‘Painting’ Ruth:

A portrait of allusion, text, and loss

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Abstract

To answer the research question – How can I portray Ruth within a contemporary social and cultural context while addressing and disturbing established gallery protocol and challenging the apparent "subject/object" polarity that defines creative composition? – I have taken my lead from three different aspects of Ruth's story: Ruth's heroism; Ruth's declaration of devotion to Naomi; and the Book of Ruth as a set of allusions of family breakage and solidarity in earlier episodes in the House of Israel. I have analogised the practice of stitching to the heroic step-by-step approach Ruth pursues to overcome the difficulties she encounters while seeking the conditions to ensure Naomi's security and wellbeing. Ruth's lyrical "poem" in 1.16-17 is used as a paradigm for an examination of personal insight as the first cause of universally appreciated works of art. Finally, in the *mise en abyme* literary technique of a subtext within the text that some scholars locate within Ruth, I endorsed my decision to unhook the linearity of time to cascade the past into the present. By using these three theoretical frameworks from Ruth, I have created artworks that represent living with loss by ploughing into the past in order to understand the present.

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CHAPTER ONE. Introduction

Introduction

As a studentship, this project came with a title, “Painting the Bible”. Although the condition was broad, it was a requirement that the artwork I produced reflected biblical exegesis in some capacity. At the same time as representing the Bible, I wanted to prove its relevance within the field of contemporary social, political, and cultural concerns. I focused on the Book of Ruth. As an immigrant married to an Englishman and also as a girl raised by a widow, at the outset the story had familiar features to my own history. After settling on Ruth and having explored insightful commentary from numerous scholars, my research question consisted of four objectives.

In varying degrees throughout the research process, I adhered to each component of the question, and when my practice did not conform accordingly, I changed tack. For me by modifying and changing direction in mid-flow, I was returning to the core of the project which the research question embodied. In order to fulfil the conditions of the proposal, then, I changed methods, for example, stitching led to sketching, sketching led to images, images to printmaking, printmaking to text, text to electronic media, electronic media to bookbinding, digital to analogue, and so it went. Although the methods I used are listed, the process was not linear; each technique was part of the “palette” I manipulated for the purpose of drawing out and examining the research objectives.

While aesthetic considerations played a part, I conceived my practice as carrying out the ideas I was exploring, for example, “ethnic translation” (Chapter One), “heroism in small integers” (Chapter Two), “the personal and the universal” (Chapter Three), “the apparent opposition of the subject and the object” (Chapter Four), and “living with loss” (Chapter Four). To address these nuanced and complex systems of thought into a formal expression, I did not develop my proficiencies as a stitcher, painter, printmaker, or sculptor. Perfecting any of these skills was not a research intention I had been aiming to develop. Finally, however, in the environment of a gallery setting, I did assess and review the “performing” or “staged” aspects of a set of identically sized posters and in sum, the impact they might produce in a viewer. And for this reason, I set out an exhibition of multiples of posters as a set of textual

images (see Appendix). Apart from the content of the piece, I had anticipated a set of fifty posters making a kind of “monumental” mark within an onlooker, but at the same time, I adhered to my research objectives. In the end, I produced an artist’s book that in one respect defied the research objective of challenging artworld convention. Carefully I considered aspects of beauty to ensure the object appeared pleasant and suitably formalised while representing inexpressible feelings of loss. I took this decision in order to document my process, and while it corresponds directly to the requirements of a gallery setting, at the same time, it offers an immanent representation of the research process I had undertaken. What I lose by challenging my own standard, I gain as evidence of rigorous learning and expedient outcomes.

The research objectives I set out are as follows: to represent Biblical exegesis within a contemporary context; to portray aspects of the Book of Ruth; to make artwork that does not conform to the conventional viewer/artist/gallery/exhibition protocol; and, to explore the apparent opposition between the “subject” and the “object” in art production. In order to unite each of these objectives into a single trajectory, the research question is expressed accordingly: How can I portray Ruth within a contemporary social and cultural context while addressing and disturbing established gallery protocol and challenging the apparent “subject/object” polarity that defines creative composition? The exhibition answered each of the components of the research question.

Although my show had taken into account my research question, I located a point of improvement in the yellow and black text “fragments”. As a formal embodiment of loss, the final images represented the hiatus of the process of eliminating narrative, meaning, and the conventional use of words. Accordingly, the exhibition ideally was greater than the sum of its parts and in turn, the posters represented my documentary process and outcome. But in order to leave a lasting expression – an “object” – of the work in the repository, I re-did the final images as diptychs in a screenprinted artist’s book.

At the same time, the creation of the artist’s book enhanced the Freudian idea – which I depend upon in Chapter Three – of the process of establishing the method of the maker. His idea consists of an artist’s predilection for accessing sub-conscious personal events or

feelings and conveying those impressions into an object. The maker's skill interprets the insight into a work of art through which others can find relevance and enjoyment. Before making the artist's book, I processed the stages of grief into various works that expressed raw emotion. Through inadequate subterfuge, the pieces did not conceal the personal tragedy I was feeling thereby stunting the relatable aspects of the work for viewers. By making the artist's book, I was enabled to produce a work that satisfied the provision of manipulating uncensored despair into a formalised object.

Still, this decision had to be squared with the objectives I set out to research. In the end, I weighed up and acknowledged the propositions I proposed at the outset. In this case, I took the line that the creation of an artist's book exceeded the importance of non-objective work because it defended the idea that personal insight leads to universal appeal. Accordingly, the artist's book represented the fulfilment of manifesting within an object the idea of "loss". By controlling the text, highlights, and page patterns I used from the font fragments, the designs yielded little resemblance to text. I had initiated a methodology that removed meaning, language, and text from two pieces of narrative: a visual depiction of radical loss. If viewers were unaware of the process I had undertaken in order to realise the final planes of colour, then, I had satisfied the requirements of camouflaging but, at the same time, restoring an unbearable piece of personal history.

Apart from my exploratory ventures regarding refugees, immigration, and the attitudes of the receiving nation in Chapter One, the topics I discuss more thoroughly are as follows. In Chapter Two, I discuss heroism by reading a comparison between Ruth and Aeneas of Virgil's *Aeneid*. In both heroes, there is steadfastness and endurance which each carries out in the midst of adversity. By taking a lead from the two principals, then, I propose a co-relation between qualities of heroism and the practice of stitching, and in particular, its step-by-step slow-moving progress as an analogy of steadfastness and endurance. With regard to loss, both heroes' slow-but-sure advancement illustrated by stitch-by-stitch sewing is again demonstrated by a mourner's headway through periods of grieving. This point is taken up again in Chapter Four.

In Chapter Three, I used Tod Linafelt's account of poetry in Ruth as an examination of personal contemplation as the muse for universally appealing works of art. While carrying out the theoretical research that underpins and supports the practice I had envisioned carrying out – the prayer flag project – I drove a wedge between rather than synthesise the two. At this point, my practical output was in crisis. I decided to retire the art proposal I had been working towards but clung onto the theory. The speculative undercurrent of Chapter Three was elaborated in Chapter Four, and I created a new working project in order to unite theory and practice. The final chapter is motivated by Mieke Bal's and Harold Fisch's studies concerning allusions in Ruth from earlier irregularities within the Genesis family. By the end of the book, Ruth is welcomed into the family, community, and nation. As a Moabite, the conversion is notable because Ruth's ethnicity calls to mind a group of people that were historically incompatible with the Israelites. The urgent question throughout the narrative is: how can a Moabite widow transform into an Israelite matriarch? Up until the Book of Ruth, it is inconceivable that the two belong together.

While the study is structured around the story of Ruth, also I am considering certain artworld features. Of these, the first I take into account is the usual "artwork-viewing public-gallery" production cycle. Throughout the course of the research, I had in mind to destabilise the inevitable self-posturing convention of artworld sensibility and this idea is articulated in my third objective: to subvert the "unassailable" viewer/artist/gallery/exhibition etiquette. However as I progressed, this inflamed attack on the establishment was muted by my decision to show my final pieces in a gallery environment. With disruption still in mind, I adhere to the idea of the power of art to threaten working concepts, such as non-reflective acceptance of artworld convention. In order to defend this idea even further, I took on board Melissa Raphael's articulation of the Second Commandment's prohibition against idolatry and its presence in the construction of artworld sensibilities.

To elaborate this serious allegation, then, a text-based image that is not immediately recognisable has a biblical fixture through the Second Commandment. This particular ban forbids idolatry (Raphael, 2009, pp. 19-42). The idea is central to my portrayal of Ruth, self-representation, and non-adherence to artworld "idolatry". From one perspective, as a

fashionable institution and at the expense of artists and artworks generally, the artworld is built on idolatry: extortionate sums of money, artist-Gods; curator-Gods; patron-Gods, commentator-Gods, media-Gods, etc. In other words, the artworld is built on a premise of a blatant corruption of the Second Commandment. As mentioned later in the dissertation, this argument is represented most forcefully by Plato when he banished the poets from the republic.[1] In this case, then, my formal decisions to use textual representations as image, explore artist-gallery-viewing public protocol, and at the same time, respond to the ban on faithlessness. By unifying a central feature of Judaic law as one of my research objectives, I adhere strongly to my formal decisions and any decision to make "beautiful objects" is taken gravely.

With this condition in hand, my concluding artworld query assimilates the previous objective and is as follows. Initially, I aimed to upset the precedent of art production by creating "space" rather than "object" as a work of art. In order to do so, I wanted to create an environment as an artwork. As an ephemeral "object", its longevity would exist as documentation and photographs. In the end, I dismissed this method but I held onto the spine of the idea. At the root of the query, there was the immutable notion of a stable and thereby oppositional subject and object, even if the object was short-lived and transient. In the subject's and object's intractable disparity, the terms provide a set piece consisting of undeniable polarities.

In my practice, then, I created a method through text that challenges this established set of opposites. As I explain and defend, the erosion of the differences between these apparent twin polarities grinds down the well-rehearsed traditions of art production, the exhibition showmill, and gallery attendance. While I was unable to escape artworld procedure, I utilised it for my own ends. Through its own standards, art production has the capacity to interrogate artworld procedure (meta-art). Albeit gallery-based, my exhibition work contains instances of unity between subject and object in a single artefact, which is not in itself unusual. Accordingly, and more importantly, I have represented an example of subject/object unity within the mind of the maker where the differences between the two

[1] See note 48.

are indiscernible. By being an everyday event – instances of subject/object unity (Kantian epistemology)[2] – yet "framed" within an artworld precedent, its status is elevated to being a remarkable occasion rather than a forgettable instance of making sense of our world in the ordinariness of daily living. Through the work of Adrian Piper and her reading of Kant, Chapter Four develops the possibility of upending subject/object polarity by considering and endeavouring to produce subject/object unity.

Following, then, by challenging the process and authority within its own system, this meta-work *strengthens* artworld efficacy. To carry out my protest, then, those tenets I had in mind to overcome instead are endorsed. In order to raise the alarm, I concede defeat, but only in a single sense. Not beyond reproach, the structure of the institution can be addressed from within its own boundaries and terms.

To provide an account of my process, the introduction reviews the research I undertook before settling into the presentation of essays and practice that comprise the following chapters. Although my focus and direction changes, there are features that begin in these early stages – together with material that later was not continued – that develop into the final production. My first work is *Take-a-Tag* which was my response to the government's position regarding families who were fleeing the impoverishment of their own country and tragically coming up against intolerable complications while seeking asylum in the EU and UK. For my second project, I used the Book of Ruth to corroborate a stitching project with a group of women who live permanently in the UK but were born in another country. Following Hannah Arendt's words, my intention was to create a sewing circle that was built upon the tenet of remembering our past despite the range of feelings it evokes. As Arendt's idea (1998) expresses a mainstay for this work – and as it turns out, corresponds with other parts of the project especially Chapter Four and the final exhibition – it is worth quoting at length:

[2] See Chapter Four.

> Those few refugees who insist upon telling the truth, even to the point of "indecency," get in exchange for their unpopularity one priceless advantage: history is no longer a closed book to them and politics is no longer the privilege of Gentiles. They know that the outlawing of the Jewish people in Europe has been followed closely by the outlawing of most European nations. Refugees driven from country to country represent the vanguard of their peoples – *if they keep their identity*. For the first time Jewish history is not separate but tied up with that of all other nations. The comity of European peoples went to pieces when, and because, it allowed its weakest member to be excluded and persecuted. (Arendt, 1998, p. 119) (My emphasis)

To put into practice Arendt's declaration of refugees representing the "vanguard of their peoples" by "keeping their identity", I planned a stitching project. The idea was to use photographs of a family member who the maker felt inspired to represent. I anticipated a short story behind the choice of image. Following, then, in an environment of family history and storytelling, I imagined a kind of experience that could be identified as an "object". Rather than focussing on the stitched work as the object of art, instead I wanted to present the setting created by the stitching circle as the artwork. As the maker of a concept, I intended to frame this experience as an "artefact". To carry out the venture, a group of women called Sahara Saheli (Welcome Friends) accepted my invitation to bring a handcraft exercise to the group. This first meeting was meant as a practice session for a larger group-centred project.

At the same time as working with Sahara Saheli, I started another stitching group. Despite the setbacks of Covid and other personal matters, we still gather and now call ourselves SEW Sew (SOCIALLY ENGAGED WOMEN Sew). To bring together a group of like-minded stitchers, I advertised the classes for those interested in storytelling, family, and the mutual affection that is created within a group while developing a creative project. At first, we were four. I structured the sessions by offering new methods of working motivated by art history, current works by contemporary artists, and learning from each other. Again, family stories and photographs provided the theme for our creative projects. SEW Sew figures prominently in Chapter Two. My daughter, Faye, was one of the original members of the group.

The objective was to surpass the artworld bedrock of engaging with the artist-gallery-viewer contraption while bringing forward an object of art that is participatory, spontaneous, and

does not possess posterity. It is a “thing” – an object of art – but it is not marketable; it is not a hold-in-your-hand/nail-on-the-wall/set-on-a-plinth artefact. As I will explain, both projects failed to bring about the kind of quality I had proposed. The anticipated friendships were kindled, but as I will explain, the sought-after “ambience” was not dependent on the condition of making art. It could easily have been a “ladies-who-eat-cake-and-drink-tea” group which equally created the same quality of experience. Also regarding either group, most of the stitchers wanted an item of work to show for their efforts; the desire was similar for both personal and community-minded projects. I thought at the time, and I still hold this view, that these two motivating factors – framing the negative space (ambience) and framing a work (a piece of stitching) – can exist alongside the other without interfering with the intentions of either camp.

In order to explain the direction the project has taken, these first elementary steps were either dismissed or expounded as I entered into what became a fuller representation of practice and its theoretical justification. Although they were discarded, I am including a summary of those works as an indication of the process of discovery through which research practice depends. Despite being excluded from the final presentation, at every stage I was creating links between practice, the Book of Ruth, and the theoretical cornerstones of the artwork I produced. Regarding the dissertation and exhibition, I will provide the trajectory I followed through the chapters as a complement to the practical work I am showing.

Although Covid interrupted the arc of the project, a far greater crisis occurred in my personal life. In an instant, my life fell apart and the research with it. In October 2020 my daughter, Faye, took her life. The shock, grief, and loss held me captive for many months. A part of this never goes away; it is important it should not. Without being a condition relating to the status of an immigrant or refugee, I am applying the sense of Arendt’s words to the distress of bereavement by suicide: “telling the truth” and “keeping my identity” – a new “identity” as a survivor – despite the reaction of wanting to grieve/live in solitude. If the project was going to continue, it had to be about the loss of my daughter and the means through which I was learning to live with her absence. Once I could hold a needle again, I started simple stitching exercises such as mending and darning. But as I was unable to think about anything apart from my daughter, I had images of Faye printed onto postcard-sized panels of linen.

Accompanied by various readings – each chapter accounts for a different aspect of Ruth's story – and an approach to making art originating from one's hidden recesses of thoughts and experiences, I moved forward with my project. At the same time, the work helped me to find a way back from despair, and in this instance, to live with loss. First, then, I will review these original research attempts. Following, I will summarise the content of the dissertation chapters with their corresponding pieces of artwork.

At the outset of the project, the theoretical foundations I was working upon consisted of the following. Already, I had established an immediate co-relation between the contemporary movement of people and biblical instances of fleeing from oppressive regimes, living with foreigners, and searching for a homeland. Together with this material, the theoretical ideas I have typically explored in my practice before doctoral work are: the representation of politics and social history in works of art; the disruption of the institutional convention of making, viewing, and consuming artwork; and, the utilisation of text and image in art production. At the same time having an intention to make "meaningful" works, I have always wanted to sharpen my drawing skills. Part of my practice, then, is to familiarise myself with the topic by sketching it.

Within the proposition of agitating artworld precedence thereby exploring the Second Commandment, I had in mind to carry this out by averting attention from an artistically derived object to an artistically derived experience. In this case, then, an "experience" possesses the same status as a 2D work on a wall or a 3D artefact on a plinth but does not occupy the same kind of space. It is "consumed in the very act of its birth", and afterwards only exists as documentation (Leonardo da Vinci quoted in Benjamin, 1976, p. 249). Through the research, the balance between the dominion of the object and the experience of the subject has been examined in different ways. I have explored various methods of making work, and each piece embodies a version of these theoretical features.

During the early stages, I researched the topic of immigration through the practice of stitchwork, family, and story. Despite the changes in my personal life and admittedly using different formal approaches, the final works are a composite of the original methods. In keeping with the proposition to carry out work that upsets the institutional convention, I committed to producing public-oriented, socially engaged, and participatory kinds of art production. But after my daughter's suicide, my artistic expressions became private-centred, autobiographical, and intimate.

While I have maintained my position of making participatory work that is not intended for a white cube exhibition, I have decided to curate my final set of works as a publicly shared presentation and curate it on a gallery wall. It seems incompatible to invite an audience to view expressions of what has been most raw; at the same time, it is what I most want to share. This idea is more fully explored in Chapter Three. Although the presentation is in a gallery setting, as I will defend, the work is documentary in nature and not objects prepared for consumption within the conventions of a market. Chapter Four provides an analysis of this approach. For Chapter Two, the artefacts I am presenting have been "exhibited" as works through the "gallery setting" of the postal service. They are "travelling" works that are visiting the homes of Faye's family and loved ones. As I will explain, these works are a part of a process and their intention is a contemplation and thus not expected to be rushed. In keeping with the character of the work, it is currently on-going.

Returning to the initial project, then, I created a public-participatory work in which I made stamps that present incongruous elements of image and text. It was meant as a satirical commentary against our leaders' response to the refugee crisis in 2015. The work is called *Take-a-Tag*. Once this project transformed my objection and perplexity into a formal expression, I settled into a research cycle of creating corresponding features between biblical accounts of immigration, their commentators, practice, and art theory. Near the beginning of the research, I found the Book of Ruth, and apart from some practical changes, Ruth's compass has been wide and deep enough to accommodate the changes within the research work. Here, then, I have the prefix for the title of the project: "*Painting*" *Ruth*.

<u>Take-a-Tag</u>

At the outset of the research, I intended to express my disappointment regarding the provision of asylum during the humanitarian emergency of 2015 and 2016. To express this surge of indignation, I made stamps for the Take-a-Tag work. The piece did not have a corresponding foothold in the Bible apart from the over-arching matter of the movement of people, and also including the response of the receiving nation, and the experience of being a foreigner – an "other" – in a country that is not one's country of birth.

The Take-a-Tag project united three sources: first, the notable quality of stamps; second, the heart-breaking crisis of families fleeing intolerable conditions and seeking asylum; and third, my perception of uninspired political leadership.

For less than a pound, stamps possess a store of power. As "postal traffic" (Benjamin, 1979, p. 93) they can legitimately and overtly cross political borders: an entitlement exceeding the rights of many people. From a red box – this entry point can be as isolated as walls in derelict farm buildings and abandoned industrial sites – a stamped envelope can be entrusted to arrive at a faraway destination within a few days. In 1913, and in large part due to the steadfast dependability of the US Postal Service, a baby was dispatched brandishing a 15¢ stamp. Satisfying the parcel post requirements of size and weight, and insured for $50, the child was received safe and sound by its grandparents. Transport by Post was cheaper than a train ticket (Lewis, 2016).

Stamps are tiny. Walter Benjamin (1979, p. 92) puts it this way, "Stamps bristle with tiny numbers, minute letters, diminutive leaves and eyes. They are graphic cellular tissue." As little portraits, stamps are ornaments of pride. A picture stamp commonly represents a national hero or a symbol of a country's fortitude, beauty, or distinction. Stamps are "visiting-cards that the great states leave in a child's room" (Benjamin, 1979, p. 94).

The nature of stamps is remarkable. Ubiquitous and quotidian, stamps are icons of our social and national status quo. They are last in line for attention or accolade. And on a darker note, they are a kind of agent endowed with an ability to hide in plain sight. Stacked with potential, then, I decided to wage a protest by tapping into the authority embedded within postage stamps.

Another line of enquiry came about because of the humanitarian crisis regarding the number of people arriving at our borders seeking safety and willing to work for it. Our leaders were using the tools of propaganda to condition public opinion. For example, David Cameron used the de-humanising term “swarm” in order to describe the escalating numbers of people crossing the Mediterranean. For many people living in the UK, the lamentable response of the Cameron-Osborne-Hammond troika did not correspond to their personal viewpoints.

Against the rhetoric of our leaders, I wanted to direct my anger into the construction of image-and-text stamps. I visualised a forceful message by bringing together the throwaway words of the politicians with an image that revealed the sad reality of the crisis. By uniting clashing pieces of information, I chose irony to convey the message.

For the most part, I create works that disrupt the usual artist-curator-viewer-gallery scaffolding. Following this aim, then, and alongside the social and political content, I sought a method of making that presented exhibition visitors with an opportunity for personal expressions. However, I did use gallery space in order to set up a small stall to access an audience to participate in the project. To collect respondents’ thoughts, ideas, or drawings regarding the crisis, I made self-addressed envelopes emblazoned with the text-and-image stamps and provided luggage tags for their statements. They were invited to post the envelope and tag back to me. As a kind of demonstration, I envisioned collecting the tags and sending them to Philip Hammond.

For the first-class stamp, I used an off-hand remark by Hammond alongside the harrowing image of Alan Kurdi, the little boy who laid lifeless at the feet of a Turkish soldier.[3] Hammond made this declaration: “The gap in standards of living between Europe and Africa means that there will always be … large numbers of pretty desperate migrants marauding around

[3] The image was prominent on the cover of many daily newspapers. Alan Kurdi’s tiny body halted the whining holiday-makers, blustering politicians, and interminable media catalogue. In that moment and especially for those inclined to criticism, the tone of the nation changed from carping over a temporary inconvenience to at least the beginning notes of a duty of care. 2 September 2015.

the area …"[4] (Hammond quoted in Parraudin, 2015). I was inflamed: why was the Cabinet streamlining a humanitarian catastrophe into an economic framework? For the text, I used a part of the Guardian headline: "Marauding migrants threaten our standard of living". With this contrary set of text and image, my intention was to cast a glaring light onto Cameron and his government's insensitive and unrepresentative reaction to the emergency.

In the same article, Hammond asserted an intention to return asylum-seekers to their "countries of origin". Up until then, Eastern countries had hosted Western meddling over an extended period of time. Apparently justified by an ambassadorial campaign to bring about freedom and democracy, instead the West's presence in Middle Eastern countries has brought about destabilisation and radical religious terrorism (Morris, 2019). The image I chose was a ravaged cityscape in Syria. I used Hammond's full quote: "We've got to resolve this problem ultimately by being able to return those who are not entitled to claim asylum back to their countries of origin" (Hammond quoted in Parraudin, 2015). I wanted to expose the context behind the words by combining them with an image that portrayed the extant meaning of "countries of origin".

As it turned out, many contributors objected to the stamps. Instead of exposing the vacuum presented by our leaders, the misunderstanding came about because the participants thought I had used the pictures in order to back the text. In a literal rather than an ironic interpretation, they were outraged by the attitude and point of view they thought I was expressing. In some cases, I received returned tags that conveyed strong and confrontational criticism.

The error dovetails with Michel Foucault's thoughts about image and text in his essay on René Magritte's painting *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* (1929) (Foucault, 1983). The end of the nineteenth century brings about changes in personhood and social hierarchy and for Foucault, Magritte's painting represents this shift. Since the image portrays a pipe and the text denies a pipe, the painting produces the kind of confusion that imparts an array of

[4] I've taken into account the difference in dates: the "marauding migrants" quote pre-dates the image of Alan Kurdi. Still, at its heart, the argument for granting asylum has always primarily addressed the wellbeing of women and children.

interpretations. It raises various readings and according to Foucault, its capacity to do so registers an over-arching similarity to late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century social and cultural contexts. To provide meaning, then, the viewer is moved to solve the conundrum the composition presents. And regarding the stamps, I had unwittingly assembled an ambiguous message by arranging disparate elements of text and image. The tiny “canvas” afforded multiple readings, some of which were in opposition to my intention.

To portray a concise impression on a stamp, the message has to be water-tight. For example, the profile of a crowned monarch: stability and safety; a state flower: beauty and singularity. I used irony, and by doing so, and as small as the objects are, I introduced various meanings. On this occasion, I was seeking to create a voice of solidarity in order to make a strong stand against the decision-makers of this country. According to the initial intention from which the work originated, the project was a failure. Irony is already a slippery construction and it is even more perilous while carrying the weight of human tragedy.

Illustration 1.1.A

Illustration 1.1.B

Illustration 1.1.C

By these responses, it is apparent that the respondents interpreted the stamps as the text endorsing the image. I received six negative comments; a good deal more were positive.

Illustration 1.1.D

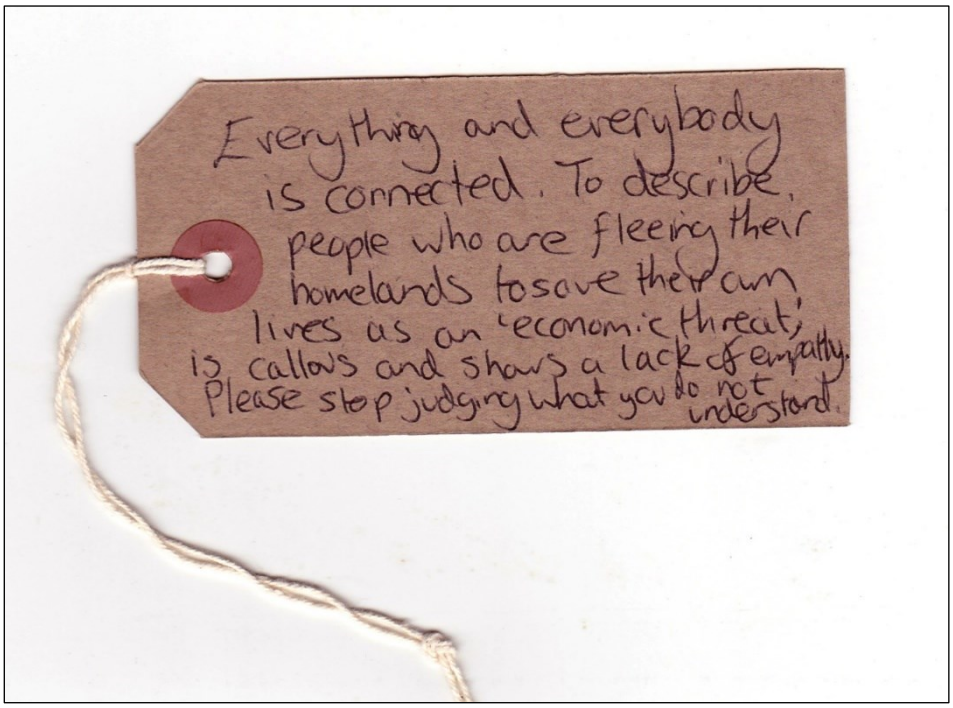


Illustration 1.1.E

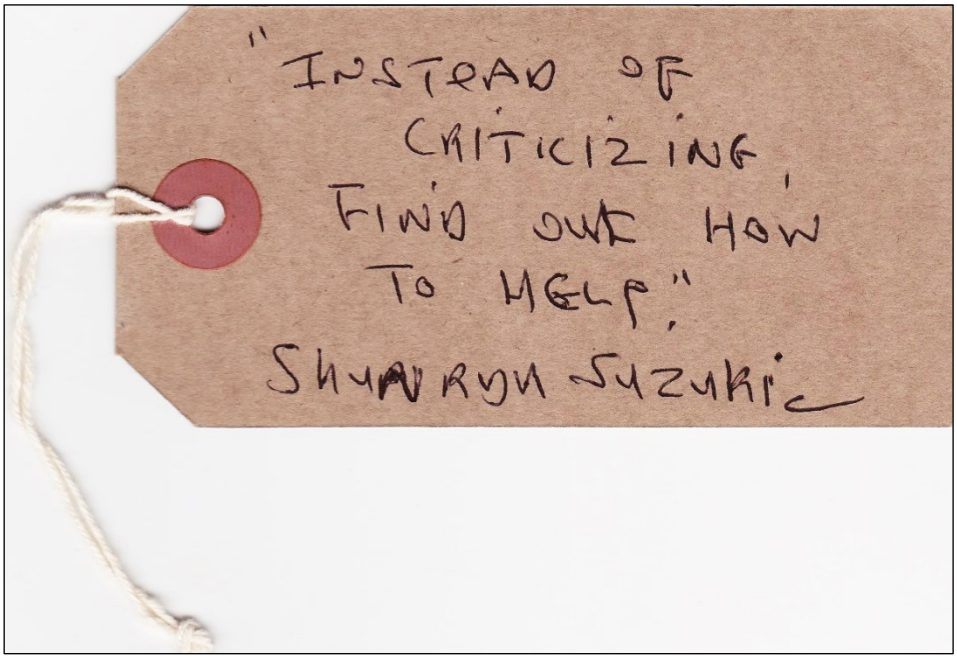


Illustration 1.1.F

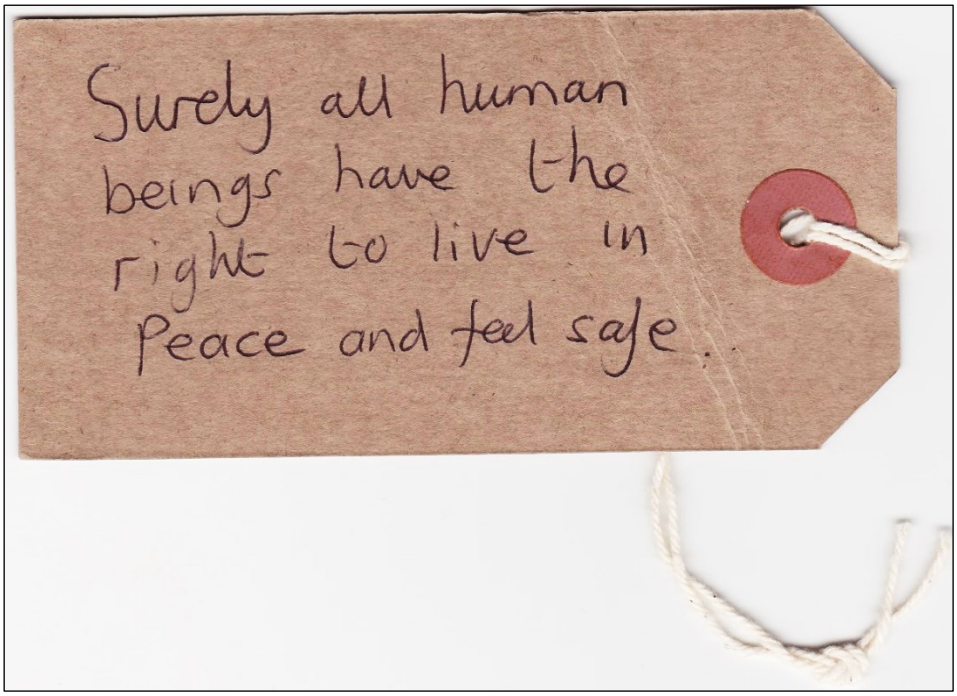


Illustration 1.1.G. To return the tags, I provided envelopes with a printed stamp in the top right corner. In themselves, the envelopes possess aesthetic merit. The first envelope (3.1) is especially poignant with the Holy Family positioned alongside the text “marauding migrants”. The second envelope (1.1.H) is an artwork in itself. It was returned anonymously.

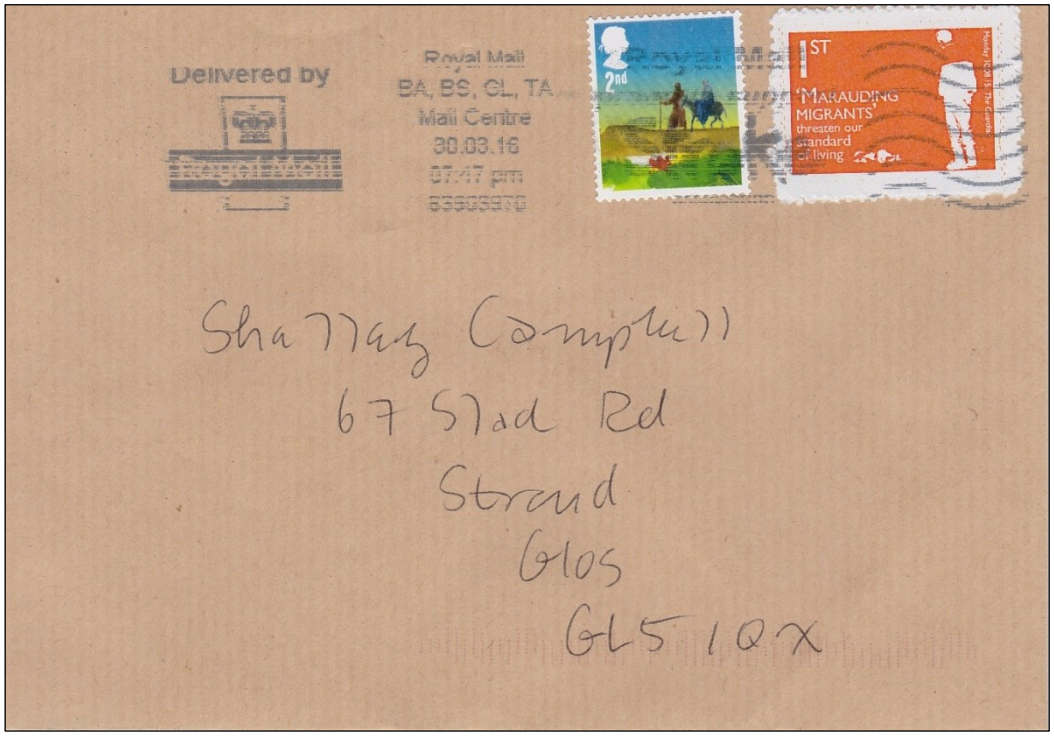
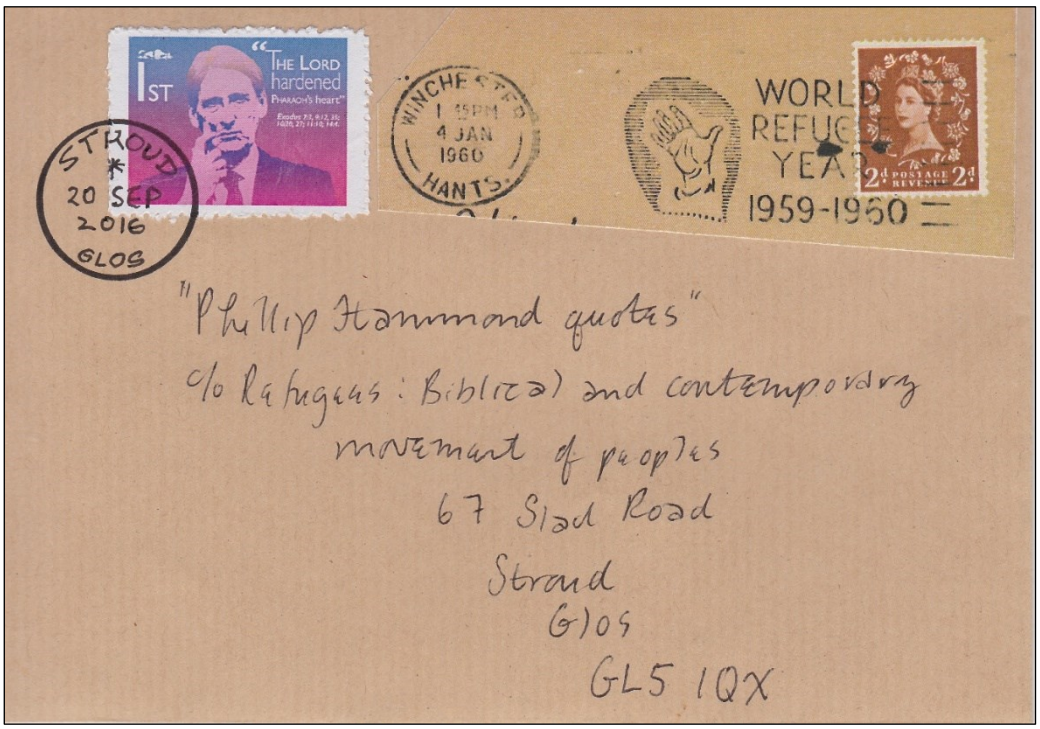


Illustration 1.1.H



Due to the miscommunication, the results were disappointing. However, I had several outcomes that did not originate due to the work's failure. First, its production assuaged my feelings of powerlessness regarding an issue about which I felt strongly. Second, I received numerous tags and the beauty of the returned envelopes was a pleasant surprise. Despite the error, it was a project that engaged the public in a participatory manner. Although I have the stamps, tags, and envelopes, they do not have monetary value and accordingly, possess a different status than an "art object". Instead they are evidence and documentation that the work was provisioned and completed. In keeping with my objective to disrupt the artist-gallery-audience ternion, then, I carried out the work without the ambience of a gallery or a viewing public. A third result, then, is a lesson. I learned something about the ambiguity of messages. This feature is more fully explored in Chapter Three where I use Frank Auerbach's assertion (1953) about the scope for interpretation through pared-down, fact-based text.

Although complexity is a fruitful condition for exploring text and image, it did not encompass the objectives I wanted to explore in the project. Later in the project I return to text and image, but still, I moved away from examining their potential for ambiguity. And the fourth is a success. The project was published in the second issue of a volume of works called *Catalogue of Failures* (Campbell, 2021a, pp. 19-22). Also it was printed in a postgraduate journal of social philosophy (Campbell, 2021b, pp. 359-360). While *Take-a-Tag* failed in one respect, it produced a legacy of success in others.

Once *Take-a-Tag* processed (exorcised) my reaction to the refugee crisis, I settled into making a body of associations between instances of biblical immigration, living with "the other", and their contemporary counterparts. In a journal article by the biblical scholar Katherine Southwood, the following idea is conveyed. According to Southwood (2014, pp. 102-131), Ruth's status in Bethlehem is transformed from being an adversarial foreigner, to becoming a valued member of the community. The shift occurs because Ruth's honourable actions exceed the threat caused by her "otherness". Southwood calls this shift in perception "ethnic translation".

At the same time as applying Southwood's notion of ethnic translation to practice, I was exploring the ideas of socio-political commentators who use Ruth's example to represent contemporary issues in the sphere of policy and immigration. Cynthia Ozick (1994, pp. 211-232) and Julia Kristeva (1993, pp. 23-24) refer to Ruth through the body of the receiving nation. For Bonnie Honig (2001, pp. 41-72), Ruth's status as a foreigner is considered on her terms: its impact on her. Honig explores how psychologically prepared Ruth can understandably be as an inhabitant of Bethlehem, racially "other", and Naomi's in-law. Each of the reviewers considers Ruth's story as a paradigm for the contemporary phenomenon of immigration and the provision of asylum for refugees.

While mindful of Ozick's, Kristeva's, and Honig's recommendations (provided by Ruth's example) for social cohesion between immigrants and their host nation, the means through which I shifted Southwood's idea of ethnic translation into a mode of practice was conceived as socially engaged artwork. I sought out a group of women who live in the UK but their nation of origin is elsewhere. After contacting different government bodies who provide an interface between immigrants and their UK community, I found the women's group Sahara Saheli at the Cheltenham West End Partnership (CWEP).[5] As I am an immigrant in the UK – a Canadian who married an Englishman – I did not feel I was being exploitative within a group amongst whom I would otherwise have felt an outsider.

As already mentioned, I was developing the idea that the making of art is an alibi for camaraderie, discussion, support, and storytelling. Once I built a foundation for a stitching circle by providing the materials for a sampler, I imagined a second project that entailed an old photograph of a family member together with an accompanying story. At the same time as taking this approach to fulfil ethnic translating, I was delving into the stories of the mothers and daughters in my family in order to work alongside the women in the stitching groups.

When I say, "mothers and daughters", I am referring to my grandmother, my mother, myself, and my daughter. Each of us is both a "mother" and a "daughter", except my daughter, who

[5] From this point forward, I will refer to the Cheltenham West End Partnership as CWEP.

was only ever a daughter. Either role is considerably different from the other. Throughout the dissertation, I refer to this group as the "mothers and daughters". In Chapter Four and the exhibition, the mothers and daughters of my family are the central feature of the work. But although an element at this initial stage, my family cluster is far less significant. I was more interested in other peoples' families.

These research objectives were being explored up until the Covid lockdown period. As the central thrust of the project consisted of a notion of participatory art, and isolation and quarantine were being enforced by law, I suspended my studies. Together with the limits imposed on the nation and, then, Faye's death, I retired this research. Despite a change of course, these pursuits entailed three years of enquiry and examination. Here, then, I will explain my work by first giving an account of Ruth and the relevant theories that supported the research practice I carried out with Sahara Saheli and SEW Sew.

Ruth

As a biblical account of two widows who are foreigners each in the other's nation – Moab for Naomi and Bethlehem for Ruth – each is alone until the two pool their resources during the lawless years of the Judges. All the menfolk of the family have died, and Naomi is alone with her daughters-in-law in Moab. She decides to return to Bethlehem and is accompanied by Ruth. Together the two women set up a home. Not without guile nor hardship, the story ends happily with a marriage, the birth of a son, security for both women set in the context of harvest-time.

Ruth. A prototype for immigration policy

At this stage in the research, I was focussing on contemporary outcomes of immigration, and accordingly, the social and political status of Naomi and Ruth as visitors in each other's country. At every fork in Ruth, one of the women is a stranger in the other's homeland. Within the scope of the narrative, Ruth is an outsider for the shortest time, as Naomi had already been a foreigner in Moab for twenty years. As an émigré in Judea, Ruth is conveyed in three different types of account by Cynthia Ozick (1994, pp. 211-232), Julia Kristeva (1991, pp. 69-76) (1993, pp. 23-24), and Bonnie Honig (2001, pp. 41-72). Although I did not pursue

this line of enquiry for my dissertation, it provided the basis for a set of works I committed to with the Sahara Saheli group.

To summarise this analysis, I will briefly describe the theoretical structure I had been considering. Ozick, Kristeva, and Honig explore Ruth as a text that provides guidance for current-day immigration policy. For Ozick, Ruth is an exemplary immigrant bringing gifts to the regime she is joining, while for Kristeva, Ruth is a reminder to her host community to overcome the impulse to reject "the stranger". In these instances, Ruth's resourceful and kind actions affirm the receiving nation both by supplementing its regime (Ozick, 1994) and by disturbing it (Kristeva, 1993). In Kristeva's evaluation, the differences presented by "the other" within a community or integral to an ancestral line prevent a kind of perfection that otherwise is pursued in the dominant or receiving regime: an insurable protection against ethnic purity.

Since Ruth the Moabite and by association, Moab, the presence of which represents the offence of incest, King David, Ruth's great-grandson, embeds the foreigner, and transgressor, at the core of his Israelite sovereignty (Gen. 19.33-38).[6] On Kristeva's reading, then, the stranger is part of the anointed crown and imparts an admonition, "that peace of mind will then never be … [David's] lot, but a constant conquest for welcoming and going beyond the other in oneself" (Kristeva, 1991, p. 76). In a contemporary context, the "other" is a visual inference to reject the pursuit of professed perfection or cultural homogeneity because by not doing so denies an inner development. In a psychoanalytic interpretation, the foreigner resides within us; if we "flee from or struggle against the foreigner, we are fighting our unconscious…" (Kristeva, 1991, p. 191).

Ozick's and Kristeva's readings reinforce imperialism by focusing on the receiving nation. Instead, Honig emphasises Ruth's and Orpah's choices. According to Honig, Orpah returns to Moab, while Ruth breaks with her past without the psychological resources to overcome and individuate. Honig recommends a process of transition and translation: remembering and reacquainting with the past.[7] Honig's version correlates with Arendt's strong

[6] See Chapter Two and Four for a fuller account of Moab, Lot, and Lot's daughter.
[7] cf. Gen. 19.26. Lot's wife turns into a pillar of salt for glancing back at the destruction of Sodom.

recommendation to deliver one's past at the cost of popularity, and Southwood's ethnic translation, a description of which follows.

Ruth. Ethnic translation

To make the research relevant to Ruth's story, the approach I espoused resembles Katherine Southwood's idea of "ethnic translation" (2014, pp. 102-131). For Southwood, ethnic translation is a more suitable social system of living with or being "an other" within a host nation than say assimilation or integration. In these cases, a newcomer is conditioned to their receiving country by practicing its customs and traditions. Instead, ethnic translation recognises the other without the constraints of race or ethnicity. For Southwood, recognition is determined by considering actions and behaviours and importantly, it relates to Boaz's response to Ruth.

When Boaz "recognises" Ruth for her devotion and loyalty towards Naomi he is noticing her actions and not her ethnicity. According to Southwood, ethnic translation is carried out when the other is seen or recognised by their actions and not by their physical presence nor the degree to which they absorb the customs and practices of their new environment. Despite being a "self-designated 'foreigner'" (Southwood, 2014, p. 121), Ruth is recognised and blessed by Boaz for her notable actions – he "recognises" her by her good deeds – and makes no allusions to recognising her by her ethnicity (2.6).[8] For Boaz, Ruth's ethnic differences are evident, but they cease to be relevant. The foreignness of the outsider, then, is apparent without the baggage of having to establish a set of manners to acknowledge, confront, or tame "otherness". For Southwood, this aspect of Ruth and Boaz's relationship characterises her definition of ethnic translation. The following is what's crucial for Southwood.

Ethnic translation consists of an acknowledgement of difference together with personal recognition, "Ruth is acknowledged and recognized as Ruth *alongside* being acknowledged

[8] The following citations refer to Ruth's ethnicity: 2.10, Ruth identifies herself as a foreigner to Boaz; 2.11-12, Boaz recognises and blesses Ruth for her notable actions and good deeds. From this point, all references to Ruth will be bracketed and cited by chapter and verse, i.e., (2.4). All other biblical references will include book, chapter, and verse.

as a Moabite" (Southwood, 2014, p. 113) (Author's emphasis). Together with this level of recognition, a more deeply perceived appreciation accepts an individual for their humanity which partially consists of their moral commitment. For Boaz, it is Ruth's behaviour towards Naomi that precedes her ethnicity; Ruth's decency is beyond her Moabite origins.

Ruth. Kindness

While I offer an alternative reading in Chapter Four, arguably, the defining feature of the narrative is Ruth's kindness. Similarly, at the core of ethnic translation, kindness is fundamental to its inception and the conditions through which it is implemented. In a socio-political sense, kindness is legislated into policies of care and asylum, and the preservation of dignity. In this sense, commentators are tempted to fully accept Goethe's summation of Ruth as "the loveliest little epic and idyllic entity" (Goethe quoted in Fischer, 2007, p. 140).[9]

In the text, the reader is reminded repeatedly of kindness: Ruth bestows kindness upon Naomi (1.8) and Boaz (3.10), in turn, Ruth's kindness is recognised by Boaz which returns a reciprocal kindness to Ruth (2.20). At this point, the story offers kindness as a natural and intuitive response to life's hardships and incongruities.

Also, I would like to stress that kindness is not an easily won, sentimental, or lavish expression. Although, Goethe has characterised Ruth as "the loveliest little epic", some contemporary scholars have deepened this summation. Without admonishing that reading, some reviewers emphasise Ruth's importance beyond its harvest-wholesome landscape. For example, Pádraig Ó Tuama (2018) recommended Ruth as a timely story to mark the 2021 centenary of the Irish Border. It was an event bound to incite mixed and powerful feelings, and Ó Tuama focussed on the Book of Ruth as a strong enough narrative to carry the weight of the celebration/lamentation as the anniversary drew nearer (2018).

For Ó Tuama, Ruth is a figure of courage for whom the means of overcoming adversity is through kindness. According to him, kindness is recast from a type of "friendliness" – and

[9] Fischer does not endorse the characterisation of Ruth as "the loveliest little epic and idyllic entity" and provides evidence for its presence amongst the legal as well as narrative texts. Ruth's importance beyond its hardship/happy-ending narrative is more fully explored in Chapters Two and Four.

without losing that reading – to a political position that possesses sufficient good sense to inform policy. It's worth quoting Ó Tuama (2018) at length:

> The serious practice of kindness is neither saccharine nor sweet. It is exhausting. It demands negotiation, compromise, confrontation, the declaration of hurt and the determination to find a way forward that hurts the fewest people. It requires the practice of hospitality in times of hostility. Kindness costs. Kindness doesn't cover over the past. It does however propose something for now that might make the future different (Ó Tuama, 2018).

Social making art practice, then, appears to fulfil aspects of ethnic translation augmented by Ó Tuama's declaration of the ground-level grit of kindness and hospitality to "the other". In the socialisation of being one within a group and moving towards a shared goal, for example a number of people stitching a quilt, racial differences are transcended through the act of creation. Community art projects, then, have the power to "precede ethnicity" where ethnic and racial (as well as gender, class, ability, age, etc.) differences are evident but cease to be relevant. Ethnic translation is undertaken when disparities are transformed by exercising shared commonalities, which far outweigh variant appearances and customs.

For me, the best working metaphor to convey unity amongst diversity is stitching, i.e., bringing together broken or disparate pieces. In one of its fundamental reasons for existing, handwork art expresses a fusion of single elements for a greater purpose. The practice of handcraft – weaving, knitting, sewing, mending, and even, cooking – are terms that are used to symbolise a synthesis of parts. While these crafts are "bringing together", the idea of the project is to produce a communal sense between people. It is an instance of hospitality – more fully explored in Chapter Two – and within this notion, there is the potential to improve the spheres of the social and political. The site of community, then, was "the thing" I was interested "to frame".

