

Reflection Statement

“Faith: not wanting to know what is true.”

-Friedrich Nietzsche

“It is impossible to exist without passion.”

-Søren Kierkegaard

Our faith has the potential to destroy us. Faith is an emotional impulse that overpowers intellectual discourse; hence it is both irrational and integral to the human condition. My major work *At the Doors of the House of Bread*¹ intends to illustrate conflicting notions of faith –as destructive and as preternatural, but does not necessarily aim to reconcile the two.

My major work is an exploration of how faith can be destructive; where faith is defined as a belief in what cannot be established as true. As such, faith inherently opposes reason. *House of Bread* is concerned with how faith can have destructive repercussions, and thus how we can reconcile or justify faith within our lives. Faith can be destructive because it involves a denial of truth, according to Bishop². When the truth corresponds to religious scripture, complexities of emotion, or physical reality, it cannot be ignored without these destructive repercussions, which are explored throughout *House of Bread*.

In my work, the human necessity for faith comes from the human yearning to emotionally rationalise the world. As Kant articulates in *Critique of Pure Reason*³, quantifying the world solely with mechanisms of reason inevitably fails when metaphysics is considered; certain things can only be comprehended with passionate devices, exterior to syllogistic reason.

¹ ‘Bethlehem’ translates to either ‘house of bread’ or ‘house of war’ in Hebrew

² J. Bishop, *Believing by Faith: an Essay in the Epistemology and Ethics of Religious Belief*

³ I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*

As such, some aspects of the world cannot be understood rationally, such as notions of infinity or absolute emotion. I thus found faith to be most appropriately represented through poetics and metaphor. The poems comprise a suite that sustains the interaction between character and reader, without creating the extremes in scope and banality presented in longer poems. As such they are more lyrically intense, but create levels of intimacy and contradiction that are not enabled by short poetry.

I envision my work to be published in a literary magazine such as *Armchair/Shotgun*, or *Seizure*; which both tend towards more the broader poetry-reading demographic, rather than just writers, poets and academics. *Seizure* particularly resonates between the solidity of a printed journal and the ephemeral permanence of online publication, and has a diverse national audience. *House of Bread* is an examination of belief; my intended audience consists of anyone who has ever questioned a belief. *House of Bread* aims to be confronting because it subverts romanticised notions of religion, life, and love. This produces a certain self-contradiction, which reflects the paradoxical nature of faith. As such, the simultaneously aesthetic and non-aesthetic descriptions (“...this street of drowsy shops/and garbage pillars”) represent faith as ambivalent.

My inspiration for this concept stems from not only personal interest, but from study of *Arcadia*⁴ in preliminary Extension 1 English. The thematic discussion in *Arcadia*, particularly the parallel binaries of passion and rationality, and order and chaos that construct the world (both interior and exterior to the mind), formed the basis for the major work. In *Arcadia*, order and chaos are intrinsically linked, each dependant on the existence of the other. Eventually, and inexorably, passion overwhelms rationality in *Arcadia*. In my work I provide a more extensive investigation into the consequences of faith specifically, as a mechanism of chaos (whereas rationality is a mechanism of order).

Kierkegaard states, “It is impossible to live without passion”. This is the secondary notion explored in my work, balancing the discussion of faith as destructive. Kierkegaard’s work became a critical starting point for discussion of whether or not the two aspects of faith can be reconciled: faith as destructive, and faith as integral. The discussion in *House of Bread* covers a wide degree of varying scenarios and settings,

⁴ T. Stoppard, *Arcadia*

which characterise the principle character as something of an ‘every person’; embodying behaviour that is commonly human such as the emotional yearning for faith.

“...bitter cyanide taste of lovers

deferred and a caustic

father’s care...”

Faith is ubiquitous in the human psyche. It synchronically permeates our thought and is applicable to each one of us individually. I chose to include an intonation of perspective; between third person (free indirect discourse) and first person personae, to reflect the universality of faith, in that it affects all of us. I used the controlling metaphor of a wild creature, inside the head of the principle character, to link the suite and describe the emotional dualism inherent. This enables a physical representation of faith and helps to ground the poetry in terms of more tangible images. The creature tears at the interior of the psyche, but cannot be removed; the key characteristics of faith depicted in my major work. The initial description “...a wild thing...”⁵ accentuates the psychological corollary between childhood experience and emotional genesis. The passage of time is redolent of *Where the Wild Things Are*, in synchronic timelines: taking the course of a lifetime, and a single day. The further lexis of ‘creature’ connotes that faith is the animal aspect of the psyche, in opposition to logic which distinguishes people from animals.

