response to these films, partly to gauge whether the discrepancy between local reception and international acclaim that Roberta du Randt met with in releasing *Krotoa* has any echoes at all in relation to the local reception of this film. I told a small story of a scuffle involving a member of the Numbers Gang who objected to the

portrayal of a character in the film. I was reliant heavily here on internet sources and did not have the benefits, for example, of a questionnaire or survey generated body of data. I have given a very brief sense of the international accolades garnered by the first film and the more limited local acclaim attracted by the second.

I also think that the issue of the “authenticity” of these gang biopics and the gang genre of films more generally in relation to written representations is worthy of close investigation. There are, as I have noted in some footnotes across the texts, signs of a kind of referencing of literature in Joshua’s cinematography as say in AB’s story about “The Dog” or “Doggy Dog”, a well-known name in Numbers prison law, the references to boy-“wyfies”, and so on. Don Pinnock, Charles van Onselen and Jonny Steinberg among others have produced a rich body of social history and creative non-fiction in the latter case in relation to which film scholars can read these movies. On the other hand, I have been motivated above all by a quest to demonstrate that this (one might say partly) misses the point. Film is so powerful because of its distinctive mode of presentation and we ought, as some of the best film scholars like Rosenstone and Bickford-Smith in the South African context insist, examine it for its strengths not in relation to its limitations. Its strength is its ability to move, to individualize, to dramatize, to transport imaginatively, to convey the intensity, even at times the horror or enormity, of the human experience and this is why I believe filmic analysis needs to begin with a rigorous engagement with “visual story-telling” in relation to particular texts and with attention to “the visual language” of the story-teller”. Daryne Joshua is undoubtedly, in the South African post-apartheid context, a consummate raconteur whether he chooses to narrate in a chronological linear sequence of chapters with a disturbing two-part preface as in *Noem My Skollie* (2016), or whether he choose the more radically disruptive and experimental form of the parallel narrative as he did so judiciously in the construction of *Ellen. Die Stories van Ellen Pakkies* (2018).

## Epilogue

*John Fredericks* died after a long battle with pancreatic cancer in 2019.

*Abie Pakkies* died in his room at the end of his mother's rope in 2008.

*Ellen Pakkies* had completed her 280 hours of community service, but still offers her services as a motivational speaker. She still lives in the same house in Lavender Hill where the traumatic events of the film that bears her name are set.

*Daryne Joshua* continues to work to make home-brewed South African films relevant to the experience of communities marginalised by apartheid, drawing on his own experiences of growing up on the Cape Flats as a lower middle-class boy with a vivid imagination and a dream to make films.



## **Appendix 1: Biopics in Post-Apartheid South Africa**

1. 2019: *An Act of Defiance* (Bram Fischer) (Dir: Jean van de Velde, Netherlands: Menemsha Films), 123 mins.
2. 2019: *Poppie Nongena* (Dir: Christiaan Olwagen, Johannesburg: Helena Spring Films), 141 mins.
3. 2018: *Ellen Pakkies: Die Storie van Ellen Pakkies* (Ellen Pakkies) (Dir. Daryne Joshua, Cape Town: Moving Billboard Pictures), 123 mins.
4. 2018: *Sew the Winter to my Skin* (John Kepe) (Dir: Jahmil X.T. Qubeka, Johannesburg: Yellowbone Entertainment), 118 mins.
5. 2017: *Krotoa* (Krotoa) (Dir: Roberta Durrant, Cape Town: Penguin Films), 117 mins.
6. 2017: *Kalushi: The Story of Solomon Mahlangu* (Dir: Mandla Dube, Johannesburg) Flash Films), 107 mins.
7. 2017: *The Forgiven* (Desmond Tutu) (Dir: Roland Joffé, US: Saban Films), 115 mins.
8. 2017: *The Number* (Magadien Wentzel) (Dir: Khalo Matabane, Randburg: Born Free Media), 95 mins.
9. 2016: *Noem My Skollie* (John Fredericks) (Dir. Daryne Joshua, Johannesburg: Maxi-D Productions), 140 mins.
10. 2013: *A Lucky Man* (Ernie "Lastig" Solomon, gangster) (Dir: Gordon Clark, Cape Town) Lucky Man Pictures), 77 mins.
11. 2013: *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* (Nelson Mandela) (Dir: Justin Chadwick, Durban: Videovision Entertainment), 141 mins.
12. 2012: *Die Wonderwerker* (Eugene Marais, Jane Brayshaw) (Dir: Katinka Heyns, Paarl: Sonneblom Films), 119 mins.
13. 2011: *Black butterflies* (Ingrid Jonker) (Dir: Paula van der Oest, Netherlands: IDTV Film), 110 mins.
14. 2011: *A Million Colours* (Muntu Ndebele and Norman Knox, two child stars of the 1976 movie "eLollipop") (Dir: Peter Bishai, US: Cloverleaf Films), 115 mins.
15. 2011: *Winnie Mandela* (Dir: Darrell Roodt, Montreal: Equinoxe Films), 104 mins.
16. 2010: *Mrs. Mandela* (made for TV) (Winnie Mandela) (Dir: Michael Samuels, UK: Diverse Productions), 90 mins.
17. 2008: *Hansie: A True Story* (Hansie Cronje) (Dir: Regardt van den Bergh, Cape Town: Global Creative Studios), 123 mins.

18. 2008: *Skin* (Sandra Laing) (Dir: Anthony Fabian, UK: Elysian Films), 107 mins.
19. 2007: *Goodbye Bafana* (US - The Color of Freedom) (James Gregory, Nelson Mandela) (Dir: Bille August, Belgium: Banana Films), 118 mins.
20. 2006: *Faith like Potatoes* (Angus Buchan) (Dir: Regardt van den Bergh, Cape Town: Global Creative Studios), 116 mins.
21. 2004: *Drum* (Henry Nxumalo) (Dir: Zola Maseko, US: Armada Pictures), 94 mins.
22. 2003: *Stander* (André Stander) (Dir: Bronwen Hughes, Germany: ApolloProMedia), 111 mins.
23. 1998: *If this be treason* (Helen Joseph) (made for TV) (Dir: Cedric Sundstrom, Johannesburg: Innervision Films for SABC), 102 mins.
24. 1997: *Mandela and De Klerk* (made for TV) (Dir: Joseph Sargent, Cape Town: Film Afrika Worldwide), 114 mins.
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