In order to transform ethnic translation and the spirit of hospitality into artistic practice, I wanted to carry out a project that encompassed an acknowledgement of differences while those distinctions ceased to be relevant. To bring about this ideal, I envisioned that the

possibilities of making a shared artwork could achieve this ambition. For a rehearsal before the main event, I introduced a “sketchbook” exercise. Keeping in mind the making as an excuse for creating ethnic translation, I offered a sewing kit to each participant with needles, cottons, and a piece of material for stitching into. I found a simple stitch that could be repeated simply or elaborately according to the experience or skill of the stitcher.

Sahara Saheli

I had conceived bringing about a kind of community solidarity by offering the Sahara Saheli ladies stitching projects that included individual kits with the necessary supplies, tools, and instructions. My first idea was to introduce an opportunity to express the importance of family and homeland by discussing photographs and using them as a basis for certain kinds of handwork. I had in mind a shared project wherein each participant made a stitched panel. The individual works would be hand-sewn together in order to create a wall hanging. Although I was focussing on a community of stitchers, as it turned out, they liked the idea of producing an artefact that could be displayed. Importantly, the managers of the venue where the meetings were held thought a work produced by the Sahara Saheli women would be a valuable contribution to the centre.

The members of the group were ladies ranging in ages from late 20s to, say, mid-70s. Some of the younger participants had little children and the older ones had grandchildren, all of whom were welcome at the meetings. The women were born outside the UK but now live permanently in the UK. They originated from a range of countries: Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Turkey, Italy, Morocco, Jamaica, Republic of Ireland, and Canada. Some British women attended to practice their inter-faith commitment.

In the first session, I distributed stitching kits to each of the women. Each pouch included a piece of material for stitching into, needles, and a braid of colourful cottons. The first meeting was bedlam; there was loud and fast chatter, and furious activity. In the manifesto written by CWEP, chief amongst the regulations is to speak English. When any of the women reverted to speaking in their first language, a chorus shouted out, “Speak English Please”.

After the session, the project was tucked back inside the zipped bag until I visited again. The second meeting was different. The women had not been consumed by “meeting and stitching” mania. Some had given the package to their grandchildren or forgotten it at home. Some of the women could not thread needles easily. Others had arthritic hands and found stitching painful. Regarding the stitched panel idea, the ladies did not want to talk about the past. They were even less interested in photographs. An appetite for stitching did not root itself in their daily lives; their enthusiasm had waned. It looked unlikely that stitching a shared project would arouse and hold the interest of the Sahara Saheli ladies.

Doggedly pursuing ethnic translation into research practice, I organised another handwork exercise to engage with the women. If a shared quilt-making project was unlikely, I sought a different type of activity in order to create an “artefact” which I translated as a conceptual idea of a quality of mood or environment. In the very least, stitching provided an alibi to spend time with the ladies. To learn from the mistakes of the first attempt, I removed the problem of having to use finer motor skills that are necessary in stitching. Instead, then, I introduced a weaving project which was more user-friendly. Again, I made kits with a cardboard loom, wools, and a large-eyed plastic needle for weaving. They did enjoy the making as a one-off, but consistent with the previous activity, in the second session, they were less interested. What could they use their weaved square for? A pot holder maybe? A mat for the teapot? For them, the exercise was pointless. As she sat drinking tea, one woman explained why she did not have her weaving kit, “I gave it to my granddaughter.”

The third handwork project was rug-ragging. This kit consisted of a square of material with a simple pattern I had designed, a chunky crochet hook to push the strips of material through the hessian, and bags of ripped-up-strips of old clothes. As it turned out, the scheduled day fell on a critical date during Ramadan and none of the Sahara Saheli group attended. Still it was a successful session, but not what I had envisioned. I was invited back to repeat the activity, but Covid restrictions were enforced and socially engaged artwork entered a hiatus that was never again taken up over the course of the research. In due course, I will explain the reason behind the decision to indefinitely postpone interpreting ethnic translation into research practice.

Final remarks

In theory, then, ethnic translation is a wholesome and moral betterment that potentially accommodates a power to build community and inform policy. Motivated by a plan exhorting a worthy set of morals expressed in a programme of social making art practice, I set out to do some serious and improving ethnic translation.

While carrying out this kind of ethical position in a mode of practice as research, a number of troubling issues became apparent. First of all, how is the community that is being treated to ethnic translation actually benefitting? No matter how worthy the cause, are they being used as a means to somebody else's end? Exploitation then is a grave reality to what is initially conceived as an exploration of a worthy proposal.

Second, there is another outlook that is deceptively innocent but is just as damaging as exploitation. It shares the same trajectory but this particular platitude stops halfway round as the opposite of exploitation. Sentimentality is as brutally self-interested despite a less aggressive appearance. Both manners are responsible for reducing "the other" to a stereotype, a kind of observation that diminishes whole populations of people through the aperture of a predetermined "gaze", for example, "male gaze" (Mulvey, 1975, pp. 6-18) and "western gaze" (Said, 1978).

Finally, there is a third difficulty with regard to practicing a kind of ethically conceived principle such as ethnic translation. Invigorated by its worthiness, I had been stubbornly attached to the reading without immediately recognising its shortcomings in practice, or at least my particular version of interpreting its theory and putting it into action. I had adopted the teaching as dogma.

This type of encroachment is reminiscent of the symbol of clutching hold of the teaching in an unbending or, say, doctrinal manner. In this instance – and apart from feeling confident about engaging with a "worthwhile moral action" – the ethical intention itself was being exploited. As a kind of missionary do-gooding, the context of the action had been irrelevant and the carrying out of its requirements reached a pitch of non-reflective zealousness. It simply was not working.

Although I did not pursue this line of enquiry, I still have the documentation. Accordingly, together with the research material, there is the potential to address aesthetic discourse from the following starting point. In a different context, then, exploitation (Levinson, 1998) and sentimentality (Eaton, 2008, pp. 1-9; Markowitz, 1992, pp. 307-316; Solomon, 1990, pp. 304-323; Eaton, 1989, pp. 269-282) can be more fully explored.

Although parts of these projects were abandoned, some I carried forward to my final presentation of works. The most radical outcome was the departure from socially engaged artwork. Apart from *Take-a-Tag* which for me satisfied a requisite for socially engaged artmaking, I was unable to locate and frame the ambience I had initially envisioned. One of my objectives is to explore and augment the notion of an object. But in my pursuit of an object without a plastic form, the results were incomplete, fragmented, and even if I had wanted to focus on aesthetically derived pieces of stitchwork, I did not stoke enough enthusiasm to bring this to fruition.

In contrast, the SEW Sew group is a strong stitching circle. There is joyful participation, camaraderie, family images and stories, friendly disagreements, support, learning, but regarding the experience of the movement of people or being an “other” within a host nation, the connection was weak. At the same time, while the Socially Engaged Women aspect of our set is apparent – each of the stitchers is a politically motivated commentator – their works correspond to social disparities: refugees, climate change, cost-of-living crisis, etc. In stitching works, they represent elements of our social and political culture. In other words, the bottom line of the work is an aesthetically pleasing artefact that conveys a socio-political dispute. Consequently, the works maintain a polarised subject/object divide, and on that account, the fourth objective (subject/object unity) of my research was unrepresented.

For SEW Sew, the artwork-object is the protest, and the action is not. As an outcome, then, the group works towards having a show. In collaborative projects, there are pieces we have all had a hand in creating. For example, during the Covid months, we started a wall-hanging that was sent through the post to each of the SEW Sew sewers. But of course in keeping with the objectives of the research, a concluding presentation is not its aim. Although the

objectives of SEW Sew conflicted with my research question, the work of the group was instrumental as a fundamental part of the *Travelling Boxes* project. The SEW Sew stitchers figure prominently in Chapter Two.

As I was refining how to advance the research I had up until then undertaken, the pandemic descended upon the nation. Then, Faye died. When I could continue, I returned perfunctorily to research practice. To live with loss, the analogy of stitch-by-stitch and little steps is the idea behind Chapter Two. As both characters portray heroic qualities, I compare Ruth to Aeneas. Through patient progress by degrees, each hero displays remarkable advancement. Accordingly, I draw a correspondence between slow, integer-by-integer advancement to stitchwork. Without thinking about direction, objectives, or aims, then, I simply picked up a needle and started. The practical work consists of a non-gallery sewing project called *Travelling Boxes* that is "exhibited" in the precedent and movement of the postal service.

In Chapter Three, I expand on Tod Linafelt's idea of Ruth's and Naomi's famous speeches as verse (1.16-17 and 1.20-21) (Linafelt, 2010). Linafelt uses the NRSV version wherein each utterance is treated as poetry in a formalised construction. According to Linafelt, by aestheticisng these declarations, the reader is treated to a personal insight of each woman's thoughts and feelings. It is a rare event in the tone of Old Testament story-telling. Usually in biblical narrative, the reader is given bare episodic facts without detail or emotion (Auerbach, 1953). As a consequence, its text is light on subtleties but is fruitful for interpretation. I integrate Linafelt's reading of Ruth through Auerbach with the idea of formalising the deeply personal into a universally appreciated art object. Finally, then, the origins of Chapter Four begin with an essay by Mieke Bal about intertextual references within the text of Ruth. As *mise en abyme* – text within a text – Bal discusses the presence of Old Testament laws concerning family and property as a kind of watermark within the development of the plot in Ruth.

Briefly, I will describe the undergirding of the arc of the chapters taking into account its presence within the practical research. In the introductions of the chapters I convey a more

nuanced account of the correspondences between the Book of Ruth, the art theory according to my practice, and the art production it motivates.

The progression of the chapters corresponds to the stages through which I am learning to live with my daughter's absence when she took her life in October 2020. As I have already established, in order to continue to research, the focus shifted from developing strategies of carrying out socially engaged artwork to conveying a process of living with loss through self-generated works. At first glance, it seemed that the work I had undertaken was discarded for a clean slate. Especially regarding the decision to retreat from pursuing a methodology of art production produced through social engagement, in this sense alone, I did make a radical break from the earlier work. But on the other hand, I picked up and developed research methods that I had already started that equally represented my lifelong approach as a maker.

The overarching programme, then, follows a range of the changing patterns of grief. From starting small and orderly, I fell into despair. At this lowest ebb, I floundered for some time trying to express the most personal pain I could manage. Although I began the preparation for a fully realised exhibition strategy, the emotional changes I was subject to, accordingly, uprooted those plans. I discarded the project and again, the work I had been advancing towards was dismissed. In the first instance, I wanted to portray my daughter. I could only think about her and on this account, I looked through photographs of her, poetry she had written, artworks she had produced, and journal entries of sketches and quotes she aspired towards. By representing Faye over and over again, I kept her close. Later, the photographs afforded me another gateway through which I explored my final project.

I accumulated a number of sewn panels and used them "to quilt" boxes. I wanted to send the boxes to our friends and relations who live far away. In advance, I sent to the participants the panels of her image into which I had been sewing. When it arrived later, they had an opportunity to stitch their work onto the quilted box, and then, they were invited to post it back to me. The work is called *Travelling Boxes*, and through the slow-

moving act of stitching, it represented the step-by-step progress and hardships of Ruth and Virgil's Aeneas.

In Chapter Two, I briefly consider Aeneas's challenges controlled by the Olympian matriarch, Juno, and the trials of Ruth. In the Aeneid, the Fates declare that the founding father of Rome is the Trojan hero Aeneas. As an enemy of Troy and the champion of the spurned Carthaginian queen, Dido, Juno is unrelenting in her anger towards Aeneas, the agent of Dido's distress. While Ruth is not waging against an embittered deity, she endures a number of trials, for example, the context of her story during the era of the Judges, working in the fields, and gender, racial, and class-oriented prejudice (Shepherd, 2018; Grossman, 2007; Shepherd, 2001; Fischer, 1999; Exum, 1996, Carasik, 1995; Fewell and Gunn, 1988). And second, then, despite each hero's setbacks, both achieve notable results and in Ruth's case, she makes a notable contribution to the laws of Leviticus and Deuteronomy (Fischer, 2007).

While the *Travelling Boxes* project portrays the act of stitching as a slow-progress activity through the context of grieving, also it corresponds to the research objectives. By being "shown" through the movement of the postal service and in the home environment of the contributors, the work expresses a non-gallery aesthetic. Following, as "the object" of the work was each participant's experience of thinking about Faye and how they could use stitching materials that represented her, the work is ephemeral. Although each box is "an artefact", at the same time, I was "framing" the slow-moving, stitch-by-stitch activity as an analogy of grief.

From *Travelling Boxes*, I set to work on my exhibition. As a natural progression from the sewn postcard-sized panels of images of Faye, I kept the idea of small works but decided against a stitching project. Following on, then, I worked out a proposal for printing hundreds of prayer flags to be suspended from the trees at Park Campus, University of Gloucestershire. I wanted to use Faye's image together with fragments of her poetry pressed onto dyed fabric.

But as I progressed with the theoretical aspect of the research, it was leading me away from the practice I had proposed. Through Linafelt, I started to research the personal as the key

component of the universal (Chapter Three), and although the prayer flags were about and for Faye, they did not express the developing progress of my feelings of loss. At this point, I had sunk into a level of grief that up until then, I had not experienced. In a fundamental way, the prayer flags did not represent the scope of emotion I was encountering. Even at this late stage in the progress of my temporal plan and pressed for time, I abandoned the prayer flag project.

While I was overwhelmed by this newly found grief, I awkwardly tried to express my experience validated by the idea of the personal being the point of origin for art production. As a principle for utilising the deeply personal as material for universally enjoyed works of art, my experience could not be adequately formalised. Without an inviting "shape" for others to appreciate as recognisable perceptions of their own challenges, my expressions were far too personal, far too sentimental, and far too raw. Of course, works are always personal, sentimental, and raw, but following Friedrich Nietzsche's endorsement of the emotional immersion of the maker together with their technical ability, an artist creates a sleeve of "deception" in order for a viewer to recognise themself in the work (Nietzsche, 1967, pp. 153-154; Freud, 1974, pp. 423-424). The "trick" is achieved through the skill of the maker; their ability as a technician – removing what is too personal – invites a viewer to identify themself in the work. An artist makes a work about a deeply experienced feeling or event, but their ability as a technician invites a viewer to self-recognise and participate through the "object's" universality. About a Sophie Calle work, a commentator imparts, "… it starts off with a purely private incident but eventually reaches common ground…" (Brøns, 2009, p. 158). Chapter Three, then, addresses the artistic process within this idea.

As I attempted to take into account Linafelt's attention to verse-form regarding the famous utterances of Ruth and Naomi, and Auerbach's description of pared-down Old Testament narrative, I wrote poetry – a skill I do not possess – to express my feelings. Still clutching onto the idea of prayer flags, I envisioned the words scattered through the air by windswept flags. In Chapter Three, I show my unsuccessful attempts. Although I was unable to interpret my personal expression through verse, the project leaped forward by locating the source of a new project: the mind of the maker.

From the gravity of the personal and the efforts I undertook to formalise those insights, and following on from trying my hand at poetry, I selected an approach that unbeknownst to me at the time picked up some undeveloped research directions from before Faye died. I built on the idea of family stories, family photographs, and family unity. Suddenly for me, the past seemed to contain the knowledge that was necessary to restore balance in the present and encouragement for the future. Through a process of one work leading to the next, I synthesised my memories of the mothers and daughters, the Book of Ruth, and the theory that provided the scaffold for the process (Chapter Four).

As I started to consider family stories, I kept in mind Auerbach's description of Old Testament paucity of detail and its resulting richness for interpretive potential. As a contemporary example of this style, I examine Joan Didion's fact-driven, unadorned voice in her essay about the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco in 1967. While she had a clear message, she conveyed her meaning in a straight-forward, pared-down piece of writing that in the end was interpreted in ways that she had not intended. Although she was disappointed by this outcome, I argue the essay has restorative powers for the present and possesses the potential to act as a precursor for eras yet to come.

Up until then, I had found fruitful ways to apply aspects of Ruth to relevant contemporary social and cultural events. The Covid pandemic had struck our nation and every citizen was experiencing their own sense of loss either of a loved one, working life, or status quo: education, friendships, leisure or practicalities such as shopping or even, walking the dog, "don't pat a dog" the media screamed at one point. For each of us during 2020 to 2022, we underwent individual feelings of loss.

As a maker addressing my personal experience of loss in the hiatus of dismissing one project and looking for the next, I unhooked my research objectives and allowed my intuition to lead the process. As I had been riffling through photographs, I started to see patterns emerging – pictures of the mothers and daughters at the same age (different eras), photos with dogs, dolls, and horses, etc. – and then I started remembering the stories incited by the images. Accompanied by Mieke Bal's and Robert Fisch's ideas about the allusions in Ruth, I wondered if the short story mythology of family folklore corresponded to my current

feelings of loss. Following this insight, Walter Benjamin's historical materialism provided me with the confidence to pursue this line of enquiry.

While Bal and Fisch locate a subtext in Ruth through the allusions of the Old Testament matriarchs, Walter Benjamin establishes historical accounts through the forgotten, overlooked, and mundane remnants of the past. By using these theoretical footings, I cascaded the past into the present and brought the mothers and daughters into my timeline. The stories I remembered, then, provided me with a "medium" through which I could understand my extant circumstances and feelings of loss.

As I started to handle the text of Ruth as a non-linear medium, I used family myth as a means of enquiry to examine my experience of loss. By working with memories, most of which were my mother's – thus second-/third-hand – I wondered about their accuracy and their efficacy for relating anything useful. Benjamin describes memories as being unavailable and not simply waiting in the wings for a roll call. They are not easily accessible, and added to this condition, they are interpreted through present-tense nostalgia. Accordingly, memories are "hard won". To illustrate this feature of exploring an apparently inaccessible past in order to find relevant insight, I convey a story told by Laurie Anderson from her film *Heart of a Dog*.

As I started to manipulate the text of Ruth, I treated the family stories I had started to write to the same conditions. In a similar way as *Take-a-Tag*, I juxtaposed the texts of these sources and the photographs that were guiding me through the different phases of the process. I produced a method whereby I "portrayed" loss through my treatment of the text: the removal of narrative, meaning, words, even the font until only a residue of the story prevailed as simple planes of colour, shapes. *By representing loss and thereby removing the structures through which we understand the written word, I analogised the dismissal of the art/viewer/gallery artworld skeleton*. With the "leftovers" – the "gleaned" shapes of colour – I made an archivable artist's book, albeit "an object". Although it breaches the fourth objective of my proposal, still, it leaves a surviving artefact to represent the scientific process of the research work. And during the process, I learned valuable print- and book-making techniques.

At the commencement of this doctoral project, the idea at its core was to explore apparent contrasting elements of “subject” and “object”. While I was progressing, developing, and building arguments, I overlooked the significance of the “subject” and “object” field of study. In Chapter Two, I theoretically examined the gulf between the two concluding that the gap is not as wide or distinct as it initially seems. At the time, my practice did not consciously envelope this idea. But using my progress through the abyss of grief, and by illustrating the enigma of opposites as the composition of the same or similar material, I conclude that under certain conditions there exists little if any difference between “subject” and “object”.

Here, the aforementioned “certain conditions” that are critical for this non-dual provision are brought about by a composite between what is deeply personal and what is then capable of being universal. The insight extracted from this procedure has been brought about through an art-related correspondence that is both a remarkable manifestation but, at the same time, an ordinary event that each of us experiences in our daily lives whether or not we register its significance. When artists metamorphose “subject” into “object” by economising and formalising the material, viewers appreciate its composition because both a universal presence and an individual’s singular manifest are contained within it. It touches “common ground”.

Through the work of Adrian Piper, both as an artist and a philosopher, I examined her reading of Kant’s epistemology a component of which claims that for experience to occur a sensory intuition must be subsumed under an adequate concept in order to “bring forth” the faculty of understanding (Kant, 1998, A50/B74). In Piper’s *Catalysis* series, she performs incongruous spectacles in various public spaces. Piper claims that the spectators do not possess a relevant concept and in turn, they automatically locate her aberrations under cognitive categories already within the scope of their conceptual archive, for example, “xenophobia”. I consider Piper’s art/philosophical approach in my vista of living with loss. In Kant’s taxonomy, sensible intuition without an adequate concept is “blind” (Kant, 1998, A51/B76). Never having experienced this type of adversity, I could not correspond my daughter’s death to any other lifetime condition; grief is a kind of loss or inertia, blindness, say.

As she produces a number of anomalous public performances, Piper removes the boundary between subject and object and finally as the artist, she experiences moments when she embodies concurrently each of the polarities. As I removed meaning from the narrative and at the same time, formalised the medium (text), I encountered a similar result. By choosing preferences, highlighting text, removing meaning, then reinserting it, I was unable to discern the difference between my subjective input and the formal demands of making an object. For the production of an artwork, this process is arguably ordinary. In themselves, artworks are defined by their ability to embody in the same instant this set of polarities. What is unusual here is the provision of evidence as a kind of meta-work about this unique feature of the production of art.

After my daughter died, I grieved her absence by embarking on a series of experiences for which there was a lamentable lack of preparation. None of us can rehearse losing a loved one. All of us experience loss, but one views the adversity through one's own monocle. In this, each of us is the same. As I represent in practice the shared identity of "subject" and "object", at the same time, I am aspiring towards uniting the unfathomable and broken reality of living with loss.

CHAPTER TWO. The heroism of Ruth

Introduction

Up until now, my practice had incorporated methods such as drawing, printing, and stitching within a socially engaged methodology bristling at the edges of artworld convention. A core principle at the heart of the project is an examination of what an "art object" consists, and the aim is to demonstrate that an "art object" can be an experience, a participatory event, and/or a collaboration outside the bounds of galleries and museums. The type of artefact, then, we conventionally visit at an exhibition is not present in the work I produce. Instead, my output is merely a kind of sketchbook review. Nothing is finished – always "a work in progress" – and typically, the artefacts I display are not the thing you are looking at.[10]

To break down the inscrutability of this declaration, I will put it this way. The objects I produce are ephemeral and temporal, and the display-objects that bear witness to this kind of expression – the things I conventionally show – are traces of the artwork I have had a hand in bringing about. If you are looking at a piece I have made, the art is spent; it has vanished. Instead, you are perceiving a piece of evidence from an archive. In this project, the works are crafted instances of living with grief, seeking solace in the midst of unfathomable loss, joining with others who are similarly suffering, and building a network of friends and family who are joined in remembrance. The artwork consists of movement; by living, seeking, joining, and building, the work is performed, and thereby, "consumed in the very act of its birth" (Leonardo quoted in Benjamin, 1976, p. 249).

In this kind of instance, another way of expressing or describing the created object is to ask the question: What is being framed? Is the artist drawing attention to process or a sensible object? And in extreme breaches of the aesthetic realm cascading into the ethical, can the frame ever be broken? These are theoretical questions that tell us something about how philosophers of art and aestheticians go about making art generally – and socially engaged art specifically – respectable philosophically.[11]

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[10] For work that represents something other than what is perceived, see, for example, the work of René Magritte. (Foucault, 1983). See also (Porter, 1986, pp. 210-219).

[11] Chapter Three explores these ideas more fully. Vid Simoniti (2018b, p. 76) explores the query, "Can … socially engaged artworks as good art, be made philosophically respectable?". Citing Marcel Duchamp and the origin of unassisted readymades in 1914 and the theoretical response some fifty years later by Arthur Danto

With regards to Ruth's step-by-step processional approach of slow and steady movement to overcome her difficulties, I am making a correspondence with Virgil's Aeneas who has been dealt the responsibility of founding Rome. Added to Aeneas's task at every corner, Juno, the wrathful goddess, dogs every move he makes. For both heroes, an unannounced and challenging life event is delivered by the enigmatic hands of: God (for an Israelite), the gods (for a Moabite), or the Fates (for Aeneas and Juno). Whomever is the author of the conditions of one's adversity, there is no window of opportunity for revision; neither argument, persuasion, bribery, nor threat will make a bit of difference. The sorrowful incident is non-negotiable.

Although these inexpressible hardships cannot be reversed, each of the two characters possesses natural resources. Without misfortune, the reserve may have lain dormant. For Ruth and Aeneas, reverence, devotion, and action are hewn to address their trials one-by-one. At the outset, though, I want to dismiss high-minded, Freudian (Freud, 1986) super-ego martyrdom in either Ruth or Aeneas.[12] The Ancients (Aristotle, 1996) were careful about the portrayal of their heroes.[13]

Putting into practice the acceptance of the non-negotiable adversity of loss, I could only move in tiny increments. In order to even consider recovery in concert with practice, the only activity with which I could engage was stitching. As a process of recovering unity, mending was a literal and metaphorical restorative. The two works I proposed during this period are *Travelling Boxes* and *Prayer Flag Pastoral*. Although I withdrew the prayer flag project before its realisation, it was written as the culmination of the Book of Ruth research.

In this chapter, first, I convey the theoretical girth of the practice. In this section, I go into more depth of the similarity between Ruth and Aeneas as heroes. Following, I argue the

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(1964, pp. 571-584) and George Dickie (1974), Jason Gaiger (2009, p. 44) points out the lull between art production and philosophy's seal of "respectability".

[12] Id, ego, and super-ego are three concepts in Freud's psychoanalytic theory.

[13] Heroes are noble, but imperfect and victims of occurrences that come about through a reversal of fortune. These circumstances are never motivated by wickedness, but usually an error of judgement or in character. Heroes and heroines possess flaws; readers need to feel connection with a fellow human, not unworthiness beside a member of the heavenly host.

extent to which Ruth undergoes significant trials. But through goodwill and guile, she manages to prevail in what appears in the first reading to be a good-luck story without too much trouble. The premise of the various social obstructions in Ruth's vista is an important feature because I have set it up as a counterpart to my experience of bereavement. Second, after a description of the theoretical underpinnings, I offer a full account of my practice throughout the initial stage of loss. I could only manage the simplest of tasks and in that frame, I was only able to manage stitching. As step-by-step movements, I imply connections between Ruth's and Aeneas's attitudes to the duties they were bearing and my small step progressions in the activity of stitching.

Heroes. Aeneas and Ruth

As I am framing the incremental process of stitching and stamping flags, Freud defines a similar kind of slow, steady, and sometimes sideways procedure in psychoanalysis. To illustrate this idea, Freud makes a connection between an utterance made by Juno in *The Aeneid* and the retrieval of buried information from other domains of consciousness. In Juno's famous "*Acheronta movebo*" quote, Freud compares the idea of moving beyond restrictions by retrieving insight that for unknown reasons have become unavailable. In order to explain why I chose Aeneas's story to compare to Ruth's, I offer a brief summary of its relevant features. Juno's well-known utterance galvanises the idea of progress by degrees against considerable constraints. In *The Aeneid*, both Juno and Aeneas move in sets of circumstances that have been written by higher authorities. Even goddesses cannot escape decisions made by the Fates. Although the grudging Juno is a mischief-maker, and Aeneas is a hero moving towards establishing the dynasty he is destined to build, both characters accept and address their limitations. For his fortitude to carry out a mission exceeding its apparent difficulties, I am making a comparison between Aeneas's progress and Ruth's part in correcting trespasses in the House of Israel (Fisch, 1982, pp. 429-435; Bal, 2001, 62-63) while confronting the immediate difficulties of social and cultural restraints imposed on foreign women during the era of Judges. And while the epic is an integral installation in western literature, nonetheless, I am applying its features to the continuing progression of living with loss.

Freud introduces *The Interpretation of Dreams* with an epigraph: *Flectere si nequeo superos, Acheronta movebo* (Freud, 1976a, p. 31). Although translations differ, the main gist of the line reads: If I cannot bend the will of Heaven, I shall move the powers of Hell.[14] Freud puts it as follows, "this line of Virgil … is intended to picture the efforts of the repressed instinctual impulses" (Freud, 1976a, p. 769). Freud interprets Juno's expression as a means through which the unconscious can be momentarily accessed through everyday but profound resources. In this case, the gateway, or "royal road" in Freud's taxonomy, is the interpretation of dreams (Freud, 1983). Taking into account the slow-moving process of foraging within different spheres of consciousness, Freud is careful not to claim immediate results and satisfaction: "Only a small step, no doubt; but a beginning" (Freud, 1976a, p. 769).

Here, then, is another instance of the removal, or at least an understanding, of an apparently invincible opponent by applying small-scale but steady pressure. Each hero changes the status quo of their misfortunes by undertaking a pragmatic series of progressions. Aeneas founds Rome and Ruth establishes the dynasty of King David. Through resolute and ceaseless action, apparent obstructions are addressed and surpassed.

In a toned-down nomenclature from founding empires to living with grief, my practice is a kind of *Acheronta movebo* pronouncement. I cannot bend the ear of a heavenly presence to reverse my grief or to return my daughter; in a world of numerous options, I have only one: accepting Faye's absence. In order to begin the process, stitching "postcards" of Faye's image, attaching them to the quilted boxes, exhibiting the artefact through the post, "travelling" figuratively from household to household, and collaborating with a network of friends and family was my first foray of living with the loss of my daughter. The production line creation of prayer flags, then, amasses another group of activities that seeks to attain a further level of acknowledgement and acceptance of this abysmal reality.

First, then, I provide a brief summation of Aeneas's challenges, chief amongst those is Juno's interference. I offer an alternative reading of Juno. As an agitator, Juno is meddlesome, but

[14] *Acheronta* refers to the Acheron, the river across which the dead travel in order to enter the Underworld.

as I indicate, she is acting against the Fates. Although prophetic, decisions made by the Fates are inflexible. In a sense, then, the Fates can be analogised as "the establishment" of antiquity: an institution against which it is impossible for a lone person, or goddess, to have any kind of influence. Second, I offer a detailed account of the trials of Ruth, which are as follows: danger in the fields, the silences of Naomi, intrigue in the threshing-floor scene, and the context of the story within the age of Judges.

The Trojan Hero, Aeneas

Virgil's epic poem, *The Aeneid*, commences after the Trojan defeat and the inhabitants of Troy are dispersed. From the Trojan battlefield, Aeneas, a counterpart to Greek Odysseus, is a warrior known for conscientious *pietas*.[15] For the homeless Trojans, the Oracle has decreed that the great Roman civilisation will be founded by Aeneas in Italy. Despite his destiny having been already cast, for many reasons, his progress is repeatedly beleaguered by the wrath of Juno.[16] In the origin of Rome, Aeneas's role is foretold and cannot be revoked, and even celestial Juno cannot rewrite a declaration written by the Fates.

Without the usual decoration brandished by classical heroes, Aeneas accepts this role with a sense of duty. As a devotee of the gods and father-figure to his people, Aeneas adopts an attitude of service for the mission he has been chosen to perform. While Juno and Dido are full of passion, Aeneas's notable attributes are reverence towards the gods, benevolence towards his followers, and endurance regarding the cosmic attacks whipped up by the Queen of Heaven.

[15] *Pietas* represents rigorous mastery over the passions, and expressed through devotion to higher powers, duty to one's calling, and standing as a figure of leadership for family, and in Aeneas's case, his followers.
[16] In the Iliad, the gods and goddesses are divided by their loyalties to either the Greeks or Trojans. In the Judgement of Paris – the event that establishes the conditions that bring about the Trojan War – there is a contest to choose the fairest of the goddesses, Venus, Juno, or Minerva (Aphrodite, Hera, and Athena in the Greek canon), upon whom a golden apple will be awarded. Paris chooses Venus because as a bribe, she promises Helen, and accordingly, Juno feels snubbed. At the outset, then, Juno's sympathies lie with the Greeks. Another contributing cause of Juno's malice is the fate of Carthage and its Queen, Dido. Juno loves Carthage, and its destruction and Dido's demise are destined to be carried out by the founders of Rome. When Juno discovers that the prophesy declares Aeneas Rome's founding father, it stokes her wrath against him even further. Added to these grievances, when Juno's daughter (Hebe) is replaced as cup-bearer to the gods by Ganymede, a Trojan youth favoured by Jupiter for his beauty, Juno's jealousy is ignited and her hatred for the Trojans deepens. "… [T]he Queen of Heaven [Juno] sustained such outrage … she forced a man famed for his true-heartedness [Aeneas] … to face so many trials. It is hard to believe Gods in Heaven capable of such rancour" (Virgil, 1956, p. 17).

In Book Seven after spying Aeneas's good fortune as he is welcomed by King Latinus at Latium (the future site of Rome), Juno multiplies her efforts to thwart the relationships being built between the Latins and the Trojans. She makes the remarkable utterance: *Flectere si nequeo superos, Acheronta movebo* (Virgil, 1956, p. 312). Powerless against the providence of Rome's creation, Juno settles for making the most awkward kind of mischief she is allowed: causing delay and prolonging the process (Virgil, 1956, pp. 314-315).

Here, then, there is pause for analysis. While I am modelling Aeneas's advancement by stages for settling Rome, at the same time, I am defending his progress against the wrath of the Juno, who uses jiggery-pokery to upset an immovable contrivance – the will of the Fates – that cannot be destabilised. As it turns out, it is a type of irony that Juno's agitation against Aeneas ensures his rise in status rather than decline.

While analogising Aeneas's heroic attitude towards his duty, I raise Juno's mantle as an agitator. As I labour against the dominant procedure for making and exhibiting work, I know I will not make a dent in its machinery. At best, I can utilise its powers to nip at its heels by offering alternative procedures for making and exhibiting. On the other hand, by accepting the work I produce, the structure of the artist-viewer-gallery precedent is strengthened. Although the content and methodology of the output aims to upset artworld tenets, the object I end up "framing" is the flexibility, inclusiveness, and democracy of the establishment. In this way, I am indicating how its perimeters are broader and its purpose deeper than assumed, the upshot of which, I am endorsing the institution up until now I had been determined to oppose.[17]

Still, unrelenting agitation provides a necessary component of the polity. From the introduction, I mentioned Kristeva's idea of striving against a kind of perfection or homogeneity that thwarts an "otherness" – the stranger within – that each of us possesses.

[17] The same idea is present in the role of the Saturnalia in ancient Rome. Similarly, see also commentators who consider political humour as breaking free of the constraints of the status quo and once the joke has passed, convention settles back more contentedly into the very restrictions that had been ridiculed (Spencer, 1911; Freud, 1976b; Morreal, 1983, pp. 20-37. Cf. Bergson, 2003, who sees laughter and humour as opportunities for correction).

For Kristeva, Ruth's presence in the bloodline of David is a reminder to the House of Israel that "…sovereignty opens up – through the foreignness that founds it – to the dynamics of a constant, inquisitive, and hospitable questioning eager for the other and for the self of the other" (Kristeva, 1991, p. 75). By doing so, the state takes into account "inner development" (Bhabha, 1994, pp. 132-144). While citizens are political, also they are social and psychological and good policy accommodates these aspects.

In summary, then, when challenges take on proportions that are beyond our regular capacities, there is a notion that misfortune on this scale cannot be fathomed in any knowable way. In order to describe and then explore in my practice this kind of affliction, I have adopted the analogy of the removal of a large and powerful obstruction, one that cannot be approached through any normal means, at the hands of small and continual gestures of action. By taking into account Aeneas's task-by-task progress to found Rome, Ruth's devotion to Naomi through which the dynasty of King David is created, Adrian Piper's calling card distribution as a means of bringing awareness of racist microaggressions, and Freud's excavation of the unconscious through everyday liminal access points such as dreams and jokes (Freud, 1983), I am addressing the omnipotent object of grief through the practice of small gestures. Without plumbing the depths of the Acheron, I am drawing a parallel between "small and continual action" and "moving hell".

The Book of Ruth. Ruth the Moabitess

Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn (Keats, 1819)

In this section, I will present the hardships, struggles, and ambivalence Ruth endures as she puts into practice the principles she conveys in her remarkable declaration of devotion to Naomi (1.16-17). She moves steadily from an impoverished status of being a childless foreign widow to being a member of a family, community, and nation. In order to account for the two corresponding parallels in research practice – stitch-by-stitch advancement and living with loss – I will go into some detail of Ruth's challenges. The first is to illustrate slow and gradual progression; and to complement this measured pace, the second is to bring into focus the extent to which non-reflective and ingrained institutional policy can be addressed,

updated, and made more suitable to the needs of those it represents. Thus in Ruth, the first refers to the ardent determination of the hero, and the second to the laws of the land, those to which Ruth commits when she pledges to Naomi, “Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.” (1.16) This second point refers to the hard-wired versions of the Levirate Law and the law of Redemption. Unbeknownst to Ruth, her kindness to Naomi modifies entrenched laws and the changes are brought about through the task-by-task set of trials she undertakes.

The Book of Ruth is a four-chapter Hebrew Bible/Old Testament story. Short, pastoral, and happily ending in the birth of a son, at first glance the book lacks the eventful thrust of drama – “the sublime, tragic, and problematic” (Auerbach, 1953, p. 9) – we usually associate with the House of Israel. Taking this into account, first, I compare the Trojan hero Aeneas to Ruth, and second, I interpret the Book of Ruth as a meaningful text which provides an ancestral bridge between the Genesis family and the Davidic covenant. As both Aeneas and Ruth encounter a set of trials and to explore this link between the two, third, then, I examine some of the instances when Ruth brazens out significant gender, class, and racial otherness.

Importantly, fourth, I relate the high-minded laws of Levirate Marriage and Redemption in Deuteronomy to their manifest practice in everyday life in the Book of Ruth. With regard to the task-by-task dutiful progressions of Aeneas on behalf of his followers and Ruth with respect to the devotional selflessness with which she fastens onto Naomi, the institution of small deeds has a talent for calling attention to and disabling great adversity.

Keeping this motif in mind, I am translating the notion of tiny acts shouldering great obstacles into the conditions I have been exploring in *Travelling Boxes* and *Prayer Flag Pastoral*.

Arising out of considerable loss, the first resemblance that Aeneas and Ruth share is their agency in the creation of golden dynasties: for Aeneas, it is the founding of Rome, and for Ruth, it is her well-known selflessness that resides at the hearth of King David’s lineage.

Corresponding to epic poems, Ruth's story begins in the middle. For undisclosed reasons, a family is devastated by the deaths of its menfolk, at which point, alone with two childless daughters-in-law, the mother of the household decides to leave her adopted home and return to her birthplace.

In the context of "the days when the judges ruled" (1.1), the reader is given a brief account of the history predating Naomi's decision to return to Bethlehem (1.1-6). During a famine, a Judean man, Elimelech, moves his wife, Naomi, and their two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, from Bethlehem and to Moab.

On Elimelech's part, it is an odd decision, as "the Moabites are among the Torah's classic Others". (Cohn, 2014, p. 165). Moab, a place where "Judeans ought to have no business". (Sasson, 1989, p. 321). Since the refusal to offer provisions was demonstrated towards the Israelites by the Moabites when Moses was travelling from Egypt, the Moabite camp has been an historic enemy (Deut. 23.4-5). Apart from this initial reproach, ensuing encounters with the Moabites strengthened the Israelite resolve to declare the inhabitants of Moab as resolute adversaries.[18]

In Ruth's story, a Judean man and his family settle in Moab to escape famine in their homeland. In Ruth, Moab and the memory of its trespasses are stirred by continual references; Ruth is identified as Ruth the Moabite or Moabitess. On the other hand, then, in Ruth's lifetime, Moab's inhabitants accommodate Elimelech's family, and their sons marry Moabite women. Already the reader is aware of a kind of reversal at work in the Book of Ruth.[19]

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[18] See the seduction of Israelite men by idolatrous Moabite women (Num. 25.1-2). Also, the region of Moab is flawed from the outset. Moab originates through the incestuous relation between Lot and his eldest daughter. The child born from this union is Moab, founding father of Moab (Gen. 19.33-38). Thus, it is forbidden for any Israelite to associate with a Moabite (Deut. 23.3-6). For the injunction against inter-marriage (Ezra 9-10; Neh. 13.1-3, and then with specific reference to Deut. 23.4 in Neh. 13.1-3), together with an interpretation that the Book of Ruth is a prohibition against the inter-marrying ban, see Fischer (1999, p. 35-37).

[19] See Aschkenasy (2007, pp. 437-453) for a survey of texts that refer to Ruth as a set of gender, sexual, and legal reversals. For the reversal of security that a married woman's family, country, and faith conventionally assures, see Trible (1978, p. 173). "… [Ruth] has also reversed sexual allegiance. A young woman has committed herself to the life of an old woman rather than to the search for a husband …". (Trible, 1978, p. 173). For gender/sexual reversal, see Ruth 1.14. Ruth "clings" (NRSV) or "cleaves" (KJV) to Naomi. This passage

After Elimelech's death, the sons marry Moabite women, and for ten years, the family is childless. "One might expect this to be a rather tense household." (Esler, 2018, p. 652). Then, Mahlon and Chilion die. Alone, apart from her childless Moabite daughters-in-law, Naomi's prospects have become significantly reduced and she decides to return home. At the end of chapter one when she arrives back in Bethlehem, the village women exclaim,

> 'Is this Naomi?' **20** She said to them,
> 'Call me no longer Naomi,
> call me Mara,
> for the Almighty has dealt bitterly with me.
> **21** I went away full,
> but the LORD has brought me back empty;
> why call me Naomi
> when the LORD has dealt harshly with me,
> and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?' (1.19-21 NRSV)

Apart from the first six verses of background information, the Book of Ruth begins with Naomi's decision to return to Bethlehem. When Naomi departs on her journey, she is accompanied by her sons' widows, Orpah and Ruth. Naomi expresses gratitude and imparts blessings to her daughters-in-law, but insists they return home to their mothers. After a great deal of cajoling, Orpah returns, but as a response to Naomi's persuasion, Ruth utters her "incandescent reply", that "set[s] thirty centuries to trembling". (Ozick, 1994, p. 225)

> 'Do not press me to leave you
> or to turn back from following you!
> Where you go, I will go;
> where you lodge, I will lodge;
> your people shall be my people,
> and your God my God.
> **17** Where you die, I will die—
> there will I be buried.
> May the LORD do thus and so to me,
> and more as well,
> if even death parts me from you!' (1.16-17 NRSV)

Within her remarkable declaration, Ruth invokes a curse should she withdraw her promise to Naomi. The intensity of her statement stands in stark relief to Naomi's address of despair.

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mirrors Genesis 2.24. Here, a man leaves his father and mother and "clings" or "cleaves" to his wife. Also the same Hebrew word *dabaq* is used for "cleave" in both places.

(Esler, 2018, p. 655). While Naomi is characterised by a sense of loss, in contrast, Ruth is represented as embodying the heroic qualities Aeneas is seen to portray: reverence, devotion, and endurance. When Naomi and Ruth arrive at the entrance of the city gates, they are greeted by the village women. As an explanation for her malaise, Naomi identifies God as the author of her misfortune. Ruth's pledge to Naomi and Naomi's testimony of suffering at the hands of God bookends the drama that is about to occur in the following three chapters. The two speeches are in concert with one another. The authenticity of Ruth's assertion is going to be tested by the degree to which Naomi's cheerless deportment is relieved by the security of family and wealth.[20] A fuller account of Ruth's and Naomi's speeches are elaborated in Chapter Two.

While Ruth's steadfast character has been established following her extraordinary avowal, the reality of the women's situation is still bleak. After having set up a household together, Ruth sets to work gleaning at a nearby farm. Wherever she goes and whomever she meets, information about Ruth's reverence to the Israelite God and devotion to Naomi precedes her.[21] (Esler, 2018). Without reserve, she is given permission to work, and from Boaz – a relation of Naomi's through Elimelech – she is given extra grain and protection.

> … they regard her as embodying their values and as worthy of praise in consequence. They do not exchange information about the absent Ruth negatively because she is a threat to their community's values but laud her because she, a Moabite of all people, exemplifies their own values. (Esler, 2018, p. 661)

While this account is braced on all sides by rural pastoral and a plotline that progresses from hardship to recovery, there is evidence within the book of Ruth having to bear at least some difficulty, extending, depending on the commentator, to significant danger. First, the story is not short on reminders of Ruth's place regarding gender, race, and class, "Ruth's vulnerability to violence turns out to be intimately bound up with her multiple identities as woman, worker and foreigner" (Shepherd, 2018, p. 528). The reader is repeatedly advised

[20] Security for women is carried out through the Levirate Law and the practice of Redemption.
[21] For a commentary on the social beneficence of gossip in the Book of Ruth, see Esler (2018).

that Ruth is Naomi's daughter-in-law and a Moabite (Glover, 2009, p. 305).[22] As Ozick says, "a universe of folklore confirms that a daughter-in-law is not a daughter" (Ozick, 1994, p. 226). On many counts, Ruth is an outsider.

The trials of Ruth

In this section, I am relating a number of hardships that commentators have established through the close reading of certain aspersions against Ruth. Sometimes Ruth's challenges are not immediately apparent from the text. Reviewers examine textual contrivances, for example, the number of times Ruth is referred to as a Moabite to indicate prejudice. In Boaz's conversation with his farm manager, a close reading of the overseer's words indicates Ruth's greed and laziness for one commentator. Others have considered Naomi's responses to Ruth. Often Naomi replies to Ruth, and to others about Ruth, in silence. Some scholars read antipathy in Naomi's omissions.

Still, even and especially if her environment is inhospitable, Ruth continues advancing towards honouring the covenant she has promised Naomi. Despite these travails, Ruth manages to affect change in the customs and laws of her receiving nation. Similarly, through my practice, I am endeavouring to represent a methodical, if slow, process in order to live with loss.

Despite the harmonious finale at the end of the text, I will pay due attention to Keats's characterisation of Ruth. Homesickness is the malaise Keats identifies in Ruth's "sad heart". By using the terms "sad heart", Keats invokes an ambiguity – apart from homesickness – that Ruth's selflessness comes at a personal cost. On the other hand, the story has been read as a comedy (Esler, 2018, pp. 665-666; Aschkenasy, 2006, pp. 62-85) for example, categorised as

[22] As a daughter-in-law, Ruth is mentioned seven times: Ruth 1.6, 7, 8, 1.22, 2.20, 22 and 4.15; and naming Naomi as Ruth's mother-in-law, there are eight instances: Ruth 1.14, 2.11, 18, 19(x2), 3.1, 16, 17. As a Moabite, Ruth is identified six times: Ruth 1.22, 2.2, 6, 21, 4.5, 10. By repeating Ruth's status as a foreigner and a non-blood member of Naomi's family, the text emphasises Ruth's otherness.

a difficult set of problems resolved by the end and developed through a continual array of reversals.

In order to explore the hardships undertaken by Ruth, I will provide evidence of far greater danger associated with Ruth's experiences. The episodes I am considering are: the story's setting during the epoch of Judges; gleaning in the fields of Boaz; Ruth's appearance on the threshing floor; what Naomi says together with her omissions; and the story's happy resolution as a family portrait (without Ruth) celebrating the birth of Ruth's son.

By reaching a glorious outcome by confronting and satisfying a set of difficulties, Ruth's story is being compared to Aeneas's. By conveying the trials of Ruth, I am reiterating the qualities – reverence (duty), benevolence, endurance – that Aeneas is seen to possess. As her hardships are cast, and then, dispensed with, I am identifying these traits within Ruth's character. Deepening their significance, they are the same attributes, especially endurance, that I am analogising through the slow and steady process of living with loss.

The context of Ruth

As any good story begins, the reader is introduced to the general setting the characters will inhabit. The book preceding Ruth is Judges. With the sentence, "In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes", the book of Judges concludes (Judg. 21.25). The book following Judges is Ruth. Its first words, "In the days when the judges ruled …" introduces the background for Ruth's story (1.1). To introduce her essay on Ruth, Alice Trible puts it this way, "A man's world tells a woman's story" (Trible, 1978, p. 166); and Judith McKinley, this way, "That beginning signals: Be alert" (McKinley, 1999, p. 154). In order to produce a fuller picture, it is worth expanding upon the relevance of locating Ruth's story within the days of Judges.

To contextualise Ruth's story during the period when the Judges ruled, the reader knows that the behaviour of Israel's people was ruled by how each individual saw fit: "people were constantly losing God's grace before earning it again" (Sasson, 1989, p. 322). The book of Ruth is a story about women, and regarding the time of Judges, we know women were

treated as collateral regarding the reputation of men.[23] (Shepherd, 2018, p. 534; Shepherd, 2001, pp. 444-463). Violence was gendered.[24] In comparison or as a supplement to this idea, some commentators consider foreignness or "otherness" as an improving influence within the Israelite community in Ruth's story (Honig, 1999, pp. 50-75; Ozick, 1994, pp. 211-232; Kristeva, 1993, pp. 23-25).

Following Shepherd's argument, for foreign women, then, civic conditions were even less likely to be accommodating, "…the presentation of Ruth as both foreign woman and foreign worker may imply that she is doubly vulnerable to exploitation." (2018, p. 543). In Ruth's case, gendered violence is linked to her status as a Moabite and as a labourer. She is a foreigner, and critically, part of a group that is held in contempt by the Israelites for reasons already mentioned. For Ruth, then, her appearance in Bethlehem might be far more dangerous than the bucolic accounts of the Book of Ruth confess.

To throw into question the ubiquitous environment of acceptance by the Judeans, Jonathan Grossman (2007, pp. 703-716) focuses on Ruth 2. Grossman defends Boaz's kindness by attributing a kind of malevolence to the overseer's account of Ruth's activities in the field. By using a literary foil, Ruth's author increases the scale of Boaz's kindness. According to Grossman, the supervisor's hidden hostility reveals itself in a number of ways. By identifying the manager's ambivalence, then, another reference to danger is alluded to in the context of Ruth's story.

This kind of narrative impression is created by introducing a minor character – say for instance, the manager – to impress value onto another character (Boaz) and vice versa. In Chapter Two, Ruth tells Naomi about her plan to glean barley and wheat from nearby farmers' fields. Boaz, then, notices Ruth leaving his field. According to Michael Carasik,

[23] Judges 19. In the town where they are spending the night, a Levite man and his Bethlemite concubine/second wife settle into their lodgings. A disorderly group of Bethlemite men arrive at their host's doorstep. The mob surrounds the house and demands the appearance of the Levite; they want 'to know' him. Instead, to preserve the Levite's reputation and dignity, the concubine is released to satiate the appetite of the crowd. By morning, the Bethlemite woman has been discarded at the entrance of the house, raped to death.

[24] For another civic domain effected by the period "when the judges ruled" and with some relevance to Ruth, McKinlay identifies land wars. (McKinlay, 1999, p. 154)

Ruth's departure is interpreted by Boaz as an escape from sexual harassment committed by the harvesters (Carasik, 1995, p. 493). Other commentators agree that Ruth is being "molested" or "touched" rather than "bothered" (Fischer, 1999, p. 28; Exum, 1996, p. 152; Fewell and Gunn, 1988, p. 105).[25]

On this reading, Boaz asks his overseer the woman's identity and he answers in an extraordinary way. The overseer identifies Ruth as "the Moabitess" who returned to Bethlehem with Naomi. But he doesn't stop at identity, which is after all the only information Boaz is requesting. He continues to say that Ruth is "gleaning" and "gathering" and has asked his permission to work "amongst the sheaves". The overseer finishes his summary by conveying that Ruth has worked from dawn apart from a short rest. The overseer puts it this way:

> She is the young Moabite woman, who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. She said, "Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves after the reapers." So she came, and she has continued from early morning until now, except for a short rest (2.6-7).