Studying the poetry of John Donne⁶ in HSC Advanced English, provided me with substantiation on my ideas about faith. Donne’s extensive investigation into mortality is underscored by his own deeply theistic beliefs. As such, his poems are exemplary of the philosophical musings of a deeply pious persona, which was a valuable insight in terms of how I constructed the views of my character. Each of my personae represents a different emotional perspective, of the same principle character. So, as Donne’s poems chart his approach to death, *House of Bread* charts my character as he speculates about his own faith.

⁵ M. Sendak, *Where the Wild Things Are*

⁶ J. Donne, *Holy Sonnets*

The poem anthology *Eyes in Times of War*⁷, composed by Ali Alizadeh, was influential in terms of relating war and cultural paradigms, such as religion. This is a predominant theme in *House of Bread*, informing how religious conflict and the role of individual decisions associated are described. The tone had to be balanced between prescribing and permitting various suggestions of faith, in order to avoid becoming didactic.

“...show us your soul

bare and beating raw

and we will clean it.

Because it is dirty.”

I avoided direct phrasing, literal communication and similarly controlling language to allow greater ambiguity and permutations of meaning. Having less restrictive denotations makes the poetry more accessible and varying.

The form of *House of Bread* has shifted progressively over the composition process. Originally the works of Dylan Thomas⁸ and Audre Lorde⁹ were influential in terms of informing meter and external rhyme. Thomas’s use of the villanelle –a complex poetic structure, demonstrated the power of refrain and simplicity, which I replicated within *House of Bread*. Each poem gradually shifted towards more organic forms (less constrained by meter and external rhyme) such as free verse. *Ashes in the Air* and *In the Palm of your Hand* were influential during substantiation of interior musical devices and adopting more minimalist structure. The structures of each poem are effective in terms of directing the linguistic flow and being unobtrusive to the poetic meaning.

I included a villanelle, as the form represents paradoxical dualities and highlights the antithetical in *House of Bread*. The villanelle also serves to describe faith in my work, generally – the frequent refrains reflect

⁷ A. Alizadeh, *Eyes in Times of War*, *Ashes in the Air*

⁸ D. Thomas, *Do not go Gentle into that Good Night*

⁹ A. Lorde, *Coal*

how faith is illogical and can be obsessive. *Mad Girl's Love Song*¹⁰ and *One Art*¹¹ both informed my writing, and illustrated the constraints and strengths of the villanelle. This stabilised the structure of my poems in comparison with the earlier, unrestricted forms. The predominate style of my poems is prose poetry, in free verse which I found to be less restrictive and more organic in structure. This enabled a reflection of how faith cannot be restricted, but rather, controls the direction and shape of our thoughts. Faith is intrinsically appealing, but corollary to often repulsive consequences. I depicted this notion with dualistic images; being both aesthetic or natural and conversely grotesque.

“...attendants tending not to attend
but may remove the saturating
deluge of drool.”

*The Crow*¹² by Ted Hughes, provided me with the confronting style, and construction of images subject in *House of Bread*. Hughes's contemplation of the darker aspects of humanity has informed my exploration of the duality of emotion, with specific regards to faith. Hughes's description of the repulsive is paradoxically intriguing, a mechanism which is manipulated within my major work through tone and imagery. Hughes's poetry is reflected in *House of Bread* as very dark tonality which is ubiquitous throughout the suite. With lexical intonation, the tone is fully realised, and becomes more resonate. Hence, the diametrically opposed images, creates dual binaries, that are inspired by Hughes's poems. The process of forming my major work has been an insightful experience into the intricacies of poetic expression. It has precipitated in me a greater appreciate the conventions of the poetic form, and the unique power of metaphor to describe the indescribable. I hope my work can evoke a greater appreciation of conflicting perspectives of faith, in my readers. I would like my work, a representation of my interior, to cause my readers to investigate their own interiors; and explore their own perceptions of faith.

¹⁰ S. Plath, *Mad Girl's Love Song*

¹¹ E. Bishop, *One Art*

¹² T. Hughes, *The Crow*