

Title: One Thousand Years of Therapy

Log line: A grieving couple must choose the sentence for their child's killer: ten years in prison, or a complete psychological rewrite and immediate release.

Synopsis: Jess and Michael return home from court feeling utterly hopeless: the man who raped and murdered their six-year-old daughter has been sentenced to a mere ten years in prison. While Jess tries her best to rebuild their lives, Michael descends into anger and aggression, so consumed by the lust for revenge that he continues to destroy what remains of their relationship. In their small, middle-class town in southern England, everybody knows everybody, and they are continually reminded of their horror by the desolate looks on neighbours' faces.

Jess is unable to return to work at a school, since being around children haunts her; Michael chooses to return to work at an insurance company but is unable to keep a calm demeanour around clients. Everything seems irreparably broken until a doctor provides them with the option of an alternative: a treatment which has proven 100% effective in Sweden can rehabilitate criminals, and Jess and Michael are offered the chance to use this same treatment on the murderer. Using a combination of amphetamines, hallucinogens and immersive audiovisuals, the criminal would have their perception of time slowed and be subjected to the equivalent of one thousand years of therapy as well as a chemical rebalance in the dysfunctional areas of the brain. After an evaluation to check the effectiveness of the treatment, the former criminal would be released with a new name and identity, while those involved in the trial would have their name and appearance wiped from their memories.

Michael is horrified by the idea, believing it to be a betrayal of their deceased daughter, while Jess is tempted by what she perceives as the lesser of two evils. Jess researches in great detail and is convinced this is the only way to prevent reoffence and so respect their daughter's legacy. On the verge of divorce, Michael reluctantly agrees to the treatment on the condition they try to repair their marriage. However, a review by a marriage counsellor determines that their toxic relationship has deteriorated beyond repair and recommends a divorce. Michael refuses to accept this, getting even more aggressive and unstable, thus proving the counsellor's point.

Jess tries her best to rebuild her life but struggles to let herself trust anyone. She attends a bereavement group alone, where she meets a charismatic man and begins to trust again; the two bond over their shared experiences of grief. However, her trust is betrayed once again when she discovers he has been lying about his mother's death in an attempt to seduce her. Feeling utterly hopeless, she talks to Dr Robinson, a psychologist, and they agree to let Jess undergo a reduced form of the reform treatment to simulate five years of therapy.

One year on, Jess is happy and relaxed, able to enjoy her life without either forgetting about her daughter or dwelling upon death and pain. However, her life is thrown back into turmoil

when Michael re-enters her life, more unstable than ever and reveals he's appealing to have the new name and identity of their child's killer revealed. Jess argues that this will only make everyone's lives worse, and that Michael needs to move on with his life. With the stress of the legal battle, Jess returns to the hospital for more counselling from Dr Robinson. As they get closer, she develops an attraction towards him, but he remains professional and rejects any attempts to meet outside work.

Working outside legal means, Michael enlists a tabloid journalist to help him uncover the identity of their child's killer. After several sleepless nights, he turns up at Jess's door in a manic state, telling her he's going to murder their child's killer. Jess tries to talk some sense into him, but he explains he has nothing left to live for and doesn't care what happens to him, he just wants revenge. They talk about the difference between justice and revenge until they seemingly reach a point of peace. As they say goodbye, Michael suddenly reveals the new identity of their child's killer: Dr Robinson.

Major characters: Jess is an exasperated, grieving school teacher, who has taken a break from her work in the aftermath of her daughter's murder. After six months and a court case, she just wants to try to rebuild her life, no matter how difficult that may prove. Always having to be the 'fixer' in the relationship, she grows exhausted with Michael's inability to make any effort or open his mind. While she doesn't necessarily want a divorce or to release their child's killer, she is practical and determines that these are the best available options.

Michael is a stubborn, aggressive insurance salesman who views himself as the transitional masculine figure of power. The murder of his daughter devastates him not just because of the brutality of it, but because he feels he has been rendered useless as a man and failed to protect his family. Rather than trying to support himself and his family in days ahead, he obsesses over trying to get revenge for the recent past. While he was once very kind and considerate, his humanity is rapidly disappearing as he descends into bitterness and anger which cause him to lash out and hurt those close to him.

Comment: Inspired by the philosophical debate about justice and revenge, I wanted to tell a straightforward story which showed the conflict between humans and rationality. While Michael's reactions to every decision or study are purely emotional, knee-jerk responses, Jess tries to find a balance between emotionless rationality and irrational anger. Although the premise is rooted into slightly futuristic scientific treatments, the style of the film is far removed from traditional sci-fi, adopting instead the tone of a domestic drama, similar to the films of Ingmar Bergman. By focusing on only two main characters, the film can explore a difficult philosophical debate with Jess and Michael standing in for the two sides: reform versus revenge.