At first, the manager's account appears to be praising Ruth's work ethic. According to Grossman, though, these words imply a counter-narrative to Ruth's perceived congenial welcome to Bethlehem.[26] In order to make this declaration, Grossman lists these reasons: Boaz asks only for her identity but receives much more information; Ruth is unnamed and is instead called "the Moabitess"; he declares she asked for permission "to glean" and "to gather"; and, he adds that she has worked all day without stopping save a short rest.

Within these assertions, Grossman identifies ambivalence, and not approval. Since Moabites are historical enemies of the Israelites, he explains that identifying Ruth as simply "the Moabitess" is a "degrading description". When he repeats to Boaz Ruth's request "to glean and to gather", he inserts "gather". According to the manager's version, then, Ruth had

[25] For a comprehensive survey of translations for Ruth 2.9 and 2.22, see Shepherd (2001, pp. 444-463). Shepherd compares various translations (KJV, RV, RSV, JB, NEB) in order to show the range of verbs that are employed to describe the kind of attention Ruth receives from the harvesters. This event is portrayed varying between a kind of bothering attention to unchecked molestation.

[26] With regard to Judges 19, the event of hospitality is explored by Shepherd (2018, pp. 532-535) and for a survey of other commentators who examine the role of hospitality of the concubine's father in Judges 19.4-9 and its lamentable absence in Judges 19.22-26, see Shepherd (2018, pp. 532-533).

asked to work amongst the sheaves. Grossman points out that to consent grants Ruth a privilege apart from the other gleaners. Easier and more plentiful, “gathering” in “the sheaves” means a far greater yield with much less effort. Finally, there is the overseer’s claim that Ruth has been “at it” since daybreak. According to Grossman (2007, p. 711) the manager is covertly asserting that Ruth is a greedy interloper in accordance with the Moabite stereotype.[27]

By setting the manager’s apparent contempt for Ruth beside Boaz’s benevolence, Grossman develops an interpretation that this narrative strategy creates an impression for the reader. Here, then, by opposing qualities in two separate characters – mischief and kindness, say – the narrator is improving the reader’s picture of Boaz.[28]

Apart from a literary technique, also Grossman is conveying a murmuration within the text that opposes the usual pastoral hymn usually identified in the book of Ruth.

As a set of hardships that is not immediately apparent, Ruth Two corresponds to a stage in the process of living with loss. According to my interpretation of Grossman’s essay, the manager’s description of Ruth’s behaviour in the field is a kind of involuntary prejudice fitting with the Israelite stereotype of the Moabite ethnicity. Grossman shows how the manager unnecessarily embellishes the information Boaz requests. Since he refers to Ruth as “the Moabitess”, a reader may assume that the manager feels entitled to characterise Ruth as “crafty” in accordance with the presumed traits of her racial group.

In unison with unthinking and reactive prejudice, bereavement by suicide carries the weight of preconceived notions about the parents of sons and daughters who take their life. For example, while working on a building project, my son, William, fielded the following query from one of the labourers, “God, what are your parents like?”

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[27] Honig (2001, p. 60) and Trible (1978, pp. 183-187) select instances of behaviour that not only relate Ruth’s generosity and kindness, but suggest that certain actions represent Ruth as – Honig’s term – “a taker”.

[28] The same narrative technique is used to make a distinction between Ruth’s decision to accompany Naomi and Orpah’s return to Moab (Ozick, 1994, pp. 219-228). Here, Ozick compares the “Normality” of Orpah and the “Singularity” of Ruth. While applying analogy and chronology to a linguistic interpretation of the proper names in Ruth, Mieke Bal (2001, p. 49) describes Orpah as a “character of contrast” to Ruth. For Bal, Orpah represents “the reality principle”.

It is easy to hold this man's attitude in contempt. But on the other hand, his response is part of living with bereavement by suicide. Whether or not it is rhetoric, prejudice, or knee-jerk exclamation, this type of unreflective utterance is common amongst those who have not been touched by this kind of loss. By being strapped to the preconceptions of others, say, the "Goliath" of prejudice, the accused has but one course of action: slow, tiny, measured action. In response to prejudice as an immovable object, I have solicited a repetitive one-thing-at-a-time methodology: stitch-by-stitch travelling boxes and print-by-print sets of prayer flags. In this context, a survivor is living with loss and a part of the experience is living with the preconceptions of others.

Naomi's silence

Do Naomi's "silences" play a part in the difficulties Ruth has to endure? For some commentators, Naomi displays ambivalence towards Ruth in the context of Ruth's unwavering devotion to Naomi. In this light, Naomi's countenance has been considered a hardship for Ruth.

As "the loveliest little epic and idyllic entity" (Goethe quoted in Fisher, 2007, p. 140) a distinctive element of the Book of Ruth is the devotion expressed by Ruth to Naomi in verses 1.16-17. Together with the overall tone of love and support expressed between the women, Ruth's profound announcement remains steadfast and appears in contemporary proclamations of love often appearing in wedding ceremonies (Honig, 2003, p. 52). On the other hand, the relationship between Ruth and Naomi has split some commentators. For some, Ruth's heartfelt commitment to Naomi is the grit that permits her to overcome the working conditions (2) and the various risks on the threshing floor (3), which I examine in the section on "The significance of law". But for other reviewers, Naomi appears to reject Ruth and expresses a kind of embarrassment towards her. This reading is in accordance with Naomi's silences. According to those accounts, in a story driven by dialogue, then, a silence is a "shout".[29]

[29] Fifty-five of the eighty-five verses are in dialogue (Sasson, 1989, p. 320).

In 1.14, an instant before she imparts her famous speech, Ruth "clings" or "cleaves" to Naomi. It is a powerful verb "signifying the free choice made by a subject to renounce freedom in favor of another being". (Bal, 2001, p. 48). As an echo of Genesis 2.24 when a man leaves his family house and "clings" or "cleaves" to his wife, Mieke Bal (2001) calls the appearance of the same word a *mise en abyme* by describing the phenomenon thus: a "dramatic confrontation with the *same* by the perception of the *different* …"[30] (Bal, 2001, p. 67) (Author's emphasis). The gesture together with the utterance is surely a remarkable moment that tells the reader that the surface plotline of Ruth invokes deeper readings, earlier biblical correspondences, and the reunion of long ago severances between the founding mothers and fathers in the House of Israel. The phenomenon of *mise en abyme* to which these examples belong is more fully explored in Chapter Four. But for now the focus is thus: Naomi is silent. Here, then, commentators find clues within the text to establish whether Naomi's silence signals dismissal and embarrassment or consent and approbation.

Danna Fewell and David Gunn identify and elaborate five silences, four of which are Naomi's and one, Ruth's (Fewell and Gunn, 1988, pp. 100-103).[31] Including Naomi's curious silence post Ruth's moving declaration of attachment, for Fewell and Gunn, these silences represent "withdrawal". The term is borrowed from Phyllis Trible's observation that Orpah's separation is, in fact, in agreement with Naomi, while Ruth's attachment is in opposition to Naomi's wishes. Ruth "decides contrary to Naomi's orders" (Trible, 1978, p. 171). Fewell and Gunn wonder, "If Ruth's famous … speech can melt the hearts of a myriad preachers and congregations down the centuries, why not Naomi's heart?" (Fewell and Funn, 1988, p. 100).

If Naomi is motivated by a chilly heart, her outward "withdrawal" is a possible reading. But, is withdrawal the only possibility? In other words, a response of silence can be accounted for by a number of psychological conditions; silences are over-determined. As a deliverance of

[30] Bal borrows the expression from André Gide. Its meaning "infinite reflection" can be sensed in the idea of standing between two mirrors. In art history, *Las Meninas* by Diego Velázquez is thought to express the phenomenon.

[31] Fewell and Gunn identify five silences: Naomi's, after Ruth 1.16-17; upon arrival to Bethlehem's gates, Naomi does not introduce Ruth to the townswomen; by surmising that Naomi has known all along that Boaz is a close relative; after the night on the threshing-floor, Ruth's silence when she averts Naomi's question – how was it? – and draws her attention to the "gift" (barley) from Boaz. From Ruth 4, the fifth silence is Naomi's. After the birth of Ruth's son, Naomi is declared Obed's "mother". Although Naomi is present in the chapter, she is silent.

one of the most significant pledges portrayed in biblical history, a close reading of Ruth's words points to a powerful strength of mind together with fundamental changes within her conception of the world.[32] Esler sees Naomi's silence thus, "Seeing such determination, Naomi, unsurprisingly, says nothing more" (Esler, 2018, p. 655).

Apart from Naomi's silence after Ruth's initial announcement, which I think can be easily interpreted as something other than being an expression of dismissal, I would like to explore more fully Naomi's silence occurring in Ruth 4. Despite the story's happy resolution, Naomi's muteness strikes a disconcerting chord. "No passage in the book seems to have caused as much pain to commentators as these closing verses" (Glover, 2009, p. 298). A happy harvest scene closes the Book of Ruth, yet it is perceived as being lamentable as Ruth's child is given to Naomi. The townsfolk exclaim, "A son has been born to Naomi!" and then, following, a notable endorsement of Ruth is elicited by the neighbourhood women: "your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons" (4.15). Reviewers wonder why Naomi is silent. Why are these words – a declaration of the generosity of Ruth – spoken by the neighbourhood women: the chorus?

Some analysts sense that the neighbours' words are persuasion. Naomi needs to be cajoled into acknowledging Ruth's value. For Fewell and Gunn, the declaration made by the townswomen is a response to Naomi's silence. Accordingly, their words are spoken to offset Naomi's apparent ingratitude. For these commentators, if Naomi is silent bearing in mind the improvement to her circumstances Ruth has brought about, then, the women are uttering a reminder in order to correct her trespass of omission (1988, p. 102).

In Ruth 4, Ruth the Moabitess is welcomed into the community by the townswomen and not by Naomi. Without having to chastise Naomi for omission or insensitivity, the apparent slight can be argued for other reasons. For example, the embrace of belonging emerges from a public oration because it originated in the sphere of the private: the relationship between Ruth and Naomi (1.16-17). To preserve a place in the community, Ruth's "conversion" cannot

[32] For a line-by-line survey and analysis of the social, historical and cultural importance – a change in ethnic identity – of Ruth's message, see Esler (2018, pp. 654-655). For Cohn, each line of Ruth's famous address in 1.16-17 represents an Otherness Ruth "desires to overcome" (Cohn 2014, pp. 165-166).

be accepted by Naomi alone. For Ruth to be received, a motion of belonging must be bestowed by the neighbours (Glover, 2009). As a full-fledged member of the town's network, and acceptance by the village women is a kind of synecdoche – a gesture to convey Israel's acceptance of Ruth – representing Ruth's hard-won social victory. The relationship between Ruth and Naomi is already assured; but Ruth's place amongst her nation within the covenant begins with her neighbours. The judgement of these women, then, raises Ruth's story a register by illuminating and progressing Deuteronomic law, as will be argued in the following section.

By starting with Naomi's silences, the upshot of Ruth's trials brings about instances of more urgency. Emerging from the personal realm of the relationship between Ruth and Naomi, the simple narrative arouses the revision of Levitical and Deuteronomic laws. As an ongoing and developing theme, the surface material is deceptively shallow but alludes to deeper and broader significance.

The concern here, then, is the homily of not being deceived by the modesty, ubiquity, and mundanity of what is over-looked, cast aside, or rendered simple and unassuming. Ruth and Naomi's relationship, then, is an alibi for universal meaning. To myopically focus here though, a reader overlooks a more far-reaching message.

In summary, although Ruth confronts significant trials, I argue against the silences between Naomi and Ruth as a part of this classification.

<u>The significance of law</u>

In the same vein as the preceding idea of the small and over-looked possessing more power than originally assumed, Ruth makes significant advances in Levitical and Deuteronomic laws. For the wider purview of the chapter, the point corresponds both to my reading of Ruth and the small-scale method of stitching that represented my practice at the time. In a state of catatonic stillness apart from pushing a needle through fabric, the most ambitious task I could manage was making a cup of tea.

While Ruth develops in what appears to be a literary convention – an idyll, epic, short story, short novel, with lots of dialogue and a small set of characters – that invokes an ancestral lineage between the House of Israel set out in Genesis (4.11-12) and the generations-later empire of King David, there is the appearance of Levirate Law and the search for a Redeemer. Allusions to officialdom, then, unite the interpretations of scripture, not only "to narrative texts, but also to legal ones"[33] (Fischer, 2007, p. 145). If Ruth is a linking account between the Genesis family and David's governance which is not immediately evident, then, equally the book occupies a position within the Torah's legal texts (Fischer, 2007, p. 143). First, I will focus on the susurration of the House of Israel within the text of Ruth, and then, second, on juridical law specific to Ruth. For allusions to the Pentateuch within the text of Ruth, see also Chapter Four.

With regard to the Levirate tradition, Obed, son of Ruth and Boaz,[34] takes his place in the genealogy of the great King David, whose father, Jesse, is the son of Obed. Here, I will examine how the Levirate Law and the role of the Redeemer has been fulfilled. But, then, I will make a suggestion on the possibility of only a partial or obscure fulfilment of the Levirate Law in Ruth. The observation attests to laws set out in Deuteronomy bending to practical solutions in contemporary contexts. In the previous section, I alluded to a set of reversals apparent in Ruth. Here, these "reversals" are reviewed as instances – from whatever cause – that correspond to passages in Deuteronomy (Goulder, 1993, pp. 307-319).

In a juridical sense, Ruth's story is an embodied version of the laws of Leviticus and Deuteronomy by narrating "… the political history of the people in the form of family stories…" (Fischer, 2007, p. 148). Once the perspective shifts from a characterisation of the Book of Ruth as a rural poem of a kindly foreign woman who finds love, family, and community to a narration of an extraordinary woman who clarifies the ethical penumbra

[33] For the significance of Ruth in a juridical sense, see Bal (2009, pp. 42-69), and Goulder (1993, pp. 307-319).
[34] To seal the legal contract, Boaz declares that the levir tradition has been observed by his commitment to marrying Ruth. Also, Boaz has fulfilled the duty of Redeemer by preserving the title of the dead men's land to posterity (4.9-10).

regarding Deuteronomic municipal law, especially regarding the wellbeing of women, then, the timbre of the story encompasses a greater relevance.

For the destitute – the poor and widows – there is some provision set up in the laws for at least a modicum of security to be granted by more prosperous members of the family and community. For example, to avail those in reduced circumstances, farmers are forbidden from harvesting corners or up to the edges of their fields. Also, it is prohibited to collect fallen grain in the fields; on the ground, the leftovers are for the gleaners who follow the harvesters (Lev. 19.9).

While one reading does not preclude the other – in fact the Book's calm pastoral anaesthetises the anxiety arising from legal matters – I want to emphasise the importance of the presence of the law. When Naomi hears of the fortuitous meeting between Boaz and Ruth, she remembers that Boaz is a near relative. In the Book of Ruth, this is the second time that the Levirate Law (Deut. 25.5) has been invoked. The first instance occurred when Naomi was urging Orpah and Ruth to return to Moab. Naomi is rhetorical, "Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb that they may become your husbands?" (1.11).

In the first chapter as a kind of literary foreshadow, Naomi jogs the reader's memory of the terms of the Levirate Law by her rhetorical utterance, "have I sons in my womb?". The endowment, then, protects widows and the deceased husband's lineage and property. In an androcentric system, the focus of the levir is to restore the name and family (posterity) and property (wealth) of the dead man. If a widow is childless, she can re-marry her husband's brother and should the union produce a son, the child will carry the mother's first husband's name, and inherit any property from that man's estate. When Naomi is urging her daughters-in-law to remain in their homeland, she – perhaps comically? – addresses her aged body as an unsuitable receptacle for delivering another son in order to serve the levir tradition. Even, she qualifies, should she bear a son, the Levirate Law cannot be raised for another, say, eighteen years (1.12-13). By awaiting this opportunity, Ruth's and Orpah's lives would be wasted.

But within Naomi's reaction, a spectre from the House of Israel rustles through Ruth's text. In this instance, there is another legitimate, but this time, obstructed, invocation of levir communion. The story of Judah and Tamar, then, represents a theoretically textbook execution of the tradition but for Judah's refusal to bestow his daughter-in-law with her right of levir (Gen. 38). Instead, for different reasons,[35] Tamar's brothers-in-law are unable to satisfy their parts in the carrying out of the law. When Tamar learns that Judah has wilfully kept Shelah – Judah's third son – from observing levir on her behalf, she ventures a pretext of her own. Tamar proffers a rendezvous with Judah in order to instigate the Levirate Law to which she is entitled. As it turns out, Judah confesses his negligence that has forced Tamar to carry out the deception. "She is more righteous than I," Judah finally admits (Gen. 38.26). Their son, Perez, born of the union between Judah and Tamar, is a forefather to Boaz.

In contrast to Tamar's version of levir – two living brothers, and a third still too young, at the ready to observe the dispensation – Ruth cannot be compensated through the Levirate Law as it stands in Deuteronomy. But in relation to Boaz's attention towards Ruth, a spark of hope is kindled in Naomi. If no other brother exists, then the Levirate Law can be accommodated by extending the arrangement to male relations outside the single-family unit.[36] With a risk of damaging the younger woman's reputation, Naomi instructs Ruth to prepare herself to meet Boaz on the threshing floor. (3.3-4). In order to convey to Boaz Ruth's willingness to bring about a levir consummation, it seems this shadowy encounter is necessary. Ruth's simple identification of Boaz as a Redeemer – her awareness of its implications – informs Boaz that she is not on the threshing floor for a dalliance. In a gender reversal, Ruth's declaration is a proposal of marriage.

While the narrative of Ruth 1, 2, and 4 is conducted during the day fully exposed to the public, Ruth 3 occurs behind closed doors and at midnight, accompanied by furtive planning. Accordingly, the scene inhabits the realm of the private. Naomi instructs Ruth to stay hidden

[35] The death of the first son, Er, makes Tamar a widow. The second son, Onan, unites with Tamar, but prohibits a full union. Onan's withdrawal from Tamar angers God, and he is punished with his life. Judah blames Tamar for his sons' deaths and prevents his third child, Shelagh, from satisfying the Levirate Law on behalf of the first son (Gen. 38).

[36] Significant instances of familial relations producing sons are: Lot and his eldest daughter, and their son, Moab (Gen. 19.30-38); and Judah and Tamar, and Perez, a forefather of Boaz (38.1-30). For an account of old grudges and trespasses originating in the House of Israel and resolved in Ruth, see Fisch (1982, 435-436).

from view (3.3); Boaz advises Ruth not to be seen when she returns home to Naomi (3.14). Also following in the opposing spheres of hiddenness and exposure, we learn something about what Boaz knows.

Once Ruth has declared her intention, Boaz appears to be already aware of his Levirate position and as a kinsman of Elimelech's, his potential role as a Redeemer (Cohn, 2014, p. 173). As Boaz identifies a closer relation, it appears that he may have already considered a betrothal to Ruth. Each woman's widowed status raises a different institution: the role of Redeemer regarding Naomi's land inheritance and the Levirate Law consisting of a betrothal and birth of a child.[37] Again, Boaz already knows that first refusal belongs to a closer relation with whom Boaz will have to negotiate to earn the right to deliver the widows from penury on both counts. Closely guarding Ruth's character, Boaz realises that there is some risk should the villagers become aware of Ruth's presence on the threshing floor. With a generous measure of barley, Ruth departs incognito from the threshing floor before dawn (3.14).

Although the outcome is fortunate and glorious, equally it is accompanied by numerous "what ifs". What if Boaz had not welcomed Ruth's presence on the threshing floor? Especially in the context of the lawlessness under the rule of Judges, what if Ruth had been seen? What is a Moabite widow doing on the threshing floor at midnight? These possibilities must have occurred to Ruth, and indeed Naomi. Despite the pitfalls, Ruth's devotion to Naomi prevails as one-by-one she addresses the impediments to her progress.

<u>Travelling Boxes</u>

Soon after taking up mending and darning as a means of keeping active while reclaiming some modicum of stability after Faye's death, I shifted from patching up old clothes to stitching images of Faye. As I had a number of pictures of Faye and her paintings printed onto linen, I was considering how to shape these tiny works into a larger embodiment of individual portraits.

[37] Redemption and Levirate are not connected in the Torah. The Levirate is not a provision for the widow, but is instead a "special regulation" of the inheritance law (Fischer, 1999, p. 39).

Illustrations 2.2.A – 2.2.D are photos of Faye and two examples of her artwork that are representative of the kinds of image that were printed onto linen.

Illustration 2.2.A

Illustration 2.2.B

Illustration 2.2.C

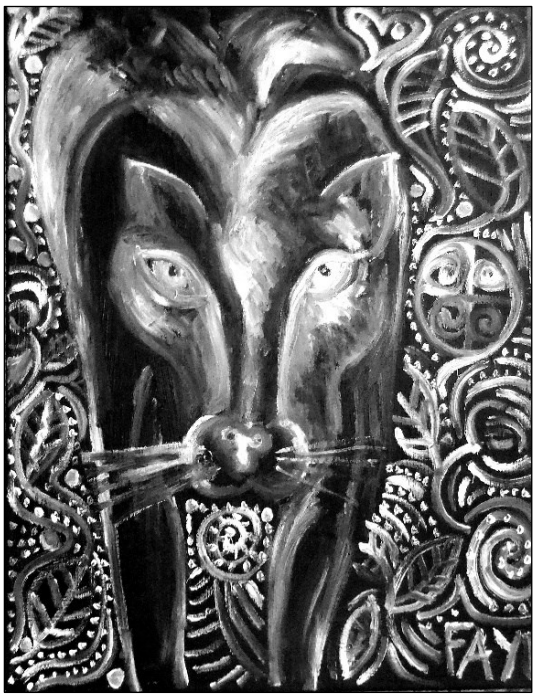


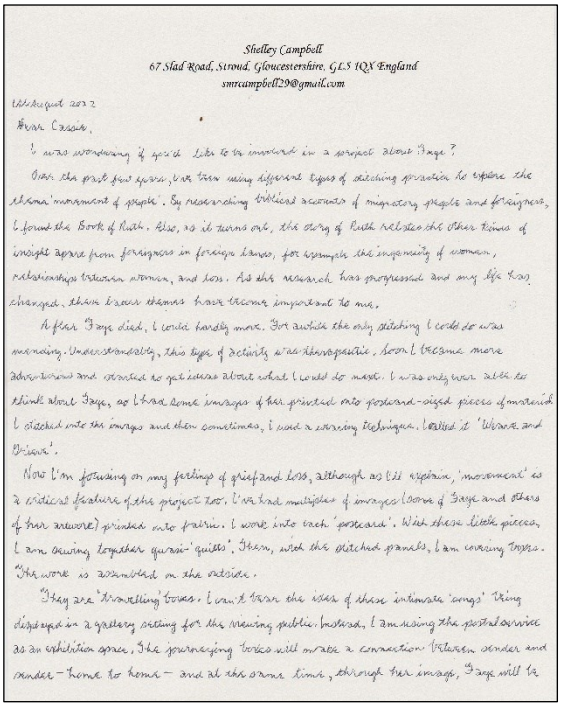
Illustration 2.2.D

At this fork, I was still fastening onto socially engaged practice and a non-institutional form of “exhibition”. After considering different options, I settled on an idea of quilting the outside of boxes and onto the “quilt” stitching the postcard-sized portraits of Faye. At this juncture, I was preserving my contempt for “white cube” exhibition spaces. In two ways, my objection was embedded in the model of the work: first, gallery space was exchanged for postal travel, and, alongside the mailroom “show”, the intimate setting of the receiver’s house was a second exhibition “space”, one with which even I could not engage. The two sites of presentation connect a public sphere (in the conventional sense of a “display” albeit without a viewing public) with another in the private.

For the participants, the act of working on the box inhabits the domain of a conventionally minded “wall display” or “plinth”. By shifting the venue from a gallery to second-class parcel post, I envisioned destabilising the institutional policy of viewing art in a customary setting. Under these conditions, the decision to do so is strengthened by designing a participatory work that comes about through the contributors’ affection for Faye. Some were makers and others not. For this project, I did not envision the creation of beautifully and skilled artefacts

of quilting expertise. In other words, they could treat the image by glueing or stapling an embellishment onto it. The work is inclusive insofar as participants were not required to be creative practitioners. On the other hand, the project is exclusive: I invited only those who were Faye's loved ones. In advance, I sent each participant a letter and three linen pennants printed with Faye's images. Later I posted a quilted box for the stitcher to attach their worked-on piece of linen to the box and then return to me. This work is still in progress.

Illustration 2.3.A



Shelley Campbell
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[illegible] 2022

Dear Cassie,

I was wondering if you'd like to be involved in a project about Faye?

Over the past few years, I've been using different types of stitching practice to explore the trauma/movement of people. By researching biblical accounts of migratory people and foreigners, I found the Book of Ruth. Else, as it turns out, the story of Ruth related the other kinds of insight apart from foreigners in foreign lands, for example the ingenuity of women, relationships between women, and loss. As the research has progressed and my life has changed, these themes have become important to me.

After Faye died, I could hardly move. For awhile the only stitching I could do was mending. Understandably, this type of activity was therapeutic, soon I became more adventurous and started to get ideas about what I could do next. I was only ever able to think about Faye, so I've done images of her printed onto postcard-sized pieces of material. I stitched into the images and then sometimes, I used a running technique. I called it 'Weave and Brian'.

Now I'm focusing on my feelings of grief and loss, although as the reprint, 'movement' is a critical feature of the project too. I've had multiples of images (some of Faye and others of her artwork) printed onto fabric. I work into each 'postcard'. With these little pieces, I am sewing together parcel 'quilts'. Them, with the stitched panels, I am covering boxes. The work is assembled on the outside.

They are 'travelling' boxes. I want to use the idea of these intimate 'wings' being displayed in a gallery setting for the viewing public. Instead, I am using the postal service as an exhibition space. The journeying boxes will make a connection between sender and sender – home to home – and at the same time, through her image, Faye will be present too. The kind of exhibition I envision, then, is performed outside a conventional gallery setting and 'audience only' Faye's friends and those who held a space in her heart. That's why I'm writing to you.

With this letter, I'm enclosing two panels for you. If you feel inclined, you can stitch, draw, print or paint into the image. You can use your creativity to do anything you like with it. Of course you can keep your finished panel. Or, you can donate it to the project, and stitch it into a box-quilt. Then it will join the exhibition and commence its travels.

This idea came about because Faye loved travel and adventure. She taught school children in Tanzania. She undertook an internship in Turin. For an independent project at university, she organised a residency in a convent in the Dordogne region of France. On an Erasmus scholarship in her final year of university, she studied in Berlin for a term. She lived and worked locally in Florence, Corfe and Marrakesh.

I am analogising Faye's wandering afar with the travelling quilted boxes. For our project, we're creating a stitcher-to-stitcher tour for the travelling box. After stitching your work into the 'quilt', I'm asking participants to post the box to the next member of the stitching group. In this way, Faye is leaving one act of welcoming arms and arriving at another's whilst wending Her Way Home.

Love,
Shelley

Illustration 2.3.B

Illustration 2.3.C

Illustrations 2.3.A – 2.3.C. Each kit I sent out to contributors included linen images for stitching, a letter, and a plastic folder. Illustrations 2.4.A and 2.4.B show a box I sent to three participants. As these women are in one family, I wrote one letter to all three.

Illustration 2.4.A

Illustration 2.4.B

Illustration 2.5.A

Illustration 2.5.B

Illustration 2.5.C

Illustration 2.5.D

Illustration 2.5.E

Illustration 2.5.F

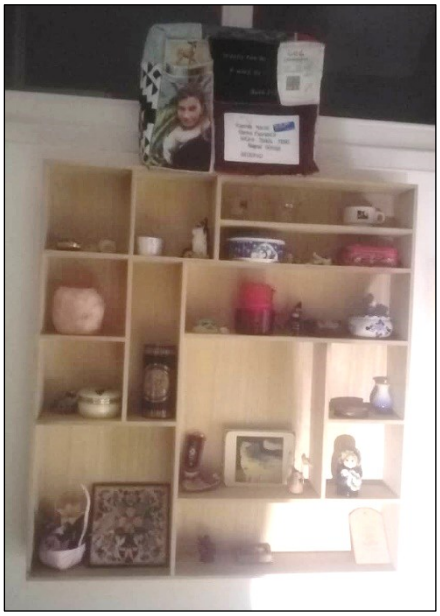


Illustration 2.5.G

Illustration 2.5.H

Illustrations 2.5.A and 2.5.H. On its way to and from Serbia, these images illustrate the first box I posted. As it had been damaged by the voyage, it was returned in a bag (2.5.G). Still, it held up well to the journey. For a few months, Radmila, the woman who received the package, lived with it on a shelf in her flat (2.5.F). It is a condition of the project that should the receiver not want to add anything, they can live with it for awhile before returning it. From the documentation provided by the photos, the box project consists of different stages of production. From the initial call through letter-writing, then, sewing the quilted cover for

the box, stitching the panels onto the quilt, posting the box, waiting for its return, and finally receiving it back, for one box, its travels take months and as it turns out, years. Through the hands and will of the participants – including the postal workers – I am always unsure about what will be returned. I am not looking to provide a “show” with the box artefacts; this project is spent in its doing. The creations of the contributors and the movement of the work is what is being “framed”. The photos pay witness to the “art” that has been produced.

Under these conditions, it represents the process of living with loss, it is meant to be a long-term project that cannot be defined by deadlines and speed. Instead it is contemplative and invokes the image of a labyrinth with multiple portals and gateways. The participants share aspects of their memories of Faye, details they alone know. In Chapter Four, I discuss Benjamin’s “map” of his life. Without setting out at this point the full reach of Benjamin’s thought, the idea I want to insert here is the phenomena of circuitous associations and correspondences (Benjamin, 1979, pp. 318-319). I am invoking the idea of non-linear gateways and connections by inviting Faye’s friendship circle to express their responses to her memory and to her absence. Each participant knew Faye at a different time in her life. Their connection to her does not relate to a chronological age; it conveys a non-linear union between one person and another.

As the project is participatory, the ladies of the SEW Sew group took a leading role. They stitched multiple versions of the linen “postcards”, and by post, received, and sent the travelling boxes. They served as intermediaries between my initial postings to those more faraway friends. Sometimes participants were unclear about what the expectations of the project anticipated. The SEW Sew stitchers helped to bridge the gap. In the “exhibition” at Crush Hall, the works on display were solely the results of the work of these women.

Illustration 2.6.A

Illustration 2.6.B

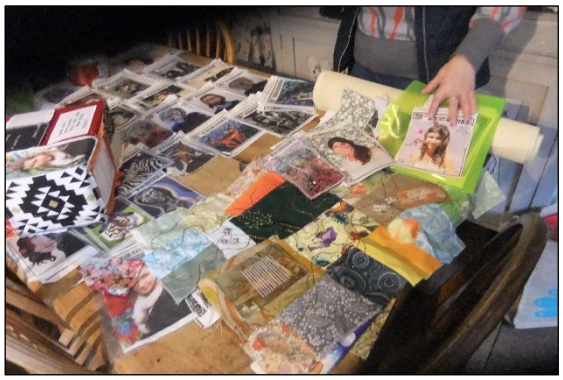


Illustration 2.6.C

Illustration 2.6.D

Illustrations 2.6.A – 2.6.D. In the first two, the piled-up table and sideboard indicates a typical layout of materials and supplies for a morning's stitching session with SEW Sew sewers. In 2.6.C, there is a representative set of panels made by Tess and Cherril made for the travelling boxes. In 2.6.D, we are having our morning coffee break, Tess and Cherril.

Stitching postcards as a metaphor for small-step progression

To adjust to the leviathan of grief, then, I am taking my lead from Ruth's step-by-step accommodation of her trials. Without ever thinking of undertaking hardship, Ruth's set of circumstances begins in impoverishment and ends during harvest-time in a glorious yield of fertility, abundance, and community. At the outset of the story, the reader bears witness to a remarkable moment of intimacy between Ruth and Naomi. Ruth's declaration to Naomi locates the attitude of the story in a relationship between two women. Before the reader knows the details of Ruth's trials, the groundwork for the story is set by Ruth's steadfast and

abiding devotion to Naomi. The social evolution that comes about through Ruth's remarkable kindness – for example, addressing Deuteronomic and Levitical laws and the prohibition against inter-racial marriage, and "cleansing" earlier transgressions in the genealogy of the House of Israel before installing King David (Fisch, 1982, pp. 425-437) – illustrates the singularity of small measures accomplishing great feats.

In my stunned inertia after Faye's death, I started small and managed simple tasks. I was always thinking of Faye and accordingly, I had some of her images and artworks printed onto linen. By stitching into the panels, I found ways to reflect her character and preferences. In this way, I felt comforted by thinking about Faye and portraying aspects of her identity: thinking about Faye, and also not thinking about Faye. While stitching, choosing threads, making decisions about material, I loosened the grip of grief that otherwise had taken possession of my thoughts and feelings. Equally, in the absence of thinking about Faye, still, I was making a project of remembering Faye. By being absorbed in the process, and through the up and down movement of the needle, I was living less consumingly with grief.

Illustration 2.7.A

Illustration 2.7.B

Illustrations 2.7.A and 2.7.B. From the photo in Illustration 2.2.B, I inserted an exotic background of flora and fauna. Faye loved tropical landscapes. I pixelated the background in order to provide a pattern for cross-stitching. The squares and therefore the stitches were so tiny that I only used this method for two stitchings. Even for a postcard-sized work, it took me a month to do.

I became more adventurous. For example, alongside the pixelated background I started introducing words into the stitchings, and one of the collaborators, Rose Wordsworth, used printing techniques as a means of including some of the tender expressions I found in poems Faye loved and those she had written.[38] Also we chose inspirational quotes from Faye's journals. Another source of inspiration was the stitchwork art of Fauzia Akbar (Akbar, 2021).

[38] She was inspired by: the unconventional literary and travelling career of Isabelle Eberhardt, notes of which I found in one of her journals; poems by Hafiz, for example, "You Were Brave in That Holy War", "The God Who Only Knows Four Words (Come dance with me)", "Stay With Us"; and her own poems, for example, "Some Candles are Too Beautiful To Burn", "Why I Smoke All Day", "Actually I'm An Angel", and "Why I drink Ginger Beer all day".

Illustration 2.8.A

Illustration 2.8.B

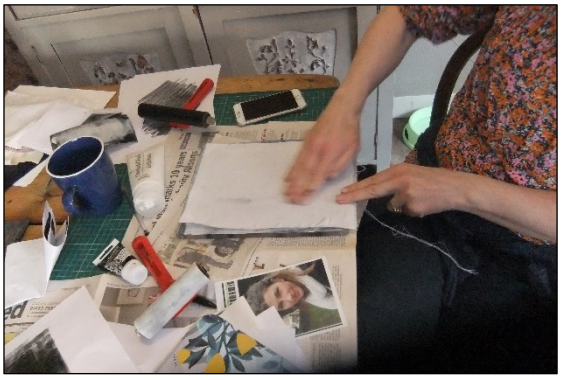


Illustration 2.8.C

Illustration 2.8.D

Illustration 2.8.E

Illustration 2.8.F

Illustration 2.8.G

Illustration 2.8.H

Illustration 2.8.I

Illustration 2.8.J

Illustrations 2.8.A – 2.8.J. From images 2.8.A to 2.8.G, I am having a printmaking tutorial taught by Rose Wordsworth. Rose made a series of prints for the project. Here, she is giving me a lesson in jelly plate printing. I chose a quote from Faye's journal: "A nomad I will remain for life, in love with distant and unchartered places", by Isabelle Eberhardt. Rose could not fit the entire quote onto the plate, so she compromised by shortening it to, "A nomad I will remain". Although in image 2.8.G the words are indiscernible in the photograph, they were faint but readable. In image 2.8.H, I embellished the the edges of the letters with stitching. And in 2.8.I and 2.8.J, the little collaborative work has been stitched onto a quilted box.

Each of the single panels is roughly postcard-sized. As postcards, I had in mind to send them through the post – as *Poste Restante* without any hope of return – to the colourful places Faye travelled. The idea was borrowed from the message-in-a-bottle mystique. Importantly,

Faye would have loved this idea. As an artist-thinker, she loved the magical and invisible and their presence in the humdrum of quotidian dailiness.

About how to shape the stitched works into a form, ideas came forward and then turned down many-a blind alley. Finally, I decided a collaboration between Faye's friends and loved ones, including those who live far away, might help to make the idea more manageable and relevant to the socially engaged approach I had adopted. In order to endorse my decision of working outside the artworld triage of artist-exhibition-viewing public, I invited a group of makers, some of whom were not specifically "makers". The proposal converted the machinery of the postal service to an exhibition space and streamlined the number of viewers to the project's participants.[39] It's an intimate work that calls to mind the presence of Faye, portrays her image, and represents her love of "unchartered places".[40]

The idea of the travelling boxes came about as an analogy to Faye's wandering star. She loved adventure and some of the ways she expressed her wayfaring temperament was through her education and her early worklife. For an independent project at university, she organised a residency in a convent in the Dordogne region of France. On an Erasmus scholarship in her final year of university, she studied in Berlin for a term. She taught school children in Tanzania. She undertook an internship in Turin. She lived and worked in Florence, Corfu, and Marrakesh. For Faye, travelling and working abroad included wending her way home.

For an interim research exhibit of the samples I had produced for the travelling boxes, I was asked to display my findings thus far. This "exhibition" was set up in the cabinets at the entrance of Crush Hall at Francis Close Campus. Up until then, my work had been designed to interrupt the "display" aspect of artworld procedure. To create a "show" of the work,

[39] In alphabetical order, collaborators are as followers: Fiona Brewster (France), Shelley Campbell (UK), Iona Davy (Australia), Liz Davy (New Zealand), Tess Docherty (UK), Christine Felce (UK), Alison Gold (USA), Cynthia Honeybourne (Canada), Lenore Kutka (Canada), Elizabeth and Jessica Marshall (Canada), Sue Meek (UK), Radmila Nastic (Serbia), Cassie Osborne (UK), Ariel O'Sullivan (Canada), Cherril Pope (UK), Narj Seffar (UK), Maureen Sherlock (Canada), Karen, Leslie, and Lisa Stroud (Canada), Lucy Trevitt (UK), Olivia Turner (UK), Anne Wood (UK) and Rose Wordsworth (UK).

[40] These words are part of a quote by Isabelle Eberhardt. I found the excerpt in one of Faye's journals.

especially a project so fragile and intimate, I thought that I was being both thick-skinned and duplicitous. By putting my daughter's image in a display case while members of the public swanned by without conveying the slightest interest in the artefacts I had flaunted for their viewing pleasure, I felt villainous. And duplicitous because how could I defend my position of thwarting white-cube convention by conducting the very behaviour against which I had been so strongly protesting?

However I claimed mitigating circumstances since the guiding principle was a condition of doctoral procedure, and not arising from a tenet of research methodology. But by making this compromise, I had an opportunity to review what I had up until then achieved. By viewing the work thus, I could envision my next work. Taking a lead from the displayed stitchings, I saw that I could develop the idea into a deeper and broader manifestation of the principles I had so far brought about.

For a broad view of the set of cabinets on the west wall of the entrance to Crush Hall, see illustrations 2.9.A, 2.9.C, and 2.9.D. In an east wall cabinet, I suspended one little box, see illustration 2.9.B. I decided to "show" the stitched panels pinned up with pegs on a line. Instead of suspending well-travelled quilted boxes to view, or, indeed, walk past, I pinned up a selection of little stitchings destined to be sewn onto the "quilted boxes". For the collaborators' works, see illustrations 2.9.E to 2.9.K. Although the presentation of artefacts was against my initial policy of framing a conceptual "environment" as an "art object", still, I found the presentation of these mid-work "sketches" useful, aesthetically pleasing, and, also, comforting. Those who participated had put effort into their works, and accordingly, my daughter was portrayed in a way she would have accepted.

My works are displayed in illustrations 2.9.L to 2.9.Q. Together with the stitched panels, I included the sketches I drew to practice motifs such as trees (2.9.L) and wings (2.9.M). The work in illustration 2.9.R is ongoing. Although it is unfinished, I am using a combination of print and stitch.

In summary, the postcard-sized works appeared as makeshift "prayer flags". Although only a provisional demonstration of the body of work thus achieved, the meaning of the idea –

invoking and including Faye's memory and Faye herself – was apparent. Against the grain but adhering to procedure, the exercise gave me a foothold into the next work. Together with the following description of a work by Adrian Piper, I moved into an alternative version of practice.

Illustration 2.9.A

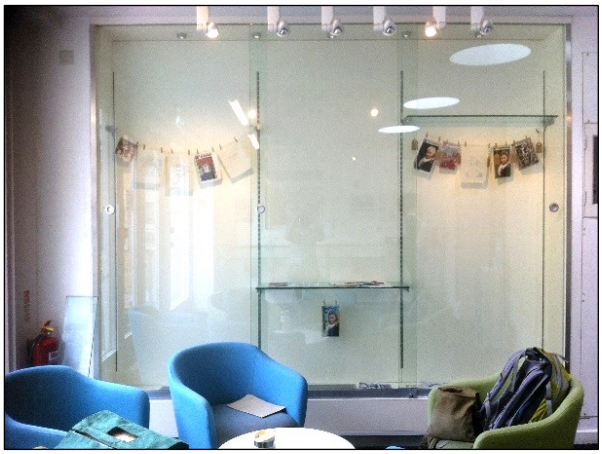


Illustration 2.9.B

Illustration 2.9.C

Illustration 2.9.D

Illustration 2.9.E

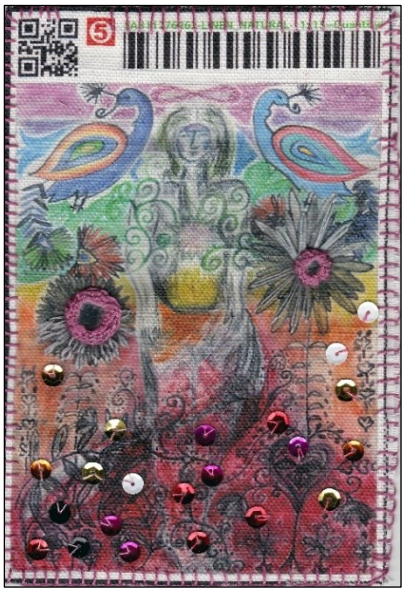


Illustration 2.9.F

Illustration 2.9.H

Illustration 2.9.G

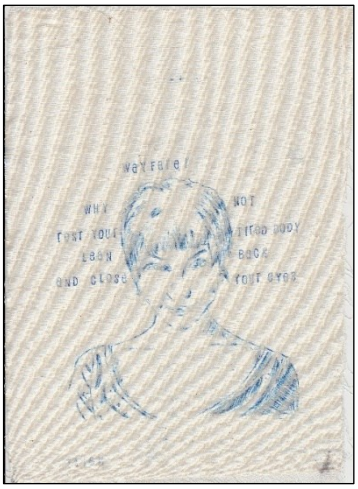


Illustration 2.9.I

Illustration 2.9.J

Illustration 2.9.K

Illustration 2.9.L

Illustration 2.9.M

Illustration 2.9.N

Illustration 2.9.O

Illustration 2.9.P

Illustration 2.9.Q

Illustration 2.9.R

Adrian Piper. Socially engaged art and making a difference

To repeat the context, then, in the stories of Aeneas and Ruth, there is the presentation of challenging circumstances disproportionate to each hero's decency and harsher than either deserves (Aristotle, 1996).[41] But the terms of the conditions are immutable, and to be addressed, first of all, they need to be accepted. For these two heroes, then, it takes grit to have integrity.

In the matter of these two having to accept and address an order that is unwanted and for which each is unprepared, I am analogising their adversity to bereavement by suicide. Regarding any kind of loss, the conditions are universally accompanied by having to accept the injury without any means of rehearsal. Losing a loved one is non-negotiable; whatever the prayer or plea, it will never enable a return of the figure to whom one has been dispossessed. For Aeneas, Ruth, and survivors, acceptance of the hardship is the chief emotional shift to bearing the loss.

Equally and stretching the comparison further to constellate societal problems that outweigh and outsize any one individual, the famous image of the success of David's – Ruth's great-grandson – sling against Goliath (Orpah's descendant) (Kristeva, 1991, p. 71; Sasson, 1989, p. 323) corresponds to the potential power of tiny and unforeseen sources to destabilise an up-until-now unchallenged bogeyman. But apart from feeling grief, and if we push the correlation of "monster" as a socio-political hardship – a deeply-rooted prejudice, say – what dominion does a single individual wield?

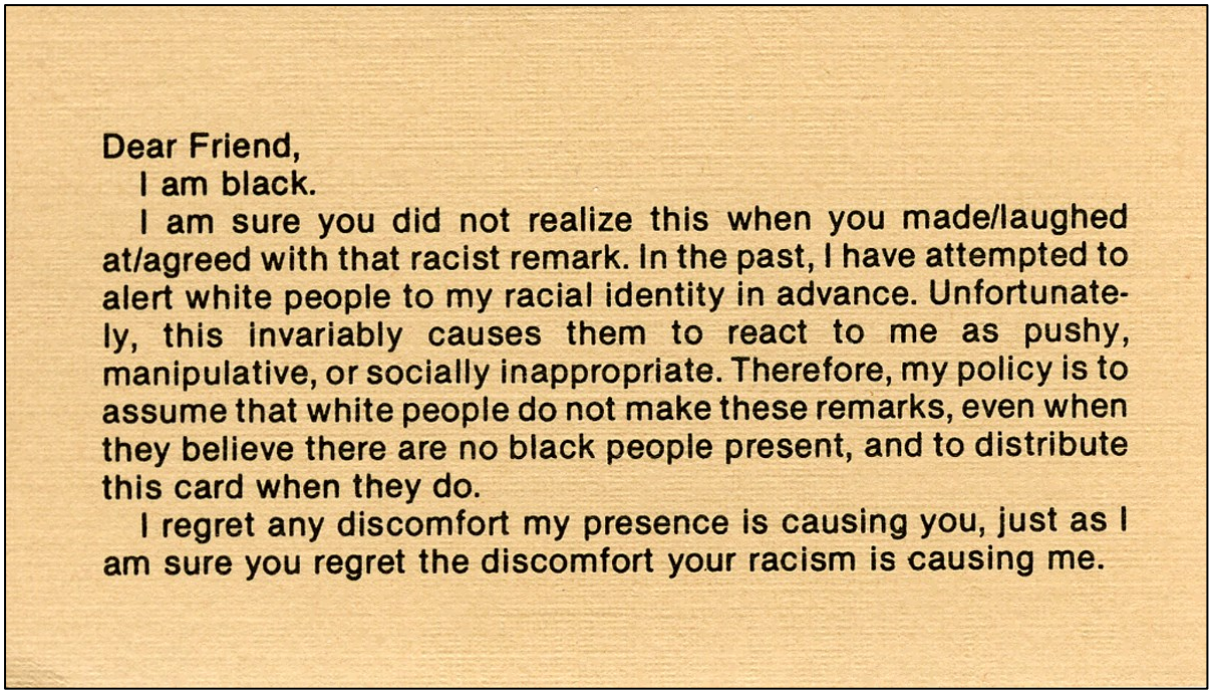
Typically, as a means of disclosure, artists address injustice or represent instances of racism or activism in their work with negligible grades of success. (For an introduction to the efficacy of art in the domain of politics, see Goehr, 2003, pp. 471-485; Eagleton, 1999; Jameson, 1977).[42] Either viewers do not think they are racists, or the offenders are non-museum goers and miss the revelation in the first place. If artists are serious about toppling racism's "Goliath" – or any other social inequality – then, an exhibition site may not be the best-placed location for the message.

[41] An unforeseen misfortune derails the hero's progress.
[42] For a reading defending the separation of art and politics, see Scruton, 2009.

To provide an account of a small gesture creating a meaningful response to the workaday prevalence of racial injustice, I will convey the details of a work made by Adrian Piper.

Between 1986 and 1990, Adrian Piper created a performance piece called *My Calling (Card) #1*. In this work, Piper's *Calling Card* portrays a powerful action through which a number of issues, including racism, are confronted.

In the work, Piper distributes "a calling card" to those who have made a racist remark in her presence. Piper passed out 15 or 16 of these cards over a four-year period. Consequently, the work amassed a very small representative audience. She stopped the project only when somebody confessed to inventing a racist remark in order to receive a card (Costello, 2018, pp. 178-179). The card reads:


Dear Friend,
I am black.
I am sure you did not realize this when you made/laughed at/agreed with that racist remark. In the past, I have attempted to alert white people to my racial identity in advance. Unfortunately, this invariably causes them to react to me as pushy, manipulative, or socially inappropriate. Therefore, my policy is to assume that white people do not make these remarks, even when they believe there are no black people present, and to distribute this card when they do.
I regret any discomfort my presence is causing you, just as I am sure you regret the discomfort your racism is causing me.

There's much more to convey about *My Calling (Card) #1* (Costello, 2018, p. 179) but for my purposes here, I want to use the work to explore two ideas. First, and following my inspiration from Ruth, the distribution of Piper's Calling Card (small gesture) bravely confronts the ubiquity of racial prejudice. The work portrays the dispensation of racial aggressions as kinds of routine patois conveyed with habitual non-reflection. A woman of

colour is present, yet the interlocutor persists.[43] With this in mind, second, then, my initial reaction to Piper's work was to ask myself, how would I introduce myself? What is the message I'd like to proclaim, say, to excuse my trespasses? Do I even desire a statement of introduction? Perhaps I could use it as a statement of activism or identity? So without even considering my circumstances, Piper's work invoked a question: What is my Calling Card?

As prevalent as the social content present in Gustave Courbet's *Stone Breakers*, 1849, Piper's *Calling Card* and the performance she carries out is a portrayal of a social and political landscape. Added to the weight of its content, the delivery of the Calling Card is a snapshot of an artwork "consumed in the very act of its birth". If only a fleeting gesture, it possesses posterity.

To explain the relevance of the research methods I have been exploring in my practice – text and image, stitched postcards, prayer flags, a version of Piper's *Calling Card* work – I aim to corral these disparate areas of enquiry within a single context. The content of which, then, embodies Ruth's qualities of resolute commitment to Naomi and how she performs this personal contract through small-scale advances.

<u>Prayer Flag Pastoral</u>

To repeat the emotional drive at the core of my practice, I have conveyed the loss of my daughter, and my struggle to carry on. But part of the work is motivated by an urge to make a pronouncement. So far, I have eluded the details of Faye's death.

The circumstances of her departure are thus. My daughter died because she took her life. After a psychosis in 2015, she experienced auditory hallucinations and was diagnosed with schizophrenia. The utterance of these words will transport you to an embedded set of values. I know this because I have inhabited this mindscape when "suicide", "paranoid delusions", and "mental health" were other families' problems. Often violence is associated with the interpretation of these terms, especially "schizophrenia" (Filer, 2019, pp. 4-10).

[43] For a discussion of hate speech within the domain of the intersection between Aesthetics and Ethics, see Tirrell, 1998, pp. 283-314.

At the point of considering the contents of my "calling card" alongside the kneejerk response often associated with "suicide" and "schizophrenia", I merged the two lines of enquiry. I resolved to create a "calling card" that expressed a desire for exploring a deeper understanding of mental health. This decision was motivated by a radio programme consisting of an interview by Michael Rosen with Nathan Filer, an author and psychiatric nurse (Rosen, 2022).

After having been trained as a psychiatric nurse, Filer became a writer and broadcaster addressing different aspects of mental health. The programme consists of Filer's ideas about the damaging effects of language within psychiatry. After what by all accounts is an informative discussion, Rosen compares Filer to a little dog at the edge of the psychiatry/psychology world, biting at it and "chewing away at a great edifice of language and complication". "It's so complex and so huge", Rosen continues, "it's so massive, and there you are, nibbling away at the edge. Are you a nibbler?"

Rosen is being light-hearted, but Filer is clearly uncomfortable with the comparison Rosen is making.[44] Keeping with my research practice of on-going miniscule efforts – nibbling at the edge – having a collective capacity for improvement, I find Rosen's appraisal of Filer's work a piece of flattery. Rosen is demonstrating how Filer is making a significant difference against a monolithic mindset of mental health misconceptions created by the institutional approach to psychiatry and the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, an authoritative, Goliath-sized tome of the classification of psychiatric conditions (APA, 2022).

In two ways Filer's revelations relate to the direction of my practice. First, as already discussed, the small-bite, sideways approach is a strategy I have taken on to address grief. It fits with my text-and-image stitchworld methods, socially engaged methodology, and theoretical translation of Ruth's story into art production. In parallel to this, Filer is

[44] Rosen says it this way, "Well, having read your book and listening to you today, Nathan, I can see you as a kind of, if I might describe this, little dog." Filer interjects, "No, you may not!", but Rosen continues, "… at the edge of the world of psychiatry…" (26.40-27.34).

demonstrating the shortfall in our grasp of knowledge about mental health. Within the sector, the domain of mental health is woefully constrained by the status quo disbursement of diagnoses and medication. Outside its medical perimeters, public knowledge is limited and inaccurate. These two elements – structure (the shape of the art) and content (its message) – provide the framework for a work that aims to disrupt the stability of this prevailing mindset.

To begin, I want to return to Nathan Filer's demonstration of our attitude towards the term "schizophrenia". Filer's proposal is to question the term's ability to categorise a number of health conditions. After having entered the vernacular, it has become a single-use term commonly associated with anti-social demonstration and violence. Accordingly, as a provision of the book, Filer treats each mention of the term with either quote-marks or with the preface "so-called" (Filer, 2019, p. 8). In order to understand the narrow understanding of disorders of this kind, Filer prompts the reader to say "schizophrenia" aloud, repeat it and add some volume. How, he asks his reader, does it make you feel (Filer, 2019, p. 4)?

My calling card statement is designed to loosen the stigma attached to preconceived notions of "schizophrenia" and suicide.

Dear Friend,

My daughter, Faye, was diagnosed with a mental health condition. She took her own life on 27th October 2020. She was 31 years old.

'Schizophrenia' and Suicide are highly emotive words. Preconceived ideas, feelings and judgements are invoked by hearing or pronouncing either of these terms. If you express other affecting words, such as Rainbow, Holiday or Chocolate Cake, your reaction is noticeably different.

The next time you hear the term 'Schizophrenia' or Suicide, take a moment. That's all this message is asking from you. Just PAUSE.

Thank you.

While I am borrowing Piper's idea of making a statement to address a social injustice, it is here the appropriation ends. I do not intend to distribute "calling cards" to those who mockingly use the terms "schizophrenia" or "suicide". It may be an injustice; it may be an issue to which I return in the future. Instead, here then, I am using my "calling card" statement as a celestial request, a "wish". For the flag installation, I will print onto the material text that represents a prayer.

The flags will be suspended high in the canopies of the trees. Viewers will be unable to read the words. Keeping with the conventional notion of prayer flag text entering the domain of cause and effect through the wind's distribution service, my desire for mental health reform and deeper understanding is conveyed. My daughter died in a tree in a woodland called "The Heavens". It is unfathomable that a union is created between such a tragic event and such a wondrous landscape.

The structure of making lines of flags followed on intuitively from the "travelling boxes" project. In the postal-box remembrance work, I – together with friends and loved ones –

created postcard-sized stitchings of my daughter. The postal needlework inspired the prayer flag project. Both represent portraits of Faye. Instead of handwork, each flag is block printed from hand-made stamps. But similar to the postal work, the content of the "stamps" portrays combinations of text and image, quotes I found in Faye's journals, lines from poetry she was inspired by, and her own writing. Importantly, the content of one set of multiples is an interception of the kind of kneejerk reactions we commonly associate with terms such as "Mental Health" and "Suicide". It is my version of a Calling Card.

In a traditional sense, prayer flags carry messages that are transmitted by the wind. Without negating that interpretation – and, in fact, comforted by its very idea – here, instead, I am focussing on the practice with the purpose of helping to live with the over-powering feeling of loss in the aftershock of my daughter's death. By dying the material, making the stamps, printing onto the fabric, and sewing together the processions of flags, I am repeating a procedure over and over. One flag by one flag – for some, a kind of boredom, for me, a kind of purgation – and at the same time, I am thinking about Faye. And also, as already declared, I am not thinking about Faye. By duplicating and being absorbed in the process, step-by-step, I am living with grief.

As mentioned, Faye died in a tree. If it is possible to understand, my choice to suspend a series of pennants in, between, and through trees analogises Homecoming. In the same way, the travelling postal boxes return to my address: Home.

The aesthetic precedent I am addressing is the impact of one tiny phenomenon repeated to an unintelligible extent. Given their height, it is possible nobody will read the content of the flags. The viewers, then, will perceive only the impression of the pretty-coloured, fluttering flags. The content is hidden in plain sight.

To prepare the proposal for the show, I visited two sites for their potential for hanging streams of prayer flags: Museum in the Park, Stroud, and Park Campus.

Illustration 2.10.A

Illustration 2.10.B

From these images, I sketched the trees and speculatively drew some prayer flags running through the branches (2.10.C and 2.10.D). I preferred the pennants moving horizontally between more than one tree (2.10.C). In Illustration 2.10.D, the swooping garlands unappealingly resembled Christmas tree decorations, so I opted for more tautly hung stretches of flags.

Illustration 2.10.C

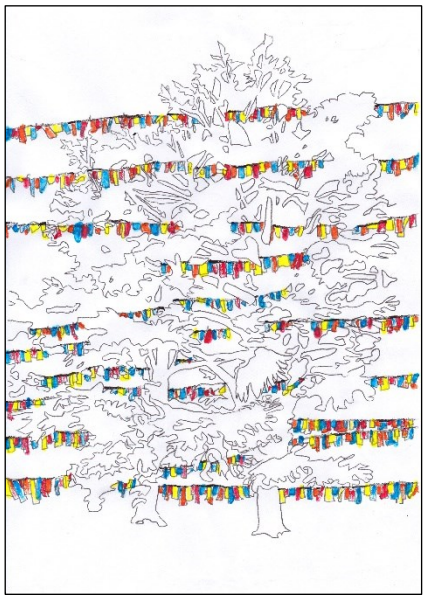
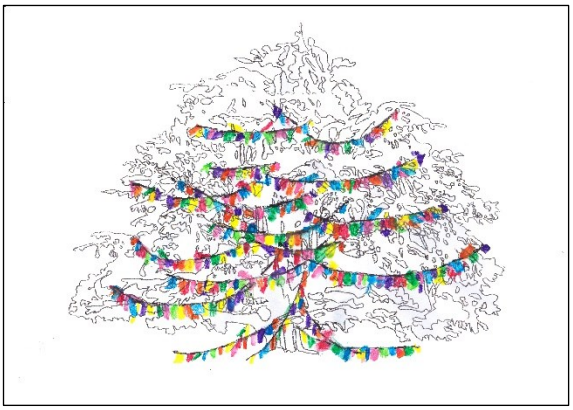


Illustration 2.10.D



For the composition of the flags, I had in mind to repeat what I had started with the stitched panels by combining image and text. Certain of Faye's pictures had been used as line drawings already, and accordingly, I anticipated making stamps from one of her images accompanied by a few words of poetry. In the following examples, I used the words from a poem by Hafiz. It is a poem she read aloud to me in the summer before she died. Due to her schizophrenia, she heard voices. Without telling me details, she did explain that she received words from either the devil or from a heavenly host: black or white. The words from Hafiz's poem struck a familiar chord in her. She felt she was fighting a battle between good and evil.

Illustration 2.10.E

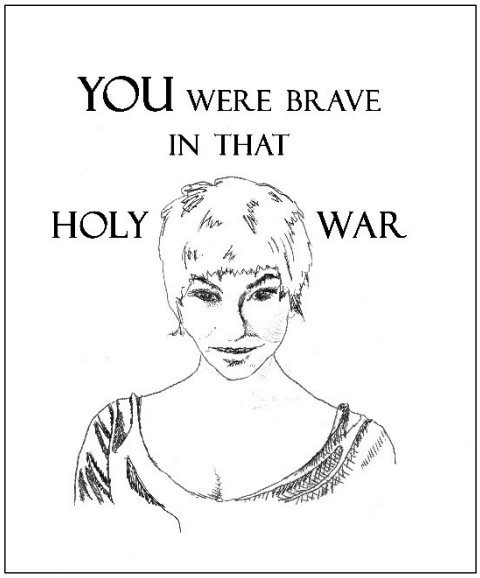


Illustration 2.10.F

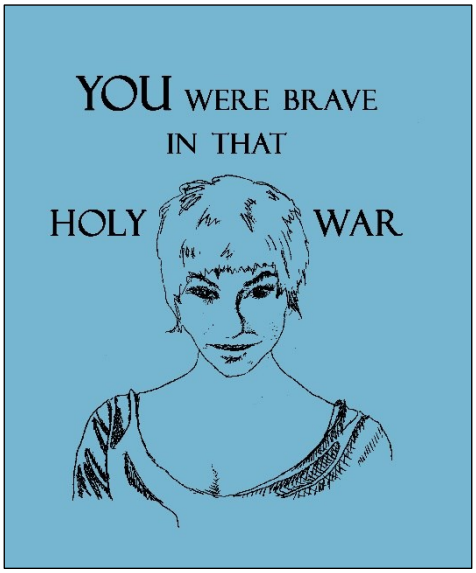


Illustration 2.10.G

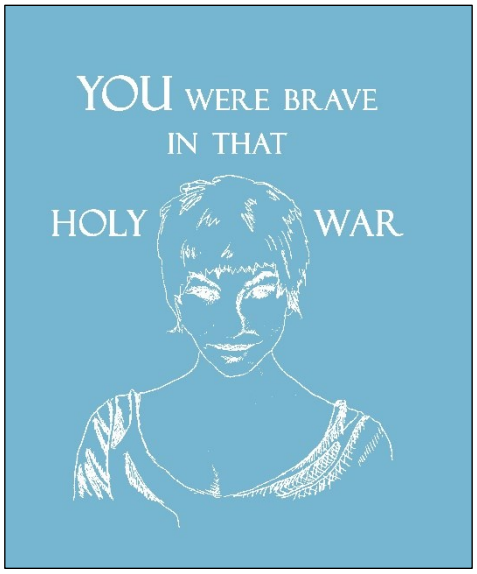
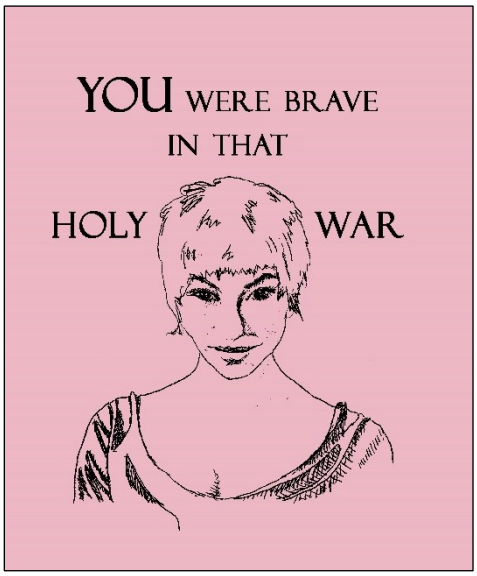


Illustration 2.10.H



Although it is unfinished, I made a stitching of how I envisioned *Prayer Flag Pastoral*. Onto the flags, I am stitching one-letter-by-one-letter a line from a poem Faye wrote (from her journal, see 2.10.J). In white thread, you can just about see on the bottom banner the words "is to be", which if finished would read "is to begin" (2.10.I). The lettering will read, "in your falling leaves pretty blue trees I know to end is to begin". The poem is as follows:

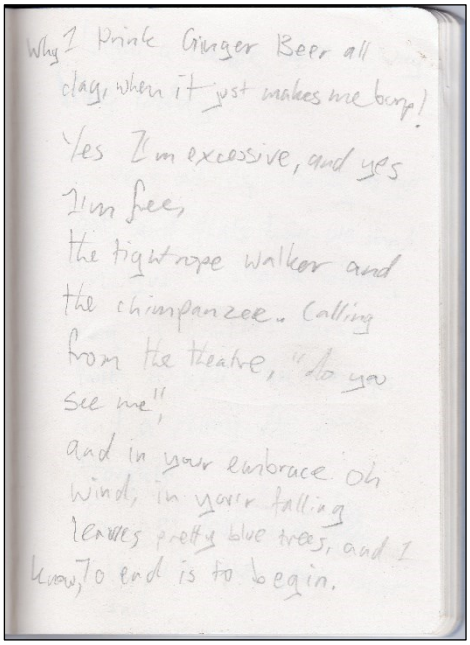
<u>Why I drink Ginger Beer all day, when it just makes me burp!</u>

Yes, I'm excessive, and yes
I'm free,
the tightrope walker and
the chimpanzee. Calling
from the theatre, "do you
see me,"

and in your embrace oh
wind, in your falling
leaves pretty blue trees, and I
know, To end is to begin.

Illustration 1.10.I

Illustration 1.10.J



In the works I have completed thus far, I have used stitching to analogise slow, steady, and repetitive action. In the next section, I will explain how Aeneas and Ruth use the same process – gradual progression – to overcome the hindrances that threaten to disable their progress. As Aeneas carries out his duties, Juno's interference is parallel to the racial prejudice Ruth encounters as a Moabite. Using these examples, finally I am making a comparison between the heroic gesture of acceptance Ruth and Aeneas demonstrate and learning to live with loss.

<u>Concluding remarks</u>

I am asserting that in the Book of Ruth there are significant dangers, although in my reading, Ruth and Naomi's relationship does not belong in this classification. Instead according to the context of the lawless days of the Judges, potentially, Ruth's agitators are stuck in the headlights of the Goliath of racial, gender, and class otherness. As a Moabite, a woman, and a labourer, Ruth's social status renders her powerless and at considerable risk. Yet in this

context of diminishing returns, Ruth prevails. Through fortitude and duty – in parallel to Aeneas – Ruth honours her oath to Naomi. At the same time, she stretches the efficacy of Israelite policy, for example, Deuteronomic and Levitical laws regarding provisions for widows, and the prohibition against inter-racial marriages (Ezra 9-10; Neh. 13.1-3).

At this point in my practice, still I am adhering to a socially engaged format in order to agitate the complacency of artworld principles. *Travelling Boxes* fits into the category of participatory work as the project's significance relies on the contribution of others. At a stretch, I inserted *Prayer Flag Pastoral* into this category by proclaiming that it is outside the perimeters of a white cube, but also the notion of prayers travelling by wind. Participation, then, is integral to the piece unbeknownst to viewers who might catch a glimpse of the installation.

In this chapter, I have addressed my research question – how can I represent Ruth in a contemporary text while pressing artworld boundaries and offering experience as an artwork object? – by analogising her notable endurance while overcoming her labours. As a symbolic gesture to living with loss, I have invoked Ruth's process through the repetitive and "little-by-little" process of stitchwork. By using the postal service as "exhibition space", I removed the gallery interface from being the endgame for art production. Finally as the work is composed of the experience of stitchers whose artwork is to think about and represent my daughter in a piece of stitching, the subject of the maker's expression is the object of the piece. In the end, there is "an object" of stitching, but as the maker, I am "framing" the community that is created by the participatory activity.

While *Travelling Boxes* represented my research aspirations at the time, the project was unable to develop. Unbeknownst even to myself, the way in which I was living with loss had changed. As a result, I did not carry out *Prayer Flag Pastoral*. In Chapter Three, I explain how I felt compelled to re-write my Calling Card onto a prayer flag. In the process of carrying this out, I made a modal shift. Instead of focusing on representing Faye as a means of addressing loss, I invoked a different level of grief; it was a shift in focus I could not have predicted. Through the research, the torch rotated 180 degrees and illuminated the raw desperation of my inner world. Chapter Three represents the cracking apart of the edifice I had up until

then been creating to address Faye's absence. Through this process, Tod Linafelt's reading of Ruth (2010, pp. 117-129) offered an alternative approach to representing Ruth's story which at the same time generously accommodated a new perspective to living with loss.

CHAPTER THREE. From the personal to the universal

Introduction

In order to examine the research question – how do I represent the Book of Ruth in a contemporary context? – I am making associations between Ruth, the story's commentators, art theory, and my practice. For Chapter Three, I have divided the discussion into Part One and Part Two. Under the title "From the personal to the universal", Tod Linafelt's essay on verse pattern and its relevance regarding personal expression in Ruth 1.16-17 and 20-21 provides the frame for the entirety of the chapter. Since defining art ranges from the viewers' response to the properties of the perceived object, the argument leads to the idea I am exploring in this chapter: the maker's insight and experience. With this in mind, I provide a truncated historical account of aesthetics in Part One. With a backdrop of art theory, then, I follow this analysis with a closer reading of Linafelt's defence for poeticising Ruth's famous avowal of loyalty to Naomi and Naomi's declaration of misery to the townswomen. Part of Linafelt's argument is an explanation through Eric Auerbach of Old Testament narration. Here, the text is a fact-based account of the plotline of the story. On Auerbach's reading, while Old Testament events are dispossessed of detail or character motivation, they are rich in interpretative properties. To provide an example of spare-style narrative technique giving way to multiple readings, I examine Joan Didion's essay about the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco during the hippie era.

At the beginning of my research on the personal arguably being the motivating source of art production, I was directing my attention to creating the prayer flag project. The crux of the prayer flag idea was to release a message about suicide and mental health awareness which up until now I had been referring to as my calling card. Illustrations 3.1.A and 3.1.B represent my proposal for the message to appear on prayer flags.

Illustration 3.1.A

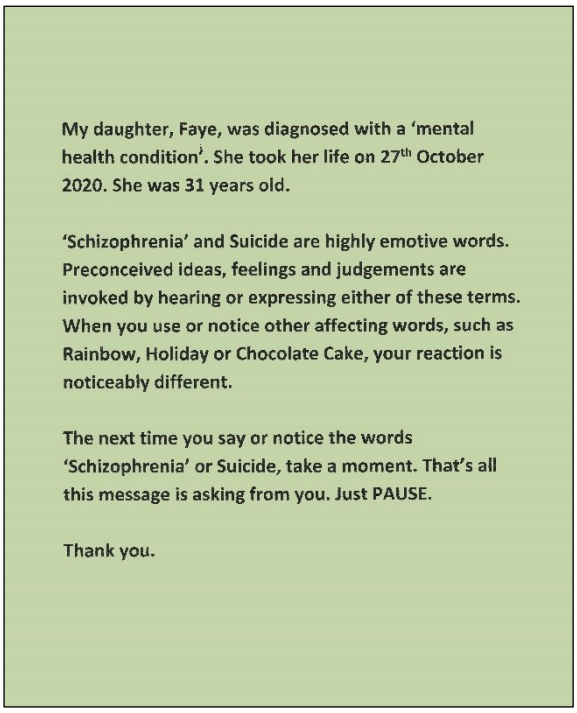
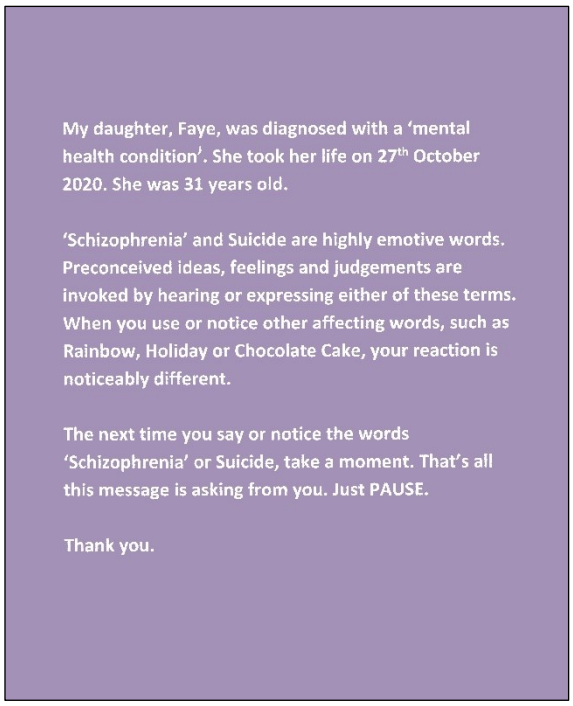


Illustration 3.1.B



As my studies through Ruth and art theory progressed, I started to realise that the prayer flag project was not an instance of the kind of personal expression about which I was writing. Instead, I was carrying out a continuation of the Travelling Boxes, i.e., representing Faye but not expressing a personal representation of living with loss. Rather than uniting into a comprehensive work, practice and theory were being riven apart. Before terminating the idea for this exhibition, I wrote two poems, one unfinished, for printing verse-by-verse onto the postcard-sized flags. As I explain, once I started fossicking through feelings of loss, the prayer flag project could not hold the weight of my experience and what I could represent. Before commencing the practice I finally started in Chapter Four – an integrated response to the research in this chapter – I wrote some poetry and produced an image of Faye inspired by a dream. Since she died, I have dreamt of her once and it was during this period. For this chapter, I am including this journal entry as a part of my practice.

After establishing the value of the personal as the heart of art production, in Part Two I explore the difference between the kind of personal that invites an audience and the other

that repels it. To explain the distinction, I use an example from Roger Scruton. The analogy is drawn wider by examining the Ovidian myths of Narcissus and Pygmalion. From Pygmalion, I provide an analysis of the line 'Such art his art concealed'. Conceivably for this argument, the text unites the personal with the universal. On this reading, I argue that the apparent disparity between the personal with the universal instead provides a theory of art.

While the theory seems plausible, still, there is the problem of accessing this dormant and godforsaken trove of personal/artistic inspiration. I revisit Piper's *Calling Card* to explain her process for arriving at those few carefully selected words and summarise the accompanying statement she provides as documentation for the project. Finally I convey the process I underwent to write the poetry for a personal calling card that was never made. Instead of interspersing my output throughout this chapter, I have chosen to reserve it until Chapter Four. For me, the work is so raw and unskilled I wanted to portray the extent of the theory in advance. Although I am not "framing" these unfinished works, for me, they are possibly the most engaging and heart-rending pieces in the trajectory of the project. Importantly, they lay the foundation and impact for the exhibition material as laid out in Chapter Four.

Introduction. Part One

Over the course of this chapter, I am borrowing the ideas expressed by Tod Linafelt in his essay about the verse form of Ruth 1.16-17 and 20-21 in the NRSV translation (Linafelt, 2010, p. 124). By being structured formally as poetry, Ruth's and Naomi's speeches express something about their personal feelings. In Old Testament narrative, a glimpse at any character's feelings or motivations is a rare event. At the same time, Ruth's declaration of devotion to Naomi (1.16-17) transcends her personal avowal and arguably has become one of the most endearing and universally enjoyed passages in the Bible. Regarding the "poetry" of Ruth and Naomi, then, Linafelt's reading provides the framework for Chapter Three.

From Linafelt's essay, I am emphasising the insight of a personal expression transfiguring into a universally understood and appreciated portrayal. But while carrying out the practice in my proposal for *Prayer Flag Pastoral*, an emerging gap between theory and practice was becoming evident. Consisting primarily of the same idea as the stitchings in the *Travelling Boxes* – images of Faye and a few words of text – the work did not portray a personal

expression of my feelings of loss. Apart from keeping Faye close by representing her through her image, my calling card statement sounded more instructional than inspirational.

While still gripping onto the idea of realising the prayer flag project, I attempted to adhere to the principles of personal expression as the vision for creativity while writing a more personally motivated calling card. Thus prepared with an accompanying principle, I produced an emotional combustion of loss and sorrow. Although the outpouring was therapeutic and clarifying, my attempt to control the torrent into an artistic composition could not be brought to fruition at this point. I chose to employ poetry, an artistic method I had no experience or skill. I managed a portrayal of sentimental distress. My efforts to carry out the rewriting of a personal calling card statement is the scope of my artistic output in this chapter. Instead of artworks and documentation, I am offering a range of "sketches" I produced to bear witness to the process of changing direction in my practice.

Chapter Three, then, represents a turning point in my methods of art production. A "turning point" is the most positive spin to describe the disruption of disposing a fully worked-out proposal. On the other hand, I was relieved about not undertaking a project I lacked the inner commitment to carry out. Chapter Four describes how I created an alternative proposal by picking up the glimmer of an idea I started in the *Who We Are* project. But at this crossroad, I addressed the condition of personal-universal expression by burrowing into the inner domain of my experience in order to re-write my calling card. The kind of personal insight I extracted and tried to represent in a formal composition lacked the artistic skill of concealment, the relevance of which I address in Part Two of this chapter.

With hindsight, I came to see that the combination of research theory about the personal and universal, and the practice I chose to carry it out, resulted in the collapse of a model that consisted of shovelling top-heavy and incongruent data onto a stockpile. Here, rather than entwining theory and practice together, each was progressing in a different direction. In order to support the personal/universal theoretical defence I was building, the practice had to emerge from private and personal expressions but at the same time, the origins of which must be "concealed" – a key idea to which I will return. Suddenly I realised I was still

representing Faye and not my inner sense of living with loss and the despair it brings about. My feelings had moved forward but my practice had not.

When I had to make a choice, I availed myself of the theoretical underpinnings of Linafelt's thoughts on formalising personal revelations in Ruth. At this fork, I abandoned the prayer flag project. Although the decision corresponded with the ideas I had been researching, suddenly I was without a working proposal to represent its theoretical counterpart. Chapter Four offers an explanation about how I moved forward from this predicament.

Linafelt's essay invokes certain theories of art and its founding principles in aesthetics. By locating the value of art production in the hands of its maker, a legacy of theory is awakened. Thus first to introduce a closer reading of Linafelt's thoughts, I provide a brief summary of aesthetics from Aristotle to Freud, through Kant and Nietzsche. Following, I return to Linafelt's essay to explore the significance of Ruth's and Naomi's exclamations as verse.

On Linafelt's reading of the personal and universal in Ruth, I wrote two poems, one unfinished. As its idea originates from Linafelt's analysis of repetition and mirroring in Ruth's and Naomi's speeches, I insert the partially finished example in Part One, and the second, at the end of Part Two.

To provide a contemporary example of Linafelt's description of pared-down writing comparable to Old Testament narration, I offer Joan Didion's essay "Slouching Towards Bethlehem". By employing a journalistic writing approach – spare and matter-of-fact – Didion anticipated her over-arching message would be unequivocally understood. Instead, the writing itself, Didion's objective, and its reception represent a range of diverse responses. By having achieved an opposing reaction to her intention, the example provides a defence for Auerbach's explanation of a coolly objective and fact-based writing style as material rich for interpretation but light on certainty.

Finally, at the end of Didion's essay, her parting image is a distressing portrait of a child. Its appearance echoes through western literature as a motif of children whose loss sustains the

prevailing order. Briefly, I mention this legacy through the works of Fyodor Dostoyevsky, William James, and Ursula le Guin. As a parent of a child who takes her life, I am seeking explanations to understand the circumstances that have led to such a tragic event. While here sacrifice presents an aspect of clarification for the unfathomable, in Part Two I express Roger Scruton's idea of lost love conceived as necessity as the inventor of misfortune.

Although unrequited or dashed love and the idea of sacrificial offerings being spilt for the continuation of the status quo are altogether different types of loss compared to suicide, one considers any kind of loss in order to provide fragments of comprehension. Still the point remains. Whatever course the powers of explanation take, loss is synthesised through bite-size and diverse illuminations. In Chapter Four, I use a practice-based method for picking up the pieces, while in this chapter, I offer the process of dissolution.

The following section presents a short history of aesthetics regarding the areas of focus – the response of viewers, the components of the object, the attributes of the reviewer, the origins of the maker's inspiration – on which art theory is founded.

Amongst other topics, the making of art, and the studies of aesthetics and the philosophy of art, express the relationship between personal experience and universal truths. How can a mere preference be conceived as an objective truth, or a science? Can we know things through the senses that can be understood as *a priori* truths? (Kant, 1966). Does beauty reside in the object (and if so, what are those rules?) (Buchenau, 2013; Beiser, 2009) or in the perception of its viewer? Do we need the role of a critic, teacher, commentator, or *aesthete* to decode an artwork for the viewing public? (Hume, 1757). It is from this cluster of opposing ideas that aestheticians locate their cornerstones for theoretical propositions of truth regarding the making and enjoyment of art.

For Aristotle and for Kant the viewer's attitude towards the work determines its value. Aristotle conceives tragedy as a medical purgation. Briefly in Chapter Two, I addressed Aristotle's conception of tragedy through its structural conventions with an emphasis on the

character of the hero. The hero must elicit pity and fear in its audience and in order to do so, their character cannot be too good or too bad. A viewer will not be able to identify with a saint, and when a reversal of misfortune occurs for a villain, the audience will feel gladdened – rather than pity and fear – when their setback comes about. The hero must possess a faultline one which is consonant with members of the audience. For Aristotle, more important than character development is the structure of the plot and its components that sets up viewers' responses to tragedy. The drama must consist of a reversal of fortune, an error in the hero's judgement, and an enlightening moment when ignorance is replaced with knowledge. When these elements are present, viewers will feel pity and fear in an instance of cathartic renewal. In this way, the purpose and value of tragedy – of art – is its improving purgative properties. By taking these elements into account, the skill of the artist is their ability to bring about a certain response in a viewer by including and ordering the constituent parts of its plot.

Up until the eighteenth century, the term "aesthetics" did not exist. The term is created by Alexander Baumgarten in 1735. Baumgarten together with the German Rationalists consider the appearance of beauty in the object and provide attendant theories to explain its compositional principles.[45] Later in the eighteenth century, there is a theoretical shift in aesthetics from beauty residing in the object to its perception in the mind of the viewer.

Kant's *Critique of Judgement* eclipses the German Rationalists' ideas about beauty and aesthetics by locating aesthetic judgement in the process of knowing sensuous intuitions by employing a disinterested comportment in the mind of the viewer. In its conception of locating beauty within a viewer's attitude, this aptitude comes about while disinterestedly contemplating an object. According to Kant's epistemology, subjectivities – personal impressions – are known by being subsumed within a suitable concept (universal). In opposition but complementary to Kant's idea (1998) about understanding, then, Beauty does not need a concept (§4). (1966) Without the presence of a concept, then, it is a rational process of acquiring knowledge and is pleasurably derived by regarding Beauty "without

[45] Among others, the German Rationalists consist of the following philosophers: Gottfried W. Leibniz, Alexander G. Baumgarten, Christian Woolf, Johann J. Winckelmann, Moses Mendelssohn, and Gotthold E. Lessing.

interest". The idea carries great significance because it identifies the viewer – the subject – as the author of knowledge (synthetic *a priori*: Kant's "Copernican Revolution") (1998). Thus an object can be known through the senses in a rationally coherent manner without having to know the object as itself, which, as Kant emphasises, one can never know. In other words, and to summarise, "… feeling also has a structure that can manifest itself as rational …" (Schaper, 1992, p. 371).

Up until then, aestheticians located the value of art in either the mind of the viewer or the composition of the object that is associated with a body of rules against which the artefact can be measured. Kant's synthetic *a priori* conception of disinterestedness in the realm of aesthetics becomes the prevailing definition of art from the late eighteenth century. In the nineteenth century, Friedrich Nietzsche cannot countenance art within the perimeters of disinterestedness. According to Nietzsche, a conception of art is built on two principles: it is the opposite of disinterestedness, and second, it is a product of deception and "the highest power of falsehood" (Deleuze, 1983, p. 102).

By corralling beauty away from other spheres of the lived experience, for example, morality, the value of art is constructed by the viewer, and from Aristotle to Kant, "a less and less gifted spectator who now has only a disinterested regard for beauty" (Deleuze, 1983, p. 102). Nietzsche shifts the burden of proof from the viewer to the artist and by doing so, emphasises being fully engaged and wholly interested. As an affirmation of active forces which presuppose the condition of an active life, "Nietzsche demands an aesthetics of creation, the aesthetics of Pygmalion" in the hands of its maker (Deleuze, 1983, p. 102).

For Nietzsche, in its possession of wile and falsehood art is a legitimate cheat and the artist need not suffer for its guile, "the *lie* is sanctified and the *will to deception* has a good conscience…" (Nietzsche, 1967, pp. 153-154) (Author's emphasis). Accordingly, art "is elevated to a higher power" (Deleuze, 1983, p. 103). The imitative power of art that Plato found so troubling is, instead for Nietzsche, a kind of shelter from truth.[46] Rather than caging

[46] See note 48. Here I list Plato's objections amongst which one is the imitative power of art to deceive.

the three prevailing principles of aesthetics into a set – the true, the good, and the beautiful – they are atomised by Nietzsche.

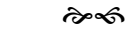
> For a philosopher to say, "the good and the beautiful are one," is infamy; if he goes on to add, "also the true," one ought to thrash him. Truth is ugly.
>
> We possess art lest we perish of the truth (Nietzsche, 1968b, p. 435).

As I quote later in Chapter Four to represent the stages one is influenced by in order to live with loss, Emily Dickinson puts across the same idea,

> Tell all the truth but tell it slant —
> Success in Circuit lies
> Too bright for our infirm Delight
> The Truth's superb surprise
> As Lightning to the Children eased
> With explanation kind
> The Truth must dazzle gradually
> Or every man be blind — (Dickinson, 1858-1865)

In these examples, we learn something further about the role and skill of the artist. Rather than forever shunting deception into the shadows, art's imitative faculty and an affirmative thrust of the will are stimulated and preserved by an artist. According to Nietzsche the will to deceive preserved in artistry is transformed into something which is asserted through the facility of invention or illusion. "'Appearance' here signifies reality *once more*, only selected, strengthened, corrected. The tragic artist is *not* a pessimist – it is precisely he who *affirms* all that is questionable and terrible in existence…" (Nietzsche, 1968a, p. 38) (Author's emphasis).

By considering a brief history of aesthetics concluding with the intensity of Nietzsche's attention on the creator, I am defending the subjectivity and personal insight of the maker as a core feature in a definition of art.



With the seat of aesthetics placed in the lap of the maker, then, the connection between the personal and the universal is a relevant area of enquiry for the production of art as well as

its guiding theories. By settling on this proposition, how does a maker go about divining universal appeal from personal experience? At first glance, this incongruent combination presents a kind of conundrum, or at least an irony because pure subjectivity seems the last insight one needs to discover an overarching truth. In fact, the oration of a personal viewpoint is usually a source of boredom and not an event to promote the repeatability of pleasure for others. To begin, I will cast some light onto what appears to be an impenetrable problem by introducing a portrait of the character of an artist by Freud.

Freud calls certain drives that have been repressed by the ego “phantasies”, or day-dreams, and the internal playing out of this drama has the potential to surface as difficulties or, say, symptoms (Freud, 1974, pp. 420-421). Normally, this combination is “decisive for a conflict. An artist, however, finds a path back to reality in the following manner” (Freud, 1974, p. 423). For Freud, artists probably produce a good deal of “phantasy” creation, and at the same time permit “laxity of the repressions” (Freud, 1974, p. 423). Freud’s idea is worth quoting at length,

> … [artists understand] how to work over [their] … day-dreams in such a way as to make them lose what is too personal about them … and to make it possible for others to share in the enjoyment of them. [They understand] … how to tone them down so that they do not easily betray their original from proscribed sources. [They] … possess the mysterious power of shaping some particular material until it has become a faithful image of [their] phantasy; and [they know] … moreover, how to link so large a yield of pleasure to this representation of [an] … unconscious phantasy that, for the time being at least, repressions are outweighed and lifted by it. If [they are] … able to accomplish all this, [they make] … it possible for other people once more to derive consolation and alleviation from their own sources of pleasure in their unconscious which have become inaccessible to them…. (Freud, 1974, pp. 423-424)

Accordingly, through the production of artworks, impressions from a maker’s inner domain, unbeknownst sometimes even to themselves, are extracted by means of the artistic process. Through making, Freud explains, the emergence of an insight is allowed to escape from its inner vault because of a special impulse possessed by artists: laxity of the repressions. Thus a maker is prepared to arrange this hallowed information into a sensual object: an artwork, a poem, a song, a book, a thing that no longer represents the maker alone.

From a deeply personal perception, then, the composition is skilfully wrought having been released from the domain of the private. In a masterful shape, the original drive, relieved from repression, and reduced from what is too personal, migrates to the public realm. By so doing, the pleasure felt by its maker is enjoyed also by the perceiver: a victory over repression. But as a hostage, the impulse – or repression – causes its owner, say, guilt or fear that has the potential to surface into waking life as a symptom or more dramatically, a neurosis. If it is discharged, it produces relief, and accordingly, pleasure. The viewer identifies within the object this psychic achievement but without having to enact the process themself. If only temporary, the work has provided a short-hand cathartic renewal.

To explore this principle, I address how deeply personal phenomena have the power to universalise experiences and understanding. But to arrive at this resolution, there must be some examination of how the apparently simple procedure – "laxity of the repressions" – is brought about. This special talent – the presence of which artists are supposedly acquainted – consists of a reflex that functions primarily to liberate a cache of inhibitions. As well-rehearsed tyrannies since birth, repressions are Bogeymen kept imprisoned by psychic enforcers. "Laxity of the repressions", then, is an oxymoron, even for an artist. They cannot and will not be exhumed in the first instance of handling a paintbrush or holding a pen.

Still, Freud identifies artists as being closer than others to piercing this membrane. Here is an opportunity to reiterate Juno's remarkable utterance, the quote that so fascinated Freud, *Flectere si nequeo superos, Acheronta movebo*: If I cannot bend the will of Heaven, I shall move the powers of Hell. As an analogy, the River Acheron in the Underworld might be the location we plumb to extract a kind of sense which provides the maker with the psychic material to construct an object that is universally understood and appreciated. Still enigmatic, I elaborate on the process through which an artist retrieves insight from the realm of the private in Chapter Four.

In order to explore and finally defend these claims, in the next section I am considering a closer analysis of Tod Linafelt's assessment of Ruth 1.16-17 and 20-21 as poems. By reading Ruth's and Naomi's declarations as poems, the reader is spoilt by having been given personal insight, a gift not often bestowed in the Old Testament. Following Erich Auerbach, we learn

that the Old Testament is written in fact-based, economical text. While sparse and unencumbered, this style builds a solid frame for interpretation.

Ruth 1.16-17 and 20-21

Even in a discussion consisting of the presence of the universal within the personal in artworld parlance, the Book of Ruth is instructive. By studying the two instances of personal expression in Ruth, there is potential for learning more about the relationship between Ruth and Naomi. As already discussed, there are wide-ranging analyses of Ruth and Naomi's relationship. Some commentators have cited their relationship as a cause for some alarm, while others see a friendly relationship between two women. Earlier, I used Fewell and Gunn's inquiry of the silences of Naomi to identify, at least in part, the hardships of Ruth. Now while exploring the polarity between the personal and universal, again their relationship is part of the examination.

Although Old Testament stories are sometimes comprised of the most dramatic intensity, the character of the narrative is lean and spare. As Tod Linafelt explains (2010, pp. 117-118), the Old Testament presents "a rigorous economy of style". For example, Abraham's journey to Moria with Isaac is imparted without description or expression of his internal struggle or God's motivation (Gen. 2.1-19). For Linafelt, "the best place to begin thinking about biblical narrative" (2010, p. 121, n. 3) is Erich Auerbach's essay "Odysseus' Scar" (1974). By comparing Homer's *Odyssey* to the Old Testament, Auerbach describes the differences in each portrayal of reality.

In Homer, every detail including flashbacks "is narrated, again with such a complete externalization of all the elements of the story and of their interconnections as to leave nothing in obscurity" (Auerbach, 1974, p. 1). In this kind of full and orderly delivery – foreground, Auerbach calls it – "even passion does not disturb" (Auerbach, 1974, p. 2). By characterising reality thus, this kind of epic poem – and here he quotes Schiller – "rob[s] us of our emotional freedom" (Auerbach, 1974, p. 2). In comparison, Auerbach cites the unvarnished narration of the binding of Isaac (Gen. 22).

By considering the difference between the character of the Greek Gods and the Hebrew God, Auerbach explains the contrast in narrative styles. For example, Zeus is one amongst many gods, he has a history, he inhabits form, he speaks, he is emotional, he has characteristics and behaviours, and makes judgements and errors. In contrast, the Jewish God appears without form or location and "is less a cause than a symptom of their manner of comprehending and representing things" (Auerbach, 1974, p. 3). And so, too, Abraham is similarly portrayed, "… whether indoors or in the open air, is not stated; it does not interest the narrator, the reader is not informed…" (Auerbach, 1974, p. 3).

God addresses Abraham by name, Abraham replies, "Here I am", and God delivers the instruction to take Isaac to Moria to be slayed as a sacrifice. The weight of the command is compounded, as God orders, "Take your son, *your only son Isaac*, whom you love" (Gen. 22.2) (my emphasis). Without a word, Abraham starts the process of carrying out God's will. Roberto Calasso puts it this way, "The Bible has no rivals when it comes to the art of omission, of not saying what everyone would like to know" (Calasso quoted in Greenblatt, 2022).

Stripped of detail, emersed in suspense, and a dialogue that omits cause and purpose, "The Scripture stories do not, like Homer's, court our favor, they do not flatter us that they may please us and enchant us – they seek to subject us … and therefore they require subtle investigation and interpretation" (Auerbach, 1974, p. 6). Turning to the Book of Ruth, we witness the same spare text, mostly comprised of dialogue, lacking cause and motive, yet the "depth of background is veritably abysmal…".[47]

With regard to conventional scriptural text, the motivation of the characters in Ruth is ambiguous. How does Naomi feel about Ruth, and for that matter, Orpah? In Ruth 1, is she concerned for their welfare? Or does she want to be rid of the burden of their kinship and her duty to them as "daughters"? Does she consider how it will look in Bethlehem when she returns without her family, and instead accompanied by a Moabite? Or is she so grief-

[47] Here, Auerbach (1974, p. 5) is still referring to Abraham and Isaac. I am perhaps mismanaging the quote by applying it to Ruth but defend its application since Ruth's author stylistically complies with Old Testament minimalist narrative approach as defined by Auerbach.

stricken by the death of two sons that she does not care whether Ruth comes with her or not? In accordance with the memory of Tamar and Judah (Gen. 38), perhaps she blames Ruth and Orpah for the deaths of her sons? Is the manager of Boaz's field criticising or flattering Ruth's work in the fields? On the threshing floor, what does Boaz have in mind? How much information does he know about the law of Levir and the role of Redeemer? When he gifts the barley to Ruth, why does she tell Naomi that Boaz has sent the barley to her? By the end of Ruth 4, and the birth of Obed, has Naomi been restored to at least a modicum of security and happiness? Does Naomi recognise Ruth as having a hand in its creation? Or for Naomi is her fate, good or bad, in the hands of God alone? As Keats suggests, is Ruth homesick for Moab?

Unanswered questions prevail, but the work of translation, interpretation, and analysis begins a richly rewarding process. Since we do not have "access to the inner lives of those we encounter, learning to rely instead on hints we receive about what people are really thinking or feeling … tends to leave open, in a literarily fruitful way, the question of character motivation" (Linafelt, 2010, p. 121).

As already discussed, the Book of Ruth is an intimate interlude within the overtly epochal momentum of the Old Testament. Apart from being a story about women thereby creating a less sweeping adventure than, say, the Red Sea or Moria, depth, intimacy, and internal worlds do exist within the text of Ruth. Amidst the spare style of scripture, wherein falls "the onus of interpretation on the readers", there are two rare portrayals of personal disclosure in Ruth according to Tod Linafelt (2010, p. 120).

Linafelt uses the NRSV translation, and within its text, Ruth 1.16-17 and 20-21 are in verse form.[48] By framing the dialogue formally and engendering poetic methods to engage the reader, the inner worlds of Ruth and Naomi are revealed. The reader, then, is given a clear representation of purpose and feelings, and in Auerbach's reading, their words in verse represent a rare sighting of "foreground". The third most prominent figure in the story is

[48] In most translations including the Hebrew Bible, the lines are unified with the prose and accordingly are without verse-form. Exceptions to the rule are the NRSV translation and the Jerusalem Bible together with "individual scholars' translations" (Linafelt, 2010, p. 124).

Boaz, but he is not paid the compliment of having his words in verse-form. While they advance the plot, his personal feelings and thoughts are not visible and accordingly, open to interpretation.

As mere dialogue, the speeches recede from particularity. If, for example, their utterances are simply part of the prose and in accordance with the abundant dialogue already present in the book, Ruth's and Naomi's words remain in Auerbach's realm of "background". The reader cannot be assured if the words are personal revelations or preconceived by the author to advance the plot. With interpretative ambiguity, they reside within the realm of ambiguity and analysis. As verse, then, the reader is treated to revelation. If we accept this move, the speeches shift intriguingly to the "foreground". Still, there must be more evidence to elicit a modification of the text in this way.

Following, then, in these two articulations, other "poetic" features must be present to justify a judicious use of verse form. The lines must be seen to provide a style that is more relevant to poetry rather than prose. To support this claim, one way to carry out the examination is for interpreters to locate verse conventions. For example, poetic form should consist of an orthodoxy such as parallelism (Linafelt, 2010, p. 124).[49] Here, words mirror each other – through some textual custom: semantics (meaning), syntax (word arrangement), diction (word choice) – and interestingly, appear within the dialogue in Ruth's and Naomi's words (Linafelt, 2010, pp. 124-126).

In the NRSV the verse-form of the statements appears as follows. First, Ruth,

> Do not press me to leave you,
> to turn back from after you.
> For wherever you go, I will go,
> And wherever you lodge, I will lodge;
> your people shall be my people,
> and your God shall be my God;
> wherever you die, I will die,
> and there will I be buried.
> Thus may the LORD do to me,

[49] For a more thorough and nuanced reading of biblical poetry, see Alter (1985). For counter parallelism, see notes 8 and 9 in O'Connor (1980).

and more as well,
if anything but death separates me from you.[50]

And Naomi's,

Do not call me "Naomi,"
call me "Mara,"
for the Almighty has made me "bitter" indeed.
I was full going away,
and empty the LORD has brought me back;
Why call me Naomi
when the LORD has afflicted me,
and the Almighty brought evil upon me?

Without going into a full analysis of verse conventions in the statements of Ruth and Naomi, I will point out a few examples to offer a summary defence for formalising these speeches. Mirroring occurs in a fairly obvious way when Ruth exclaims to Naomi, "wherever you go, I will go"/"and wherever you lodge, I will lodge" and, then, "your people … my people"/"your God … my God". The You and I, go and go, and you lodge, I lodge are straight forward tuneful "mirrors". The speech, then, brings about a kind of escalating development: "your people … my people"; and later, and more compellingly, "your God … my God". From sharing a space for practical and daily predictability (you shelter/I shelter), to joining Naomi's ethnic community – your people, my people – and then finally, a total eclipse of her former life, as Ruth forsakes her Moabite origins in order to unite with Naomi's God, Ruth's disclosure is a full and complete transformation.[51] After this crescendo, there is a more quietly spoken, if you like, curse, "may the Lord do to me, should we be separated…." Quieter perhaps, but with the grit of determination and integrity (Esler, 2018, p. 655).

Naomi's statement is formalised equally with the poetic custom of mirroring. "Do not call me/Call me", Naomi and Mara "mirror" as opposites: delight and bitterness; and also "full …

[50] I have used the translation from Linafelt's essay, see Linafelt (2010, p. 123). From the NSRV translation, Linafelt has changed the verse form by changing the last line of Ruth's speech as a return to prose while I have preserved it. For verse convention and to mirror more accurately Naomi's statement, he has made this decision. Although our outcomes are different, I have left the last line as verse and for the same reasons. For me, the final line completes the rise of the preceding lines. Although its tone is quieter, even a little menacing, the weight of its content matches the intensity that already has been established.

[51] For the singularity of Ruth's exclamation especially regarding her union with the Hebrew God, see Ozick (1994, pp. 225-228).

going away/empty … return". Finally, Naomi's parting words invoke the Lord, as did Ruth's, but here, Naomi is placing the weight of her misfortune on the shoulders of her God.[52]

As discussed earlier in Chapter One, Ruth's and Naomi's exclamations are in concert with one another. Each declaration possesses traditional verse form, but as separate objects, together, they reflect the other. Both speeches begin "Do not" – "Do not press me to leave you", Ruth pleads; and Naomi makes her request, "Do not call me Naomi" – and each ends her utterance by alluding to their witness, God.

If Linafelt's reading of Ruth's and Naomi's avowals is defended as being formalised into verse, then, there must be a reason (Linafelt, 2010, pp. 126-129). As already discussed, Old Testament narrative is dry, factual, and sparse. For Auerbach, the text provides a "background", which in turn, increases opaqueness of, amongst other things, character motivation. In turn, readers have plentiful opportunity for study and interpretation. For Linafelt, Ruth's and Naomi's words in verse tell us something different about each character. The words show the reader their inner worlds. It is a rare Old Testament instance of revealing a character's explicit feelings and purpose.

As verse, the author is revealing information about the inner world of Ruth and Naomi, and at the same time, telling the reader something about the other characters in the story. Their worlds are obscure. With Boaz, the reader is offered no insight of his intentions or feelings, and importantly, his words and actions, reliant on interpretation, are opaque and complex. Instead, for Linafelt, the reader is being advised "that Ruth's primary commitment and motivating factor for her actions is her allegiance to Naomi and, further, that Naomi [according to the attitude she professes to the townswomen] specifically fails to understand that commitment" (Linafelt, 2010, p. 127). Also for the loss of her husband and sons, Naomi is in mourning.

[52] Apart from momentarily calling herself "Mara", Naomi is still "Naomi", i.e., sweet. To help understand Ruth's motivation for unequivocal devotion towards her, it is useful to keep in mind Naomi's beneficence (Bal, 2001, p. 50).

I want to apply Linafelt's reading of Ruth's commitment to Naomi, while at the same time, Naomi is unable to understand this vow. First, according to Naomi's words, she left full and is returning empty. Although she is accompanied by Ruth, Naomi has lost her husband and sons, but also her station amongst the community. She tells the women that she should be called "Bitter". If we are following the "inner life" analogy, then, Naomi is setting the cost of her bitterness at the feet of Her God. Being treated thus cruelly is a celestial event, not a human one. Naomi's rescue, then, must also be determined by the will of Her God. If we accept this reading, it helps to understand Naomi's silence in Ruth Four: she receives her due from God and not from the realm of human contrivance.

At this point, Naomi's perspective might be considered myopic, narrow, self-absorbed, and defeatist, but equally, and what I am stressing, it is a faithful and honest scape of Naomi's inner life. While she has presented a kind of narcissistic perspective, Ruth's words conflate broad-mindedness, hard work, kindness, optimism, and a belief that destiny is in the keep of human action and not celestial intervention.

Ruth's utterance is memorable, and I propose that it is an instance of universality. It surely warrants Ozick's appraisal that Ruth's reply has compelled "thirty centuries to trembling" (Ozick, 1994, p. 225). As mentioned earlier, while we cannot know why Ruth utters certain untruths in Ruth Two and Three, we can be assured that her promise consists of an unshakeable commitment to Naomi. While Naomi awaits heavenly manifestation, Ruth takes matters up at ground level in a human capacity. She invokes the Lord, too, but not as the writer of her destiny. Instead, God is solicited as a judge and witness. In tandem, the revelatory honesty of these two opposing goalposts sets the "fundamental tensions of the plot" (Linafelt, 2010, p. 128).

At its conclusion, the narrative provides a satisfactory outcome. Since the plot advancement again is reliant solely on dialogue and action, readers have only conjecture to form their opinion about whether or not Naomi has recognised Ruth as the agent of her newly found security within Boaz's household. Correspondingly, the marriage of Ruth and Boaz and the birth of Obed – enabling the Davidic lineage – provides a strong indication that Ruth has

carried out her pledge to Naomi, the words of which have illuminated the aspiration of marital bonds ever since (Honig, 2001, p. 52).

While doubt still prevails at the end of the book – Does Naomi ever realise the depth of Ruth's commitment? Does Ruth come to love Boaz? What is God's role in human destiny? (Linafelt, 2010, p. 129) – the lines of verse tell us something unequivocal about the heart of each character.

With the echoes of words and sentence fragments – particularly the command "Do not" from both Ruth's and Naomi's exclamations (NRSV) – I constructed the first stage of a poem. I parroted text phrases from Ruth, Dylan Thomas, and Billie Holliday. With those I intertwined elements of my daughter's suicide. It is unfinished.

<u>Do Not</u>

Do not go gently
says the poet
To go, do not press me,
says Ruth
Do not call me "Naomi"
Naomi says
For it's a mistaken truth.

Do not go down to
the woods today
For there's something
unusual there
Strange fruits are falling
from a tree
Suddenly what's hidden's bare.

Wonders Naomi,
How can my trespasses
Equal what I've
Received?

Certainly
Beyond my sins
And really not
deserved.

Every survivor
With sorrow
Looks through the glass
Sadly,
Makes deals for tomorrow.
In order to borrow
Some respite and succour
Aye, for now,
but too forever.

We each have our way
Here's Naomi's truth
But what can we learn
from the hardships
Of Ruth?

Do not press me, and
Do not ask me to go.
I will stay with you
Always,
despite
Your suspicion
Like Tamar brought trouble
To Judah's position.
The loss of sons, and a
Husband too
Not caused by me
Nor was it you.
More likely it happened
We just cannot know.
It happened, just happened,
But onward we go.

Little pilgrim
The call goes unanswered
You are alone

Fortune visits you (not)
…

By reading Ruth 1.16-17, and 20-21 as verse-forms – as truth statements – within an Old Testament narrative, Linafelt has located instances of clarity within a text where it is usually absent. Following, then, the narrative occasions the privilege of artform to control the response of an audience rather than the Old Testament convention of readers' interpretations creating meaning. For Plato, the former idea comes with serious misgivings, but there is not scope here for providing an analysis.[53] These two principles of narrative technique entail two approaches: the first, the delivery of stripped down and simplified data; and the second, pure subjectivity dressed up – shaped into a public object – as a piece of artwork.

In Ruth, the Old Testament narrative is concise by being reduced to dialogue and action. For Auerbach, the shortage of description enables a richness of ambiguity that is fruitful for interpretative creativity and freedom. This, then, brings about rewarding possibilities for the mind to contemplate. For Linafelt, the addition of poetic art "revels in the play of language, in the generating of metaphor, in structures of intensification, and in the expression of feeling" (Linafelt, 2010, p. 129). Accordingly, the body is engaged. But since the revelatory statements occur in Ruth 1, the "stripped-down narrative" prevails. By the end of the book, the reader is left still wondering (Linafelt, 2010, p. 129).

[53] See Plato, *Republic* II, III, and X, *Ion*, *Phaedrus*, *Apology*. With regard to inspiration, Plato was troubled by the way in which artists can produce what they cannot account for; artists are motivated by "divine gift" – possessed by the Muses (*Ion* 534b-c) – and not "mastery". If poets are "inspired" and while inspiration is not answerable to expectations of conformity or well-trodden values, artists escape from being scrutinised or set up against certain standards (*Apology*; *Ion*). Art can incite psychological damage. Artists imitate what is bad in the world because it is more entertaining. "A bad man is various and entertaining and extreme, while the good man is quiet and always the same. Artists are interested in what is base and complex, not in what is simple and good" (Murdoch, 1997, pp. 390-391).

In the next section, I am using Joan Didion's essay "Slouching Towards Bethlehem", about the Haight-Ashbury district in San Francisco in 1967, as an example of a piece of writing expressed in a straight-forward and pared-down delivery. In parallel with Auerbach's reading of Old Testament stylistic simplicity, Didion's approach brings about a text rich in interpretative ambiguity. This effect was not her intention.

Instead, she used a deliberately fact-based method to remove opacity. Rather than exposing a myopic vision of a subculture, Didion aspired to emphasise a wider purview of a nation with a distressing fissure between fact and façade. In her essay, Didion reviews a world that provides a sub-text for the dominant portrayal of late-1960s USA. For Didion, it is a representation that should sound an alarm within its polity rather than flatter it into slumbering anaesthesia. Some of its commentators addressed the essay as a defence of establishment ideals, which ran counter to Didion's purpose.

At the end of her essay, Didion's parting image is a five-year-old on acid. Up until then, the Haight fringe seemed arguably harmless. I suggest a comparison between this child and other literary children – in Fyodor Dostoyevsky, William James, and Ursula le Guin – whose roles are to act as sacrificial fodder within a system the surface of which appears to be a model of a flourishing social order.

The analysis is relevant for the thesis as a representation of fact-based and simplified text leading a reader to interpretation and not clarity. At the same time, the utilitarian analogy of a disposable child for the greater good – what, I presume, Didion, le Guin, Dostoyevsky, and James are protesting against – introduces a theme I develop in Chapter Three Part Two when I discuss Roger Scruton's thought on the "necessity" of lost love. In Chapter Four Part Two I return to the idea of "necessity", but not "the necessity" of a child's death, but rather daily necessary fixtures that offer comfort and bring about acceptance while learning to live with loss.

Joan Didion

When it was first released on NetFlix, I watched the documentary *Joan Didion: The Center Will Not Hold* (Dunne, 2017). It is a biography of the American literary journalist, essayist,

and novelist, Joan Didion, produced and directed by her nephew, Griffin Dunne. About thirty minutes in, a voiceover reads from "Slouching Towards Bethlehem," Didion's essay about the counterculture in Haight-Ashbury during the hippie era. The excerpt is:

> When I finally find my contact he says, "I've got something at my place that will blow your mind." And when we get there, I see a child on the living room floor licking her lips in concentration. The only thing off about her is that she's wearing white lipstick. "Five years old," the contact says, "on acid"[54] (Dunne, 2017).

The narrative of the documentary returns to the present. The interviewer (Dunne) is asking Didion: "What was it like to be a journalist in the room when you saw the little kid on acid?" The question prompts a seven-second silence while Didion prepares her response. In *The New Yorker* review of the film, Rebecca Mead expresses versions of the answer most of us are anticipating in the lapse it takes Didion to reply:

> *Well, it was appalling. I wanted to call an ambulance. I wanted to call the police. I wanted to help. I wanted to weep. I wanted to get the hell out of there and get home to my own two-year-old daughter, and protect her from the present and the future.* (Mead, 2017) (Author's emphasis).

Reservedly gleeful, Didion finally responds, "Let me tell you, it was gold. I mean the long and the short of it is you live for moments like that if you're … doing a piece. Good or bad" (Dunne, 2017).

Joan Didion was not culpable for merely observing and writing about the small child high on acid. Instead, her exposition was considered revelatory and selfless, "Joan Didion, in her thoughtful tracing of disparate lives, proves a useful guide in examining the roots from which American civil life has decayed" (Spencer, 2019). As a relevant assessment of its time and prophetic harbinger of the future, the text was seen as a precursor to American social dissolution some fifty years later. In the volume *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*, the essays subject the reader to accounts that, for Didion, represent "atomisation", a term she used to describe the breaking apart of society (Heller, 2021). Through the deterioration of the family, community and the values associated with those traditions, the condition is injected like an

[54] The passage in the book is longer and different from the voiceover (Didion, 2017, p. 127).

anaesthetic, giving rise to "…[d]rugs and affairs" replacing "virtues and responsibilities" (Spencer, 2019).

With a kind of visionary insight and flawless prose, the perimeter of Didion's aesthetic frame is maintained, "She's been canonized for impeccable style, but Didion's real insights were about what holds society together, or tears it apart" (Heller, 2021).

Still. Apart from the journalist-witnessing-the-wrecked-child "portrait" – a union that conveys a deeper and wider alliteration about American society – there is the shocking realism of a "landscape" brandishing a child on LSD in the wasteland of Haight. Here, the journalist is a cool and objective viewer. She is not a part of this landscape. In this image, the observer is not a participant but an audience. Should the frame be strong enough to hold this landscape in its "exhibition space"? Who, then, is anaesthetised here?

Despite these earlier nods of appreciation, Joan Didion is not universally appreciated for her content and style-driven essay on Haight-Ashbury. In Didion's preface to the volume of essays, her final line is "*writers are always selling somebody out*". And her introduction of these final stinging words evoke a buttoned-down menace:

> My only advantage as a reporter is that I am so physically small, so temperamentally unobtrusive, and so neurotically inarticulate that people tend to forget that my presence runs counter to their best interests. And it always does. That is one last thing to remember: *writers are always selling somebody out* (Didion, 2017, p. xiv) (Author's emphasis).

When she admits that "it was gold" to have such a prurient piece of data in her clutch, it is the same bald-faced kind of honesty. For being suddenly cleansed of the indecency of voyeurism, some commentators see these self-confessed trespasses representative of Didion's perversion.[55] To identify the objection, the following extract is a typical passage in Didion's essay,

[55] See, for example, Evans (2021) and Bustilles (2018).

> Time passes and I lose the thread and when I pick it up again Max seems to be talking about what a beautiful thing it is the way Sharon washes dishes.
>
> "Well it *is* beautiful," Sharon says. "*Every*thing is. I mean you watch that blue detergent blob run on the plate, watch the grease cut – well, it can be a real trip."
>
> Pretty soon now, maybe next month, maybe later, Max and Sharon plan to leave for Africa and India, where they can live off the land. "I got this little trust fund, see," Max says, "which is useful in that it tells cops and border patrols I'm O.K., but living off the land is the thing. You can get your high and get your dope in the city, O.K., but we gotta get out somewhere and live organically."
>
> "Roots and things," Sharon says, lighting another joss stick for Michael. Michael's mother is still in the kitchen cooking seaweed. "You can eat them." (Didion, 2017, p. 96) (Author's emphasis).

The editing is so tight. The dialogue is interspersed with Didion's commentary. The narration includes, washing the dishes, the trip to Africa, lighting the joss stick, the mother cooking seaweed; bare facts carefully constructed. Jules Evans asks the rhetorical question, "Who is really being immoral and selfish here – the dumb hippies who show kindness to a stranger, or the stranger who skewers them for the amusement and outrage of the elite?" (Evans, 2021).

The excerpt composes the vapidity of the jargon and the culture of the residents of Haight-Ashbury. It is a kind of story. If an exposé of those elements alone had been the purpose of Didion's essay, a purpose that warms the cockles of the elite and the educated by the hands of the elite and the educated – "Thank *God*, we're not like *them*" exposé: the kind of unreflective satisfaction that safeguards the establishment rather than shake its foundations – it would be contemptible. And endorsing Evans's point, the Haight residents welcomed Didion into their community and by all accounts treated her with hospitality, protection, and, importantly, access to sources upon which her work depended.

In the first paragraphs of the essay, Didion sets up the tension of the piece: America was in trouble and for many reasons; and at the same time, America was thriving. On one hand, bankruptcy notices, casual killings, misplaced children, foreclosures, "vandals who misspelled even the four-letter words they scrawled" had become commonplace everyday features. "People were missing. Children were missing. Parents were missing." (Didion, 2017, p. 84). But on the other hand, "the market was steady and the G.N.P. high … and it might

have been a spring of brave hopes and national promise, but it was not …". Didion goes to San Francisco because that is where "the social hemorrhaging was showing up". She "stayed around awhile, and made a few friends". (Didion, 2017, pp. 84-85)

Didion was striking at American complacency. It was a warning.

The watershed moment of the essay is the child sitting on the living room floor wearing white lipstick. Up until then, the antics of the residents, the status of the subculture, and its location in American society are more or less forgivable. Nobody is being hurt who cannot bring about change. The arresting image of the little girl draws a line. Is all of it, is any of it, worth this miserable nadir of abject deprivation?

Through design or chance, Joan Didion waded into an ethical premonition. Citing a ritualised sacrifice of a child, Ivan Karamazov justified his atheism, William James analogised moral philosophy, and at that point, le Guin's short story was still being incubated.[56] Each commentator expounded a strong argument against the principle of utility as the greatest happiness for the greatest number (MacIntyre, 1998, pp. 219-240). But with Didion's work, she provided a life instance of what up until then had been hypothetical. And her meaning was obscured because readers and reviewers did not understand her message.

By resorting to W.B. Yeats's poem "Second Coming", the words from which Didion introduced her volume of essays, she focused on certain lines that had "reverberated" in her "inner ear" for some time (Didion, 2017, p. xi). The second line, "The falcon cannot hear the falconer", exerted an influence over her. For its description of an unlistening nation, and then, for the "unlistening" reception of the piece, these words knocked twice.

This is the point I have been working towards. First, the writing of this article was important to Didion. But second, when the essay was published, her meaning was problematised. She

[56] In 1973, Ursula le Guin wrote the short story "The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas", six years after Didion's essay.

had been feeling despondent about the uselessness of writing; the commentary on the Haight-Ashbury represented more than “a handful of children wearing mandalas on their foreheads” (Didion, 2017, p. xii). It was meant to register a more far-reaching theme; for Didion, the Haight community was a symptom of greater malaise, an entrenched nationwide disorder: it was simply the place “the haemorrhage” was appearing. And she was conveying this insight through writing; perhaps her skill could be purposeful. But on the hippies alone, responders focused. She was congratulated for the timeliness of the article “because ‘the whole fad’s dead now, *fini*, *kaput*’”. Against the piece’s many commentators, Didion answered, “… I had never gotten a feedback so universally beside the point” (Didion, 2017, p. xii).

As she was working, Didion was so adamant to be understood she wrote the piece as ‘*directly and flatly*’ as she could (Didion, 2017, p. xii) (My emphasis). The essay is deadpan, swift, economical, and matter of fact. There are no embellishing details; in reporter’s mode, it delivers data. If we compare it to Auerbach’s perception of the Old Testament, it is favourable for interpretation. It is not the effect she had anticipated. But accordingly, its dearth of foreground – the narrator’s silent voice – allows readers to return to the essay in new contexts.

Chapter Two Part One has introduced the personal as the seat of the universal. Linafelt’s formalisation and defence of Ruth’s and Naomi’s declarations provides the point of departure for the chapter. Although my theory- and practice-based directions were riven apart, I was setting the foundation for Chapter Four. To locate the idea of personal revelation being the impetus for the universal appeal of artworks, I conveyed a brief timeline of aesthetics. From Linafelt’s analysis of the verse-poems in Ruth, I compared their presence within the conventional narrative style of Old Testament storytelling. I defend the idea that the writer of Ruth formally shapes their inner worlds as truth statements.

I explain more fully my practice trajectory at the end of Part Two. I leave this analysis until the end because in this instance, the working material is theory-driven.

In Part Two, then, I address how artists go about endorsing the theoretical process of universal veracity enclosed within the compass of the personal. It sounds plausible, but what is the difference between the kind of personal that is inviting, and the other that is tiresome? What kind of process do makers undertake to remove what is too personal while keeping its spirit?

Introduction. Part Two

As verse-poems, the utterances of Ruth and Naomi have provided the material for the entirety of Chapter Two. According to verse convention, Ruth's expression is formally produced through literary techniques, such as mirroring as discussed earlier. Ruth implores Naomi to accept her presence on the journey back to Bethlehem. She pays for her passage by promising to change in every possible way – to be no trouble at all – as a means of cajoling Naomi into allowing Ruth's companionship. If Ruth had pleaded unashamedly to Naomi in dialogue – please let me come, I'll follow you, live with you, accept your family and friends, and your God, and should I break this vow, God curse me – arguably it would have been cloying almost a tantrum. Although the spirit of her message is the same, as an articulate piece of textual craftsmanship, the readers of Ruth's speech register it at a higher timbre, as a vow and not a plea, as does Naomi. Naomi is silent; what can she do but grant Ruth her heart's desire. In literature, Ruth's words are amongst those of the most endearing articulations of love. As verse, the begging promise prevails as a loving legacy.

How do we distinguish, then, between the engaging "good" personal and the "bad" personal, the kind that prevents engagement with an audience? What is the definition of the kind of personal that unites a community, and the other that repels its listeners? In a paper I heard recently, the speaker addressed "vainglory" as a kind of cannibalism, "a self-inflicted attack" (Fletcher-Louis, 2023). About its manner, vainglory means to impress an audience but instead brings about its opposite; it is a kind of "mutilated self-praise" (Fletcher-Louis, 2023).

To review the two types of "personal expression" that either request the presence of or frustrate an audience, I convey two tales of Ovidian metamorphoses: Narcissus and

Pygmalion. From Ovid, we learn about the creation of reality by the first “artist”, Narcissus, and a fuller representation of an artist characterised by Pygmalion. The stories represent artistic expressions of fatal self-absorption in the first, and in the latter, a fusion of subjective longing that is artistically conditioned – economised and objectified – into a form. According to Paul Barolsky (1998, pp. 451-474) an analysis of these myths produces the insight that art represents the maker’s personal expression but the original feeling is “concealed” by the artist’s technical ability to modify its singularity into an objectively conceived artefact. As both lines of enquiry conflate the idea of obscuring delicate material in the body of a skilfully made artefact, I compare Barolsky’s proposition to Freud’s definition of an artist keeping in mind Nietzsche’s declaration of an artist’s legitimate use of deception.

To illustrate the point, I convey an example and counter-example of love-lost distress through an analysis of two pieces of music: *Winter Journey* by Franz Schubert and Gustav Mahler’s *Songs of a Wayfarer*. According to Roger Scruton (2011), these two compositions provide personal content but while the personal/universal entwinement in Schubert’s is fruitful, it is absent in Mahler’s work.

Up until now, the research is still theory-based. How, then, do artists go about taking a deeply personal event and transform it into an “artefact” of universal significance? As the practice I undertook during this period lacked the “ornamentation” – it was too raw – required to fulfil the “hidden” aspect of art production, instead I am offering unfinished instances – “sketches” – of experimentation at the end of the chapter. My practice-based analysis of this question is developed in Chapter Four. In the meantime, I provide an explanation of how the process is carried out by the British Filmmaker, Sally Potter. Potter used experiences and confessions from her teenage diary to write and perform her 2023 album, *Pink Bikini*. Endorsed by Potter’s approach, I insert into the chapter a journal entry of a dream and the small image I produced to portray it.

Finally, I return to Adrian Piper’s *My Calling (Card) #1*. I give an account of Piper’s process of divining her feelings, thoughts, and actions in order to address racism during episodes of social interaction. As the calling card is the final cut, I consider how she arrived at the select few words she uses to represent a stockpile of offences over a lifetime of experience.

Narcissus sees his reflection in a pool of water and falls in love. As a reflection, this false embodiment cannot return his feeling. Narcissus's love is thwarted and unrequited thus condemning him to fixated and eternal self-obsessed weakness and futility. The myth analogises the "… proverb 'every painter paints himself'" (Barolsky, 1998, p. 452). This point will be re-visited in the section concerning the Ovidian line, "Such art his art concealed".

For Barolsky, Ovid transforms this myopic, self-seeking, and finally devouring pursuit into another myth about the love of an artist's creation. Narcissus and Pygmalion both fall in love with their creation, but Pygmalion's love is realised.

Through fine craftsmanship, Pygmalion produces a sculpture so beautiful, he falls in love with it. Different from the idleness of Narcissus gazing into a pool, Pygmalion's stone sculpture metamorphoses into flesh and returns his love. Barolsky cites instances in Renaissance art that convey this idea. Donatello's "five armlengths high" sculpture, *Il Zuccone*, was so lifelike he would "swear an oath" with the introductory words, "By the faith I have in my Zuccone …" (Vasari, 2008, p. 152). While working on the piece, he would demand of it: "Speak, speak or be damned!" (Vasari, 2008, p. 152).

Vasari's description of Michelangelo's *Pietà* – "it is a miracle that a stone … could ever have been brought to the state of perfection which Nature habitually struggles to create in the flesh" – indicates the response that the work inspired in its viewers (Vasari, 2008, p. 425). For Barolsky, Vasari's account of the work embeds the Pygmalion myth within the human likeness of Christ as it is invoked by the theology of the incarnation (Barolsky, 1998, 453). Among other features, the body of Christ with "finely wrought pulses and veins", appears as if in the flesh. By releasing a religious tenet – the resurrection – into the clay matter of an artefact, the artistic representation exceeds its imitative capacity.

The comparison between Pygmalion and Michelangelo's *Pietà* is the following. At the point of metamorphosis, the narrator in Pygmalion exclaims, "She was alive! The pulse beat in her

veins!" (Ovid, 1998, p. 234). Regarding Vasari's analysis of the details of Christ's body, then, Barolsky claims that "the Eucharistic implications of the work" are thus represented (Barolsky, 1998, 453). Its lifelike presentation invokes the resurrection. In the poem by Giovanbattista Strozzi, quoted in Vasari's chronicle of *Pietà*, the line "alive in dead marble" represents its compelling naturalistic features. For Barolsky, then, the sculpture of Christ's dead body has embedded within it an allusion to "his resurrection, or the moment when he will come alive and 'waken'" (Barolsky, 1998, 454).

Barolsky's idea, then, is to find instances of Ovidian metamorphosis in the works of the Renaissance and more than that too. Barolsky is seeking a definition of art originating from Ovidian metamorphosis. To review this idea further in the following section, I pay attention to line 252 in Ovid's *Metamorphosis*. By providing an analysis of the idea, I am endorsing the presence of personal accounts embedded in universal precepts.

Keeping in mind his quest to define art, Barolsky's final words in his essay convey how Ovid's "inventions are fundamental … to the very idea of art itself as metamorphosis" (Barolsky, 1998, p. 473). To explore this concluding remark, I will focus on *Pygmalion*, line 252, "Such art his art concealed T". The passage in which it is a part reads as follows:

> It seemed to be alive,
> Its face to be a real girl's, a girl
> Who wished to move – but modesty forbade.
> Such art his art concealed (Ovid, Melville [Trans.] 1998, pp. 232-233).

According to the note for the line, the statement embodies one of Ovid's favourite themes "the power of art to equal or indeed outdo nature". (Ovid, 1998, p. 434). On this reading, I offer my interpretation of this enigmatic remark.

The first "art" of the line, then, indicates the art of nature, but the second refers to the art – the skill – of the artist. In my version, this first – the art of nature – derives from the activity of the muse and the stimulus of inspiration is multi-sourced. Whether it is the pain

experienced by a beautiful vista, the enthusiasm of political commitment, or the sorrow over the loss of a loved one, Ovid's first "art" is stirred in the heart and haunch of the artist. In a well-known idea of Nietzsche's, those artists who affirm all that is questionable and terrible are fossicking for inspiration from a store of personal insight, feelings from their inner domain, or an event that has been dispatched to a private realm. For Nietzsche, since artists cannot endure reality, they work from and through what already they know albeit a "power of falsehood" (Deleuze, 1974, pp. 102-103).

"Such art" then is Pygmalion's longing. The yearning he experiences is addressed by concealing it in the perfection of the sculpture: the second art, "his art". To move forward with my proposition, "the personal" is the muse, but the technical skill of the process of making art, conceals the private aspect of the work's content. Of course, the inner turbulence is present, but it is not recognisable as an object confessed and owned exclusively by the maker.

Since an intuitive understanding of art-making is to expose the beauty of nature in an artefact, Pygmalion conforms to this element of imitative skill by revealing nature through the perfection of his sculpture. But to understand "Such art his art concealed", I want to return to Freud's definition of an artist which I quoted earlier in the chapter. To summarise, Freud's meaning expresses the idea of an artist converting a deeply felt condition, losing what is too personal, and shaping it into a formal composition. From somewhere in the artist's psyche, it is an image or event that escapes from its clandestine bondage and is shaped into a form. The artistically derived "object", a deception of its covert origins, then, is an invitation for others to enjoy its liberation, a freedom they can celebrate without having to navigate their own gaps and gulfs.

The work conceals something, and I propose that it belongs to "what is too personal". The hand – or art – of the craftsperson addresses a lump-of-a-thing, aspects of which should remain concealed, and transforms it into a universally appealing "object".

In this reading, Ovid's double declaration of "art" encompasses two separate meanings of the term. First, there is the art of nature residing in the artist. In this instance, there is

Nietzsche's artist: the courageous and gritty maker who wills to create from the raw material they alone know. And also Nietzsche's assertion, second, then, there is the art of deception; the one that conceals the furtive content through artistic feint of hand.

To resume an earlier reference, the myth of Narcissus helps to strengthen this definition of art. In the same moment as regarding his image in the pool, Narcissus falls in love and equally, makes the mistake of equating his likeness as somebody other than himself. He subjects himself to the inner realm of love and objectifies his own "portrait" as somebody other than himself. The two attitudes rob Narcissus of his power. As the lover and the beloved, he reaches to embrace the object of this cul-de-sac encounter, but it cannot be consummated. As the creator of this illusory (self-)deception, Narcissus, then, is the first artist (Barolsky, 1995, pp. 255-256).

In this analysis and to compound its felicity, I have identified similarities between the Ovidian myths and both Nietzsche and Freud for a definition of art. So far, then, art can be defined as a creation that comes about through the momentum of an artist's perspective in combination with their skill as a craftsperson. Their technical ability controls and subdues the personal insight into an illusory rendition of reality. Arguably, one might say that artists bite the hand that feeds them. There is always a condition of utility which resonates with Didion's exclamation, "writers are always selling somebody out".

<u>Roger Scruton: From loss to necessity</u>

Roger Scruton (2011) describes the difference between a work that permits an audience to engage and one that does not. Scruton avails himself of the universally experienced feeling of unrequited love. To express the pain of love vanquished, he uses two examples, one from Franz Schubert the other, Gustav Mahler. Scruton evaluates the works for being one of either appealing and insightful or on the other hand, self-regarding and indulgent.

> We know what it is to love and be rejected, and thereafter to wander in the world infected by a bleak passivity. This experience, in all its messiness and arbitrariness, is one that most of us must undergo. But when Schubert, in *Die Winterreise* [*Winter*

> *Journey*], explores it in song, finding exquisite melodies to illuminate one after another the many secret corners of a desolated heart, we are granted an insight of another order…. It is as though we looked through the contingent loss of the song-cycle's protagonist to another kind of loss altogether: a *necessary* loss, whose rightness resides in its completeness. Beauty reaches to the underlying truth of a human experience, by showing it *under the aspect of necessity*…. [W]e can ask whether that which is captured by Schubert is captured also by Mahler in his *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen* [*Songs of a Wayfarer*]. And the answer is surely 'no': there is a self-referential character in Mahler's music which in a certain way detracts from its universal significance. One way of expressing this observation is to say that Mahler's song-cycle is not true to the experience that it expresses – that it loses sight of the reality of loss in order to indulge in a sentimental grief over a loss that is not truly regretted (Scruton, 2011, pp. 108-109) (Author's emphasis).

For Scruton, in Schubert's work, the music possesses the capacity to lead the listener to the idea of necessity and order from the personal chaos of despair. The progression through hardship, then, expands beyond individual distress to encompass universal themes. In the midst of pain, it implies a perspective we are unable to know, yet through the adversity there are glimpses of order, friendship, and humour. I have chosen four excerpts from the twenty-four compositions of the song cycle:

> Deep within some dark ravine
> A ghostly flickering led me here
> Where I am, or how I'll leave here
> That is very far from clear [from *Will o' the Wisp*]
>
> One lone crow has followed me
> Since my journey started
> Circling round me, patiently
> Almost tender-hearted
>
> Thank you
> Good to know you're here.
> Here to reassure me.
> Promise, when the end is near
> You'll be waiting for me...
>
> Who knows when this road will end
> Yet it will, for certain.
> And you'll stay my faithful friend
> Till the final curtain
> You will stay my faithful friend
> Till the final curtain [from *The Crow*]
>
> Nonetheless I have a signpost

> It is fixed inside my mind
> And it shows the road to travel
> And road I left behind
> And the road I left behind [from *The Fingerpost*] (Schubert, 1827).

Accordingly, in order to defend Scruton's example, I will include a few verses from Mahler's *Songs of a Wayfarer*:

> The world began to sparkle in the sunshine!
> Everything gained sound and color!
> In the sunshine!
> Flower & bird, large and small!
> Good Day!
> Isn't it a beautiful world?
> Isn't it? Isn't it?
>
> Now won't my happiness begin too?
> No! No!
> That which I seek can nevermore blossom for me! [from *This Morning in the Fields*]
>
> When I look into the sky, I see two blue eyes.
> When I walk in the fields, I see her blond hair.
> Oh woe! Oh woe!
>
> When I awake from dreaming, I hear her silver laughter.
> Oh woe! Oh woe!
>
> I wish that I lay on the black bier,
> And could nevermore open my eyes! [from *I Have a Burning Knife*] (Mahler, 1884-1885).

For the song's indulgence of feelings, and for its apparent pleasure in the matter, Scruton shifts the focus of the well-known triviality of "being in love with love" to "being in love with pain". In any case, Scruton sniffs out a charlatan. Certainly the music is beautiful, but for Scruton the words betray the artist's insincerity. By the end of the piece, the protagonist does move forward but not through a channel of any significant insight. After a kip under a linden tree, the singer eulogises, "I forgot how love can hurt. Everything was well again. Everything … Love and sorrow, world, and dream." Despite the burning of a knife, then, order is restored but for Scruton, the story concludes without an invitation to find a moment of synthesis with its audience.

In a recent interview on Radio 4, Sally Potter was explaining her creative process for her newly released album *Pink Bikini*. As the songs consist of impressions from her youth, she was being asked about how she goes about writing relevant songs about a bygone era (Potter, 2023). As she explains, she was inspired by old diaries and photographs from her adolescence. From these initial prompts, Potter transformed the personal into means of representing veracity about "my generation and what we lived through" but at the same time, "reaching out sideways … to younger people going through … [the] turbulent dramatic intense years of … puberty and teenagehood". Some of the ideas she expresses through her personal encounters encompass themes or versions of what every young person faces: "losing yourself, losing who you thought you were … feeling yourself increasingly imprisoned in an idea of self that wasn't your own … all of these songs are about … the desire to escape" (Potter, 2023). About how she managed to record private intuitions as means of communication to her generation but also to a wider audience, she puts it this way:

> … [W]hen you use … the truth of your experience as I do … whether the memory is true or if the memory is looking at old photographs and thinking you can remember the event … I think the process of actually making a song, writing it, is about refining the idea. So it becomes many steps away from the autobiographical in the act of crafting it, arranging it, singing it. Singing it again. Doing another version and then another…. It takes a long time. And I think that's the difference between a diary [which] is really either for yourself or perhaps for posterity … and making something that is actually an act of communication (Potter, 2023).

Potter characterises the process of shaping the malleable lump of raw expression/reaction into a well-rehearsed version of the original material.

By including her working-out process as part of the artwork, Adrian Piper constructs an artpiece differently from Potter. But still, Piper's calling card artefact – *My Calling (Card) #1* – is an economised statement that entailed rewrites and refinements. It arrives at its formalised public appearance through the means of a protracted analysis of her options.

Although *My Calling (Card) #1* is just over 100 words, Piper's explanation is detailed, drawn-out, and entailed a lifetime and history of experiencing and witnessing racial injustice. "Sometimes what we observe hurts so much that we want more than anything else to disappear, disembody, disinherit ourselves and our consciousness from our black identity" (Piper, 1996, p. 230). Importantly as well as the card itself, its explanation is a part of the work.

A key feature of the work is Piper's presence within a social event – "for Dinners and Cocktail Parties", is included in its description – a mostly "white" gathering, and her presence is not registered as "black" (Piper, 1996, p. 220). In this environment, Piper perceives "the forms racism takes when racists believe there are no black people present…" (Piper, 1996, p. 230). Taking a methodical scientific approach, Piper lists a number of options she considers in order to redress the injustice.

For example, according to Piper, she could say nothing, but her silence is understood as an affirmation, bringing about feelings of guilt and self-loathing for being disingenuous to herself and others. Or she could bring about an abstract discussion about racist remarks without identifying as black. With this approach, again, she would feel offended, compromised, and deceptive. If she were to bring about a full confrontation, both she and the offender would be ashamed and feel guilty, but also the hosts and visitors would experience awkward silence and the evening would be ruined for everybody.

Or at the beginning of the evening, she could make an announcement that she is black. This option is dismissed because it seems opportunistic and "socially incompetent". In the invitation, perhaps she could ask the hostess to advise her guests that a black person or that Adrian Piper, who is black, will be present. But these alternatives are too self-consciously contrived, more fitting for a demo than a drinks party. Alternatively, Piper could simply "blend in". But for all the earlier reasons, this option too is rejected. And finally, there is the distribution of the calling card option. In this instance, only her evening and the transgressor's is ruined. And more positively, an opportunity for discussion might possibly transpire (Piper, 1996, pp. 119-120).

As a work of art, the options list represents the personal set of deliberations a member of a minority group might undertake before a social event. It portrays a cost. But by delivering a card, part of that loss turns into an asset. In this way, Piper demonstrates that the "individual is behaving in typical and predictably racist ways". According to metamorphosis, then, the character of victimhood (Piper) transforms into an agent. A sense of station is retrieved from disparagement. A table turns.

At its core, the gravity of the encounter, its potential for transformation, and its reversal of power are embedded in a single idea: "It fights a stereotype by giving the offender a concrete experience of what it is like to be the object of one" (Piper, 1996, p. 220). Over thirty years after the distribution of the calling cards, I can read this final line of Piper's "list of options at a cocktail party" and feel a hammer blow.

In Chapter One, I argued that the performance gesture of the distribution of *My Calling (Card) #1* reached an audience of sixteen, yet the weight of its words, few as they are, has had wide-ranging impact. Here, I am reviewing the work to characterise the reverberating significance of a deeply personal expression that is shaped and condensed into a work of art. However in this case, the work is being observed for its removal of the noisiness of personal outrage – but not losing the volume of feeling – and developed into a universally appreciated object as an instance of protest.

Part of universal appeal is economy: economy of words, time, image. If its audience feels the full weight of the work's gravity, it is often due to the maker's skill at shorthand. An artist's nomenclature, then, is to reduce and condense the most complex set of circumstances. Within a century-driven onslaught of racial injustice, Piper silently distributes sixteen politely written statements to guests of the dinner party set over a period of four years.

Inspired by Piper's *My Calling (Card) #1*, I wanted to lodge a protest against the ill-funded, stigma-damaged, and prevailing ignorance regarding mental health and suicide. My calling

card statement is inserted into the Introduction of this chapter. At the point of writing a personal calling card, I was still on track with the prayer flag proposal.

The American singer-songwriter Mary Gauthier calls a student's first effort at writing a song a "'polite cocktail party' version of a thorny, emotionally difficult story" (Gauthier, 2021, p. 126). She describes the core that exists even in the first draught as a "tender place that holds secrets that we protect and defend. This is where the universal resides, way down, in the deeply personal" (Gauthier, 2021, p. 127).

When I wrote my calling card statement, I did not lock myself in the bathroom or enter a sensory deprivation tank, in comparison to the Canadian singer-songwriter, Ferron, who isolated herself from light and sound to compose one of her most well-known songs (Warner, 2017). I focussed on a dogmatic approach to change other people's perceptions of mental health and suicide. I wanted my statement to be brave, bold, and effective. I thought this disclosure would make a difference. Perhaps it would bring about the delivery of funding, the removal of stigma, and open up dialogue that would promote better understanding. I wanted to incite other people to do the work. Rigid with control, this piece of writing, and its "calling" message, is a good example of Narcissus compelled to gaze unrewardingly at his image.

I faked confidence in the text's efficacy; I knew it had no clout. At this point, I had not made a sufficiently crafted artefact from my experience of grief and loss.

In her role as a co-writer with war veterans for a programme called SW:S (SongwritingWith:Soldiers), Gauthier explains the apprehension many veterans display when they arrive for the weekend songwriting retreat. Sometimes they attend because their therapist or family have encouraged their presence at the event. As Gauthier works with each veteran, starting with images and building a picture of their experiences, the songs naturally turn to prayers for peace. The song does not begin with this type of over-arching

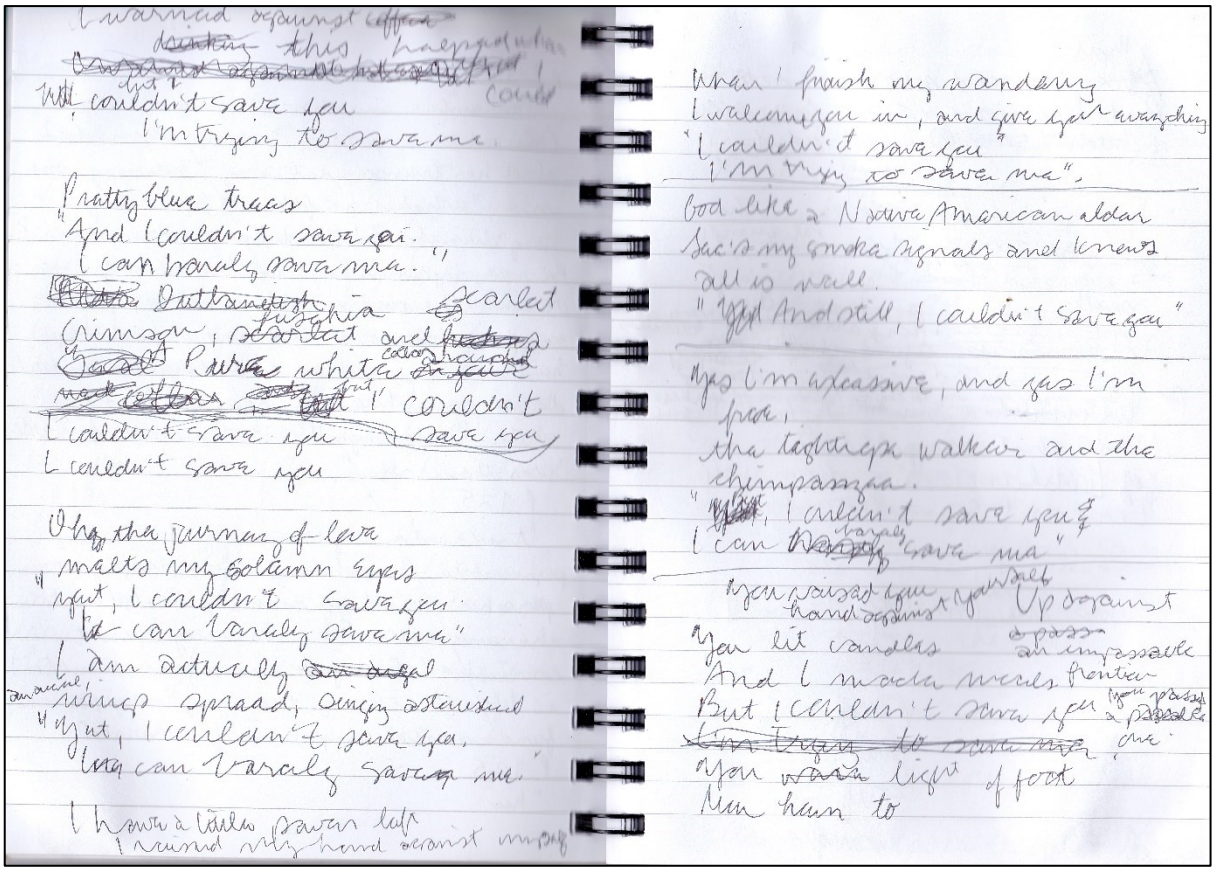
theme. “It happens naturally as the song emerges, as we sit in discomfort together, working, waiting for the truth to appear” (Gauthier, 2021, p. 209).

On her first co-write for SW:S, she was paired with two women soldiers. She noticed that they always sat together, whispered in each other’s ear, and sometimes held the other’s arm. Could you tell me a little about your friendship, she asked them:

> “Did y’all serve together? Were y’all battle buddies?”
>
> They looked at me and said, “We have each other’s six.”
>
> “What’s that?” I asked.
>
> They were surprised I’d never heard the term before.
>
> “You know,” one soldier said, without emotion, “I’ve got her back. She’s got mine.”
>
> “On the battlefield,” she explained, “12 o’clock is directly front of you, 6 o’clock directly behind you. To have someone’s six is to have their back. ‘I’ve got your six’ means they’ve got you covered so the enemy can’t come up behind your back and kill you. It’s a declaration of loyalty” (Gauthier, 2021, p. 210).

When I read this passage, it opened the floodgates. It took me to the core of my grief about Faye’s suicide. All of a sudden, an unrelenting lament emerged about how I was unable to save her. Reading about the soldiers’ loyalty to each other, I was hastened to the source of a complex array of feelings of loss, grief, and guilt. Yet apart from the countless errors my mind was busy identifying, there is one cry that represented the lot, “I couldn’t save you”. Although I was overwhelmed with sadness and pain, also I felt a great weight had been lifted.

Within this context, I composed a poem. Since the original idea was to prepare a statement for a “calling card”, the arrangement did not start as verse. I spent hours reading through Faye’s poetry looking for imagery and following her rhythms. I settled on an idea to begin a section with her lines and then complete the stanza with my response, “but I couldn’t save you”. To this, I added another line, “I can barely save me”.



Even with my negligible knowledge of writing poetry, I could tell having two narrators – Faye's lines and my response, repeated from verse to verse – was confusing and awkward. The statement I was seeking needed to be an expression of my loss. I had to plumb my personal experience to the point of impropriety. While this fits with the first condition of the theory already imparted, the complement is to erase my fingerprint from the insight through the skill of craft. At this point, I did not possess the necessary degree of hindsight, objective distance, or poetic know-how to construct art as verse.

But in the midst of the malaise, I carried on. Following, then, as a newcomer to writing poetry, I addressed the blank page by pulling upon a small store of images and word formations that I wanted to borrow from other writers.

Even before Faye died, I had been impressed by Bertolt Brecht's poem, *On the Suicide of the Refugee W.B.*, regarding the death of his friend, Walter Benjamin. As a European refugee

since 1933, Benjamin fled Germany for France and lived an iterant life. But after having been granted safe passage to the U.S., Benjamin, a German Jew, and a group of fellow emigres crossed the border through the Pyrenees into Spain in late September 1940. They received the news that the Spanish police had been given orders to return any displaced persons to France, which had fallen to the Nazis in June 1940. On 26 September 1940, Benjamin died after having taken an overdose of morphine. Brecht only heard of Benjamin's death in 1941 following which he wrote the poem. The first verse is as follows:

> I'm told you raised your hand against yourself
> Anticipating the butcher
> After eight years of exile, observing the rise of the enemy
> Then at last, brought up against an impassable frontier
> You passed, they say, a passable one.

I am repeatedly hooked by its dignified description of suicide: "you raised your hand against yourself". By having to endure the suicide of my daughter, now, I am grateful for a set a words that implies the act without having to use the loaded-up term "suicide". "Up against", too, is a poetically shorthand utterance of the idea of struggle. Because Faye heard voices, the condition was controlled by medication. In the end it proved fatal as she careered between wanting to lower her dose – because the drugs made her sleepy and removed the enjoyment of a normal social life – and then having to return to the medication because its absence aroused the free rein of voices. "Too much" and "not enough" refers to the oscillation between increasing and lowering the measure of her dose. For my first paragraph I wrote:

> Up against too much
> And then not enough
> You raised your hand
> Against yourself.

I borrowed a line from Goethe, "Stay a while, you are so beautiful". I found the quote in an essay by Vid Simoniti about Adrian Piper (Goethe quoted in Simoniti, 2018a, p. 257). Amongst others, Piper's series of works, *Hypothesis* and *Catalysis,* explores the Conceptual idea of awareness of consciousness conveyed between people, say, the artist's consciousness and the viewers, outside "the context of the art world". Regarding Goethe's

words, in order to provide an example of the impossibility of holding onto a present phenomenon, a notion explored in Piper's works, Simoniti uses Goethe's quote to represent "longing as well as metaphysical impossibility" (Simoniti, 2018a, p. 257).

Although the quote is stolen, I am using it because its explanatory strength is so fitting especially in the context of loss but yearning for it to be otherwise. I will return to Simoniti's text and Piper's *Catalysis* works in Chapter Four. Here, then, in an economy of words, the arrangement of which puts across an awkward-to-express feeling, it summarises the feeling of having to accept the temporary union – Faye's lifespan – I shared with my daughter and the impossibility of enjoying a second more; I long for her presence in a vacuum. Again, this feeling is expressed through the works in Chapter Four. If I were to say, "I am very sad because I'll never spend another second with my daughter", I am saying nothing the listener does not already know; the words are unnecessary, and if I do utter them, they are too personal and call for the deception of art to conceal their conspicuousness. When I say in reference to Faye, "Stay a while, you are so beautiful", the intensity of response is completely different. Now in hindsight, the economy of simply stating "Stay a while" is sufficient to express "longing as well as metaphysical impossibility".

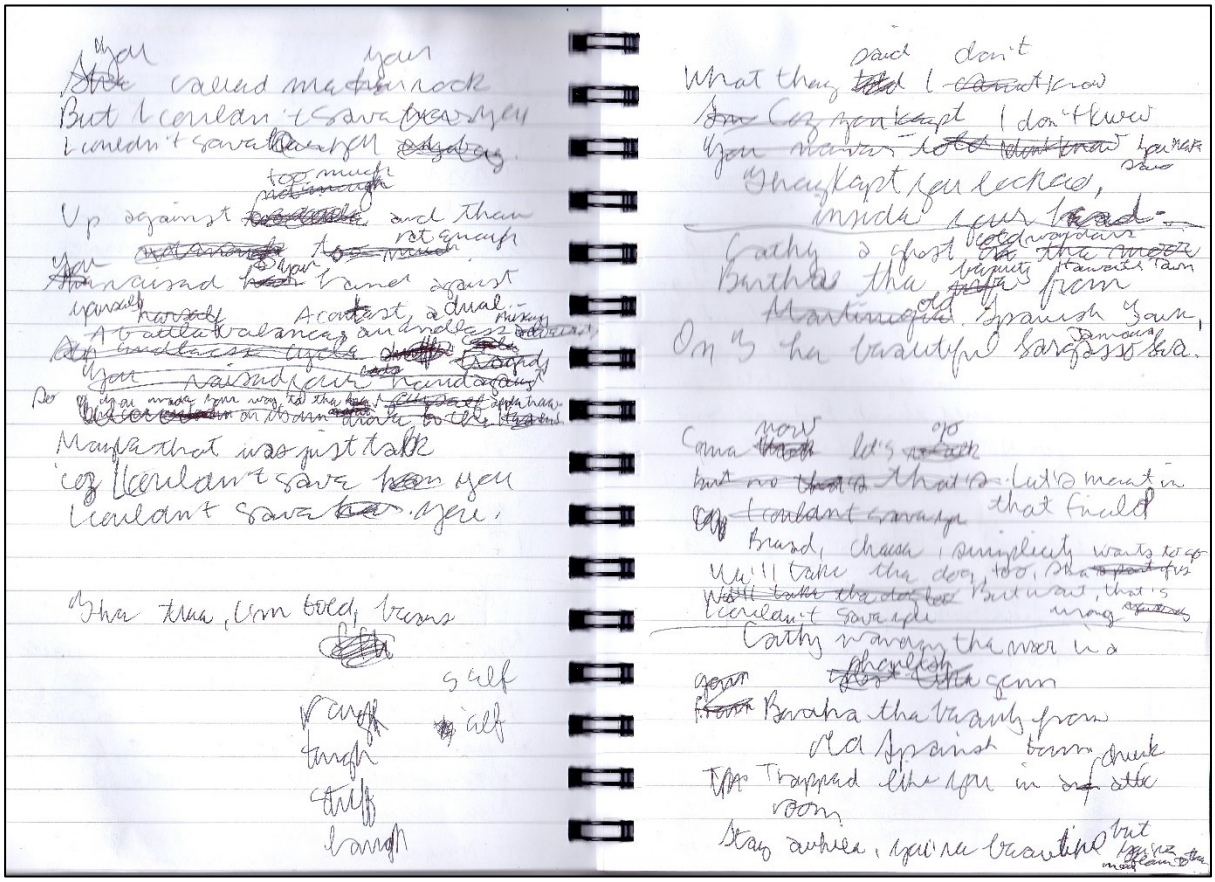
One final note: the references to the Brontës come about because of Faye's love of classic literature. I am referring to Grace Poole as the drinker in "a drunk's attic room".

Following is my version of an updated "calling card". For the prayer flag project, together with some of the original ideas from the proposal, I had in mind to print flags of single paragraphs from the poem. As objects of the wind, if the order is skewed, there is no consequence.

A proviso is as follows. As a poem carrying the weight of the words on its own, the material is too rough and raw. But if the words had been formalised as a song, then, perhaps, the accompanying music would have provided the requisite adornment unrefined expressions of feeling require before being exposed to the glare of the public realm. Still, Scruton does not allow the beauty of Mahler's *Songs of a Wayfarer* to rescue the message of the text he so obviously abhors. For him, the words destroy the music. While a fascinating corollary, I do

not have the scope to explore the well-rehearsed debate on the role of ethics within the realm of aesthetics (Levinson, 1998).

First, I have inserted a written sample of the rough draught. I synthesised these rough notes into a Word Document and carried out the editing process on the computer. Second, then, is the poem.



Prayer

Up against too much
And then not enough
You raised your hand
Against yourself.
A contest, a dual,
A long misery
So you made your way
To the apple tree.

You called me your rock
But I couldn't save you.
I couldn't save you, Sweetheart.

What they said
I don't know.
I don't know
What they said.
But they kept you locked,
Inside your head.

Maybe that was just talk
Cos I couldn't save you.
I couldn't save you, Sweetheart.

Cathy wanders the moor
In a ghoulish gown.
Bertha the beauty
From old Spanish Town
Trapped like you in
A drunk's attic room.
Stay awhile, you're beautiful
But you've gone to the moon.

Come now,
Let's go.
Let's meet in the field,
Bread, cheese,
Summer, and free.
We'll take the dog
She wants to come, too.
Hold on, something's wrong
I couldn't save you.

You called me your rock

But I couldn't save you.
I couldn't save you.
I couldn't save you.
You called me your rock
But I couldn't save you.
I couldn't save you,
Sweetheart.

During this time, I experienced some personal anxiety about the progress I was making – and not making – regarding the momentum of this project. I had missed my initial deadline and as a result, I was feeling distraught. Together with attending to my feelings of loss, I was anxious about completing my research work on time. In accordance with Sally Potter's reference to diary writing as a fount for inspiration, I dreamt of Faye the impression of which became a journal entry. Since she died, it is the only time I have dreamt of her. The vision appears to unite my feelings of loss, my longing, and my distress regarding the progression of my dissertation.

To correspond with the images of the dream, I constructed a digital picture using a photograph of Faye in the entrance to the room where the dream occurs. The dream was vivid and accordingly, I replaced the lines and spaces of the structure of the house for blocks of colour and motifs she cherished: tropical greens and flower wallpaper. As a dancer, she is striking a pose.

Again, the work does not conform to the prayer flag proposal. But as a union between "story" and photograph, it is on the cusp of the work I bring about in Chapter Four. As a portrait of Faye and also combining image and story, it embodies the Travelling Boxes idea of invoking Faye by stitching her image with elements she treasured, and in this instance, it is complemented by the text of a dream narrative.

The combination of story and illustration synthesises the end of one proposal and, unbeknownst to me at the time, inducts the work representing the theory that comes about in Chapter Four.

The dream occurred on the morning of 1 February 2023; the 31st January had been my deadline for submitting my dissertation. The story begins on the 31st when I considered re-structuring my work pattern. To give myself more time for writing, I committed to getting up at 5am. But by bedtime, I had forgotten about my resolution.

The dream and image are as follows:

> I was with a group of people in the dining room of my house. All of a sudden Faye was there. All the other characters faded away.
>
> She was tall, slender, and colourful, with long hair, exactly how she would naturally look. She was as clear as a bell. I was so glad to see her. She was so life-like. We spent a long time together. I was telling her funny stories about what had been happening with family, neighbours, friends. I didn't want to ask her anything. I didn't want to press her. I didn't want to do something that would make her go away.
>
> Then, there was another group of people, Rick amongst them. I said to Rick, "Look who's here."[57] To present Faye, I used my arms in a "Ta-da" gesture. But he couldn't see or recognise her. I was surprised to see that he was talking to somebody else. When he left the room, I was inclined to follow and pull him back. But I realised if I did, I'd lose my time with Faye. I stayed with her, and we embraced. I could feel her, body to body. When the hug ended, she disappeared.
>
> She left behind some items, but I can remember only one. An alarm clock.
>
> Immediately, I awoke; filled with adrenaline, my body was pumping. I checked the time, 4.45am. My eyes were on stalks. I stayed in bed replaying the dream in order not to forget it and to calm my racing heart. I was up by 5.

[57] Rick is Faye's father. He passed away in 2019.

Illustration 3.2

In Chapter Three, the progress I had been making in the balance between theory and practice fell apart. As I explored the theoretical underpinnings of the personal within formally produced artworks, the prayer flag practice I had proposed was not in accordance with its theoretical counterpart.

To answer my earlier query about "good" or "bad" personal, the implied "bad" sort probably does not exist. When the personal enters the realm of the public as a piece of artwork, its value consists of how well it is buried by its ornamentation. In other words, its successful reception by an audience is dependent on its crafted formal characteristics. The crux of the matter is subject to the skill of the maker. The artist, then, is the conduit between the ignition of inspiration and its manifest form in an object. It is a conflation of subject – artist – and object (its presence in the realm of the public as a solid artefact or an ephemeral event). An artwork is an instance of the conjunction of subject and object. In works of art, the oppositional tug between subject and object does not exist.

Chapter Three conveys a definition of art through the process of the maker's articulation of an imprisoned remnant of feeling or impression, something they cannot access in the bald light of day. From Tod Linafelt's idea of personal revelation in Ruth's and Naomi's "poems" in Ruth 1.16-17 and 20-21, through Freud's definition of an artist, and analogising the Ovidian metamorphosis of core-centred feeling, or trauma, transfiguring into an artistically developed object, the argument has turned to seeking representative artists who work in a capacity for fathoming personal suffering by recasting it into an artefact. Accordingly, I have used the work of Adrian Piper to represent an instance of the deeply personal harbouring within universal appeal and understanding. I have explored and am defending how the buried chamber consisting of events of shame, guilt, and loss can provide the grit of inspiration when those occasions are released and formalised. Far from straight forward, the grounds for "release" are inscrutable. Only two things are certain. In order to acquire a flash of insight from the waters of the Acheron, there is a cost and for an artist, "pain is the ransom of formalism"[58] (Neri, 2009, p. 154).

[58] From an interview with Sophie Calle, this quote refers to a statement made by Louise Bourgeois.

Upon this trajectory for reasons I have explained, I scrapped my exhibition proposal and vested my creative resources into a project the details of which, I did not know. Without being completely cast adrift, I possessed certain assets. By retaining the principle of creating from what I know, I revisited my mother's stories those I had managed to write down. When I wrote those short vignettes, I described the events as though they were essays with a close description about how the reader should feel. For the events I now want to consider as short stories, I adopt a different tone of writing. Keeping in mind Auerbach's representation of the scarcity of detail in Old Testament narrative and Joan Didion's dry journalistic approach in her essay "Slouching Towards Bethlehem", I began to write the stories of the mothers and daughters. For reasons that I explain in Chapter Four, I use a thinly detailed style to motivate a potential for interpretation. In other words, they are written to invite the speculation of the reader.

In the narratives that comprise my practice in Chapter Four, I take the droning inside-my-head admonishment "I couldn't save you" and transform it into a series of works. I found a method of practice through an essay by Mieke Bal (2001) about the presence of *mise en abyme* in the Book of Ruth.

CHAPTER FOUR. The *mise en abyme* of loss

Introduction

As examined in Chapter Three, the poetry (NRSV) in the first chapter of Ruth introduces an unprecedented glimpse of purpose within the flat narration of the scene-by-scene account of the story. In a sense, the reader has been caught by surprise, especially with Ruth's declaration of loyalty to Naomi. Conceivably one of the most memorable passages afforded in the Old Testament, the reader is treated to a rare biblical occasion of immutable truth rather than ambiguous material readily available for interpretation. Here, then, Ruth offers an explanation for doing what she does.

From Chapter Three, I am bringing forward the idea that personal intuitions inaccessible even to their owner are shaped by makers into formal representations. As I showed by my own experience of loss, personal insight is not the fluctuating array of feelings and emotions we are subject to as part of our daily routine. According to Freud, this type of awareness is normally inaccessible and the key to unlocking its confinement lies in the margins: dreams, jokes, the creation of artwork, or a protracted programme of psychoanalysis. For makers, once the intuition is lucid, it is skillfully shaped into a formalised expression.

Arguably up until now, the theory appears persuasive. But in practice, the rational equation for carrying out the procedure is not as easily controlled as its theoretical counterpart. In Chapter Three, I conveyed my problem of fulfilling the process. First, I had mistaken personal insight with the unfathomable sadness I was feeling regarding the death of my daughter. And second, once prised out, my attempts to shape the insight were insufficiently rendered into an artefact. Unstripped of its personal character, the arrant autobiographical expression denied a point of access for an audience. What is too personal and thus uncloaked in artistic ornamentation, or for Nietzsche, deception, does not provide an access point for viewers or readers to share common ground.

Although my first exertions were to no avail, I had retrieved the underlying lament at the heart of my various expressions of sorrow: I couldn't save you. As soon as this intuition surfaced and although my first attempts to interpret the insight through poetry were

abortive, I knew I possessed the inspiration to write a proposal for a new body of work. In Chapter Three and prompted by a dream, I designed a digital image that consisted of the various methods I had been practicing through stitching (Illustration 3.1). This image resides in the liminal space between the stitching works I had previously done and the practice I undertake in Chapter Four. As a reflection of the trajectory I had achieved, I am inserting a selection of works that prefaces the practical work in this chapter.

Illustration 4.1.A

Illustration 4.1.B

Illustration 4.1.C

Illustration 4.1.D

Illustration 4.1.E

Illustration 4.1.F

From Illustration 4.1.A – 4.1.F, I am drawing attention to a kind of portraiture that breaks the 2-D surface into flattened areas of space. Within this negative space, I represent the subject of the photograph by using characteristic colours or motifs. After having levelled the planes of the image into shapes, I removed the figures from their contexts and replaced them into the present-day. The procedure is particularly noticeable in Illustration 4.1.D. The original photograph portrays my neighbour, Jean, and in the background of the image, her ex-husband leans against the wall. "Take him out," she instructed. The removal of the figure, then, changed the literal and symbolic scenery of the primary subject.

Without giving this developing progression any consideration at the time, in hindsight I can identify connections between these early sketches and the method I elicited in the practice endorsed by the theory in Chapter Four. As I will show, rather than stitching and adding material to images, I have used text – story-telling – to provide context for the image. As Illustration 4.1.A has an accompanying text, it is the first instance of breaking away from what up until then had been a method for treating photographs of loved ones.

Chapter Four, then, starts with an unresolved problem from Chapter Three. While there is a theoretical underpinning within the idea of the personal as first cause for universally appealing artefacts, the method for bringing it about and my practical approach for doing so were still unknown.

The antidote to the dilemma was to return to the research question: How can I represent the Book of Ruth in contemporary contexts? What part of Ruth's story can advise me about how I can undertake the process of not only locating covert autobiographical intuitions but also delivering them as sensible forms without raising artworld trappings and at the same time, removing the polarity between subject and object?

Yet again, the text of Ruth and its commentators provide analysis that produces fruitful links between theory, art history, and practice. The means through which I arrived at this gateway

was Mieke Bal's essay (2001) about the allusions in Ruth to earlier Old Testament narratives. Bal draws a correspondence between the allusions in Ruth to the *mise en abyme* literary technique – a text within a text – introduced by André Gide in the early twentieth century (1925).

The term *mise en abyme* encompasses a range of examples ranging from art history and literature to psychoanalysis. André Gide is responsible for pulling the term from its origins and inserting it within the context of narrative. The first definition of *mise en abyme* is a motif in heraldry; *abyme* translates to "the abyss". Thus it is a shield within a shield, a second shield at the centre or the heart of the shield. Some examples portray a third shield at the centre of the second, producing telescoping replicas of three. As the most felicitous metaphor and interchangeable term for the activity of the *mise en abyme* in text, Lucien Dällenbach settles on the reflecting surface of the mirror. (Dällenbach, 1989, pp. 34-35). In other words, it is a (sub)text within the text thus creating two chronologically different worlds in a single instant.

Before launching into the creative potentials of encountering "the abyss", it is prudent to consider Nietzsche's aphorism, "Anyone who fights with monsters should take care that he does not in the process become a monster. And if you gaze for long into an abyss, the abyss gazes back into you" (Nietzsche, 1998, p. 68). In Freud's definition of the artist, inspiration is freed from the confinement of the locked-away personal and shaped into a formalised object: a painting, a sculpture, a poem, a thing that no longer represents the maker alone (Freud, 1974, pp. 423-424). In another manner of drawing out buried content, Walter Benjamin explains to Theodor Adorno that "each idea in the *Arcades* had to be wrested away from a realm in which madness reigns" (Adorno, 1977, p. 127). Whether the source is called the abyss, the unconscious, or the ruins of Benjamin's historical materialism, this territory is for visiting and not residing. And the fragment that is procured is hard won.

There is, then, a *mise en abyme* of reflection, and another *mise en abyme* that is tucked away and more difficult to access. For many of us, the occasion for noticing reflections, discovering hidden impressions, and fathoming the depth of our resources, is misfortune. As the reader already knows, my daughter took her life in October 2020. Apart from being

emersed in the deepest recesses of despair, I am developing the means to live with the inconceivable reality of her death. A mourner of bereavement by suicide is thrown into the condition without rehearsal; it is an experience for which one cannot prepare or escape. Without establishing a full version of the technical aspects of Immanuel Kant's epistemology, we can conceive that the occurrence of a sensory intuition invested in time and space but without an adequate concept cannot be experienced. Here, then, it is the shock of not only loss but the manner of its coming about. Following, this kind of loss does not have an attendant concept into which the trauma can be perceived as an object of experience. The rule is that sensuous intuitions – the concrete data we experience through our senses – must be brought under adequate concepts (the abstract, or perfect/pure forms) to sustain a sense of inner unity. In Kant's taxonomy, an intuition without a concept is rendered "blind".[59] For those struggling to comprehend a crisis, they are cast adrift; their rational power to understand or to integrate is broken. Unity, the goal of the process of experience and comprehension, is unable to be completed.

This project, then, is finding a way back. In Chapter Three, I quoted Emily Dickinson, "The Truth must dazzle gradually Or every man be blind"; loss cannot be synthesised in one fell swoop. According to Kant, understanding is a rational process of unifying the experiential/conceptual separation and here I am applying the idea to a break in consciousness that shock elicits. While learning to live with bereavement, there are stages, and one can never aspire to returning to the kind of "normal" that existed before the adversity.

To bring about the first step in the process of recovery, then, I borrow the *mise en abyme* condition of unhooking the linearity of time. In this capacity, I can embed the mothers and daughters into the present. And by doing so, I am afforded a reprieve from the reality of loss.

When I read Mieke Bal's analysis of the intertextual technique of *mise en abyme* in the Book of Ruth, I found the idea of cascading time dove-tailed with my idea of grafting the mothers

[59] An oft-quoted line by Kant (1781, B75) reads, "Thoughts without content are empty; intuitions without conceptions, blind."

and daughters onto a single timeframe.[60] In this way, there was the possibility of sharing the same moment and thus, it introduced a fruitful opportunity for exploring loss. Following, without the saturnine beat of time, I gathered the mothers and daughters into a single work in this case, a "shield" for a literal representation of an intertextual portrait: "pictures" within a "picture".

Once I had the visual prompt of the shield, the subsequent stages of the project had their origins in an overwhelming desire to feel togetherness with the mothers and daughters. Without having a final work in mind, each step I took brought about the next. From an inner drive to interact with the mothers and daughters together with Bal's *mise en abyme* of Ruth, the shield image prompted the next exploration: what would we say to one another? To bring about a kind of communication, I wrote my side of a conversation. I shortened my statements to the fewest possible words, and for responses, I used decontextualised sentence fragments from Ruth.

While I was meddling with the balance of narrative and text, I read *The Berlin Chronicles* by Walter Benjamin. Benjamin's childhood recollections prompted the idea of writing family stories to provide "voices" for the mothers and daughters. I pared down each account to the fewest possible words and undertaking the same process, I abridged the already shortened stories to single words or parts of sentences. Paradoxically, by reducing the text to incoherence – for Benjamin, "traces" – I am searching for unity. As a work in progress, its outcome is unknown.

Accordingly, to begin the process of rebuilding cohesion and unity – living with loss – I am exploring through practice Bal's identification of the intertextual literary technique *mise en abyme* that appears in the reflecting surfaces of Ruth. Equally, Harold Fisch identifies instances in Ruth that allude to a series of transgressions throughout the lineage of the Genesis family. For Fisch, these trespasses are corrected in Ruth. In the first instance, then, Ruth appears to consist of a domestic matter on a single timeline. But by engaging in

[60] See Chapter One (p. 19): "When I say, 'mothers and daughters', I am referring to my grandmother, my mother, myself, and my daughter. Each of us is both a 'mother' and a 'daughter', except my daughter, who was only ever a daughter."

intertextual activity between Ruth and the Pentateuch, both Bal and Fisch identify wider states of affairs, such as family, property, history, and jurisprudence. Through allusions and correspondences, the book's reach extends from the history of the Genesis family to the Davidic dynasty, from Abraham to David.

Equally, by undoing the sequence of time, the fan-like expulsion of memories afforded by the stories is an oxymoron. According to Walter Benjamin's historical materialism, overturning time for space will not provide an overarching pattern or all-encompassing image that shares similarities or repeats patterns in a totalising structure of progression. For Benjamin, the idea of "progress" is anathema within the framework of history. Instead, through the atomisation of the past – the ruins, fragments, discredited, rubbish, marginal, forgotten, etc. – the harbingers of the future reside. The analyses of Ruth, especially through Fisch, expresses the idea of progress, while the idea of history as a series of progressions is rejected by Benjamin. For my purposes, I am selecting from Bal and Fisch the *mise en abyme* of intertextual referencing through allusion and the disturbance of sequence and time. But on the idea of progression, I turn to Benjamin. With Benjamin, I cannot accept a notion of lineal progression especially when the latest development in the history of the mothers and daughters is suicide. Instead via Benjamin, I am extracting "fragments" from the lives of the mothers and daughters to provide opportunities for intertextual reflection. Benjamin's portrayals of his childhood in Berlin are a prototype for sketching episodes I know or have been told about my family.

To learn to live with loss, then, I have been searching for meaning: How did I get here? Do my circumstances reach back to my mothers' lives? My daughter's life? Does my daughter's suicide "reflect" an aspect of my mother's life, or her mother's, or for that matter, mine? What Benjamin calls "traces", I have represented as family stories and photographs. By the single fact that particular accounts have registered in my memory, I am raising them to the status of subtext for the condition of living with loss. And in order for the women to speak to me, I use the text of Ruth. To bring about dialogue, I remove the context and meaning from Ruth and similarly the content from the family extracts. Kibbled to single words, I establish a connection between the "remains" of Ruth with the "remains" of the family stories.

I am defending my process, first, through Bal's analysis of the activity of *mise en abyme* in the Book of Ruth. From another point of view, Fisch's identification of the Old Testament subtext in Ruth proposes an idea of progression within covenant-structure by addressing early trespasses which, importantly for Fisch, are corrected in Ruth. Leaving aside the notion of progression, I endorse drawing out family stories as data for examining the reflecting surfaces of *mise en abyme* by offering an account of Benjamin's process of considering his childhood as a tableau of the historical present he found himself: in the rise of fascism between the wars, a Jew in Europe. To illustrate the point about the elusiveness of memory, I present Laurie Anderson's story about the death of her mother.

Finally, in order to provide an account of artwork that proves the extent to which subject and object can be indivisible and thus unstable categories, I examine Adrian Piper's *Catalysis* series. For a theoretical underpinning of this set of works, Piper uses an aspect of Kant's epistemology. Through Piper's reading of Kant, I establish a correspondence between his model of rational unity and living with bereavement by suicide.

From the analysis in Chapter Three of the destabilising idea of personal insight at the heart of universal expression, another related thought is at stake. In its capacity for disrupting constant and steady categories such as subject and object, the creation of artwork is dissident and disruptive. But in its propensity for sabotaging established orders and impairing meanings, works of art possess a singular thrust that migrates back to its opposite. As a unique activity for removing the gap between opposites such as subject and object, making artwork synthesises what is in pieces and carries out the work of recovery.

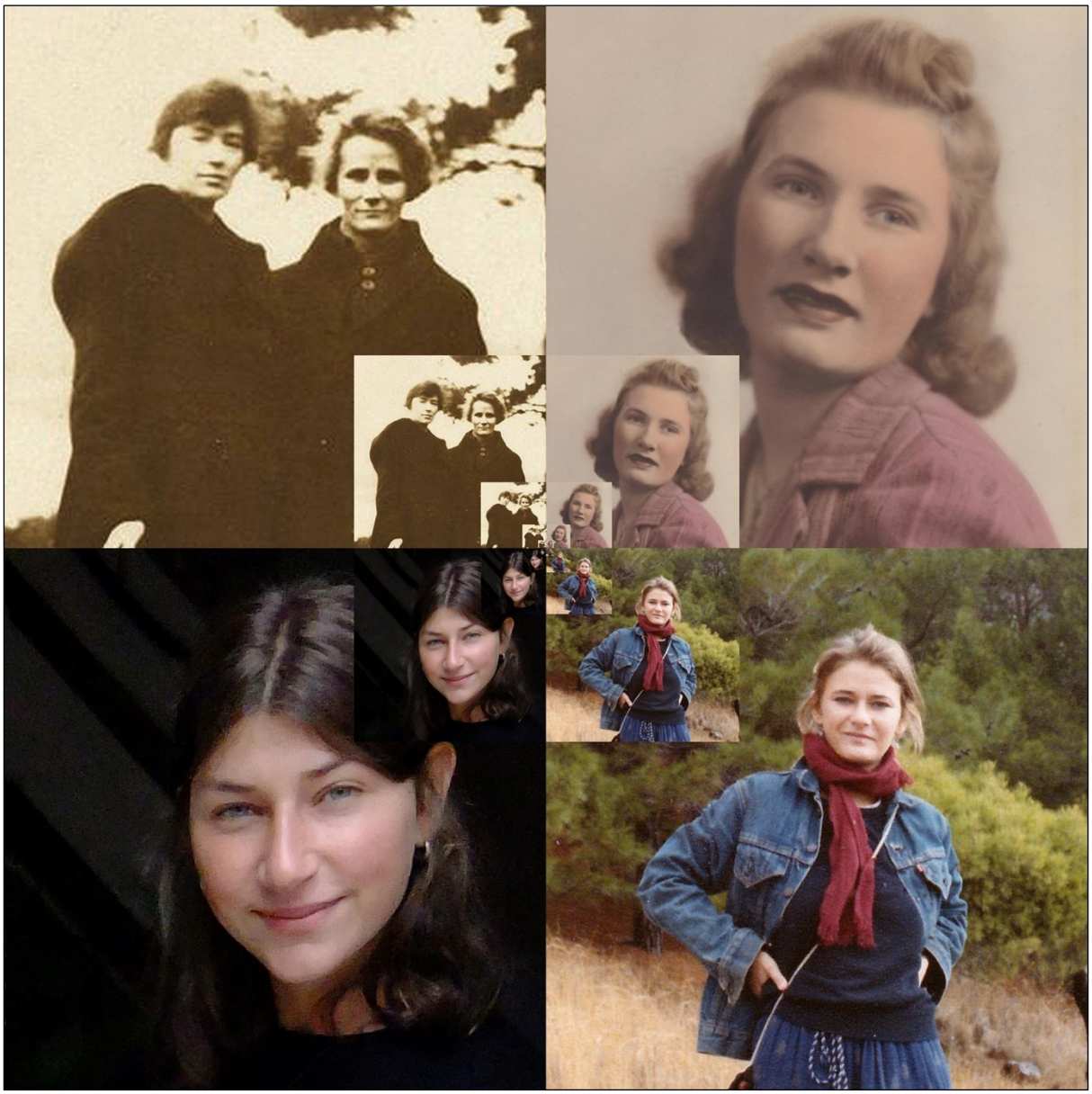
This chapter is divided into Part One and Part Two. The first section offers two insights: first, an explanation of *mise en abyme* and its relevance in the allusions of Ruth and, second, Walter Benjamin's allegorical approach to writing history. I illustrate the theory thus examined through the *Word-Portrait* series. In Part Two, I offer artists' examples that portray, first, the foundation of Kant's epistemological condition of intuitions subsumed under concepts by relating aspects of Adrian Piper's *Catalysis* series. And second, to

illustrate Benjamin's sagacity regarding the hard-won recovery of pieces of stories that are relevant to the present, I portray an excerpt from Laurie Anderson's film *Heart of a Dog*. Finally in order to synthesise theory and practice, I conclude the chapter with examples from the author's series *The Mothers and Daughters*.

Part One. Ruth, *mise en abyme*, and family stories

Apart from the digital image of the dream, my first foray into the idea of representing the dispersal of time was selecting four images of the mothers and daughters. To remove the constraint of chronology from the lineal roster of births, deaths, marriages, and issue, I produced a "shield" of the four generations of women. It is in opposition to the sequencing of autobiography, and following Benjamin, instead expresses a network of associations. In the image of a shield, the order of events disappears. The construction presents an impression of the mothers and daughters embodying a moment outside the nomenclature of past, present, and future. By cascading time into space, I have created an illusion of togetherness and simultaneity.

Illustration 4.2



Clockwise from top left: Anna Yantha (on the right), c. 1920s, Faye Campbell (Faye Dawson/Frances Josephine Kosabuski), c. 1950s, 1921-1983; Shelley Campbell, 1985, 1962-; Faye Jean Vick, 2014, 1989-2020.

Up to a point, the shield-image brought me some solace. At the same time, it created a new problem. Now that we were assembled together, it brought about a desire to communicate. What do I want to say to my daughter, my mother, my grandmother who I have never met? What do I want to know? How can I get them to talk to me?

I was longing for contact, but I was unable to compose the questions that would lead me to the kind of responses I wanted to hear. Nor did I know what I wanted to hear. I removed the

urgency of having to put the entire world into one sentence. Rather than articulating finely tuned queries, I wrote my side of a conversation that occurred while examining the images on the shield. I removed the restriction of coherence: nothing had to make sense. Without knowing what I was asking, my words started to flow. I composed thirty-six statements. I condensed, simplified, and cut out as many words as I could. The final expressions are simple and sometimes abstract: I don't see *it*; Please may I have *it*?; What is *it*?; I'm alone.

But once I found my stride, something else happened. I grew increasingly desperate. I wanted to create a shape, find a pattern, and feel fortified through the articulation of the feelings and ideas I possessed regarding the presence and absence of these women. But instead, I became even more divided. The process was churning up rather than settling down.

The presentation of the words that normally float anchorless in my mind seemed incomplete. Although it was helpful to shift the repetitive murmurings onto a sheet of paper, I wanted to hear their voices; "Speak, speak or be damned!" Donatello says to his life-like sculpture, *Il Zuccone*, in a moment of frustration. (Vasari, 2008, p. 152). Pushing the *mise en abyme* analogy I was studying in Ruth, I decided to create conversations with the mothers and daughters by finding their responses within the text of Ruth.

I printed two translations of Ruth – NIV and NRSV – and as a condition, I began to separate the story of Ruth from its component parts: words. By removing the context, I atomised the text by considering the words without their narrative anchors. Although I come back to them as the work progresses, at this point, I ignored the questions I wanted to ask. From the text, I highlighted parts of sentences: those that resonated and expressions I liked. Afterwards, I co-ordinated my outpourings with the sentence fragments I had isolated from Ruth. Through the text of Ruth, the mothers and daughters 'spoke' to me.

The first quote is my pared down query or comment. In the second, text from Ruth is used as a response from the mothers and daughters.

Illustration 4.3

<u>The *mise en abyme* of Ruth</u>

In this section, I am conveying instances of the reflecting surfaces of Ruth according to Bal and Fisch. From the outset instances of *mise en abyme* from the House of Israel take up as much space as the principal characters. For example, as a Moabite, Ruth's ethnicity is incanted repeatedly drawing attention to a lineage that came about through an incestuous

encounter between Lot and his eldest daughter. The child born from this union is Moab, Ruth's forefather (Gen. 19.33-38). Moab, then, does not only possess a sexually illicit past, but through more recent altercations, their people are long-standing enemies of the Israelites. With Ruth's ethnicity at the forefront in concert with her praiseworthy loyalty to Naomi, the reader is aware that the status quo of Old Testament narrative has been disrupted and thus is being examined.

A second textual reference is the Levirate Law and the law of Redemption invoked by the repetition of the term "kinsman" (NRSV) or "guardian-redeemer" (NIV). The role is allocated to Boaz which signals to the reader his close family tie to Naomi through Elimelich. In Levir, a childless widow expects a kinsman of the deceased – usually a brother – to marry the widow and the first child of issue takes the name of the first husband. In this way, the dead man's name is not lost to posterity (Deut. 25.5-6). Redemption is a provision for the preservation of the title of the dead man's land. Once sold, the package is either bought back, or after a period of time, it is returned to the family (Lev. 25.23-55). The two laws ensure the protection of family and property. While these are prioritised, the principles embody an endowment for widows.

Finally, up until Ruth Four, the memories of earlier episodes have been allusions. Then in Chapter Four, the matriarchs, Rachel, Leah, and Tamar, make a literal appearance to welcome and bless Ruth into Boaz's household, and more importantly, Ruth's station within the House of Israel. Tamar's role in the House of Israel is embedded as a version of the Levirate Law. According to Bal, Rachel and Leah portray an instance of women set against each other in a man's world. Despite the competitive discontent their father and husband create in their lives, Rachel and Leah settle their differences through self-governing means of conciliation. For Bal, each of the two narratives is an allusion upon which Ruth's story is built.

First, I will convey Bal's analysis of the appearance of Rachel and Leah in Ruth 4. Following, I explain more fully Bal's and Fisch's ideas of moral progression from Lot's daughter's persuasion, Tamar's solicitation to carry out her Levirate due, and finally Ruth's proposal to

Boaz. In order to guarantee Naomi's safety and wellbeing during the troubled years when the Judges ruled, Ruth confronts Boaz by saying aloud the tenets of his familial duty.

From Ruth 1, heroic qualities are identified in Ruth's actions. Already a notable figure (3.11), the spectres of the matriarchs add force to the ubiquitous knowledge of Ruth's courage and valour (4.11). For Bal, the presence of Rachel and Leah in Ruth's story impresses upon the reader the idea of "collective heroism". "A new form of hero, different from both the filial and the paternal hero, emerges here" (Bal, 2001, p. 63). It is a special type of fortitude; it is "the legitimacy of female subversion" and for men, it is in their best interests to accept "it as well" (Bal, 2001, p. 63).

As sisters and the wives of Jacob, the relationship between Leah and Rachel was under pressure at the outset. Jacob fell in love with Rachel, and his affection was reciprocated. On the condition of working seven years for him, the girl's father, Laban, agreed to release Rachel from the family household in order to marry Jacob. At the expiration of the allotted time, Laban exchanged veiled Leah for Rachel in Jacob's wedding ceremony. But after the traditional marital week with Leah, Jacob was free to marry Rachel with the provision of working a further seven years for Laban (Gen. 29).

To avert domestic tension, God forbids a man from bringing two sisters as wives into a household (Lev. 18.18). Laban forsakes the ban and shoulders the admonishment. To add to what is already a turbulent set of circumstances, one sister wins Jacob's heart but cannot produce a child, and the other, Leah, issues children but is neglected. Each lacks what the other possesses. "Rachel complains about her lack of children, and Leah complains about the absence of the husband, lack of love." In a collaboration, the women bear out each other's difficulty. Rachel receives from Leah "the fruit that fertilises" – the mandrake root – and "Rachel sends her the husband" (Bal, 2001, p. 63). Under the pretext, each sister should loathe the other, but instead they work together to overcome the restrictions imposed by their father and husband. It is a heartening story of filial and gendered bonding against multiple odds, and in turn builds the foundations of the House of Israel (Gen. 30.1-24).

In the embodiment of Ruth, those qualities divided between Leah and Rachel – fertility and love – are united. More though: through the birth of Obed, the love and fertility of Ruth restores posterity and security to Naomi. Ruth "cleaves" to Naomi (1.14) in a *mise en abyme* moment of weddedness (Gen. 2.24). Of course, then, the child born of Ruth, is born of Naomi too.[61] From this perspective, the spousal "cleaving" (KJV) or "clinging" (NIV/NRSV) of Ruth to Naomi (1.14) helps to explain the neighbours' utterance, "A son has been born to Naomi" (4.17).[62]

For some commentators, the apparent bucolic romance of Ruth instead resurrects long ago indiscretions in the Genesis family and legitimates their moral legacy (Cohn, 2014, p. 168; Fisch, 1982, p. 435). Added and connected to those "corrections" and as Ruth is a foremother of King David, there is an urgency at stake. The House of Israel is built upon two doctrines: family and land, "… the building of the house of Israel, against all odds…" (Bal, 2001, p. 66. See also Exum, 1996, pp. 144-145; Berlin, 1994, pp. 256-257). In Ruth, the family's lineage is finally recovered after a stage-by-stage progression through Genesis. First, to prepare the field for restoration, the outstanding family severance between Abraham and Lot is addressed and repaired in the *mise en abyme* allusion of Ruth (who descends from Lot) "clinging" or "cleaving" to Naomi (from Abraham) (1.17) (Fisch, 1982, p. 435). As discussed, the term's appearance invokes the kind of attachment that refers to marital bonding. To add significance to this interpretation, Ruth imparts a curse should anything but death separate her from Naomi in her remarkable declaration of devotion (1.16-17).

[61] As the House of Israel is built upon household and not biological bonds, the women are permitted to call Obed the son of Naomi (4.17) and declare, "your daughter-in-law is better than seven sons" (4.15). For Glover, "Non-biological relationships constantly repeated hold the book together" (Glover, 2009, p. 305). *Cf*. Ozick. For her, by describing the relationship between Naomi and Ruth through the repeated "in-law" insertion, Ruth's singularity and otherness is intensified, "… a universe of folklore confirms that a daughter-in-law is not a daughter" (Ozick 1994, p. 226).

[62] "No passage in the book seems to have caused as much pain to commentators as these closing verses" (Glover, 2009, p. 298).

Second, then, alluded to by the continual reference to Ruth's Moabite origins, Lot's daughter's deception is the most compromising affair (Gen. 19.33-38). This type of depravity at the foundation of Ruth's ancestral dynasty – and King David's – begins to be transformed by Boaz's ancestral line: Judah and Tamar. Judah denies Tamar's entitlement to the Levirate Law and accordingly, Tamar designs a tryst in order to receive what she is rightfully due. When her pregnancy is announced, Judah's hostility towards Tamar – "have her burned to death" (Gen. 38.24) – is hardly a condition for atonement.[63] On learning his paternity regarding Tamar's child([ren], Perez – Boaz's forefather – is one of a set of twins), and the length she went to acquire the dispensation, Judah finally admits, "She is more righteous than I" (Gen. 38-26). As the father-in-law and not the father, the encounter between Judah and Tamar starts to relieve the pressure of Lot's unalloyed transgression.

Although there is a bit of guile from both principals, the union of Boaz and Ruth transcends Lot's debauchery, Judah's disavowal of Levir, and Tamar's procurement of the Levirate bequest on her terms. In Ruth 3, the threshing-floor scene elicits allusions to Lot's daughters' seductions and Tamar's role-playing. In another *mise en abyme* moment which implies Levir but not Redemption, Naomi calls Boaz a "kinsman", but not a redeemer (3.2). Perhaps, then, Naomi is considering a Levir union – family, posterity – and not a land settlement. Or, if Levir is successful, the land settlement might be raised later. In either case, Naomi's special interest is the birth of a child. Before approaching Boaz, she advises Ruth to wait until he is sufficiently *full* (of wine) (3.3).

> Why Naomi's emphasis on Boaz's status as a relative, and not that of a redeemer? I suggest she has remembered Ruth's ancestors, the daughters of Lot. She wants Ruth to employ a peculiarly Moabite talent—the seduction of drunken elder relatives (Glover, 2009, p. 304).

Judith McKinlay puts it this way, "A chorus of intertextual allusions to other sexually questionable foreign or outsider women, including that ancestral daughter of Lot, can be all too clearly heard [in the text of Ruth]" (McKinlay, 1999, p. 155). Once Ruth's identity is revealed to Boaz, the similarity between Lot's daughter and Tamar is transformed. In the first instance, Ruth identifies Boaz as both kinsman *and* redeemer. In other words, her

[63] See note 40.

presence on the threshing-floor is not a trifling seduction. By naming Boaz's duty – what Tamar hid from Judah – Ruth's motivation is clear; she wants to solemnise the encounter. Since Ruth's original motivating factor is Naomi's wellbeing (1.16-17), her aspiration is for both posterity and redemption; in tandem, the following actions of the men at the gates and the women in the neighbourhood move the drama from the personal sphere and into the respectability of the public.

Invested in Obed's legitimate birth, the two branches of the family are corrected, and the accrued impiety of ancestral trespasses is adjudicated (Fisch, 1982, pp. 430-432).

For Harold Fisch, the three stories are similar – each follows a structural pattern: descent, disaster, abandonment, redemption, "the bed-trick", celebration, levir, and issue – but in each account, the conditions of the repeating elements are more than mere reflection (Fisch, 1982, pp. 430-432).[64] Fisch identifies a "clear moral advance" (Fisch, 1982, p. 434). At this point, Fisch breaks from a structuralist reading of Ruth because the identification of patterns leads to different outcomes. For Fisch, although the discovery of the structural threads yields an illuminating cluster of signs, it is insufficient. While the stories refer one to the other, "the biblical text is seen to reveal not just a pattern within the brain, but rather a path of salvation; not just structure, but covenant-structure" (Fisch, 1982, p. 437).

As the analysis presents, the instance of Naomi's reference to Boaz as guardian-redeemer (2.20) invokes a catalogue of associations. By calling Boaz a guardian-redeemer in the threshing-floor scene (3.9), Ruth presents herself as a receiving subject of the laws of Levir and Redemption. Accordingly, she calls on Boaz's sense of responsibility to fulfil his duty, and under this urgency – he knows she knows he knows – the matter is addressed and legislated at the city gates the following day. The utterance of the term "guardian-redeemer" abbreviates hundreds of years into a single instant.

[64] See also, Cohn (2014). Cohn refers to recurring episodes as "fairly fixed ordered series of plot elements or motifs" that are updated taking into account earlier versions but spinning "the tale differently". By providing "a counterhistory, a tale of union rather than dissolution, the book provides a fresh basis for legitimating an inclusive post-exilic Jewish identity" (Cohn, 2014, pp. 171-175).

Although “guardian-redeemer” evokes a depth of material, its resonance is not immediately noticeable. A reader may not focus on this component alone to locate what is important about Ruth’s story. It is hiding in plain sight. Likewise, I am writing the mothers’ and daughters’ stories without any certainty about which element will resonate, or indeed whether or not an abridged version of four lives will yield any kind of result.

From Illustrations 3.9.A to 3.11.D, I give a detailed accounted about the process I took to “paint” a word-portrait of Ruth.

Illustration 4.4.A

New International Version (NIV)

Ruth 2

Ruth Meets Boaz in the Grain Field

2 Now Naomi had a relative on her husband's side, a man of standing from the clan of Elimelek, whose name was Boaz.

2 And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, 'Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor.'

Naomi said to her, 'Go ahead, my daughter.' 3 So she went out, entered a field and began to glean behind the harvesters. As it turned out, she was working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelek.

4 Just then Boaz arrived from Bethlehem and greeted the harvesters, 'The LORD be with you!'

'The LORD bless you!' they answered.

5 Boaz asked the overseer of his harvesters, 'Who does that young woman belong to?'

6 The overseer replied, 'She is the Moabite who came back from Moab with Naomi. 7 She said, "Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the harvesters." She came into the field and has remained here from morning till now, except for a short rest in the shelter.'

8 So Boaz said to Ruth, 'My daughter, listen to me. Don't go and glean in another field and don't go away from here. Stay here with the women who work for me. 9 Watch the field where the men are harvesting, and follow along after the women. I have told the men not to lay a hand on you. And whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled.'

10 At this, she bowed down with her face to the ground. She asked him, 'Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me—a foreigner?'

11 Boaz replied, 'I've been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband—how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before. 12 May the LORD repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.'

13 'May I continue to find favor in your eyes, my lord,' she said. 'You have put me at ease by speaking kindly to your servant—though I do not have the standing of one of your servants.'

14 At mealtime Boaz said to her, 'Come over here. Have some bread and dip it in the wine vinegar.'

When she sat down with the harvesters, he offered her some roasted grain. She ate all she wanted and had some left over. 15 As she got up to glean, Boaz gave orders to his men, 'Let her gather among the sheaves and don't reprimand her. 16 Even pull out some stalks for her from the bundles and leave them for her to pick up, and don't rebuke her.'

17 So Ruth gleaned in the field until evening. Then she threshed the barley she had gathered, and it amounted to about an ephah.18 She carried it back to town, and her mother-in-law saw how much she had gathered. Ruth also brought out and gave her what she had left over after she had eaten enough.

19 Her mother-in-law asked her, 'Where did you glean today? Where did you work? Blessed be the man who took notice of you!'

Then Ruth told her mother-in-law about the one at whose place she had been working. 'The name of the man I worked with today is Boaz,' she said.

20 'The LORD bless him!' Naomi said to her daughter-in-law. 'He has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead.' She added, 'That man is our close relative; he is one of our guardian-redeemers.'

21 Then Ruth the Moabite said, 'He even said to me, "Stay with my workers until they finish harvesting all my grain."'

22 Naomi said to Ruth her daughter-in-law, 'It will be good for you, my daughter, to go with the women who work for him, because in someone else's field you might be harmed.'

Illustration 4.4.B

New International Version (NIV)

Ruth 3

Ruth Meets Boaz at the Threshing-Floor

3 One day Ruth's mother-in-law Naomi said to her, 'My daughter, I must find a home for you, where you will be well provided for. **2** Now Boaz, with whose women you have worked, is a relative of ours. Tonight he will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor. **3** Wash, put on perfume, and get dressed in your best clothes. Then go down to the threshing floor, but don't let him know you are there until he has finished eating and drinking. **4** When he lies down, note the place where he is lying. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what to do.'

5 'I will do whatever you say,' Ruth answered. **6** So she went down to the threshing floor and did everything her mother-in-law told her to do.

7 When Boaz had finished eating and drinking and was in good spirits, he went over to lie down at the far end of the grain pile. Ruth approached quietly, uncovered his feet and lay down. **8** In the middle of the night something startled the man; he turned—and there was a woman lying at his feet!

9 'Who are you?' he asked.

'I am your servant Ruth,' she said. 'Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a guardian-redeemer of our family.'

10 'The LORD bless you, my daughter,' he replied. 'This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier: You have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor. **11** And now, my daughter, don't be afraid. I will do for you all you ask. All the people of my town know that you are a woman of noble character. **12** Although it is true that I am a guardian-redeemer of our family, there is another who is more closely related than I. **13** Stay here for the night, and in the morning if he wants to do his duty as your guardian-redeemer, good; let him redeem you. But if he is not willing, as surely as the LORD lives I will do it. Lie here until morning."

14 So she lay at his feet until morning, but got up before anyone could be recognized; and he said, 'No one must know that a woman came to the threshing floor.'

15 He also said, 'Bring me the shawl you are wearing and hold it out.' When she did so, he poured into it six measures of barley and placed the bundle on her. Then he went back to town.

16 When Ruth came to her mother-in-law, Naomi asked, 'How did it go, my daughter?'

Then she told her everything Boaz had done for her **17** and added, 'He gave me these six measures of barley, saying, "Don't go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed."'

18 Then Naomi said, 'Wait, my daughter, until you find out what happens. For the man will not rest until the matter is settled today.'

Illustration 4.4.C

To arrive at a word or an idea that represents the entirety of the content of the story, I undertook a procedure wherein I highlighted and reduced the number of words of the narrative. By repeating the technique over and over, I arrived at a one-word "portrait" that arguably represents the Book of Ruth: "guardian-redeemer".

2 grain field ♦ a relative on her husband's side ♦ let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain ♦ favor ♦ she went out, entered a field and began to glean ♦ harvesters ♦ woman belong ♦ who came back ♦ don't go and glean in another field and don't go away from here ♦ stay here with the women ♦ watch the field ♦ follow along after the women ♦ whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars ♦ she bowed down ♦ such favor ♦ I've been told all about what you have done ♦ you left ♦ and came ♦ repay you ♦ richly rewarded ♦ under whose wings you have come to take refuge ♦ favor in your eyes ♦ you have put me at ease by speaking kindly ♦ have some bread ♦ dip it in the wine vinegar ♦ the harvesters ♦ he offered ♦ some roasted grain ♦ don't reprimand her ♦ don't rebuke her ♦ she threshed ♦ the one ♦ kindness to the living and the dead ♦ he is one of our guardian-redeemers ♦ go with the women who work for him ♦ in someone else's field you might be harmed ♦ Ruth stayed close to the women ♦ she lived with her mother-in-law

3 threshing-floor ♦ I must find a home for you ♦ he will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor ♦ don't let him know you are there ♦ uncover his feet and lie down ♦ he will tell you what to do ♦ she went down to the threshing floor ♦ good spirits ♦ he went over to lie down at the far end ♦ grain pile ♦ there was a woman lying at his feet ♦ spread the corner of your garment over me ♦ you are a guardian-redeemer ♦ this kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier ♦ my daughter, don't be afraid ♦ you are a woman of noble character ♦ I am a guardian-redeemer ♦ stay here for the night ♦ his duty as your guardian-redeemer, good ♦ as the LORD lives I will do it ♦ lie here until morning ♦ before anyone could be recognized ♦ no one must know ♦ the shawl ♦ wearing ♦ he poured into it six measures of barley ♦ placed the bundle on her ♦ she told her everything Boaz had done for her ♦ don't go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed ♦ the man will not rest ♦ the matter is settled today

2 field ♦ fields ♦ leftover ♦ went out ♦ field ♦ belong ♦ don't go ♦ don't go away ♦stay ♦ watch ♦ field ♦ follow ♦ thirsty ♦ go and get ♦ water jars ♦ bowed down ♦ favor ♦ I've been told ♦ left ♦ came ♦ repay ♦ rewarded ♦ under whose wings ♦ take refuge ♦ favor ♦ me at ease ♦ speaking kindly ♦ bread ♦ wine vinegar ♦ harvesters ♦ offered ♦ roasted grain ♦ don't reprimand ♦ don't rebuke ♦ threshed ♦ kindness ♦ living and the dead ♦ guardian-redeemers ♦ in someone else's field you might be harmed ♦ stayed close ♦ she lived with her mother-in-law

3 a home ♦ winnowing ♦ don't let him know ♦ uncover ♦ he will tell ♦ went down ♦ spirits ♦ went over to lie down ♦ spread the corner ♦ garment ♦ guardian-redeemer ♦ kindness is greater ♦ my daughter, don't be afraid ♦ guardian-redeemer ♦ stay ♦ duty ♦ guardian-redeemer ♦ I will do it ♦ lie ♦ no one must know ♦ poured ♦ six measures ♦ the bundle ♦ she told ♦ had done ♦ don't go ♦ empty-handed ♦ will not rest ♦ settled

2 field ♦ fields ♦ field ♦ don't go ♦ don't go away ♦ stay ♦ field ♦ favor ♦ whose wings ♦ take refuge ♦ favor ♦ at ease ♦ speaking kindly ♦ don't reprimand ♦ don't rebuke ♦ kindness ♦ guardian-redeemers ♦ someone else's field ♦ harmed ♦ stayed ♦ lived ♦ mother-in-law

3 home ♦ don't let him know ♦ went down ♦ went over ♦ guardian-redeemer ♦ kindness is greater ♦ my daughter, don't be afraid ♦ guardian-redeemer ♦ stay ♦ duty ♦ guardian-redeemer ♦ I will ♦ don't go ♦ empty-handed ♦ rest

2 field ♦ fields ♦ don't go ♦ don't go away ♦ stay ♦ field ♦ wings ♦ speaking kindly ♦ don't reprimand ♦ don't rebuke ♦ kindness ♦ guardian-redeemers ♦ field ♦ stayed ♦ mother

3 home ♦ went down ♦ went over ♦ guardian-redeemer ♦ kindness is greater ♦ my daughter ♦ guardian-redeemer ♦ stay ♦ duty ♦ guardian-redeemer ♦ don't go ♦ rest

2 don't go ♦ don't go away ♦ stay ♦ don't reprimand ♦ don't rebuke ♦ guardian-redeemers ♦ stayed ♦ mother

3 home ♦ guardian-redeemer ♦ daughter ♦ guardian-redeemer ♦ stay ♦ duty ♦ guardian-redeemer ♦ don't go

2 don't go ♦ don't go away ♦ stay ♦ guardian-redeemers ♦ mother

3 guardian-redeemer ♦ daughter ♦ guardian-redeemer ♦ stay ♦ duty ♦ guardian-redeemer ♦ don't go

2 stay ♦ guardian-redeemers ♦ mother

3 guardian-redeemer ♦ daughter ♦ guardian-redeemer ♦ stay ♦ duty ♦ guardian-redeemer

2 guardian-redeemers

3 guardian-redeemer ♦ guardian-redeemer ♦ duty ♦ guardian-redeemer

Illustration 4.4.D

Once the word-idea “guardian-redeemer” was discovered through the process of removing content and context from Ruth, I was still dissatisfied. As soon as the word had been located, its meaning reasserted itself back into content and context. When the sense of the term was re-established, I could not accept it as a portrait of Ruth.

GUARDIAN-REDEEMER

Illustration 4.4.E

As I had already removed content and context from the narrative, I decided to remove content and context from the letters of the term “guardian-redeemer”. I reduced the word to its component parts: letters.

G♦U♦A♦R♦D♦I♦A♦N♦R♦E♦D♦E♦E♦M♦E♦R

Illustration 4.4.F

As per the process I had up until now been using for the text of Ruth, I atomised the word-idea further by highlighting a selection of letters.

G♦U♦A♦R♦D♦I♦A♦N♦R♦E♦D♦E♦E♦M♦E♦R

Illustration 4.4.G

After scrambling and unscrambling these letters, the word-portrait I found for Ruth is:

RENEGADE

I decided to explore the possibilities by checking the efficacy of the term as a good-enough representation of Ruth. Afterall, I have never seen her described thus in any review by a commentator. The dictionary definition of renegade is as follows, “a person who has changed their feelings of support and duty from one political, religious, national, etc. group to a new one”. (Cambridge Dictionary). According to Robert Cohn in each line of her famous declaration of loyalty to Naomi, Ruth

> … sets out the elements of Otherness she desires to overcome: geographical (“where you go, I will go”), gender (“where you stay, I will stay”), ethnic (“your people shall be my people”), religious (“your god is my god”), and temporal (“where you die, I will die”) (Cohn, 2014, p. 165).

With the allusions to the matriarchs of Israel in Chapter Four, Ruth not only transcends her Otherness and joins a community but becomes a part of the “chosen lineage” (Cohn, 2014, p. 170). While professing one of the most heartfelt avowals of devotion in text, at the same time its unspoken counterpart is a denial a commitment. In the same breath of unmistakable fidelity to Naomi, Ruth forsakes her attachments to her own family, culture, religion, and country of birth. In this light, there is some weight to Keats’s words “the sad heart of Ruth” longing for her homeland. Impassioned by the matter at hand, renegades act in the moment. If later, those decisions bring about yearning, nostalgia, or regret for Ruth, the reader can only guess.

A second definition of the term “renegade” implies a kind of outside-the-law and deceptive behaviour. According to Trible, in the first instance, it was an act of defiance for Ruth to

accompany Naomi. After her protestations for Ruth to stay in Moab in the home of her mother, she disobediently follows Naomi (1.8-15), “Not only does Ruth decide; she decides contrary to Naomi’s orders” (Trible, 1978, p. 171). Since the reader is conceivably still basking in the piety of Ruth’s loyalty to Naomi and her adhesion to Israelite custom, law, and God, it might go unnoticed that at times during the narrative Ruth stretches the truth.

Furtherto this disclosure, Ruth exerts false testimony in the following examples. Is she testing Naomi’s guardianship when she reports at the end of a day’s gleaning that Boaz has told her to work behind the harvesters, i.e., men (2.21)? According to the story, Boaz advises Ruth to stay close to the women and to keep her distance from the men. On the threshing-floor, Ruth exceeds Naomi’s instructions and in a courageous (foolhardy) and remarkable (imprudent) moment, proposes marriage to Boaz by calling him a guardian-redeemer.[65] By pinning Boaz to duty during the encounter, Ruth is conveying that she is aware of the implications of the role of guardian-redeemer. Accordingly, her speech is a kind of “ultimatum”, and at that point, she cannot know the content of his response. Then, in the morning when Boaz measures out the barley into her shawl, why does Ruth tell Naomi the gift is for her “mother-in-law”? When Boaz counts out the portion of grain, he is bestowing the gift to Ruth; his mind is not on Naomi.

In the second definition of “renegade”, there is a sense of both recklessness and deception. Although these terms invoke, say, a charge, I am instead defining the term with meanings such as ardent and heartfelt. By being impassioned by a just cause, Ruth produces enough voltage to bring about revision in Levitical and Deuteronomic Law. Therefore, I feel justified on settling on the term “renegade”. With this word-portrait in tow, I have reinstated content and context and rely on this to endorse the term “renegade” as a just portrayal of Ruth.

As a pre-condition for reducing and condensing narrative to a simple explanatory idea expressed in a word-portrait, I have conveyed the process I undertook to arrive at making one word an explanatory device for understanding Ruth. By stripping content from the terms and by narrowing the selection of words, I found “renegade”. While the Book of Ruth is

[65] Phyllis Trible calls Naomi’s plan for Ruth on the threshing-floor “an outrageous scheme, dangerous and delicate” (Trible, 1978, p. 182).

usually defined by nouns and adjectives such as “kindness”, “devotion”, and “bucolic”, the term is destabilising and even, shocking. Analysts do not describe Ruth as a “renegade”. Nonetheless, I have defended this move by citing those commentators who identify instances of Ruth’s indirect methods of carrying out what she has in mind to do. For this reason, I am vouching for the process of disrupting text and meaning by reducing stories to words and words to letters. I take this step further by considering Walter Benjamin’s allegorical approach to historical materialism.

By scrambling the text of Ruth and streamlining it into a different form, I am asserting that this process can be a tool for creating meaning. The concluding image of the word-portrait is a felicitous mid-point conclusion and indicates an efficacy of the method thus created. Keeping with this strategy, I turn my attention to providing a subtext – episodes from the lives of the mothers and daughters – for my current state of bereavement. For allusions in Ruth, the Pentateuch provides a readymade text for the raw material of *mise en abyme*. For the mothers and daughters, I have a few photographs and an assortment of shorts accounts I have been told, once, twice, or three times removed. These “vignettes” are hardly stories. Nor are they tales of heavily endowed occasions exploring God’s nature as in the binding of Isaac. Instead they are snapshots from an ordinary life: the day the mangled doll is found, the day the dog buries a bone in a horse’s manger, the day the boy falls carrying a log, and the day the Barbie parts are found between the weft canes of a basket. But as reflecting surfaces, these excerpts anticipate the current circumstances I find myself.

From an analysis of the allusions in Ruth, I am borrowing the generous condition of collapsing chronological time through the idea of *mise en abyme*, a subtext within the main body of a text. With this qualification, I possess the wherewithal to bring the mothers and daughters into the present. But for my purposes, I dismiss the conjecture of progression. Instead, I make headway with Walter Benjamin’s historical materialism. For Benjamin, history is not accounted for in a series of improvements. From what is discarded and overlooked, explanations for the present and messengers of the future are found. By prising out a fragment from an over-arching context, Benjamin, the allegorist, collects a series of

unrelated particulars and pieces together a montage of unity. Again, in a paradoxical manner, disparate elements illuminate a unified whole.

In Terry Eagleton's essay on Benjamin, he raises a cautionary note regarding the union of a classical text with a contemporary and ordinary account (Eagleton, 1990). As Homer's *Odyssey* is the classical subtext of a day in the life of Leopold Bloom, Eagleton has James Joyce's *Ulysses* in mind. For Eagleton, by linking and levelling the two on par, each realm is divested of its "distinctiveness". "Allegory is in this sense symbolism run riot, pressed to a self-undoing extreme; if anything can now fulfil the role of a 'concrete universal', nothing is particularly remarkable" (Eagleton, 1990, p. 322).

Accordingly, the resulting effect produces elements of contemporary content that are reduced, and yet equivalent, to the totalising envelopment of the classical form under which they are gathered. But for Benjamin, the location of salvation is within dialectical agitation and brokenness. Thus a decontextualised vista evokes "the ghostly traces of paradise … in its sheer antithesis". (Eagleton, 1990, p. 326). Allegory provides a structure through which a scavenger pulls single units from the detritus. For the allegorist, fresh meanings are established, readings go against the grain, and startling discoveries are disclosed. Removed from their contexts, these objects "can be plucked from their environs and woven together in a set of estranging correspondences" (Eagleton, 1990, pp. 326-327).

From a methodology of sifting through, foraging in, and dredging out the leftovers of an epoch, Walter Benjamin collars that era's prophecies of the future within its pits and ditches.[66] In order to examine his personal complexities, Benjamin practices the procedure through his childhood recollections in *A Berlin Chronicle* and *Berlin Childhood around 1900*. In the vignettes of his childhood, Benjamin uncovers "early traces of his later life". (Szondi and Mendelsohn, 1978, p. 498). In one instance, Benjamin recollects his tiring attempts to get to school on time, "The clock over the school playground seems as if damaged…. The hands stand at: 'Late'" (Benjamin, 1979, p. 72). Once he arrives, his fatigue is overwhelming. He connects his "painful effort" of attending school to an adult version of it, "it was not until

[66] "Benjamin regards everything he chooses to recall in his past as prophetic of the future, because the work of memory … collapses time" (Sontag, 1979, p. 12).

much later … when I became aware that the hope I cherished of a position and an assured livelihood had always been in vain" (Benjamin quoted in Szondi and Mendelsohn, 1978, p. 498).

In *A Berlin Chronicle*, Benjamin describes an episode of sitting in a café and being overwhelmed by imagining a diagram of a kind of "map" of his life. From the fleeting image, he draws a network of associations and connections resembling a "labyrinth". He gives little importance or significance to the mystery inhabiting its core, but instead emphasises "the many entrances leading into the interior".

> These entrances I call primal acquaintances; each of them is a graphic symbol of my acquaintance with a person whom I met, not through other people, but through neighbourhood, family relationships, school comradeship, mistaken identity, companionship on travels, or other such … situations. So many primal relationships, so many entrances to the maze (Benjamin, 1979, pp. 318-319).

The "map" analogy addresses a set of linear data which metamorphoses into a visual portrayal. In other words, what is needed is "a visual, not a linear logic" (Buck-Morss, 1995, p. 218). The chief insight is to enliven a lineage of associations – and the idea stretches beyond to other domains: history, law, religion, art, etc. – through the collection of fragments (Buck-Morss, 1995, p. 218). Benjamin wants to extract historical objects from their positions within the teleological narrative of the historians and construct alternative meanings. By atomising the prevailing accounts of the nineteenth century, he discovers 'the origins of the present' in the ruins of the past (Buck-Morss, 1995, p. 218). In the *Arcades* project, Benjamin visually constructs the era as a "textual montage".

Through Benjamin's courage to carry out an approach that is both bold – for its innovation – and modest (for its primary source material), the hard work has already been done. By investing so heavily in the discounted and abandoned, and by according so little significance to time, Benjamin's textual montage produces visual portraiture. With Benjamin's locus of association and map-making, I am writing passages from the lives of the mothers and daughters with some confidence that there is potential for illumination. If nothing else, the process has been insightful. By being fully absorbed in the matter at hand, I am taming the

uncompromising experience of “bereavement by suicide” by bringing it under the concept “living with loss”.

In Part Two, I offer examples of artwork by Adrian Piper, Laurie Anderson, and the author, all of whom represent through practice Kant’s epistemological condition of intuitions subsuming within concepts. For Anderson and the author there is an additional corollary between Kant’s conceptual apparatus and the retrieval of memories. With this idea in hand, then, the task of exhuming past impressions from the labyrinth of Benjamin’s allegorical map of relationships – many of which did not have felicitous concepts – comes about through artists’ attempts to nudge and disrupt what has been up until then the status quo. For each artist, the “status quo” is an apparent obstruction addressed through the production of artwork: for Piper, it is unquestioning social responses to Otherness; for Anderson, it is the realisation she does not love her mother; and for the author, it is learning to live with loss.

Part Two. Memories. The persuasion “to talk”

Adrian Piper

As well as being a conceptual artist, Piper is a Kantian philosopher. In the *Catalysis* series, Piper first addresses the character of an object of art by embodying the “object” of art; Piper makes herself into the object. As a single material entity, she integrates both maker and object; she is the “artefact” viewers would normally see in a museum or on a plinth. For making this move, her motivation is to engage the viewer’s – “the subject’s” – perception in a “dynamic” present instant the result of which has the potential for bringing about change. “Change”, then, might encompass a range of circumstances. First, there might be a change in “retinal” perception. But more importantly, Piper seeks to change socially constructed commitments such as gender roles, cultural bias, and racial judgements. As well as addressing status quo social conventions, Piper seeks to portray Kantian philosophical formulations in conceptual artwork (Costello, 2018, p. 215).

As a philosopher, Piper interprets Kant’s analysis of reason as an explanation for xenophobia, the construal of which she explores in her artwork. As she examines the responses she

receives as an artwork “object” and the modifications she undertakes through the results of those reactions, Piper expands her perception from being not only the object, but the subject as well. She performs this synthesis by collapsing into the present her role as both the watcher and the watched.

In this ephemeral fusion, the composite of these two apparent opposites gives rise to internal unity. In Piper’s works, in parallel to the passages I have written regarding the mothers and daughters, a set of adjustments carries out the purpose of shortening and reducing, economising. In the event of loss when division and separation prevail, one seeks unity. For different reasons, and often unbeknownst to the maker, the drive to make and the steps that are undertaken bring about internal integration. On Piper’s reading of Kant’s rationalism, I am invoking the *Critique of Reason* to indicate how unity can derive from the wreckage of loss.

As already discussed, for Kant experience cannot occur without sensory intuitions subsuming within adequate concepts. Through Diarmuid Costello’s analysis of Piper’s application of Kantian epistemology the content of which I am borrowing to explain the rupture in consciousness bereavement causes, the critical worry is whether or not the idea of anomalous sensory intuitions – for example, the guerrilla performances Piper produces in the *Catalysis* series – are without conceptual apparatus. Here, then, the lack of a concept is a precondition for Piper’s performances as she is Othering herself to the extent to which a viewer can see her but cannot register the event without a conceptual counterpart. But that does not hold because if an anomaly can be experienced even if it is negatively construed as a defense, then, a concept already exists, and the original sensory intuition cannot be classed as being “blind”. As Piper is exploring xenophobia, an already existing concept, it appears that Kant’s proposition is not a fitting template.

With this objection in mind and because my practice and its theoretical counterpart hinge on the idea that bereavement by suicide does not have a readily available concept, the efficacy of my project is at risk. Keeping Piper’s analysis of her works and Costello’s examination of Piper’s oeuvre in sight, I argue that the experience of anomalies and crises by their very nature invoke a concept. According to Kant, the presence of a concept has to exist

in order to instigate experience. My offering, then, consists of the idea that even while accompanied by the existence of a concept that enables experience, it is an inadequate, makeshift concept. It is based on few if any empirical instances of sensory intuitions. Here, then, there is the potential for building, strengthening, and enlivening the improvised concept – for Piper, xenophobia, for me, bereavement by suicide – into a less damaging internal drive (for Piper, xenophilia, for me living with loss) toward the kind of unification our consciousness has tried its best to bring about.

In this section, I introduce Piper by briefly returning to Chapter Three to recount the presence of the personal in the universal. The idea dovetails with the definition of *mise en abyme* wherein differences begin to look surprisingly alike. I offer an example of the structure of humour as an "object" that sometimes relies on two elements that from one perspective are different but from another are identical. Since Piper's created "artefact" is herself, she is visibly an "object" of art and at the same time, Piper the artist. To represent the point of merging two different and separate features, I describe some of Piper's performances in the *Catalysis* series. In this set of works, Piper portrays herself by being repellent, as if she were "fighting back" (Lippard and Piper, 1972, p. 78). I discount this popular notion of Piper's work instead by addressing its correspondence with Kant's epistemology. Through Piper's interpretation of Kant's thoughts, I consider its utility in order to describe bereavement by suicide. As my argument relies on practice abating the abyss of grief by invoking aspects of Kantian reason, I address Costello's query about Kant's necessity in Piper's work.

From the concluding remarks in Chapter Three, when an artist formalises an inner insight, the designed artefact gives rise to a subjective feeling that has lost its personal trappings as it transforms into an autonomous object – say, work of art – bringing about a pleasurable release. At the same time as creating the work, the process acts upon the mind of the maker. Thus in addition to extracting an element from the artist's internal impressions, a work

comprises its own narrator and story. In this double arrangement, the process of the maker and the work they are undertaking embody the heraldic image of a shield within a shield. Dällenbach portrays the idea in this textual image: “N:S::n:s”. (Dällenbach, 1989, p. 18). As a manifestation of the double relation between the subject (the artist and their perception) and the object – the internal rationality of the work – Mieke Bal describes the *mise en abyme* synapse as a presentation of “the *same* by the perception of the *different*” (Bal, 2001, p. 67) (Author’s emphasis).

In a different type of opposite relation, a duplication of similar or identical parts are required to be dissimilar to be understood. Instead of a conflation of a set of dissimilar elements that in the end appear remarkably similar, as just discussed, here the components are the same but from another viewpoint, these identical instances can be perceived as opposites. By using the structure of humour to illustrate this idea, here is an explanation from Jean Paul:

> THE CIRCULAR WITTICISM This element of abstract or reflective wit consists of an idea that is set in opposition to itself, but none the less makes peace with its opposite in terms of similarity, if not in terms of equality…. I do not have in mind here any philosophy, but the circular witticism…. For example … “to take a rest from rest” – “to put the Bastille in gaol”…. its charm lies in the fact that the mind … see[s] the same idea – “rest”, for example – rising up before it a second time, but this time as its own adversary… (Paul quoted in Dällenbach, 1989, p. 37).

Under certain conditions, then, proclaimed opposites are remarkably alike and mirrored reflections appear strangely other. By unsettling the up until now stable dualism of subject and object, a viewer’s or reader’s perception is knocked off balance. In both these instances when conditioned expectations are destabilised, it is necessary for the rational coherence of one’s internal unity to return. In humour, the listener “gets” the joke. When the mind adjusts to the joke structure, pleasure is derived from the “trick” embedded within it. Drawing out the analogy, when the distinction between object and subject is problematised in an artwork, the artist is prompting their audience to engage, participate, and finally, to change. The reaction of the audience is fundamental to the value of the work. (Piper, 1996, pp. 32-33)

In her early artistic career, Piper saw her “existence in the existence of the work”. When the object was viewed, Piper could see her effect on the world. Similar to Gide, then, the work

acts upon its creator. By combining the conventional artistic production cycle of makers making and viewers viewing, Piper takes an additional step. She economises the "artist-work-viewing public" troika by presenting herself as the object. First, then

> … in the existence of the work, I saw my effect on the world … But … [second,] I become identical with the artwork, and the sequence is shortened: as an art object, I want simply to look outside myself and see the effect of my existence on the world at large, rather than first in another, secondary object (Piper, 1996, p. 35).

From the idea of opposite appearances alluding to similarities, I will change tack and reverse the perspective to likenesses evoking radical difference. For Piper, the artist and the object lose all marks of distinction and telescope into one embodiment. By abridging the process, Piper omits the intermediary "object" as the creator and their object merge. Although Piper is both, the perception is an "uncanny" union because both are Piper and at the same time, one is Piper, the object. Even if the body/material is the same – in this case the physical appearance of Piper – it is an "uncanny" presentation of identical material.[67] As an "art object", Piper's ontological status has changed (Danto, 1981). Apart from its effect upon the viewer, the work is intangible. It does not conform to an abiding presence as a "discrete form" which "occupies its own time and/or space" (Piper, 1996, p. 33). Instead, the work is "the final part of the process, rather than the embodiment of the process" (Piper, 1996, p. 33).

Note, then, a significant difference between Piper's portrayals as the object in the *Catalysis* series, and from Chapter Three, Freud's definition of artists who lose what is too personal by transforming their private impressions into formalised objects. In Freud's account, the audience experiences a kind of impact from engaging with the not-too-personal artefact – pleasure, say. But in Piper's view, by eliminating themselves from their work, artists alienate "process from product" thereby limiting "the viewer's reaction to the work" (Piper, 1996, p. 33). Instead, Piper dispenses with the "discrete object" and as the artist, she "becomes the catalytic agent inducing change in the viewer; the viewer responds to the catalytic presence of the artist as artwork" (Piper, 1996, p. 34).

[67] I am referring to the uncanny presentation of "the double" and "the compulsion to repeat" (Freud, 1990, pp. 355-361).

To instigate firsthand encounters with viewers, Piper carries out catalytic performance events in a series of pieces called *Catalysis*. In 1970 when Adrian Piper walked into a café – the eponymous work is *Max's Kansas City* – she was not a subject but an object.[68] She defines an object-artefact as a passive representation that enters the consciousness of its viewers but is removed from "tactile, aural, and visual feedback" (Piper, 1996, p. 27). To represent this idea, she inhibited her sensory data by wearing a sleep mask, nose clips, ear plugs, and gauntlet gloves. By removing herself from corporeal experience in this way, her idea was to fully integrate into the indifference of an object.[69] In the end, Piper declared the experiment a failure owing to her "*voluntary* objectlike passivity" implying "aggressive activity and choice". "My objecthood became my subjecthood" (Piper, 1996, p. 27) (Author's emphasis).

Following *Max's Kansas City*, Piper's *Catalysis* series continues to throw into disorder the stability of subject-object dualism. In an exhibition text from 1971, Piper declares, "I am interested in the elimination of the discrete form as art object" (Piper quoted in Kobena, 2018, p. 107). To carry out this area of exploration, Piper performed a number of events that together represent the *Catalysis* series, some of which are these: Piper undertakes routine activities such as riding a train and visiting a bookstore dressed in clothing that had been steeped for a week in vinegar, eggs, milk, and cod liver oil; on an ordinary shopping trip to Macy's, Piper wears clothing that has been freshly painted with bold lettering brandishing the warning WET PAINT; in another version, again riding a bus and subway, she stuffs a large white towel into her mouth until her cheeks expand to twice their size; and although there are others, here is one last example. A bag already carrying a wallet, a comb, a set of keys, a hand mirror, etc., is filled with ketchup. When she is asked to pay for her bus ticket, she rummages through the ketchup for the coins; at a mirror in Macy's, she pulls a comb from the ketchup to fix her hair; and on a bus, she checks her face with a pocket mirror pulled out from the bag.

[68] Max's Kansas City café was a meeting place within the wider community of the New York artworld. At that time, Piper had been rejected from artworld events due to her gender and status as a student. See Piper (1996, p. 27).

[69] Note, then, the weight of the action when for gender, racial, or class reasons, swathes of people are socially, culturally, or racially "objectified".

As in *Max's Kansas City*, the overwhelming response to Piper's aberrations is to ignore or turn away from her. On some occasions, a photographer friend accompanies her. The images show viewers declining to acknowledge or engage with her. For Piper, the activity of embodying the notion of being an "object" is an attempt to remove the separation between artwork and audience. By portraying herself as an anomalous and remarkable "object", her catalytic force produces a reaction of "turning a blind eye".

According to an interview with Lucy Lippard, Piper carried out these spectacles two or three times a week (Lippard and Piper, 1972, p. 77). As she continued, she started to notice variations, qualifications, and realisations. By portraying herself as the object, already she had been focussing on shortening or economising the distance between means of production and product. Through the repetition of these site-scenes, Piper realised the "denial" response softened when more personal engagement occurred between herself and a viewer. In one instance, she was riding the subway decked out in varying sizes of Mickey Mouse balloons. Annoyingly, the balloons were breaking and her normal size had been doubled making her movement along the carriage awkward. Passengers were becoming hostile

> and it just occurred to me to ask someone what time it was. So I did, and they answered me in a perfectly normal voice. This was very enlightening. I decided that was a worthwhile thing to go after. Somehow transcending the differences I was presenting to them by making that kind of contact… (Lippard and Piper, 1972, p. 77).

Through personal interaction, then, the object/viewer gulf was addressed and up to a point, overcome. In another piece, Piper memorised the song *Respect* by Aretha Franklin. Within her mind, she learnt it to the point of spontaneously recalling it at will. When she "turned the music on" in her head, she would dance to it using a combination of dance steps such as the Bugaloo, the Jerk, the Lindy, the Charleston, and the Twist (Piper, 1996, p. 49). Without access to Piper's internal accompaniment, viewers witnessed a woman dancing without the context of music. This piece was performed while waiting in line at the bank, at a bus stop, and in the library (Piper, 1996, p. 48). In the same mode as other pieces of the *Catalysis* series, the dynamic relationship is Piper's presentation of herself as an object to a viewing public or "perceiving subject".

In these cases, Piper is putting an object – herself – in the purview of an "audience" without artworld reference. Without this kind of scaffolding – museum, curator, artist's statement, gallery announcement, patronage, opening party, etc. – viewers are unable to locate the performances in an artworld context. Here, then, as the object, Piper carries out a representation of herself with an internal set of rules that provides a coherent explanation of her external manifestation. But in the absence of Piper's internal rationality, the witnesses are presented with an anomalous event that is breaking the rules of conditioned public behaviour. According to Piper, her portrayal is registered by the viewers as meaningless or insane. For the audience to make this judgement regarding Piper's exceptional appearance, then, an already available explanatory structure must be invoked to explain this anomalous vision, for example, insanity or meaninglessness (Piper, 1996, p. 50). Following Kant, then, here is a concrete example of finding an already existing concept, "insanity" or "meaninglessness", for an anomalous perception. I will return to this point later in the argument.

Diarmuid Costello puts it this way, "… instead of presupposing some prior set of categories, concepts, or kinds under which such particulars can be immediately subsumed, … [viewers] actively seek out and, if necessary, invent the concepts that might best illuminate whatever it is they are experiencing" (Costello, 2018, pp. 183-184). For Costello, the relevant idea in the *Catalysis* series is Kant's explanation for the faculty of understanding. As already discussed, the rule is that sensuous intuitions – the concrete data we experience through our senses – must be brought under adequate concepts (the abstract, or perfect/pure forms). Unless sensory intuitions are registered through the provision of abstract concepts, a sense of inner unity cannot be sustained. In her own translation of Kant's German, Piper refers to this passage from the *Critique of Pure Reason*:

> In original apperception everything must necessarily conform to the conditions of the thoroughgoing unity of self-consciousness, that is to the universal functions of synthesis, namely, of that synthesis according to concepts…. Without such no thoroughgoing, universal, and therefore necessary, unity of consciousness would be met with in the manifold of perceptions. These perceptions would not then belong to any experience … merely a blind play of representations, less even than a dream (Kant, 1998, A112 quoted in Piper, 1992-93, p. 193).

To draw attention to an aspect of Kant's epistemology, the idea is that to know something in the world, we must know it first through a conceptual judgement. When presented with an assault of anomalous data, a perceiving subject elicits an internal mechanism to restore order, or unity. If a "rationally unified consciousness" cannot be preserved, the sensory intuition will not be registered as experience and separation and alienation of personhood – rather than unity – will prevail (Piper, 1992-93, p. 189).

For Piper, Kant's conception of the self affords potent resources for understanding xenophobia as a special case of a more general cognitive phenomenon. Here, then, when anomalous data intrude into one's consciousness, the information is resisted by being registered into a conceptual system wherein an internal rationality can be preserved, i.e. an adequate concept provides a category for the anomalous thing in the viewer's midst. At a temporary loss, an already available concept is revived to account for the deviating object in order to maintain internal unity. If the anomaly being considered is a person, a concept such as a xenophobia might be introduced in the mind of the viewer to safeguard the internal mechanism of experience. In the short run by generating a stereotype in the void of having any other concept at hand, no matter how skewed, it protects "our preferred conception of the world … in the interests of an honorific self-conception until such time as the costs to the self of doing so begin to outweigh the gains" (Costello, 2018, p. 198).

Of Kant's quote cited above, Costello pays attention to the final sentence wherein the absence of a suitable concept renders the sensory data, or intuition, "blind".[70] For Costello, if the anomaly is without a concept, as Piper is suggesting, then, it will not be experienced in the first place. Without being registered as an experience, there is no need for a reaction of distrust, contempt, or omission. If Piper's unannounced events elicit a xenophobic stereotype or any other kind defensive reaction, the xenophobic conceptual "category" acts as a convenient receptacle for Piper's aberrations. But following Kant, if Piper's routines are so anomalous that a concept cannot be found, xenophobia will not be relevant because without a concept Piper's works will fail to be registered as experience. If in the first case there is a reaction, then, the internal schemata of intuition and concept has failed to be at

[70] An oft-quoted line by Kant reads, "thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind" (Kant, 1998, A51/B76).

risk enough to render the empirical appearance as “blind” (unable to find a relevant concept), or second, the concept of xenophobia already exists and is readily at hand. Piper’s efforts are conveniently gathered under this category in turn strengthening the classification she has tried all along to confront and undo.

> … [i]t looks as if either nothing will be experienced – the conditions for coherent experience not having been met – in which case a xenophobic response will be neither required nor triggered, or else something will be experienced, in which case the deep structures of rational intelligibility cannot really be under threat – since they are required for the anomalous other to show up as such in the first place (Costello, 2018, p. 191).

Costello’s insight is grounds for concern regarding my proposition about grief. Up until now, I have declared that survivors of bereavement by suicide cannot possibly have a concept for experiencing the effects of this kind of loss. According to the theory, then, mourners of suicide will feel and experience nothing. A cursory examination of the phenomenon of grief will conclude that this is simply not the case. How, then, can one possibly use Kant’s teleology of reason as a theory-based precursor for examining any kind of loss? Both Piper and Costello provide useful guidance.

Piper returns to Kant to examine the conditions of both conceptual categories and empirical data. According to Kant, while sensuous intuitions are unalterable and complete in themselves, as a group, they are powered by being varied, numerous, but never sufficiently enough (A 307/B 364) (Piper, 1992-93, p. 223). The system for conceiving experience, then, seeks multiple instances of data for testing the efficacy of the up until then conceptual framework. “… [W]e are disposed actively to welcome anomalies, as tests of the adequacy of the conceptions we have already formulated” (Piper, 1992-93, p. 225). On the other hand, the transcendental concept under which sensory perceptions are stored is flexible and mutable. The idea is that once data conforms to a certain concept, the integrated unity of reason seeks “to enlarge our understanding by searching for further data by which to explain it (Piper, 1992-93, p. 223).

As objects of understanding, Piper’s anomalous displays, then, are flouted “under other people’s noses” in order to test perceivers’ notions of personhood (Costello, 2018, p. 198). As already conveyed, she knows viewers’ responses will find theoretical categories – insanity

and/or meaninglessness – under which their internal rationality will provide a satisfactory category for the event to be recorded in consciousness. But through her testament to the contrary, when in fact, she has provided rational explanations for the performances she stages, we know those “make-do” categories are incorrect (Piper, 1996, p. 51).

Without the empirical evidence having to be blind, the anomalous instance still possesses the clout to reform the concept within which it has been subsumed. According to Kant, our intellect is constructed to seek as much sensory data as possible in order to support “our empirical theories of ourselves or the world”. If this were not the case, we would “feel somewhat dissatisfied, inquisitive, restless about whether there might not be more to explain”. For Kant, we actively search for the datum that will complete the set that is construed within its conceptual boundary (Piper, 1992-93, pp. 224-225).

According to Kant, the human condition is predisposed to fervently seek empirical evidence which in turn indicates a hard-wired drive to reform, update, or improve our conceptual rigour. As Piper says, effectively, anomalies are received “as tests of the adequacy of the conceptions we have already formulated” (Piper, 1992-93, p. 225). By providing an initial category for Piper’s works, the concept “xenophobia”, then, gives way to modification and development. By seeking out more and more sensory intuitions, the internal faculty of reason is always at work improving and concept building. For Piper, “When applied specifically to the transcendent idea of personhood, this disposition to welcome anomaly as a means of extending our understanding amounts to a kind of xenophilia” (Piper, 1993-92, p. 225). Costello puts it this way:

> By putting pressure on such conceptual laziness, Piper’s art, and contemporary art more generally, might be thought of … as a kind of training ground for xenophilia: a safe domain in which to test and stretch our unnecessarily stunted empirical conceptions of self and other. Anomalous entities, person, and events thus become spurs to the refinement of our understanding of some stretch of experience, notably our experience of other human beings who look or behave differently (Costello, 2018, p. 199).

Within the context of anomalies and personhood, Piper’s works represent valuable opportunities for conceptual acuity, growth, and reward in the presence of another’s singularity rather than the “fear and suspicion” of resistance (Piper, 1992-93, p. 225).

To shift Piper's comprehensive theoretical construction onto the empirical appearance of bereavement by suicide, I suggest similarities and differences between Piper's *Catalysis* series and my works representing the mothers and daughters. In this way, I am defending the position of underscoring my output relating to the mothers and daughters in Kantian epistemological terms through a reading of Piper's analyses and collection of artworks in *Catalysis*.

1. Both sets of works aim to improve outmoded conceptual categories: for Piper racial prejudice and xenophobia, and in my case bereavement by suicide. Each set of works aims to create new categories: respectively, xenophilia and living with loss;
2. While Piper creates anomalies as artworks, for me, the anomaly arrived uninvited. I am a receiver of the anomaly in parallel to the viewers witnessing Piper's performances. How then can I adjust my conceptual articulation to accommodate this unwanted anomaly? In contrast to Piper's, my artwork does not bring about a selection of anomalies to address kneejerk features of an inadequate status quo. Instead, my works regarding the mothers and daughters have been produced as a result of the death-by-suicide anomaly;
3. Piper's work elicits an already existing conceptual apparatus despite its imperfection. Up to a point, the loss of bereavement by suicide is similar to the general category "loss" by death. Arguably, the loss associated with suicide is singular and will always be an anomaly; for most survivors, it will be a once-lifetime occurrence. As in the first point, both sets of works have in mind conceptual examination and reform;
4. For years, Piper had weathered kneejerk, unreflective, and painful instances of racial prejudice. In my case, the adversity arrived in one fell swoop; and,
5. For both series of artworks, each came about through a cost. In artwork, often "pain is the ransom of formalism" (Neri, 2009, p. 154).

Despite their differences, both groups of works have in mind conceptual reform through a collection of works that aim at disrupting languid conceptual lethargy. For this reason, Piper's works and her utility of features within Kant's methods are fitting theoretical foundations for the works brought about in *The Mothers and Daughters* series.

Laurie Anderson

The next point is a caveat: the characteristic capriciousness of memory. As Benjamin considers the project of writing about Berlin, he realises that the topic "accustomed for years to waiting in the wings, would not so easily be summoned to the limelight" (Benjamin, 1979, p. 305). For years, memories can squat unnoticed until suddenly offered "anew as if by chance" (Szondi, 1978, p. 495). As I indicated earlier, some memories and their presence in the clutter of the chronicles of a lifetime are hard won. In Kantian terms, sometimes a record exists but its significance is in arrest until an adequate concept is available. To illustrate this idea, Laurie Anderson's film *Heart of a Dog* portrays an autobiographical set of accounts of loss amongst which a latent impression is brought forward regarding her mother. Only after the death of her mother, Anderson possesses the capacity to integrate the meaning of the memory. In the film, she assembles sound, music, hand-drawn animations, dream fragments, and narratives as a cluster of expressions to document grief. Mark Kermode calls it a "refractive musing on matters of life and death" (Kermode, 2016).

Almost at the end of the film, Anderson relates an episode about visiting her mother, who is nearing the end of her life. Anderson is worried because she does not love her mother and she decides to speak to a respected friend, Father Pierre, to ask advice about how to handle this dilemma. The priest advises her to take some flowers and to tell her mother that she has always cared about her. Anderson thinks, "I can do that."

When she arrives at the hospital, her mother's room is chaotic. It is loud and confusing, and the hospital staff is rushing around. There are no flowers, and there is no chance to say, "I've always cared about you." Then, suddenly, her mother is dead.

Anderson decides to practice a Buddhist exercise called the Mother Meditation. When you cannot feel anything, you undertake a kind of contemplation that asks you to find a moment when you felt your mother loved you without reserve. As you focus, you imagine that you

have been everybody's mother, and they yours. Anderson searches but cannot find the moment when her mother's love conquered all doubt.

At this point in the film there is an interlude, and the narration stops. Anderson sings and the visuals present atmospheric 1970s footage of children ice skating on a small lake with an island at its centre. As viewers are watching the skaters, the narration begins again.

> We lived by a lake and every winter it froze. We skated everywhere. One evening I was coming home from the movies and I was pushing my little brothers, Craig and Phil, in a stroller. I had decided to take them over to the island to look at the moon that was just coming up. But as we got close to the island, the ice broke. And the stroller sank into the dark water. And my first thought was, 'Mom's going to kill me.'
>
> And I remembered the knitted balls on their hats as they disappeared into the black water. So I ripped off my jacket and I jumped into the freezing water and dove down and got Craig. And pulled him up and threw him on the ice. Then I dove down again, but I couldn't find the stroller. It had slipped down the muddy bank further down under the ice. Then I dove in again and I finally found the stroller and Phil was strapped in and I ripped the strap off and pulled him out and pushed him up onto the ice. Then I ran home one twin under each arm, frozen and screaming.
>
> I ran in the door and I told my mother what had happened. And she stood there and said, 'What a wonderful swimmer you are. And I didn't know you were such a good diver.'
>
> And when I think of her now, I realise that was the moment I had been trying to remember (Anderson, 2015).

Anderson had been unable to locate a single instance of unconditional love from her mother until the appearance of the memory of her brothers' immersion into the freezing lake. As a third party and not the agent, I cannot know why the impression of her mother's reaction had not surfaced earlier. Maybe the incident at the lake had brought about trauma and memory loss? Maybe the relationship between Anderson and her mother was so acrimonious the kindness bestowed in that instant could not be integrated? Maybe her mother's death and the Mother Meditation loosened the episode from its buried chamber? Whatever the cause of the amnesia, I am using the story to illustrate an absence of experience (memory) if a suitable concept cannot be found to embody an intuition. Until one is available and in accordance with Kant, the longed-for impression – in this case feeling unreserved love from her mother – cannot be experienced.

As already discussed, in the reflecting surfaces of Ruth, I discovered the *mise en abyme* of citing family stories while enduring bereavement by suicide. Over the years, I have heard a number of anecdotes about the mothers and daughters. Sometimes it seems that I have invented the stories. For the project in its entirety, I am amassing these fragments in a wall-mounted collection of records: short stories, images, and passages from Ruth. After having written the vignettes and as I did with Ruth, I am removing content and context, and reducing the episodes to sentence fragments and single words. In the same procedure I used for locating the word-portrait "renegade", I am looking to find an enlightening word or sentence fragment to represent my current circumstances.

According to Fisch, Cohn, and Bal, Ruth's story "corrects" earlier transgressions in the history of the Genesis family. Although linear time is suspended to invoke reflecting surfaces through allusions, it is restored to identify incremental moral improvement from the violation of Lot's daughters, and the deceptions of Tamar and Judah, to the legitimisation of the marriage and issue of Ruth and Boaz. In other words, there is a kind of linear moral development providing a background scene-set for the Davidic covenant. While I have used family history for the reflecting surfaces of *mise en abyme*, I am unable to accept the idea of "progression" as a component of the broken lineage in the mothers and daughters. But through Benjamin, I can forego this conclusion. According to him, there is a direct and immediate severance of any notion of progression, which is the central feature of his version of historical materialism.

Without the dispensation of hindsight, I cannot trace a dialectic improvement in my family. But, following Benjamin, in the presentation of the stories, I am searching for the precursors that are embedded in the past. It is not only my memory I am fossicking, but my mother's accounts from her already edited repertoire. Accordingly, I do not possess the source to find those relics waiting "in the wings".

This, then, is the initial strategy for untwining the past and illuminating the present. While I am processing these long-ago impressions for explanatory precursors, the mothers and

daughters of my family are responding through the decontextualised content of Ruth. In this way, I can hear the mothers' and daughters' parts of the conversation. For their share in the dialogue, there is kindness, humour, and practical sense. It is the kind of interaction one would expect from the mothers and daughters of any family. To give the reader a sense of this next stage of the project, I am inserting four stories about my mother, three I heard from her, and one from a third party. *Frank Murphy* was told to me by Doreen, the young girl my mother had been caring for.

Illustration 4.5.A Kirkland Lake

RUTH 2.3 SHE WENT OUT, ENTERED A FIELD AND BEGAN TO GLEAN.

RUTH 1.16 DO NOT PRESS ME TO TURN BACK.

In early 1939, when Frances is 17, she leaves home. Up until then, she has been living with her family up north, in Kirkland Lake, Ontario.

She starts to waitress in a nearby café. One day she is washing dishes at the sink. The owner approaches her from behind, far too close.

She wheels around quickly and slaps him across the face with a wet dishcloth. She moves to Toronto and learns secretarial skills.

Illustration 4.5.B Frank Murphy

RUTH 1.17 DEAL WITH ME, BE IT EVER SO SEVERELY, IF EVEN DEATH SEPARATES YOU AND ME.

RUTH 2.2 IN SOMEONE ELSE'S FIELD YOU MIGHT BE HARMED.

SHE is looking after the Majury's eldest daughter. Doreen, she is 17 and unhappy at home. Clary and Edna, Doreen's parents, ranch horses too.

While Doreen is staying with Faye and Louis, Frank Murphy turns up. Murphy is Molly's on-again off-again. Irish 'charmer'; he's let Molly down badly. Molly, her dearest friend.

On that day, Murphy is not only drunk, but carrying a mickey of scotch. It's raining. Nobody has an appetite to listen to nonsense. For a while, she tries to be hospitable.

'Do you want a cup of tea?'

'Nah. Two glasses, and we'll have a nip.'

'No, Murphy. It's time to leave.' But he doesn't leave. He looks at Doreen.

'I've had enough of you, Murphy. Get the hell out of here and take your goddamn bottla' booze with you!' She grabs the neck of the bottle, throws open the door, and flings the scotch into the field. Some time later, cursing and crying, he's still stumbling around in the mud looking for it.

Illustration 4.5.C Cherry Pie

RUTH 1.14 RUTH CLUNG TO HER.

RUTH 2.13 BY SPEAKING KINDLY, YOU HAVE PUT ME AT EASE.

JACKIE is living with Faye and Louis. From Toronto, Jackie is 12 years old; her family is going through a hard time. In Canada in the 1950s, domestic management is stewarded by families and not by the state.

Faye and Jackie could be mother and daughter. They even look alike. Jackie loves the horses, the chores, and the cooking. It's summertime, and she's dreaming about having a cherry pie. Jackie shall have a cherry pie.

After collecting the ingredients, together they're making the pie. Jackie wants to do it, and Faye watches over. The pastry first, then the filling. It's sweet and sharp.

Into the oven and an hour later the bell announces the completion of this greatly anticipated visitor. Of course, Jackie wants to remove the pie from the oven.

'Don't forget the oven mitts.'

When the door is opened, a great rush of hot air blasts outward. The scalding pie, its weight, and the little girl's unpractised arms thwart the task. The pie overturns onto the floor.

'Accidents happen,' and Faye carefully spatulas the viscous gloop into the pie dish. The child clings to her and she pecks the top of her head.

Illustration 4.5.D Bootlegging

RUTH 1.5 NAOMI WAS LEFT WITHOUT.

RUTH 2.1 DON'T REBUKE HER.

After Louis dies in 1960, she carries on the bootlegging business. It's a good income. Times are tough and horses are expensive.

Their ranch, Long Acres Dude Ranch, is on Highway 92 just on the border of Wasaga Beach and Elmvale districts.

Whether they already know or whether the police are acting on a tip, she's raided, and the liquor is confiscated. If she is producing or illegally transporting it, I don't know. She makes liqueurs. But if this is the kind of booze she is selling, I don't know.

If she went to jail overnight, I don't know. But she is summoned to court. She finds a lawyer.

The lawyer presents the ticket she had been issued by the police. On the document, she is identified as Faye Campbell residing at R.R.#2, Wasaga Beach.

The lawyer says, 'I don't know this woman.' He nods toward the ticket, 'My client is Faye Campbell residing at R.R.#2, Elmvale.'

Afterward she politely asks the judge if she can collect her alcohol.

Empty-handed, she returns home.

In order to construct a kind of "conversation" between the mothers and daughters, I have begun to remove content and context from the narratives. First, I highlighted the sentence fragments I felt summarised the meaning of the vignette. At this point, then, content and context are still relevant, but in the responses of the mothers and daughters represented by the passages in Ruth, Ruth's context has been entirely removed. For example, in *Bootlegging*, the "Times are tough" fragment refers to widowhood. In Faye's (my mother) case, the widow's "inheritance" refers to the husband's ventures deposited into the widow's domain. In turn, she lacks the wherewithal of knowing how to prevail in the conditions set out by her husband. The widowhoods of Faye and Naomi are a straightforward parallel. In fact, the correspondence is so compatible that it is a cheat because decontextualisation is a precondition of the work and it has not been observed in this instance.

In *Bootlegging*, the second Ruth/mothers-and-daughters union is more in keeping with content and context removal. The direction, "Don't rebuke her," is said by Boaz about Ruth to the harvesters. For the mothers and daughters, I have used the command as words of advice in order to overlook the misdemeanour Faye had unwittingly or naively carried out. At this point in the work, then, Ruth's content and context is separated from its content. For this series of works, the original meaning of the vignettes is still being preserved.

In accordance with the process I created for the text of Ruth, I will present the same method with a selection of stories from *The Mothers and Daughters*. First, I provide a selection of four vignettes. From the stories, I begin to select words and sentence fragments and in the following step, from those initially chosen terms, I choose and remove again. The method continues until the stories are reduced to a single word. The final term is decontextualised further – the word from its characters – until a few of its letters produces a word-portrait.

Illustration 4.6.A

FAYE and Louis own three dogs. One is large, a shepherd, called Rex. He is Louis's dog. A second is a tiny terrier cross; that's Pal. He's Faye's. And the third is medium-sized, but I don't remember her name. For awhile Faye is an orderly in a hospital. When she leaves for work, she asks Louis to keep the dogs inside otherwise they follow her.

She knows they will because one day she catches the bus and at the stop after hers, the bus driver opens the door and the three dogs hasten up the steps. There is a great commotion; whenever the dogs find her, they mark their happiness by howling and jumping up and down. The four disembark.

On another day, all three dogs visit the hospital. They are trotting up and down the corridors. She spots them before they her. Apart from the bruhaha once they see her, she deftly corrals them into a room. Louis is fetched to take them home.

PAL is Faye's dog. He is a terrier cross. Terriers are territorial. Faye and bones are treasures in Pal's territory. She is a hard-worker but a late-riser. The household is already up and out before she cracks an eyelid. While she sleeps, the little dog sits outside her bedroom. On Pal's watch, nobody can go near the door. He can be vicious. If anybody says a word against the dog, she can be vicious.

He likes burying the bones she buys him. Often he digs into a horse's manger and hides his quarry under the hay. As resolute as he is outside her door, he keeps vigil over his hiding place. When the horse bends its head for a bite of hay, he creeps closer to the horse's head and snarls and barks savagely. Once she discovers the little dog's antics, she scolds him and hurls his bone out into the field.

One day Louis holds a rodeo at Long Acres Dude Ranch. They make a large corral where the main events are set to take place. Everybody is busy and nobody notices Pal. On the day of the event as the horses and riders are ready to move into the arena, the inconspicuous little dog poises at the entrance gate.

ONE afternoon she suddenly realises that Pal hasn't been around. She asks the men in the barn if anybody has seen her little dog.

She calls on a couple of neighbours. Then she arrives at Eugene Dubeau's house. He's a tall, thin Frenchman with a high-pitched reedy voice. If humour consists of teasing children almost to the point of cruelty, Eugene's a humorous man.

"Have you seen my little mongrel dog? The one with a curly tail."

Not bothered by imparting bad news, Eugene replies loudly, "Yeah, I've seen your dog. Saw it this morning. Got run over by a car. It's over there in the ditch."

She goes in the direction Eugene had pointed and carries the stiff little body home.

SOME twenty-five years after Eugene Dubeau tells Faye about her dog, he drives the school bus that takes Shelley to school in Elmvale.

At one stop, there's Paul Swackhammer. He is five years old, fair haired, and freckled. He breathes through his mouth because he always has a runny nose, wears a patch over an eye, and keeps a pair of taped-up glasses balanced on his nose. His parent's house is set two hundred metres from the road, and he walks alone to the end of the driveway to catch the bus. Despite the long trek, he always carries a log in his arms. With his lunchbox, school bag, and log, he carts a load disproportionate to his size.

One morning Paul falls up the steps of the bus landing face first by Eugene's feet. Concealing his mirth while his whiskery Adam's apple quivers up and down, Eugene glances down at the dishevelled little boy. He offers this: "Walk much?"

Paul collects his belongings and makes his way to a seat. Eugene jerks the bus forward before the child is seated, and Paul stumbles again.

Illustration 4.6.B

FAYE and Louis own three dogs. One is large, a shepherd, called Rex. He is Louis's dog. A second is a tiny terrier cross; that's Pal. He's Faye's. And the third is medium-sized, but I don't remember her name. For awhile Faye is an orderly in a hospital. When she leaves for work, she asks Louis to keep the dogs inside otherwise they follow her.

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Paul collects his belongings and makes his way to a seat. Eugene jerks the bus forward before the child is seated, and Paul stumbles again.

Illustration 4.6.C

three dogs ♦ shepherd ♦ terrier ♦ medium-sized ♦ an orderly in a hospital ♦ they follow her ♦ catches the bus ♦ three dogs hasten up the steps ♦ great commotion ♦ mark their happiness ♦ howling and jumping ♦ up and down ♦ four disembark ♦ three dogs visit the hospital ♦ trotting up and down ♦ corridors ♦ spots them ♦ the bruhaha ♦ home

terrier cross ♦ territorial ♦ bones ♦ territory ♦ hard-worker ♦ late-riser ♦ household ♦ up and out ♦ the little dog ♦ Pal's watch ♦ go near ♦ vicious ♦ a word against the dog ♦ vicious ♦ burying the bones ♦digs ♦ horse's manger ♦ hides his quarry ♦ vigil ♦ hiding place ♦ creeps closer ♦ snarls and barks ♦ discovers ♦ hurls his bone ♦ the field ♦ large corral ♦ Everybody ♦ nobody ♦ and riders ♦ poises ♦ entrance gate.

neighbours ♦ Dubeau's house ♦ high-pitched reedy voice ♦ teasing children ♦ point of cruelty ♦ humorous man ♦ mongrel ♦ curly tail ♦ in the ditch ♦ goes in the direction ♦ carries ♦ little body home.

Dubeau tells Faye ♦ breathes ♦ wears ♦ keeps ♦ walks alone ♦ long trek ♦ carries ♦ in his arms ♦ carts a load disproportionate ♦ falls up the steps ♦ face first ♦ whiskery Adam's apple ♦ up and down ♦ dishevelled little boy ♦ belongings ♦ makes his way ♦ jerks the bus

Illustration 4.6.D

three dogs ♦ shepherd ♦ terrier ♦ medium-sized ♦ an orderly in a hospital ♦ they follow her ♦ catches the bus ♦ three dogs hasten up the steps ♦ great commotion ♦ mark their happiness ♦ howling and jumping ♦ up and down ♦ four disembark ♦ three dogs visit the hospital ♦ trotting up and down ♦ corridors ♦ spots them ♦ the bruhaha ♦ home

terrier cross ♦ territorial ♦ bones ♦ territory ♦ hard-worker ♦ late-riser ♦ household ♦ up and out ♦ the little dog ♦ Pal's watch ♦ go near ♦ vicious ♦ a word against the dog ♦ vicious ♦ burying the bones ♦digs ♦ horse's manger ♦ hides his quarry ♦ vigil ♦ hiding place ♦ creeps closer ♦ snarls and barks ♦ discovers ♦ hurls his bone ♦ the field ♦ large corral ♦ Everybody ♦ nobody ♦ and riders ♦ poises ♦ entrance gate.

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Illustration 4.6.E

dogs ♦ shepherd ♦ terrier ♦ orderly ♦ hospital ♦ follow ♦ up the steps ♦ commotion ♦ happiness ♦ howling jumping ♦ up and down ♦ disembark ♦ dogs visit ♦ hospital ♦ up and down ♦ corridors ♦ home

territorial ♦ bones ♦ territory ♦ hard worker ♦ household ♦ Pal's watch ♦ vicious ♦ vicious ♦ burying the bones ♦ horse's manger ♦ hiding place ♦ snarls and barks ♦ bone ♦ the field ♦ entrance gate

neighbours ♦ Dubeau's house ♦ teasing children ♦ humorous man ♦ curly tail ♦ in the direction ♦ home

long trek ♦ carts ♦ disproportionate ♦ falls up the steps ♦ face first ♦ up and down ♦ dishevelled boy ♦ belongings ♦ jerks the bus

Illustration 4.6.F

dogs ♦ shepherd ♦ terrier ♦ orderly ♦ hospital ♦ follow ♦ up the steps ♦ commotion ♦ happiness ♦ howling jumping ♦ up and down ♦ disembark ♦ dogs visit ♦ hospital ♦ up and down ♦ corridors ♦ home

territorial ♦ bones ♦ territory ♦ hard worker ♦ household ♦ Pal's watch ♦ vicious ♦ vicious ♦ burying the bones ♦ horse's manger ♦ hiding place ♦ snarls and barks ♦ bone ♦ the field ♦ entrance gate

neighbours ♦ Dubeau's house ♦ teasing children ♦ humorous man ♦ curly tail ♦ in the direction ♦ home

long trek ♦ carts ♦ disproportionate ♦ falls up the steps ♦ face first ♦ up and down ♦ dishevelled boy ♦ belongings ♦ jerks the bus

Illustration 4.6.G

up the steps ♦ commotion ♦ howling jumping ♦ dogs visit ♦ Pal's watch ♦ burying the bones ♦ horse's manger ♦ hiding place ♦ entrance gate ♦ teasing children ♦ humorous man ♦ curly tail ♦ long trek ♦ face first ♦ dishevelled boy ♦ belongings

Illustration 4.6.H

up the steps ♦ commotion ♦ howling jumping ♦ dogs visit ♦ Pal's watch ♦ burying the bones ♦ horse's manger ♦ hiding place ♦ entrance gate ♦ teasing children ♦ humorous man ♦ curly tail ♦ long trek ♦ face first ♦ dishevelled boy ♦ belongings

Illustration 4.6.I

burying the bones ♦ hiding place ♦ humorous man ♦ long trek ♦ dishevelled boy

Illustration 4.6.J. From this list, I highlighted those two that seemed to correspond one to the other.

burying the bones ♦ hiding place ♦ humorous man ♦ long trek ♦ dishevelled boy

Illustration 4.6.K. With these two, I started to reduce and reorder the letters.

HUMOROUS MAN ♦ DISHEVELLED BOY

Illustration 4.6.L

HUMOROUS MAN ♦ DISHEVELLED BOY

Illustration 4.6.M

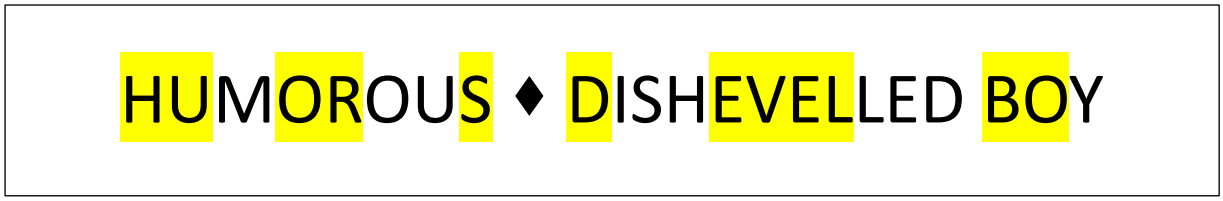


Illustration 4.6.N. From “humorous” I made “hours” and from “dishevelled boy”, beloved.

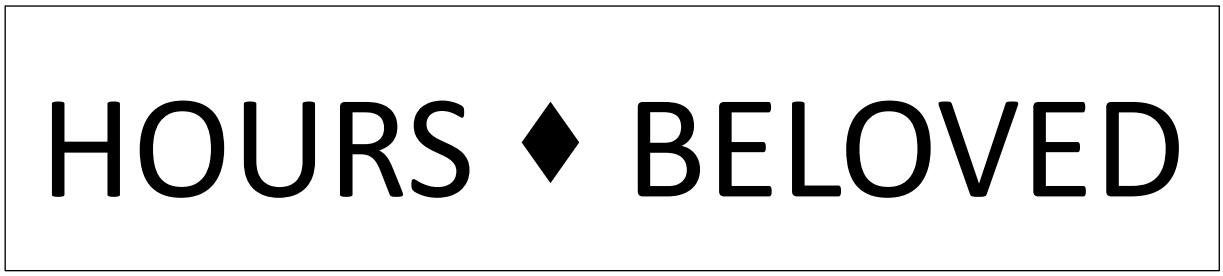


Illustration 4.6.O. In the end, I chose “hours”. For this decision, I provide an explanation in the next section.

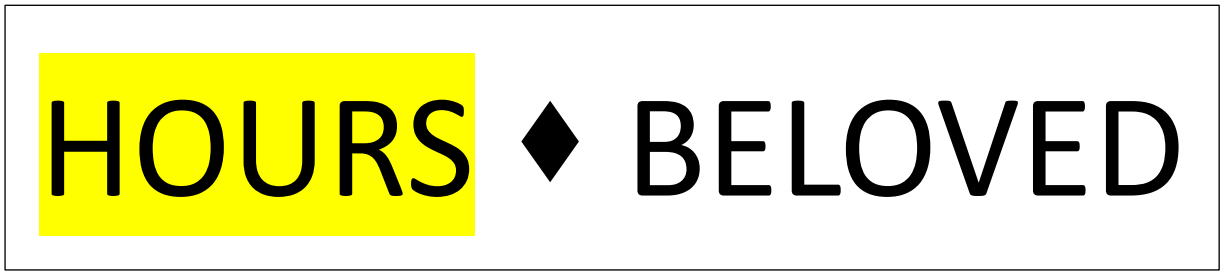
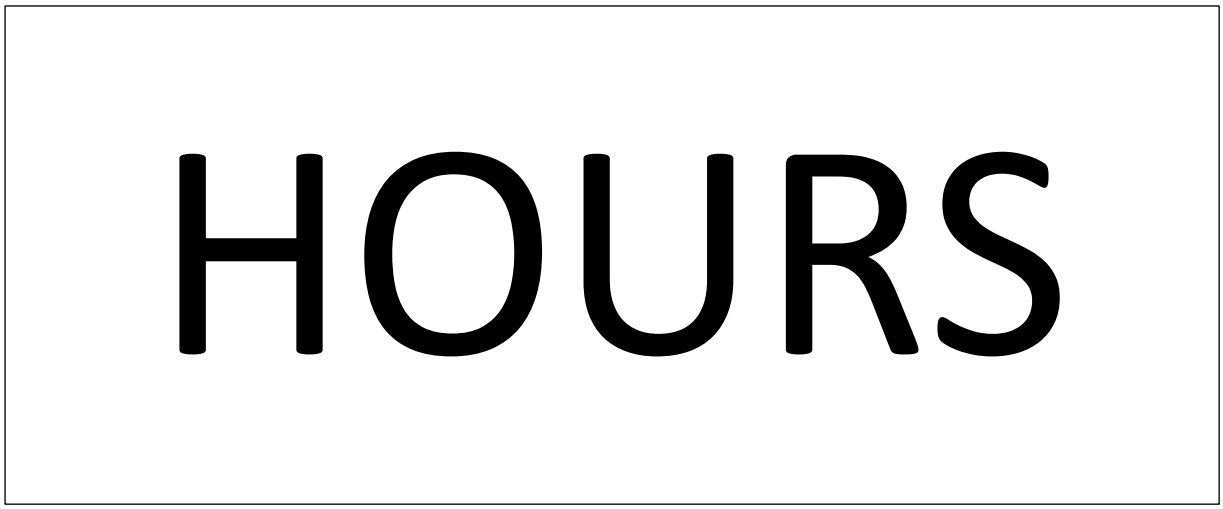


Illustration 4.6.P



When I had narrowed the fragments down to two – humorous man and dishevelled boy – I liked the lyrical mirroring between “man” and “boy”. But more importantly, I found a correspondence between the two adjectives “humorous” and “dishevelled”. Within their proximity in the work, an implication emerged. It occurred to me that it is very likely that a “dishevelled boy” becomes a “humorous man”. Examining this thought further, the “humorous man” motif might already integrate the idea of having been a “dishevelled boy”, and within his adult inner world, the “humorous man” exerts the desire to find and train other dishevelled boys into becoming humorous men. If the idea is transposed onto the vignette, it influences the reader’s perception of Eugene and even for me the writer; I had not intended to create an apology for Eugene. Although the narrative dismisses Eugene’s humour because he is the realist who points Faye in the direction of her dog’s broken body and his humour is linked to “teasing children almost to the point of cruelty”, by stripping word from content, another idea emerges. By separating the terms from their meaning in the locked world of narrative, the allusion might be equal to its opposite. Rather than a misguided display of humour or raw realism, magnanimity and generosity of spirit are prevailing features in the bumpkin who apparently teases to the point of malice or warms at the task of delivering bad news. If this is a step too far, perhaps it could simply be said that among the characters within Eugene’s mindset at least one is a dishevelled little boy.

This, then, is a reading removed from content and context. In the first reading of the vignettes of the mothers and daughters, an analysis of Eugene Dubeau is a strange anomaly. But returning to earlier arguments, for example, Ruth’s story expounded through its allusions, Walter Benjamin’s method of scavenging details from the leftovers and over-looked, and Adrian Piper’s idea of artwork as a testing range for sought-after empirical anomalies to improve conceptual categories, the most useful information is yielded by being shorn of its context. In order to strengthen the concepts sensory intuitions have the potential to upset, it is a precondition that they are freed from their conventional locations. In other words, since I was focused on the terms and sentence fragments (subject) in *The Mothers and Daughters* for other reasons apart from the storyline (object), I had amassed a set of random words. And released from association, they are transformed into a resource

for making artwork. By carrying out a process of narrowing the number of words and omitting their meaning as the building blocks of the story of which until recently they had been a part, I have in hand the material to build meaning of a different nature.

With a set of words in view – a ready artistic medium – now there is potential to formalise the matrix into something relevant about the mothers and daughters but at the same time, removing the mothers and daughters. Working through the procedure set out in Illustrations 4.6.A to 4.6.N, I settled on “humorous” and within this set of letters, I found “hours”. When I happened upon the word, I had a visceral response. With nothing more than a feeling, I settled on the term.

For “hours”, I had two immediate points of reference: Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* – originally called *The Hours* – and the Canonical Hours. Through time, each example addresses the measurement of a day. For Liturgy of the Hours, a set of ritualised practices mark the outset of each interval which consist of prayers, readings, and hymns. The day is broken up thus: Matins or Vigil (2am), Laud (5am), Prime (6am), Terce (9am), Sext (midday), None (3pm), Vespers (6pm), and Compline (7pm). Similarly, Mrs. Dalloway’s day is divided into the tasks she performs before hosting a party, buying the flowers, etc. In the streets of London, the beat of her preparations is bracketed by the intervals of the striking clock as she organises and carries out her dutiful arrangements. As the rough-draft version was entitled *The Hours*, some commentators have analysed *Mrs. Dalloway* as an allegory of a monastic existence that is structured by the Canonical Hours (Wood, 2003, pp. 19-32; Richter, 1982, pp. 236-240).

The two sets of ideas unite within the work *The Mothers and Daughters*, and it emerges under the concept “necessity”. In Chapter Three, the idea was considered regarding Roger Scruton’s analysis of two pieces of music the content of which addressed the breaking of one’s heart in the context of lost love. While one song cycle reflects a temporary setback in the confessions of a fully self-absorbed protagonist, for Scruton, the other, Franz Schubert’s *Winter Journey*, provides valuable insight about adversity of this kind. In accordance with Schubert, Scruton identifies the notion of the universally understood embodiment of “necessity”. At least from one perspective, then, the discovery allows for an exemption from

freewill as though the loss and sadness were unavoidable. In the analogy of “hours”, then, time irrevocably leans forward; there is nothing any one agent can do to alter its inevitability.

Returning to my context and the purposes of carrying out the work portrayed in *The Mothers and Daughters*, I am looking to find a way back from the inertia to which a survivor of bereavement by suicide becomes subject. As explained, I am writing episodes of memories from the lives of the mothers and daughters. Through Ruth, I produced a system for seeking fruitful associations by highlighting words and sentence fragments for no other reason apart from personal preference. By carrying out the method, I found one word that provides explanatory rigour in Ruth: “renegade”. Through the same process, I found “hours” for *The Mothers and Daughters*. For me, the term has relevant literary and religious correspondences that convey ideas about measuring a day through increments of time. As the purpose of the work was to uncover insights from the past to explain my present, the term “hours” is a satisfying and felicitous discovery.

Regarding the consideration of duties associated with times of day, an accompanying significance is the notion of “necessity”. Although I cannot accept the occurrence of suicide as a “necessity” – unlike Scruton who embraces lost love as a “completion” – the term still has significance regarding bereavement. To commit to the “necessity” of pain of a desolate heart is compatible with the “necessity” of the passing of time. At certain intervals in the day, there are chores, there are meals, there are moments for rest, there might even be prayer or time for contemplation. Thus pain can be deeply experienced but at the same time not overwhelming; the kind of mundane beat that constructs the elements of a day provides comfort to the bereaved. The structured dailiness of action – hours – is a provision for living with loss. What is particularly profound about the meaning of the term is its ordinariness. While there are numbers of available distractions, and words of advice from sages and charlatans, the thing at hand – hours – is a notable thing that is always available and each of us possesses but is utterly disregarded.

The final point revisits the ongoing theme of oppositional counterparts. Throughout the thesis, I have set up the tension of polarities by relating the idea as the relationship between

subject and object. In Chapter Three, the correspondence appeared between the personal and the universal. The distinguishing features of the process of making consist of an artist's private experience being transformed into a formalised art object. In this explanation of artwork, a personal subject and a universal object are embedded as a single entity. Up until now, this is a conventional notion of explaining how an artwork comes about.

In the 1970s, Adrian Piper short-circuited the formality of having a universal object as an outcome of the process of making an artwork. First she used her body as the perceived object as well as being the point of conception for the work. At different intervals of the process, the work inhabited both her body and mind. As a performance, the works are spent; now they exist as documentation and in a few photographs. In my analysis of the possibility of artwork being a suitable field – arguably, unique – as a point of dismissal between apparent opposites, Piper's repetition of her performances hastened an occasion when the two – subject and object – not only merged into one body. Still, the body is perceived as an object, but in Piper's case there was an instant when the maker's body united with her mind. In the Aretha piece for a fleeting moment, Piper was aware of being both the watcher and the watched.

Up to a point, I have borrowed Piper's process with the work I have carried out regarding the mothers and daughters. In this case, I have been removing context and content; in other words, I have discarded the formalised objects of Ruth and the vignettes of the mothers and daughters. I reduced the formal components of story – plot, characters, grammar – to free-floating sentence fragments and words. By highlighting the word elements of the stories for no other reason than subjective inclination, I traded object for subject. In the final move when I found the one-word "portrait", context and content returned. After a suspension of time, meaning resumed in order to make sense of the word-portrait.

Ruth's story was accompanied by its subtext: the network of the Genesis family. In accordance with Benjamin's childhood in Berlin, I invented a subtext, *The Mothers and Daughters*. I flip-flopped between meaning and removal of meaning; I darted between preference and the rules of formalism. There were times in the process when I was unable

to identify the difference. When that happened, then, the sought-after but unlikely occurrence of unity appears, short-lived as it is.

Conclusion

Keeping in mind the research objectives of representing the Book of Ruth in a contemporary context, breaking free from artworld precedent, and challenging the immutability of "subject" and "object", I have laid out a sequence of theoretical queries relating to the biblical text from three points of origin. First, I conveyed the heroism in Ruth's character and her actions by focusing on small actions. Ruth stays firmly rooted in the present and one at a time performs her daily endeavours usually at the bidding of another character, for example, Naomi or Boaz.

I analysed the significant social, cultural, and even legal challenges Ruth encounters and overcomes. Not only does Ruth courageously confront her adversity – through human decision and action not prayer nor celestial intervention – but by doing so, she engenders significant restorations within the Genesis family. Also in a more over-arching sense, Ruth's interpretation of the Deuteronomic laws of Levir and Redemption of property are modified to encompass the anomalies of ground-level humanity that conform to the essence (protection of vulnerable persons, in this case, widows) while not always adhering to the letter of the law. From this outlook, and learning to live with loss, I interpreted Ruth's steadfast continuation, innovation, and step-by-step progress through the medium of stitching.

Most often, Ruth is conveyed as an Old Testament figure of exemplary kindness and devotion as represented by my analysis in Chapter One. In Chapter Four, I conveyed an alternative reading of Ruth's character traits and actions. In each instance, I have provided justifications in order to defend both interpretations.

At this early stage of production, I began the process of grieving by "keeping Faye close". I wanted to surround myself with her images, her writings, her interests. I stitched and printed a memento mori project entitled *Travelling Boxes*. The artwork invited contributions from Faye's family and friends from England, Canada, U.S., France, Serbia, Australia, to New Zealand.

By being “exhibited” through the activity of the postal service and “the object” constructed as the ambience of grief each participant experienced while stitching panels according to their memories of Faye, the work denied artworld trappings. As the work envisioned each participant’s act of stitching as “the art”, albeit ephemerally, the artwork did not occupy a plastic form and in this respect, the work could not be “shown” or exhibited. Accordingly, the distinct categories of “subject” and “object” have been contested, as the artwork *is the act of* stitching “in remembrance of Faye”.

In Chapter Three, I used Tod Linafelt’s reading of verses Ruth 1.16-17 and 20-21. By classing Ruth’s and Naomi’s declarations as poetry, Linafelt proposes that the verses are unequivocal utterances of the inner worlds of Ruth and Naomi. While the Hebrew Bible is rich in background – a recital of bare bone facts – and sparse on foreground information (details), the poetry is a unique and valuable source of insight. As expressions of poetic intimacy, then, the composition of the women’s feelings are artworks indebted to their private origins but formalised for universal appeal. By providing an accessible object – a poem – readers can have first-hand knowledge of Ruth’s experience, feelings, and thoughts through the timelessness of formal expression. Interpretation is unnecessary.

In Freud’s view, an artist’s mode of working is to plumb the personal in order to articulate a deeply private episode that has been banished from daily consciousness. By enduring this process, the artist transmits their hard-won insight into a universally acceptable object. As a maker, the aim is to use and at the same time, distance oneself from this source of inspiration. At the height of my grief, I attempted to produce meaningful works that expressed personal sorrow. I did not plumb the depths to find it; it was readily available.

But by working in this respect, my feelings were raw and subjective. In conventional practice, for example, after being treated to artistic formalism, private intuitions successfully transform into works of art. In my case, my attempts were not formalised sufficiently to lose the elements that were “too personal”. I expressed various portrayals of grief – the prayer flag proposal, poetry, journal entries, etc. – and although they could not be adequately controlled as a piece of artwork, this stage allowed me to fully inhabit the primal expressions of sorrow. From this process, I was enabled to find my hidden lament, “I couldn’t save you.”

In this respect, I was given the means to move forward and at the same time, I had provided evidence of the efficacy of Freud's idea: personal perception is a condition for making work giving rise to general appreciation. Put another way, the claim empowers widespread interest through the portrayal of what is subjective rather than imitations from what is perceived in the objective world. By taking this into account, the perceived object – the artwork – is a representation of the maker's internal landscape. The most striking example of this is the enduring appeal of Ruth's avowal of loyalty to Naomi in 1.16-17.

For Chapter Four, my foothold in Ruth came about through the ideas of Harold Fisch and Mieke Bal. In accordance with Fisch's comparisons between the Genesis family and Ruth's location within it, the reflective surfaces of intertextual words, allusions, and references to the matriarchs in Ruth Four, define an ancestry, legacy, and lineal moral progression. Bal refers to these instances as *mise en abyme*. Through Bal's analogy, Ruth's story comprises a range of auditory manifestations – whispers from the subtext – and removes the presence of linear time. With this provision in hand, the possibility of antediluvian nuance cascades into the present.

However, with regard to historical and moral progression, Walter Benjamin's historical materialism counters the idea of advancement and development. Instead, Benjamin identifies the facts of history within its decay and deterioration and those remnants are the harbingers of truth-seeking insight. For an explanation of the present, the answers can be extracted from the overlooked data of the past. As a middle-class child in Berlin around 1900, Benjamin recalls childhood vignettes in order to find the origin of his adult challenges. Although in opposition to Fisch's commitment to historical progression, I conflated the two lines of enquiry through the idea of locating a subtext to one's present (Bal and Fisch) in the smallprint of one's past (Benjamin).

From this idea, I composed a collection of text and image stories of the mothers and daughters of my family. I established links between the four of us through the apparently random recollection of these stories. While I was working on the family "myths", I started to reshape Ruth's story. First, I stripped the text of Ruth from its plotline. As a collection of

words, I used Ruth's terms and sentence fragments as a means of communication between myself and the mothers and daughters. Also in another work, I used the decontextualised words to tie together Ruthine passages to sentence fragments in the script of the short compositions of the mothers and daughters. And in turn by highlighting certain passages, my family's stories are reduced – now also removed from their meaning – to selected words. In the final work and applying the same process, I reduced the text of Ruth to one explanatory word: RENEGADE. I offered this term as another impression of Ruth's character and to account for moments in the story when Ruth twists meaning and is bolder than her demure attitude appears.

Following the process I undertook with Ruth, I narrowed the words from *Dog Stories* to one: HOURS. As in Ruth's word-portrait at the point of the most radical removal of context and content, meaning returns. In Chapter Four, I conveyed not only notable particulars of "hours" as the rhythm of time within the unit of a day but also the idea of necessity. Here, then, a survivor is confined to another circumstance commensurate with the non-negotiability of the loss of a loved one: time. In a world of apparent free will, the agent is powerless to make any modicum of difference to these immutable fixtures: death and time. Although the manner of that idea gives an impression of being melancholic, in fact for a survivor, the tick of time is an elixir. With a pace of one move at a time – the analogy of stitching, see Chapter One – loss is integrated and synthesised.

Through Adrian Piper's artwork *Catalysis* consisting of the transformation from xenophobia to xenophilia, I was provided the means to link Kantian epistemology with the devastation of loss. By defining bereavement by suicide as an example of a human predicament without a fully rationalised concept – in which I had no prior experience and therefore did not possess a functional concept to locate the condition – I was able to develop a method for living with loss through the process of making art. Following, then, I have shown that art practice can examine both art theory and also certain propositions of philosophy.

In order to show the value of practice within the realm of theory, I have examined its premises by offering an account of a definition of art through Ovidian metamorphosis and to defend that claim, I provided contemporary examples of its efficacy. While these claims are

not original, I developed those ideas by continuing to explore the characteristic opposition of the subject and the object. When I discovered the confluence of the two within the body of the artist as site (an already established practice), and then more profoundly, within the artist's mind (less well known), the notion went beyond imitating a philosophical idea in an artwork. The artwork *became* the philosophical idea and thus possessed the power to modify or upset its endurance and stability.

As a provision of the process I undertook to arrive at this nexus, I had no idea what the result would be. Equally I was considering the possibility of being unable to find a salient word from the system of discovery I had created. By carrying out a series of steps more or less in the dark and without possessing any knowledge about where the work was heading, I happened upon an insight that resonated with my own internal sense of unity.

When the Victorian toy turns a disc of a bird on one side and an empty cage on the other, the child perceives a bird sitting in an ornate enclosure. It is a fleeting image and vis-à-vis, Nietzsche, it is a deception since in its stationery position, the bird is "free". Accordingly, as I undertook this series of inversions by removing and then restoring content and context, the process quickened until there was a transient union between theoretical rigour and art practice. For a fleeting moment, then, there is a single coherent image. Accordingly, by representing an impression of a philosophical principle (an aspect of Kant's epistemology), applying it to the human condition of loss (the shock of bereavement by suicide as an intuition without an immediate concept), and thereby developing the precept through making, I am enabled to claim that the practice has transpired into an original approach and a singular manifestation.

To embody the ephemeral work of analogising loss by removing meaning, I made an "art object". By developing printmaking and bookbinding skills, I made an artist's book that provides a tangible counterpart to the incorporeal act of grieving I had been aiming to represent. Although the hand-made book portrays the accoutrements of conceiving and building a "plastic" arts object, also it documents the findings of my research. It is a piece of evidence that accounts for and is a culmination of my research process. Although designing and producing an artist's book interrogates one of my research objectives, in return it offers

the project a material presence to express a dialogue that is both within and against the establishment.

Through the formal components of the artist's book – inks, screenprints, stab binding, embossed cover, the tactile surface and transparency of the various papers, the delicate envelope it sits within, etc. – the research propositions are "hidden in plain sight". From my abject feelings of loss and disgorging my sadness and confusion into expressions that were inadequately composed, I adopted the medium of text as a palette. By manipulating the printed word and narrative, it became my methodology. I separated meaning from story; I juxtaposed passages from Ruth and the Mothers and Daughters; I removed text to analogise loss until I found a single term; and I enlarged the word to font fragments to remove even the "letteriness" of the alphabetical characters. By making an artist's book of the planes of colour derived from pieces of print, it delivers a personal tragedy radically condensed to the shape of a finely made exhibitable artefact.[71]

[71] For the excellent instruction I received for screenprinting skills and technique, I wish to extend my gratitude to Christine Felce. For cover-making expertise and patient tutoring, I am indebted to George Richards.

Illustration 4.7.A. I made five books each with its own handmade glassine envelope sealed with a “Painting Ruth” decal. As ink for the label, I chose “bling” gold. As much as my daughter was natural and makeup free, she loved bling and rhinestones.[72]

Illustration 4.7.B

[72] For the archival images of *Painting Ruth*, I wish to acknowledge the intelligent insight of photographer, Amanda Harman.

Illustration 4.7.C. Japanese Stab binding. The colour of the waxed thread was chosen as a complement to the yellow ink of the screenprints.

Illustration 4.7.D. There is a leaf of glassine paper over the screenprinted title page “Painting Ruth”.

Illustration 4.7.E

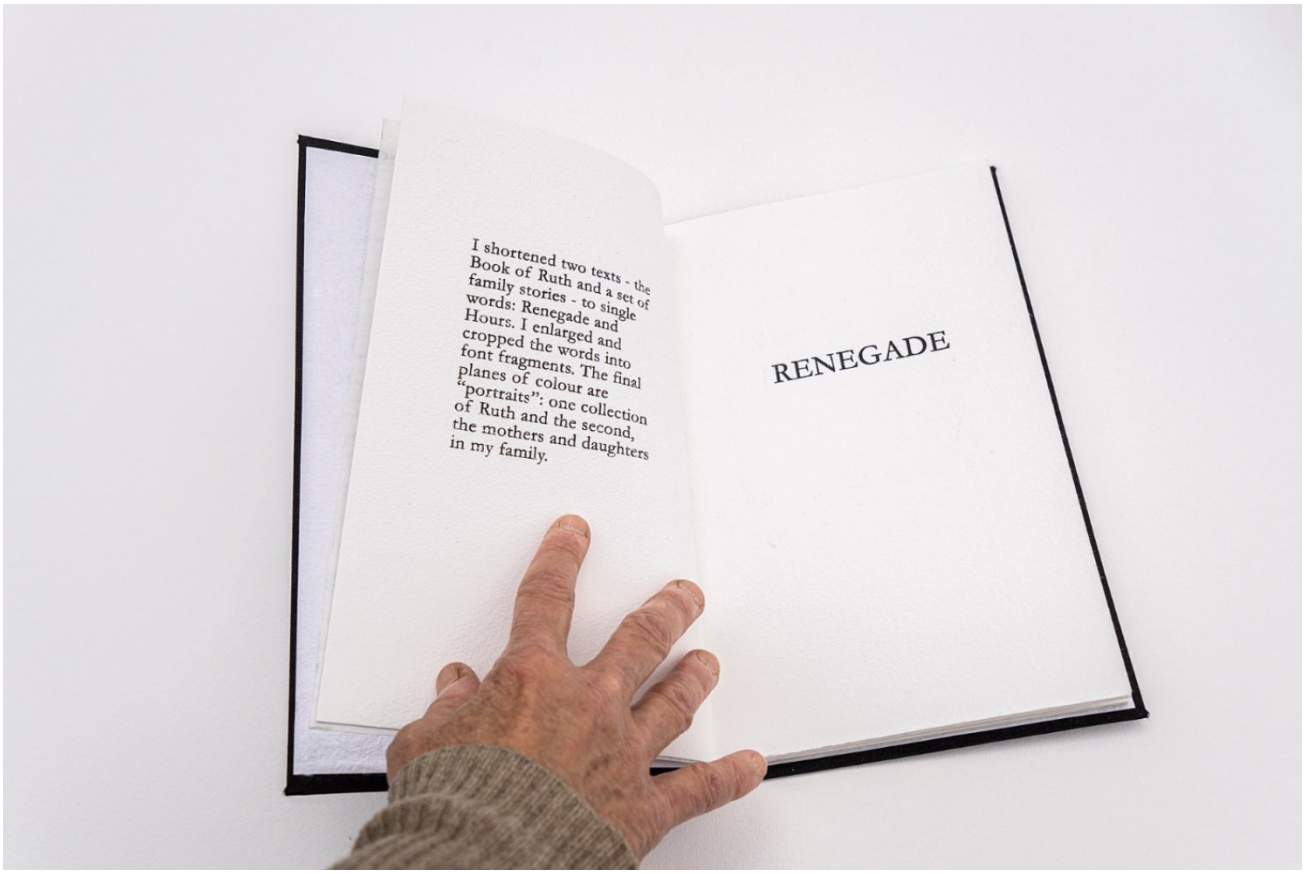


Illustration 4.7.F. Each set is a diptych: the pattern is the same but the juxtaposition of The yellow, black, and white (the blank page) is arranged differently. I sought the most diverse composition in order to avert immediate pattern recognition.

Illustration 4.7.G

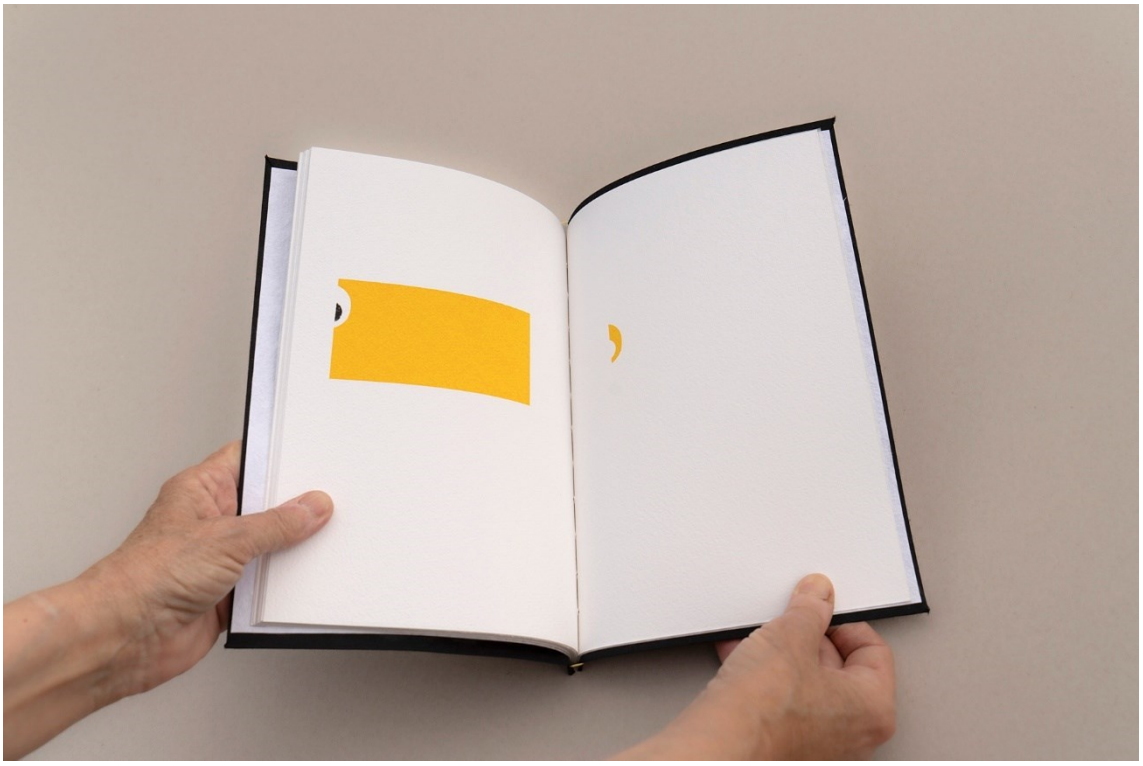


Illustration 4.7.H

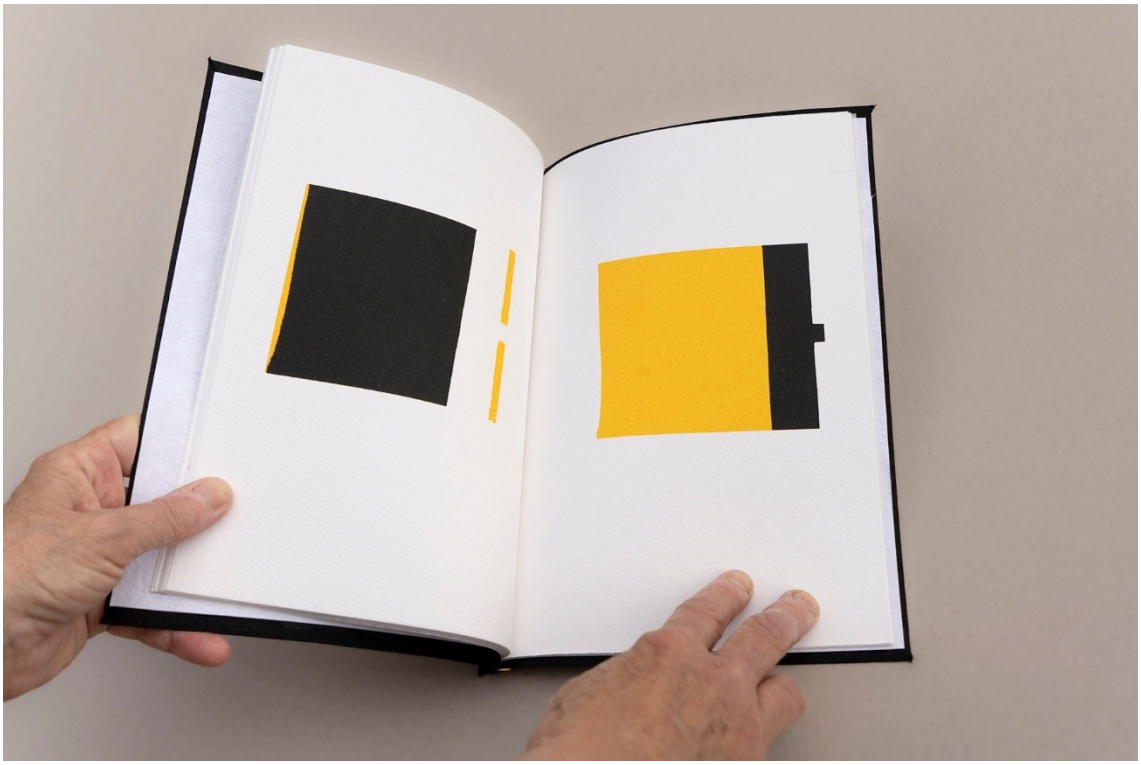


Illustration 4.7.I. For Angus, who believed in my ability to carry off this project.

Within the arc of doctoral research, there are cogent lines of inquiry favourable for post-doctoral examination. In this work, there are “cliff-hangers” in the dissertation that can be explored by pursuing fuller accounts of the following: representing “the other” bearing in mind the twin “othering” entanglements of exploitation and sentimentality; a more fully explored aesthetic account of “subject” and “object”; continuing the proposition of institutional artist/gallery/viewer/artefact ossification; and the problem and (potential) solution of beauty as a means for identifying artistic merit. As the significance of beauty has already been an ongoing concern of mine over the course of my artistic career, recently I wrote an essay addressing its apparent shallowness. Through Kant’s account of the sublime, I conceive another reading challenging the inferred “weakness” of beauty. My proposal is to consider these theories of art and apply them to an exploration of the Book of Esther.

As a story of anti-establishment and reversals, Esther offers fruitful opportunity for examining the premises “hiding in plain sight” and “nothing is as it seems”. Apart from commentators of Esther, key texts for the research are as follows. For its capacity for delving into the over-looked material residing in the margins of existence, Walter Benjamin’s historical materialism can be more deeply examined by considering his book *The Origins of German Tragedy*. Together with Benjamin, Søren Kierkegaard’s *Concluding Scientific Postscript* provides useful insight by discussing Christianity and Humour while at the same time illustrating the content of material alongside its textual structure. By identifying borders and gateways as liminal spaces, Kierkegaard explores unsaid, peripheral, marginal, unspoken, and overlooked verbal and non-verbal exchanges. By interrogating image and text in my artistic practice, I addressed non-linear regions of dialogue and information, and through Esther I envision a continuation of the research.

Finally, to summarise my enquiry, I was beholden to the system I had up until then been challenging. While exploring tiresome aspects of established art practice upheld by an artist/gallery/public apparatus, the irony consists of a contest that instead of dismantling or offending the system I had envisioned, I defended it. The institution provided me with scholarly individuals from whom I could learn; it offered a space from which I could discuss and portray my findings; and it evidenced its flexibility, diversity, inclusivity, and democratic girth by supporting and encouraging a voice of dissent. As long as the jurassic

art/public/gallery formula continues, it motivates artists to break away from received precedents and utilise their creative output to address the fundamental components about what artwork is and has the potential to be.

Appendix. The Exhibition, 2023

The exhibition consisted of approximately fifty A3-sized posters. Each print is attached to foamboard and "floats" in front of the wall by a hanging ledge attached to the back. The posters wrap around the entire gallery: *Renegade* from the entrance along the right-hand side and to the left, *Hours*. From the buzz of constant communication through various types of media, my idea was to create an installation of silent beauty and contemplation by showcasing a set of multiples of identical size fully occupying a gallery space. Apart from the content of the work, the formal decisions for the exhibition are as follows. When a viewer perceives the posters emblazoned with a single word – Renegade or Hours – I was prompting responses such as: Why this word? What is the meaning of this single piece of text? What significance are the integers of language and communication? Do we pay the building blocks of communication as much attention as we ought? What's hidden in plain sight? Through the constant noise of media, what single words ring true for each of us?[73]

Illustration App.1.A. As a viewer enters the exhibition, the artist's statement is on the right.

[73] I wish to acknowledge and thank Emily Hutchinson who shot the photographs for the exhibition and who also brought good humour and cheer to the setting up work. Equally, many thanks to Matt Fredericks who tirelessly installed the exhibition.

Illustration App.1.B. To the left of the entrance, the posters relating to Ruth begin running clockwise around the gallery.

Illustration App.1.C. Closeup of Ruth posters.

Illustration App.1.D. On the near wall, Hours begins running to the left, counter-clockwise. In the distance is the continuation of Ruth (clockwise).

Illustration App.1.E. Close-up of Hours progressing to the left.

Illustration App.1.F. Hours, progressing leftwards.

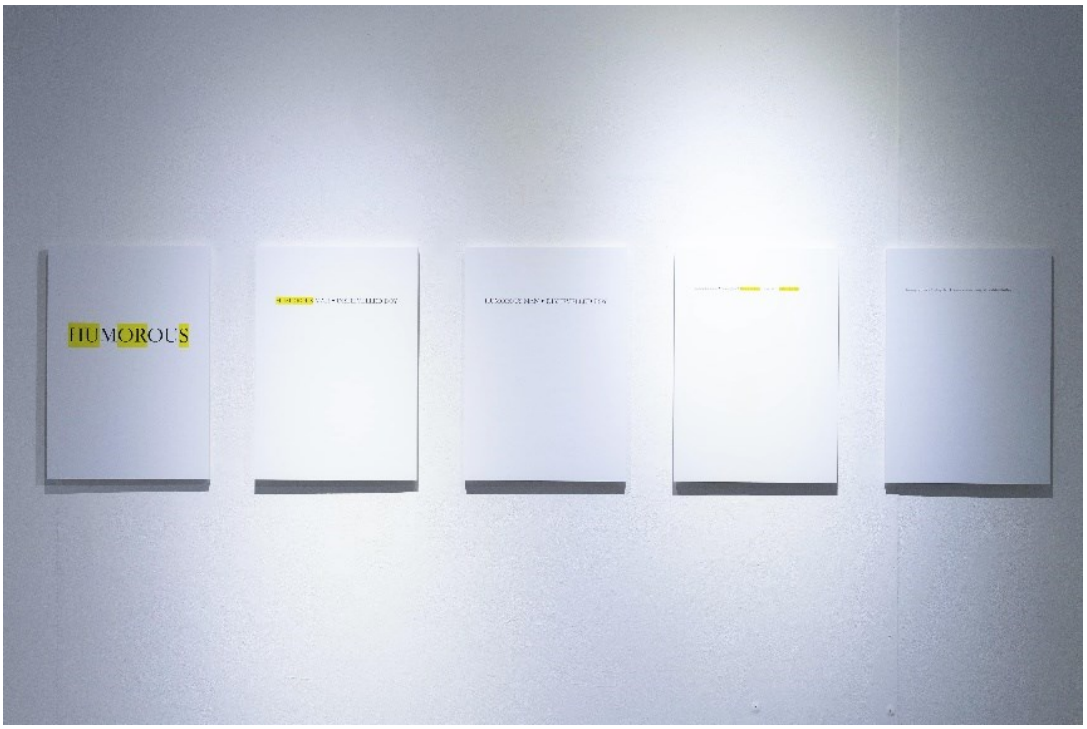


Illustration App.1.G. Hours, detail. Reading from the right, leftwards.

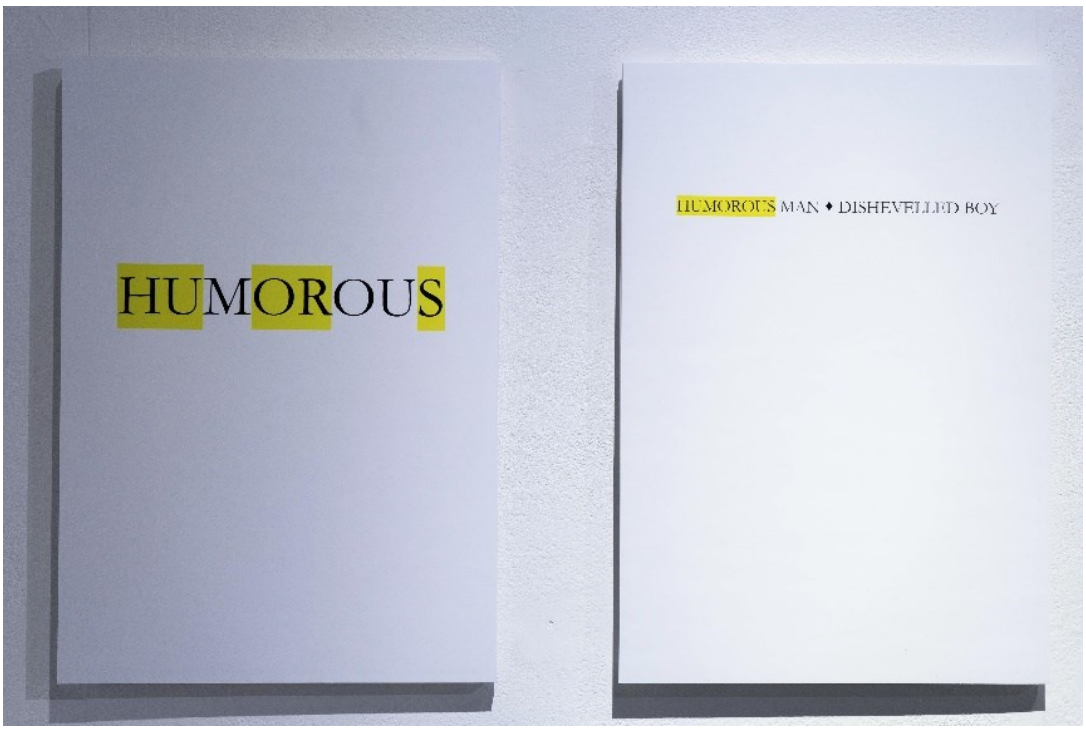


Illustration App.1.H. For the exhibition, I had not developed the images into diptych patterns as those presented in the artist's book. These final images are simply the yellow of the highlight and the black ink of text.

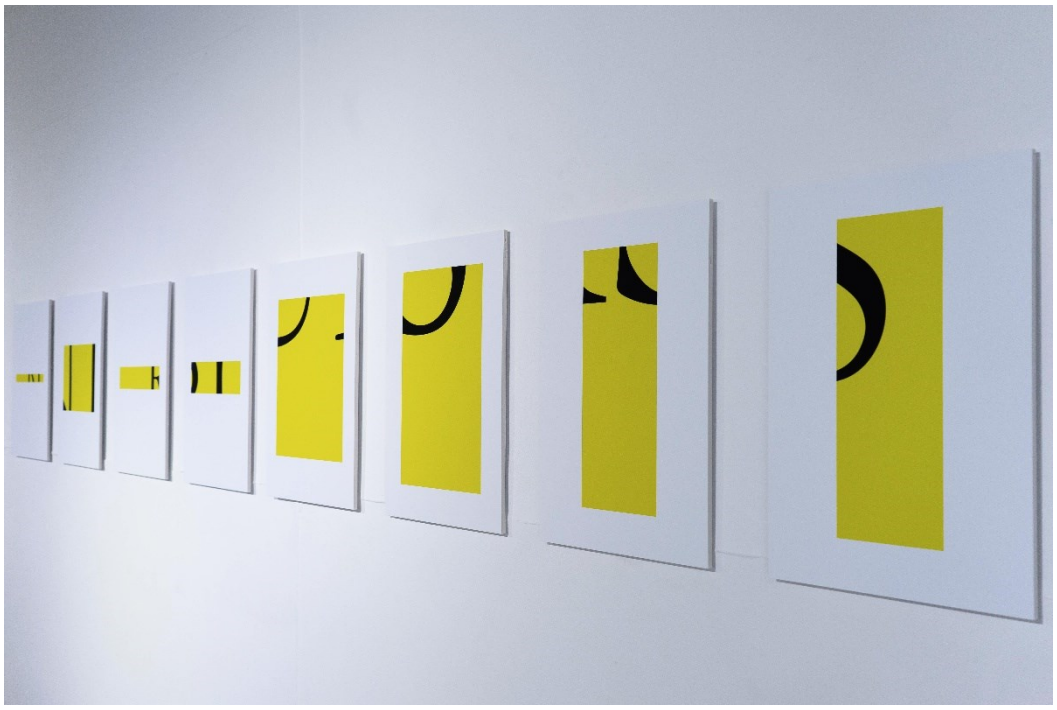


Illustration App.1.I. Close up of final images.

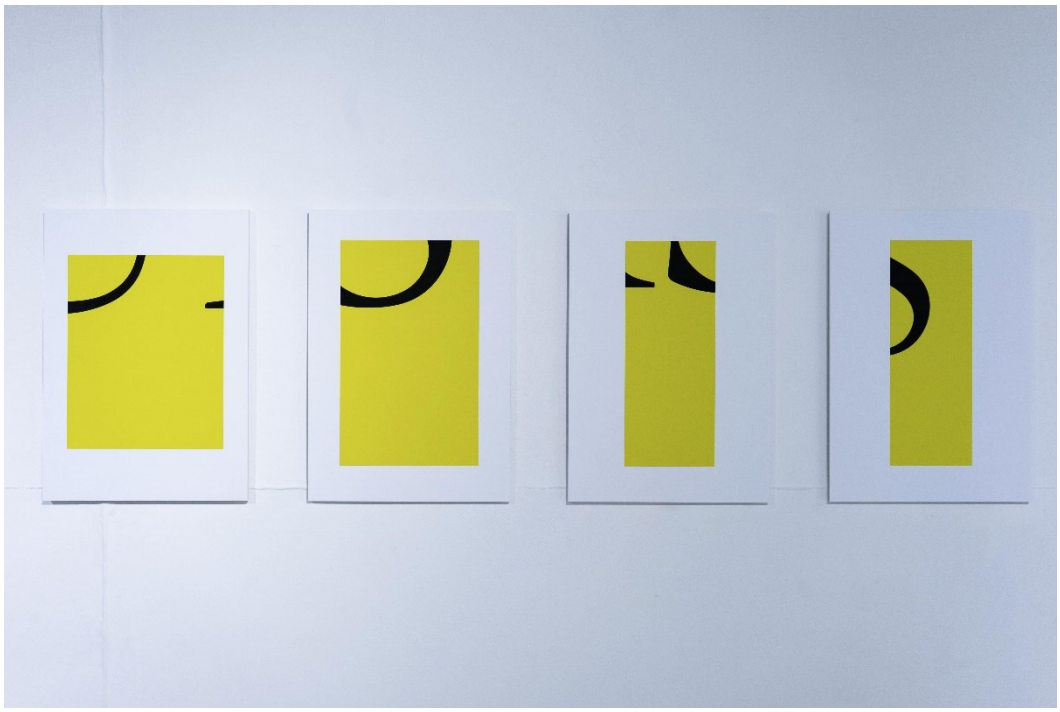


Illustration App.1.J. At the artist's question and answer event, this image is looking towards the entrance, Ruth running along the right, Hours around to the left.

Illustration App.1.K. If you were looking from the entrance, you would see the final set of images and flanking these, the roped around sequence of text-based posters.

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